

Ninth-grade pupils' significant experiences in aesthetic areas: the role of music and of different basic modes of confronting music

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Fifteen–sixteen years old Fenno–Swedish compulsory school pupils' written descriptions of 'strong' experiences were used for comparing (a) the frequency of experiences related to music and to other aesthetic areas (literature, drama etc.) and (b) the frequencies of music experiences related to different basic modes of confronting music: receptively (listening to live or technically reproduced music) or by productive activities (performing etc). In at least moderately urbanised regions, music was the art area most frequently evoking experiences. The 'non-art' area of nature was also important especially in some female and rural subgroups. Most music experiences related to listening, but a fifth involved performance activities. Among other things, attention was directed to the role of the school in preparing its pupils for music experiences, to the importance of productive activities, and to some problems regarding the efficiency of audiovisual media to evoke music experiences.

Background and general character of the study

In recent decades there has been a growing interest to explore music experience not only experimentally, focusing on a few specific reactions, but to study also more global experiences in naturally occurring situations involving music. In two pioneering studies, Pennington (1973) and Panzarella (1977), inspired by some earlier work by Maslow, investigated musical 'peak experiences'. Later, Gabrielsson again studied uniquely strong experiences (Gabrielsson 1989; Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik 2003). As to methodology, requiring people retrospectively to describe earlier music experiences lies at the heart of this kind of research. If adult subjects are asked to recall music experiences in childhood (Sloboda 1990) or the most intense music experience they have ever had (cf. Pennington 1973: 5, 42; Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik 2003: 163), the experiences reported may lie far back in the past.

Such investigations may contain elements of both basic and applied research. Exemplifying the recent Gabrielsson project just cited, the data were used to work out a detailed taxonomy for describing music experiences generally, but they also comprised information regarding situational-individual factors accompanying the reported experiences, i.e. information which evidently may contribute useful knowledge to the search for practical ways to enhance people's experiences of music.

Some research on naturally occurring experiences has focused not on experiences remembered as particularly strong, but rather on people's often quite undramatic encounters with music during their ordinary daily activities. In such a study Sloboda *et al.* (2001), using portable paging devices, were even able to obtain real time- or only slightly delayed reports of evolving musical episodes in their subjects' current everyday life.

Similar research interests may of course include other forms of art, but systematic comparisons between reactions both to music and to other aesthetic objects seem to have been made only rarely. In a study of adult subjects, most of them taking an active interest in either music or visual art, Panzarella (1977) compared peak experiences in these two areas.

The planning of the current project began in 1992 and data were collected in the period 1993–1999. The study could briefly be characterised by the following distinctive features.

- (1) As in the studies initially mentioned, the information collected concerned naturally occurring experiences which were more or less strongly felt, since such experiences clearly must be regarded as especially important. The focus here, however, was not exclusively nor even primarily on experiences being exceptionally intense. Rather, the capacity of music to cause feeling reactions and to fulfill different functions in the persons' current everyday life was considered central, and when the young subjects in this study were instructed to write down descriptions of 'strong' experiences and the social-situational context of these, they were therefore encouraged to think, in the first place, of experiences having occurred to them within the last few months.
- (2) Earlier research on strong music experiences has mainly considered adults, except a small-scale study related to the Gabrielsson project, carried out by Antonsson & Nilsson (1991) on Swedish gymnasium pupils, mostly 17–19 years old. As participants in the current study were young people still in their middle teens and attending compulsory school, they were a socially and academically unselected group, of interest particularly from an educational point of view.
- (3) Due to the evident lack of studies which simultaneously involve experiences in different aesthetic fields, the original plan to study music experiences was completed with the idea of including experiences also in other areas of art, such as visual art, film and theatre, literature and dance. Finally, it was decided to include also the 'non-art' area of nature, since nature is also generally considered an important source of aesthetic experiences. All these areas are here denoted by the term 'areas of aesthetic experience', and occasionally some term such as 'art areas' is used to refer only to the first-mentioned ones.

The reports that the subjects were expected to write down considered fairly recent experiences, that they regarded as sufficiently important or memorable to be worth reporting when they had been instructed to describe 'strong' experiences related to different aesthetic areas, which were illustrated in the instructions (see below) by examples from the traditional areas just mentioned. Instead of calling these experiences 'strong' experiences, the term *significant experiences* has here been preferred, to avoid unnecessary confusion with the strong experiences studied by the type of research first cited above, i.e. experiences generally pretending to be of the uniquely strong or even 'strongest ever had'-variety.

