

[Book review] Harmony of the Body—Musical Principles in Human Physiology

By: Kevin Maher

Harmony of The Body - Musical Principles in Human Physiology. Armin J. Husemann, MD. Translated by Christian von Arnim. Published in English by Floris Books 1994. First published as *Der Musikalische Bau des Menschen* by Verlag Freies Geistesleben. Second Edition 1989.

Harmony of The Body by Armin Husemann is not light reading. From the dedication of the book to his father and teacher, Gisbert Husemann, one intuitively feels that the book represents the work of generations. What becomes readily apparent on reading the book is that the writer is a man whose whole life has been steeped in anthroposophical thought, experience and influences. The very fabric of Steiner's vision, with all of its eclectic wonder and complexity, has so woven itself into the pattern of Husemann's writing that he and Steiner seem to speak as one voice. There are times when it seems as if it is Steiner who is elucidating the multi-layered complexities which are being presented by Husemann. The book is so rich in content and ambition that even the most seasoned anthroposophical physician might have a hard time digesting its contents in one sitting.

Husemann informs us in the preface that the cohesion of the book is derived from its focus on three modeling exercises which Steiner gave to young doctors in order to "train their understanding of the life processes on an Imaginative level." This focus is aimed at solving the following problem: if we cannot see the etheric body or the astral body, how can we justify our practice of anthroposophical medicine whose focus is on that which most of us are unable to perceive objectively? Husemann's answer is to allow the subjective into the realm of science, and this is justified by a philosophical perspective which places subject and object equally within the phenomenology of thinking.

One gains access to the astral, etheric and "I", in which one lives, through the practice of art. Sculpture gives us access to the etheric, music to the astral, and the "I" becomes accessible in language. By artistic exercises and explorations, such as sculpting the organs in modeling exercises according to Goethean archetypal forms, one can verify Steiner's perceptions of the etheric, astral and "I" in the deeper states of one's own being. It is the elaboration of these artistic exercises and explorations that makes up the remainder of the book.

The high quality of scholarship in the book is evidenced by extensive footnotes. Husemann provides us with detailed information from the fields of physiology, comparative anatomy, pathology, human anatomy and embryology, as well as many elucidating examples from the realms of sculpture, music and poetry. This erudition is complemented by Husemann's thorough familiarity with current anthroposophical thought and with Steiner's writings in relation to the subjects under discussion.

The book is divided into four parts which build on each other and lead the reader from the physical to the etheric and on to the astral and the "I", from sculpture to music and on to eurythmy and language. Basic concepts are presented in part one: a sculptural conception of organ formation is presented in light of plant and animal forces; the sculptural exercise of limb formation is presented and growth discussed in relation to musical laws. Part two presents the modeling exercise of inversion and explores its musical structure. Parts one and two use sculptural exercises and the quality of the musical interval to investigate vital organic processes externally in the limb and internally in the organs. Part three investigates respiration and the mediation between the external processes in the limbs and the internal organ processes. Part four presents a discussion of eurythmy as musical structure and leads to a concluding examination of language.

A fascinating section in part two explores the significance of artistic exercises in the cognition of Goethe and Haeckel. Using numerous quotes from Steiner, Husemann shows how Haeckel used drawings similar to those in ancient Egyptian mystery schools to arrive at the idea of the *gastraea*. For Steiner, the *gastraea* represented the animal archetype counterpart to Goethe's plant archetype; yet Haeckel, stuck in the materialism of his thinking, was unable to recognize the archetypal significance of his own perceptions. Steiner places Haeckel's work "in the epistemological context of Goethe's methodology." This discussion of Steiner's relationship to the work of Goethe and Haeckel provides valuable insight into the development of anthroposophical thought.

American osteopaths will find interest in Husemann's discussion of cerebrospinal fluid. Anthroposophical osteopaths, who have been telling us that craniosacral treatments draw them close to perceptions of the etheric, will find support in Husemann's statement: "Every artistic, every thought experience arises because respiration intercepts, in the cerebrospinal fluid, the motion of the etheric body."

Comparative anatomists will enjoy following Husemann's description of his father's research in the development of the clavicle throughout the animal kingdom. The bone's great variation of form as depicted as the large, elegant and bow-like structure in the storm petrel contrasted with the tiny, square blocks that are found in the mole.

The graphics in the book are startlingly well chosen. The static Apollo of Tenea from the archaic period of Greek sculpture is used to illustrate what happens musically in the tonic prime feeling: "I rest my weight on my feet." One sees how the legs of the statue carry the weight of the body like pillars resting in prime position. Then Husemann illustrates the musical movement from the prime to the second feeling: "I carry the weight of my lower leg and foot." He uses Doryphoros by Polycletus from the Greek classical period as a sculptural representative of the musical second. We see in this statue how it is imparted with life and a fuller humanity as the free leg lifts and induces movement throughout the whole body. The graphics serve to enhance our understanding of Husemann's discussion of music.

Husemann realizes the difficulty of discussing certain musical concepts on the printed page and urges the reader to listen to the pieces to which he refers: Bruckner's Seventh Symphony; Mozart's Piano

Sonata K.545; Chopin's Etude Op. 10, No. 12; a Hopi Indian lullaby and much more. What a wonder-inducing approach to the study of medicine!

Husemann's book makes a timely appearance in English translation. *Harmony of the Human Body* deals directly with core issues of anthroposophical medical education at a time when we are making the first gestures toward formalizing such education in America. The Anthroposophical Medical Education Seminar, which took place in November 1995 in California, included modeling exercises of human organs and eurythmy exercises. The book is already exerting its influence.

Husemann reminds us in his postscript that personal training in Anthroposophy should lead to the practical implementation of Anthroposophy in the life of society. Never has the need been greater to revitalize the spirit of medicine. The pressures of managed care and algorithms of care strive to intrude in all our practices. The large insurance companies and market forces, which have taken over our profession, steadily attempt to reduce the practice of medicine to the bottom dollar desolation of a business. Husemann's book is a welcome aid to all physicians who sense the wrongness of the present situation and seek to awaken within themselves the spiritual forces which should guide our lives and our profession.

Husemann, A. J. (2002). *The harmony of the human body: Musical principles in human physiology*. Floris.