Book Review Essay

Ascoltare con Tutti i Sensi. Estensioni del Paradigma dell'ascolto Psicoanalitico [Listening with All the Senses: Extensions of the Paradigm of Psychoanalytic Listening]

by Tiziana Bastianini, Anna Ferruta, and Benedetta Guerrini degl'Innocenti
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Reviewed by Violet Pietrantonio, Ph.D.

As Stefano Bolognini indicates in his preface, this book presents itself as a theoretical and clinical update about the needs and orientations of contemporary psychoanalysis, composed by three experienced Italian psychoanalysts with training roles in the Italian Psychoanalytic Society. Indeed, *Ascoltare con tutti i sensi* [*Listening with all the senses*] seems to belong to the emerging generation Alpha of psychoanalytic writings about the extension of the method and the expansion of the metapsychological paradigm in psychoanalysis. It is a short but very dense and intense work, somewhat like certain dishes of *nouvelle cuisine* in which we taste unusual flavors within a distillation and fusion of distinctive elements and ingredients in an experiment with entirely novel combinations.

This book requires careful reading and focused attention from the first page to the last, culminating in the afterword by Francesco Barale, which is essential in helping the reader pull together the threads, rethink, and reflect on everything that has been encountered on this trek through the rugged mountains of metapsychology and clinical work with early trauma.

In fact, with Barale, we realize how richly the three essays in this book are infused with implications of Freudian postmodernity, with their central focus on the theme that Bastianini seems to set out from the first pages: a *necessary extension of the Freudian paradigm of analytic listening*. During the past 20 years, this analytic listening has taken account of the fact that we can no longer allow ourselves to remain circumscribed by listening only to the repressed unconscious; we must also be prepared to accommodate and capture all that Bollas (1987) called the *unthought known* and Mancia

(2007) the *unrepressed unconscious*. In other words, analytic listening must expand its spectrum and register, becoming *polyphonic and polymorphous*, so that analytic treatment can be a time and place for acknowledging and caring for more archaic psychic sufferings, unthinkable and inexpressible in words, that live on — and perhaps try to show themselves and speak — in their embodied state and in actions.

Sensoriality and action reveal themselves as unconscious channels of communication for a feeling that has never been mentalized, a feeling that may be one of early trauma or that may even belong to an area of psychic experiences that have never been lived or realized in the absence of contact with the symbolizing function of another mind. This feeling is unspeakable because it is not yet symbolizable or thinkable; however, it can be intercepted with the analytic probe if we accept that we must prepare and equip our analytic ear, theoretically and technically — not only with Freudian listening to words and free associations, but also with auscultation to the palpitations and pulsing of a protomentality that vibrates or flashes in the body, in action, in the atmosphere and sound-world of a session.

In *Ascoltare con tutti i sensi*, this subverbal or paraverbal listening is explored by three psychoanalysts in its various clinical permutations and in the possible ways it may be metapsychologically codified as an update of Freudian hardware. Yet it remains faithful to Freud's admonition to the practitioner to "use his unconscious … as an instrument in the analysis" and "not tolerate any resistances in himself which hold back from his consciousness what has been perceived by his unconscious" (1955, p. 116).

On the theoretical level, what is proposed seems to be an extension of the metapsychological paradigm and the psychoanalytic method in view of a change and renewal that is achieved in transformative continuity with the Freudian paradigm. In this respect, I think the book very clearly represents the current scientific position of a wide band within varied and multi-ethnic Italian psychoanalysis. Various theoretical and clinical orientations coexist in Italian analysis today, oscillating between more conservative continuities of method and current paradigmatic changes in the field today, in line with the thinking of writers such as Eshel (2017), who elaborates *with-ness* in the analytic couple, and Ogden (2019, 2022), who speaks about an *ontological* dimension of psychoanalysis in which the focus of analytic cure becomes *being and becoming* instead of knowing and understanding.