Purpose of this article

The participants' written reports are mainly intended for qualitative study of the experiences and their contexts, and qualitative comparisons between music experiences and experiences in other aesthetic areas. This first article resulting from the project, however, will not yet focus primarily on such issues, but rather on using the data to get some basic quantitative information. Here, an attempt will firstly be made to estimate the general 'quantitative importance' of music experiences, by comparing the frequencies of the pupils' reported experiences in the music area and in other areas.

Although closer analyses of how the experiences relate to situational aspects will also be postponed to later publications, a second purpose of this article is to assess to what extent the reported experiences in the music area are differently related to certain fundamental modes of confronting music. Two evidently relevant such modes are the receptive (listening) vs. the productive one (performing, composing; see, for instance, the classification of activities implying 'direct involvement' with music in Swanwick 1981: 42–5). The receptive mode may, moreover, imply confronting either live music or technically reproduced music received aurally or audiovisually (for some considerations regarding this live-aural-audiovisual tripartition as being a fundamental one in music listening, see Behne 1990: 222–3). Thus, the main purposes of the article are to:

- (a) compare the frequency of the young subjects' significant music experiences with the frequencies of experiences related to other areas of aesthetic experience, and to
- (b) compare the frequencies of significant music experiences deriving from actively producing music through performing or composing, and from listening activities related to live music or to technically reproduced music received aurally or audiovisually.

Some preliminary considerations

No specified hypotheses were formulated in advance, since the study is regarded as mainly exploratory. As to purpose (a), it could of course be expected that a considerable proportion of the reported significant experiences would represent the music area, due to the well-known omnipresence of music made possible by modern sound reproduction techniques. When Panzarella (1977: 248–9) found it easier to recruit subjects with musical peak experiences than subjects with similar experiences of visual art, he almost wholly explains this with 'the difference in the availability of appropriate music and visual art stimuli'.

It could also be pointed out that a 'unit of confrontation' with music typically (not least regarding youth music) consists of a piece only a few minutes long, and that this fact, combined with the great availability of music, makes it possible for a young listener to sample in one single day an immense number of music pieces, of which anyone may provide an opportunity for a significant experience.

Regarding more qualitative aspects, there may be no obvious reasons why music experiences should possess any special characteristics evoking stronger or less strong feelings than experiences in other aesthetic areas. A fact possibly favouring music, however, is that music particularly often may cause some kinds of reactions which,

through their concreteness and directness, make themselves especially clearly perceived and felt. Such reactions can be, for example, the rather frequent bodily sensations brought about by music listening (overt or latent motor responses, shivers, relaxed stillness etc.; see Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik 2003: 170–1). Panzarella (1977: 180–1, 248–50) indeed found more such responses in the music experiences than in those of visual art.

The questions implied by purpose (b) could partly be related to some earlier research on strong music experiences, suggesting that, concerning the receptive-productive dichotomy, most subjects' reported experiences have occurred when listening to music (Pennington 1973: 8–9; Lindström 1989: 38, 66; Antonsson & Nilsson 1991: 35–6; Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik 2003: 191). Regarding strong experiences reported to have occurred in connection with own performance of music, Gabrielsson and Lindström Wik (2003: 191) in their large-scale study on adults report a percentage of 12, and the corresponding proportion in the Antonsson and Nilsson study on 87 Swedish gymnasium students not much older than the subjects in the current study, also seems to have been very low (of 21 subjects interviewed only one reported a 'productive' experience; Antonsson & Nilsson 1991: 33).

Regarding different modes of music reception, all the studies cited in the preceding paragraph report that subjects' strong listening experiences mostly had occurred when listening to live music at concerts. Summarising his own and others' thinking and empirical findings regarding different listening modes, Finnäs (1992, 2001) found some evidence for the experience-enhancing effects of live music, although well-controlled investigations were surprisingly few.

Several experimental studies have also paid attention to the potentially differential effects of receiving technically reproduced music aurally (by radio, CD etc.) vs. audio-visually (by films, TV, video; e.g., Schmidt 1976; McClaren 1985; Behne 1990; Cassidy & Sims 1991; Geringer *et al.* 1997), but the results are, on the whole, rather unclear. Modern young people's frequent confrontation with music films, music programmes on TV and music videos could be expected to provide them with abundant opportunities to get significant music experiences via audiovisual media, but there is also the possibility that at least the more fanciful visual stimuli accompanying typical rock videos may easily attenuate the music experience or even transform it into a non-musical one (Finnäs 2001: 57). According to a classical 'optimal complexity'-theory regarding preference for aesthetic stimuli (e.g. Berlyne, 1974), it could also be assumed that adding rich and varied visual material to music may easily result in stimulus compounds too complex to be really appreciated (for some studies involving young people exposed to tonal stimuli, see Bragg & Crozier, 1974). That listener characteristics also may be highly important is suggested in a study by Springsklee (1987). Here, a clear majority of German Hauptschule-pupils preferred music video watching to music listening, while students in the more 'academically' oriented gymnasium preferred music listening to music video watching, often complaining that music videos were visually over-stimulating and distracted listening to the music. Regarding Antonsson and Nilsson's (1991: 36) Swedish gymnasium students, the authors' descriptions of the reported strong music experiences suggest that no notable number of these could have been related to music video watching nor to other kinds of audiovisually received music.

Research procedures

Sample

The subjects were pupils in the last, i.e. ninth grade of the Finnish compulsory school. The data collection sessions took place in the end of either the spring or (for only 3 classes) the preceding autumn term, when practically all subjects were 15 or (somewhat fewer) 16 years old. In 1993–1999 data were collected for 50 classes by the author (28 classes) or his assistants (22) in 13 schools. 832 subjects were present at the sessions, i.e. 411 boys, 406 girls and 15 with unknown gender. The schools were not randomly chosen, but were selected to represent various types of residential areas in different parts of the Swedish-speaking and bilingual regions in Western and Southern Finland. Of the schools three were located in the countryside, seven in small or medium-sized towns (8000–55 000 inhabitants) and three in the capital Helsinki (600 000).

Instructions

Care was taken to secure a sufficient sample of relevant experiences in several areas not only by including a considerable number of subjects, but also by trying to make clear to these what kind of experiences they were expected to report and not to report. As a first measure to make the pupils focus on relevant kinds of reactions and activities, a questionnaire was distributed before the instructions proper, with items exemplifying (1) various 'receptive' activities in aesthetic areas: reading fiction and poetry, watching films and plays, listening to music, watching music videos, attending concerts, being interested in visual art and visiting art exhibitions, and staying outdoors to enjoy nature (always with 3–4 response alternatives indicating how often the pupils engaged in such activities: every day – several times every week... etc.) and (2) corresponding 'productive' activities: writing prose or poetry, making music by playing an instrument or singing, acting in amateur theatricals, drawing or painting, and dancing classical or modern dance (response alternatives: yes–no). Secondly, in the oral instructions many different examples were then presented of how similar activities often may be accompanied by more or less 'strong' experiences (e.g. finding some visual object particularly beautiful, being captivated or moved by the story in a book or a movie). Thirdly, when the subjects were finally asked to write down such strong experiences, they were explicitly instructed to think of experiences such as those just mentioned, and to avoid reporting other ones, especially three types of experiences that, according to a pilot study, were very frequently reported as 'strong' ones: those connected with love or friendship, with one's own or others' accidents and with one's own or others' successes and failures in various activities; reporting such experiences were not 'allowed' if they did not happen to contain elements clearly related to some aesthetic area.

The pupils' task was to write a short essay about at least one experience, and they were instructed to consider mainly experiences during the last 2 or 3 months, but to feel free to describe experiences in a more distant past if no recent ones seemed 'strong' enough. They were asked to describe in detail each experience and its social-situational context, and also to reflect upon possible causes of the 'strength' of the experience and to rate this strength on a scale ranging from 4 to 10, with 4 indicating an only barely strong and 10 an overwhelmingly strong experience. All information was given anonymously.

Categorisation of experiences

About two-thirds of the pupils reported experiences which represented traditional aesthetic areas (see the six first categories in Table 1). The classification of experiences into different areas was done by the author and was generally quite straightforward. Most reports of experiences in the music area simply described listening to or performing some music, together with some information regarding the music or the performance and/or regarding one's own reactions. The categorisation of certain experiences generally related to music or to nature, however, was sometimes complicated by the presence of various different elements in the experience situation. Such an experience was classified according to the area represented by the most salient elements described. For instance, a report containing both music listening and painting was counted as an experience of visual art if the music was described as a background for the painting activity, but was classified as a musical experience if the music was described more closely and as providing a crucial incentive for the painting. Reports of situations and phenomena containing different elements but ordinarily conceived of as mainly 'musical' ones (concerts, musicals, music videos), were considered to represent the music area if there was no evidence to the contrary. For a report of a concert, such evidence could consist in a stress laid on the social atmosphere, the shouting and crying of the audience, the excitement of seeing one's idols in flesh etc., while no references at all were made to the music. Likewise, in some reports describing the performance of a musical, the event in question was mentioned only as a 'play' and only other aspects of it were noticed than the singing and the music. On such grounds, 10 experiences involving concerts or musicals were not classified as music experiences, but rather as 'social' events not belonging to any aesthetic area, or as drama experiences. Also two experiences related to music video watching were not regarded as music experiences, because the reports in question only contained reactions to isolated aspects of the visual content. Eight experiences where the lyrics of a song had been a crucial element were still classified as musical rather than literary ones, since the lyrics were always described as something received acoustically along with the music, and not only read as separate poems.

It should also be pointed out that some of the subjects reported recurring encounters with or a continuing involvement in some phenomenon or activity. Representative formulations regarding music could be of the type: 'Every time when I hear [some music/musician], I feel. . .', or 'Singing is very important to me, because. . .' Such preferences and habits were also termed and considered music experiences in the same way as those reported to have occurred on a single occasion.

Regarding other aesthetic areas than music, it may be mentioned that experiences involving scenic art, as well as movies watched at cinema or on television, were all referred to the area of Drama. Experiences related to painting, drawing, photography and sculpture were referred to the category Visual art. The category of Literature included reactions and activities related to fiction or poetry, but not to factual information in books or newspapers.

Typical experiences referred to the category of Nature were outdoor experiences accompanied by reactions (of enjoyment, humility etc) in front of natural sceneries or phenomena. Here, it must be observed that the data collection sessions were mostly organised in May, something which readily invited reactions to the arriving or newly arrived

Nordic spring, which for these pupils also implied the end of the school year and of the whole compulsory school. The number of nature experiences thus probably were inflated in a misleading way, although far from all 'spring experiences' were referred to the area of nature (e.g. experiences expressing scarcely more than happy feelings of the 'spring is here-summer is coming-school is ending-variety' were referred to the non-aesthetic category).

For the experiences referred to the music area, the classification of these according to different modes of confronting the music was then quite uncomplicated in practically all cases. Even relatively meagre descriptions generally made it clear whether the music had been produced by the pupil or listened to, and in the last case, whether the music was performed live or had been received by audiovisual means (film, TV, video) or aurally (radio, cassette, CD).

Results

Descriptions of experiences were obtained from 776 pupils. The reports showed a considerable variation from very short notes to descriptions covering 3–4 sheets of paper. Since only 21 subjects described more than one experience, the frequencies and proportions in Table 1 are based on a 'one experience per subject'-principle; for the pupils reporting two or more experiences, the one with the highest 'strength rating' was chosen. Since there was an uneven representation of pupils from regions with different levels of urbanisation (cf. the total N-values in the bottom row) and since this variable seemed to be of some importance, the data are also given separately for pupils from countryside, from small or medium size towns (population c. 8000–55 000), and from the capital Helsinki (c. 600 000). The 'other aesthetic' category mainly refers to a few descriptions of mixed or vaguely defined experiences.

According to the data for the total groups and for the urban regions, music with its percent values always amounting to at least 20 would be the most important area of art generating significant experiences; only among the town girls is the value for music surpassed by the non-art area of nature. In the countryside, however, one finds lower values for music. Especially for the boys the proportions of music experiences tend to increase with increasing urbanisation, with a remarkably high value (34%) among the Helsinki boys.

Regarding other art areas than music, one may note, for example, the low frequencies for visual art and dance, the consistently higher percentages for girls regarding literature, and the rather similar percentages (never far from 15) in all subgroups for the dramatic area. The percentage values of the nature area tend, especially for girls, to increase with decreasing urbanisation, a fact which contributes to the high position of nature in the countryside. Here, the values for music are exceeded by nature and equalled by drama for both genders, among the girls they are equalled also by literature.

The reports not belonging to any aesthetic area represented a wide variety of experiences, many of them considering interpersonal relations, reactions (of interest, indignation etc.) on information presented in non-fiction literature, newspapers or television programmes and, especially among the boys, success experiences (in hunting, solving technical problems, sports etc.). Only rarely did these reports reflect an explicit consciousness of the fact that the described experience was not of the requested kind. The

Table 1 *Frequencies and percentages of experiences for different areas. (Regarding strength ratings, see below)*

	Countryside		Towns		Capital		All regions		Strength rating								
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls									
Area	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	mean								
Music	8	10	14	16	45	23	43	21	30	34	24	22	84	23	81	20	8.1
Drama	10	12	14	16	28	15	25	12	14	16	19	17	52	14	58	15	7.6
Literature	4	5	15	17	12	6	21	10	2	2	13	12	18	5	49	12	7.4
Visual art	–	–	–	–	7	4	8	4	8	9	3	3	15	4	11	3	7.1
Dance	–	–	1	1	–	–	5	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	6	2	8.5
Nature	13	16	24	28	27	14	53	26	9	10	19	17	50	14	96	24	7.8
Other aesthetic	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	1	2	2	2	2	6	2	7	2	7.6
Not aesthetic	45	55	17	19	71	37	44	22	24	27	29	27	140	38	90	23	7.6
TOTAL	82		87		192		202		89		109		365		398		7.8

Table 2 Frequencies and percentages for significant music experiences resulting from different modes of confronting music. Regarding strength ratings, see below

Mode of confrontation:	f	%	Strength rating
1 Aural	69	42	8.1
2 Audiovisual	12	7	7.7
3 Live	43	26	8.0
4 Productive	35	21	8.3
5 Other/unclear	7	4	7.6
Total	166		8.1

proportion of such experiences is high among the boys both in the countryside (55%) and in towns (37%). These two subgroups also contained the only notable numbers of pupils not reporting any experience at all, i.e. 15 boys in the countryside and 27 in towns; in all other subgroups only 1–5 such subjects were found.

The differences between the frequencies for various experience categories show clear statistical significances within both the total groups and the subgroups, also when the analyses are restricted to the defined aesthetic areas, i.e. the six first categories of the table (P always < 0.001 , with χ^2 -values varying between 24.84 for country boys to 131.93 for boys from all regions; df in all cases = 5).

Table 2 presents data relevant for research purpose (b), regarding to what extent the reported experiences in the music area derive from different basic ways of confronting the music. Almost half of these experiences results from technically reproduced music, but when the distinction is made between aurally and audiovisually reproduced music, there is a striking difference between the percentages of 42 and 7 respectively, these two values also being the clearly highest and clearly lowest ones, disregarding the few 'Other/unclear'-cases. A χ^2 -test for the difference between the frequencies of confrontation modes 1-4 indicates a high level of statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 41,73$, $df = 3$; $p < .01$).

A somewhat closer look at the reports revealed that nearly all experiences of live music relate to concerts or concert-like events. The productive activities generally involved own performance by solo or ensemble playing or singing; only a few pupils reported creative activities such as composing or arranging music, inventing lyrics, or improvising. Of the 12 music experiences resulting from audiovisual confrontation, one related to films, three to TV programmes and eight to music videos (of the only ten 'music video experiences', two were not classified in the music area, see above). Subdividing the data in Table 2 according to gender and urbanisation would have made the subgroups too small for reliable analyses. It seems clear, however, that the area of residence was related to the frequency of experiences involving live music: only four such experiences were reported by countryside subjects, whereas half of them (21/43) were noted for the Helsinki pupils, although these constituted only about one-quarter of the total sample. Regarding music-making, the experiences related to rock band activities were almost always reported by boys, while only girls described experiences connected with solo singing (with or without an audience).

Some additional observations

The total number of reported music-related experiences

To the 166 music experiences in Table 2 (which includes also the only subject with unknown gender, who described a music experience) could be added eight music experiences left out due to the principle of entering only one experience per subject (i.e. 8 pupils reporting a 'principal' experience belonging to another area also reported a separate music experience). Moreover, some other experiences not categorised as musical still contained reactions that could justifiably be regarded as significant music experiences, as when, for instance, the contribution of the music in a drama experience (e.g. enjoying a film) was explicitly mentioned and considered important, by formulations characterising the music as beautiful or impressive, well adapted to the visual content etc. At least 15 reports could be considered to contain this kind of music experience, mostly integrated into some experience referred to the areas of dramatic art or dance. All these 189 (166 + 8 + 15) music experiences represent different pupils, amounting together to 24% of all the participants reporting at least some experience.

In addition, many reports which did not refer to the area of music still mentioned music as playing some secondary role or as an accidental element of some situation (when reading or doing homework, sitting in a car, socialising etc.). Some reports even contained quite a few details regarding some situation no doubt comprising musical aspects, which were, however, totally left without mention (certain musicals, concerts and music videos, see the 'categorisation'-paragraph). Including such cases, the total number of reported experiences certainly involving music in one way or another amounts to 271.

Strength ratings

Most pupils rated the strength of their experiences on the scale varying from 4 to 10. Mean ratings for different experience areas and for different modes of confronting music are shown in the last columns of Tables 1 and 2. In the former case the means for the aesthetic areas generally vary over one step of the scale from 7.1 for visual art to 8.1 for music, excepting the high mean of 8.5 for the few dance experiences. A one-way analysis of variance reveals a statistically significant difference of the mean ratings ($F = 3.05$ with $df = 7, 728$; $P < 0.01$). The corresponding values of Table 2 show (for the 157 pupils who rated their music experience) a smaller variation around a higher grand mean, ranging from 7.7 for the audiovisual to 8.3 for the productive mode. These means do not differ significantly, something which partly may depend on the reduced size of the subgroups, the reduced variation of the generally rather high ratings, and the possibly modest reliability of these ratings, with occasional low ratings given for experiences verbally described as quite intense, and vice versa (regarding similar inconsistencies among adult subjects, see Pennington 1973: 6–7).

Questionnaire data

According to the questionnaire administered before writing the reports, a considerable part of the pupils' activities were related to music. While, for example, only 10% of the

subjects reported reading fiction every day, the corresponding value was 81 for listening to music. The other variable showing the highest percentage for the 'every day'-option was music video watching (32% 'every day', 25% 'several times a week'); similar values were noted for two variables not related to music, i.e. staying outdoors to enjoy nature (30% and 39%) and watching plays or films on TV or video (28% and 33%). Regarding productive activities, two of the three activities pursued by at least about 20% of the pupils involved music, i.e. playing an instrument (27%) and singing (18%); the third one was drawing or painting (23%).

Some qualitative and contextual aspects

Although closer analyses of qualitative and social-situational aspects of the experiences remain to be reported in further publications, the following observations will here be noted regarding some apparent qualitative characteristics of the experiences and their context, and regarding a few more specific matters relevant for some points to be made in the concluding discussion (see also the comments after Table 2 on some details concerning different modes of confronting music):

- The experiences described covered the whole range from deeply felt affective reactions to those apparently considered barely worth mentioning (this observation also cautioned against using 'strong experiences' as a generic term for the experiences in this study). Experiences related to the aesthetic areas generally expressed positive feelings, at least in the sense of personal involvement (in some music, the story of a book etc.); unequivocally negative reactions were rare.
- In the reports of music experiences all kinds of traditional and modern music were mentioned, but a clear majority concerned typical youth music performed by Anglo-American, Swedish or Finnish pop and rock artists.
- Experiences reported from a school context were unusual. For the music area, only five experiences had occurred in class or on concert-like occasions arranged in school, and a few other ones in connection with school visits to concerts or musicals, or with national school music festivals.
- The bodily sensations and reactions which were discussed above as possibly being particularly effective in intensifying an experience, were really rather frequent in the music area. In a recent analysis on the pupils' music experiences according to the classification system developed by Gabrielsson and Lindström Wik, Ray (2004: 142) presents some quantitative evidence on this point. The percentage values noted for physiological, quasi-physiological (feelings of weightlessness etc) and behavioural reactions are 23, 9 and 21, respectively.

Another apparent characteristic noted for a certain subcategory of music experiences were the 'ego-bolstering' elements often accompanying experiences involving productive activities: feelings of musical and personal competency and self-development, sense of being appreciated etc. This author found that slightly more than one half of the reports in question (19/35) contained such elements, when only quite clear cases were considered (e.g. expressing self-satisfaction when singing or playing well according to one's own

standards, when attaining new musical goals or discovering latent musical abilities in oneself, when receiving approval from listeners etc.).

Discussion

Regarding the relative importance of the different experience areas, the data strongly suggest that at least among the pupils living in the more or less urbanised environments most typical of modern Western countries, music may well, for both boys and girls, claim to be the area of art which most frequently generates significant experiences. Among pupils living in regions with low degrees of urbanisation this position of music may not be unchallenged, especially if one considers also the non-art area of nature, although it should be remembered that these data probably overestimate the importance of the nature area to some degree.

The non-random selection of subjects from different regions and the modest sizes of some subgroups should caution against making definitive conclusions based on group differences, but it seems of course reasonable that the urbanisation variable may, for example, be related to the availability of resources required for arranging public events involving live music, something which could partly account for the positive correlation between urbanisation on one hand, and the number of experiences of live music and of music generally, on the other.

The important role of music as an area of significant experiences, underlined also by a high mean of the strength ratings, might be explained with reference both to practical conditions facilitating young people's encounters with music, and to more intrinsic characteristics of the music experiences themselves. Regarding the former, the earlier discussed factors of availability are certainly relevant for music reception, i.e. listening. Moreover, the questionnaire data indicating that these teenagers play an instrument relatively often or engage in singing draw attention to the possibility that the pursuing of productive activities may also be favoured by 'availability' factors specific to the area of music. Thus, music-making is greatly facilitated by simply using one's own voice and by the existence of a music notation system and ready-made instruments, which make a satisfactory performance of music more easily learned and taught than satisfactory productive activities in several other art areas, e.g. writing prose or poetry, painting or acting on the stage. Although Panzarella (1977), as earlier mentioned, regarded music as favoured by availability factors, the accessibility of music and the possibilities of music-making had certainly reached even higher levels in the 1990s, when this study was carried out; extrapolating a little, it may well be that today's conditions may be even somewhat more favourable to music than in the 1990s, due to further technical innovations and commercial efforts, perhaps also to pedagogical initiatives.

The second possibility, that music experiences might possess some particular characteristics enhancing their impact can hardly be studied without detailed analyses of experiences reported from different areas. The role of the potentially important physiological-motor responses has already been noted. Another relevant aspect may be the rather frequent engaging in productive musical activities. It seems of course highly reasonable, considering also the relatively high strength ratings for the productive mode of confronting music (see Table 2), that experiences involving one's own overt activity should often be especially clearly and deeply felt, as should certain elements often accompanying

such experiences: mastering new skills, getting approval from listeners (see the 'ego-bolstering' effects noted above), feeling moments of kinship and common enthusiasm with one's co-performers, etc. A third factor which might strengthen particularly the affective reactions in front of music, is the frequent combination, especially in youth music, of both tonal and lyric components. The lyrics may add a contribution of their own, or the two components may potentiate each other's effects, or inspire a listener to spontaneous productive activity by singing.

Regarding the different typical modes of confronting music, it was found, as could be expected with reference to availability factors and previous research, that most reported experiences were of the receptive kind. The majority of these did not, as in some of the earlier studies, occur when listening to live music, although the proportion of such experiences is also considerable here (i.e. $43/124 = 35\%$). Experiences related to the productive mode were more frequent than among the somewhat older teenagers in the Antonsson and Nilsson study (1991) and the adults studied by Gabrielsson and Lindström Wik (2003), and they were also rated as somewhat stronger than other music experiences.

The proportion of experiences resulting from audiovisually exposed music was very low, contrasting strikingly with the high availability of this kind of music especially through TV-programmes and music videos, which may suggest some limitations regarding the capacity of such audiovisually produced music to enhance young listeners' music experiences. The modest average strength rating for this category points in the same direction. The fact that only eight subjects described significant music experiences related to music video watching, while a clear majority reported watching such videos every day or at least several times a week, strongly indicate that at least ordinary pop and rock videos, entertaining or attention-catching as they may be, seldom lead to deeply felt music experiences, perhaps due to the way in which the visual material may distract listening or make the stimulus situation too complex. Reverting to 'Berlynean' research and terminology, there is the possibility that a high complexity of aesthetic stimuli may increase their 'interestingness' and thus their capacity to attract attention, but may decrease the listeners'/watchers' tendency to evaluate them positively (see esp. experiments 2–3 described by Bragg & Crozier 1974: 101–7). The visual richness of much televised music and of almost all pop and rock videos may also disturb people used to producing their own mental images while listening to music. In this study this was illustrated by a boy who reported that some music with its lyrics often makes him see emotionally coloured images which, however, vanish entirely when he watches the video presenting the same music.

Some implications for education, cultural work and research

The most general pattern of the results should be gratifying for the music educator, as it indicates music as a most important medium for genuinely felt experiences among young people. Possibly, many theorists and practitioners in art education and cultural work would have appreciated a more equal representation of experiences from different areas, because it could be held that experiences in many different areas are desirable in order to fully develop the cultural-aesthetic life of individuals and societies. Here it should be noted that the classification of the experiences into traditional aesthetic areas risks masking the importance of visual stimuli, because many experiences involving visual impressions

were not referred to the category Visual art; this was the case especially for numerous nature experiences (of beautiful flowers, snow fields and seaside panoramas, sunsets, etc.). Nevertheless, the rather uneven distribution of experiences in Table 1, with relatively high frequencies for music contrasting with many clearly lower values for certain other art areas, could be seen as problematic, especially if music experiences could be suspected to profit from an 'undue advantage' of being favoured by sheer availability factors, commercial interests etc. It should be noted, however, that the proportions of music experiences can hardly be regarded as extremely high in an absolute sense. Moreover, it could be maintained that music should never be charged only of stealing experiences from other areas, but should, on the contrary, also be regarded as a possible means for promoting experiences in other areas. In art education, a teacher may be more successful in sensitising pupils also to poetry, visual art and drama, not to mention dance, by combining stimuli or activities in these areas with appropriately selected musical material.

The music teacher's satisfaction with the results might be curbed by the fact that remarkably few pupils' descriptions of music experiences expressly referred to school activities. Here one should note that school activities, including many elements of music teaching (listening exercises, developing instrumental and singing skills etc.) naturally may be of vital importance for pupils' potential to have significant music experiences, whether these occur inside school or not. Indeed, according to much traditional philosophy of music education, the teacher's task is definitely not to provide strong subjective experiences during music lessons, but rather to promote certain abilities and interests making such experiences possible, regardless of the context in which they occur (Reimer, 1970: Ch. 6). Nevertheless, it is hard to see why it would not be desirable to strengthen the possibilities to have significant music experiences in school, and the closer qualitative analyses to be made on the reports in this study may also yield some information relevant for considering how elements typically enhancing pupils' naturally occurring music experiences could be taken into account in music education.

The findings regarding different fundamental modes of confronting music confirm that simple aural listening is often sufficient to give rise to significant experiences among these young people. Also, in this study live music seemed to be important mainly in the form of concerts, and since school concerts and concert visits can not be organised very often, it would be of interest to know if a systematic arranging of more informal and easily realised live performances in school could serve as good 'concert surrogates', e.g. music teachers, local amateur musicians and musically able pupils singing or playing in classrooms and at morning assemblies.

As already mentioned, certain results draw attention to the importance of teaching performing skills and of encouraging active music-making, educational objectives which have been particularly stressed by certain theorists, perhaps most forcefully by Elliott (1995). The comparisons made with earlier data for older subjects could possibly imply that such music activities are experienced as somewhat more important by young people still in their middle teens, perhaps because mastering musical skills often generate feelings of competence and of social status and appreciation, feelings which may play an especially crucial role in such teenagers' lives. Regarding the productive category, the very low number of reported creative activities scarcely indicate that these would not be efficient in generating experiences. More probably, it suggests that relatively few pupils engage in such

activities, and here it would be an important task for music teachers to provide their pupils with rewarding opportunities for inventing melodies and musical arrangements, writing song lyrics etc.

The results certainly should justify some doubts about the efficiency of TV and video to evoke significant music experiences, useful as they may be for other purposes, e.g. providing factual information, awakening interest, making some music comprehensible, etc. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that such audiovisual media could not be used also to enhance music experiences. Therefore, these same results should also stimulate both practitioners and researchers to explore and test the particular possibilities that such audiovisual techniques may nevertheless provide for intensifying music experiences (by avoiding excessive use of irrelevant visual material, selecting images accentuating the tonal and affective content of the music, using large screen-formats etc.; see Finnäs, 2001: 59, 71, 74).

Regarding aesthetic education and cultural work more generally, the results imply many questions and problem areas which cannot be commented on here. The uneven representation of the experience areas was touched upon above. In the less urbanised regions the strikingly high number of boys reporting no experiences in aesthetic areas evidently should call for attempts to develop more aesthetic sensitivity in these subgroups. This may require providing more practical opportunities for relevant experiences (regarding music, e.g. facilitating the access to live concerts in countryside environments), as well as more general efforts to relax the often rather stereotyped masculine roles probably still prevailing in many parts of these regions.

Concerning research methodology, the present study indicates that collecting written reports during group sessions in class can be a practicable way of securing large quantities of information on school-age subjects' experiences in aesthetic areas. At the same time it illustrates the problems that easily accompany such research, especially in the form of reports of irrelevant experiences and meagre or ambiguous descriptions that may complicate especially closer qualitative analyses of the experiences. A general impression, however, is that young people's free descriptions of and reflections on their naturally occurring experiences may be of definitive interest in elucidating their relations to stimuli and activities having potential aesthetic value and being felt as really important. Traditional experimental research on music experiences, for example, focuses almost wholly on music listening, thus directing insufficient attention to 'productive' musical activities. As a not very surprising but neither trivial fact, knowledge about young people's significant experiences really seems to demand research on experiences subjectively felt as 'strong' or 'memorable' to some extent. Investigations only surveying activities or interests by asking for kinds of pastimes or for the amount of time dedicated to various activities are not sufficient, because mere occurrence or frequency of some activity does not necessarily imply genuine personal involvement. Regarding music, this may be illustrated by a Helsinki boy reporting that although he listened regularly to certain pop and rock music he could not comprehend how such listening could ever evoke strong experiences in anybody. An example on the collective level would be the observed fact that a high frequency of music video watching was not accompanied by any corresponding high frequency of reported significant music (or other) experiences related to this activity.

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