This transformation of the tradition in continuity is very well illustrated

by Barale's afterword, for example, which highlights an extension of the concept of transference that emerges in the book's three essays: *transference* and *object* are still essential elements of theory and technique. But, Barale tells us, at the same time a new dimension of transference is taking shape: transference onto *the object in order to symbolize*. He writes, "The transference is not just about a transference of contents. What happens in psychoanalysis concerns a search for symbolization and for the lost object to symbolize. This is the first object of the transference, even before its contents" (p. 116).[1]

In each of the essays, we are permitted to enter the intimacy of the analyst's consulting room and enabled to "sense" (Civitarese, 2016) analytic work that hosts the whole process of containment and unison that is a prerequisite for symbolization and the development of the symbolizing function. In the words of the Boston Change Process Study Group, this kind of analysis incorporates *more than interpretation;* there is also a time and place for *generative enactment* and *dramatic dialogues* (Atlas & Aron, 2017).

As Stefano Bolognini anticipates in his introduction, the analytic exchanges described in these essays exemplify highly expert clinical practice, sensitive to the patient's most archaic and inexpressible needs. This is sophisticated and precise analysis that requires a refined capacity for analytic listening, waiting in negative capability, resonance, timing, and reverie; here one listens with the unconscious (Manica, 2022).

A fertile and mature professional skill set is also manifest in the structure of the text, which is as light as carbon fiber but extremely agile and skillful at venturing onto the paths of the most indescribable theoretical and clinical areas of the analytic listening that is the subject of this book. Indeed, the three authors seem to pass the pen and the discourse from one to the other in a learned narrative choreography in which one of them describes nuances and aspects of the theme that had not yet been developed by the others.

Bastianini dwells at great length on the territory of literature and metapsychology, stating:

> We have to be able to build a polygraph and polytopia of the unconscious, because it is necessary to extend the representative forms of the psyche along a continuum which goes from matter

[1] English translations of quotations from the target book are my own.

> to the word and vice versa, from the sensorimotor to the symbol. (p. 13)

For her part, Guerrini degl'Innocenti gives vivid portraits of clinical practice in action, bringing us into contact with the nebulous nature of mental states that are not yet representable and the disruptiveness of an unconscious in search of figurability and mentalization, entering the consulting room embodied in action. For example, in the section entitled "Daniel and the Verge of the Chaos," she describes analytic work with a patient who started the first meeting by saying, "I'm here because I felt a bomb exploding inside me."

The author writes that the first year of analysis with Daniel was "really an exploration of a place the day after a nuclear explosion. Daniel's speech continuously crumbles and turns into a sort of ejection of disconnected mental conglomerates, containing stumps of facts, ambiguous and allusive phrases, and sketches of thoughts" (p. 54). During this initial year, the analyst feels she can be available only for "immersions in the confusion" (p. 55), waiting for shreds of meaning to emerge. One can see how transformative these kinds of immersions can be; the reader appreciates the presence of negative capability in the magma of such formless protomental states of mind, following Daniel in his becoming able to live, dream, and make meaning of his emotional life.

Lastly, Ferruta, a master of the music of the unconscious, uses her theoretical notes and clinical examples to help us focus on the *sensory* dimension of words that, if they are captured by an analytic ear well versed in listening, can become a sort of "open sesame," giving access to previously inaccessible states of mind. The analytic trailer in which Ferruta describes the feelings that arise from hearing the word *avulsa* (detached) is really an example of a generative unconscious communication in vivo:

> The word *avulsa* strikes me because it is unusual and not that effective at expressing a personal condition. In an instant, through fluctuating attention, the image fell before my eyes of a basket I saw in Portugal in a souvenir shop with a sign spelling the word *avulsos* on it.... It is one of those tiles made of polished ceramics, mostly decorated with white and blue details, thrown away and picked up later on. The patient and I work together on the word *avulsa,* a word charged with affection.… The word

> condensed carries, overcomes, reaches, opens up unconscious worlds, which would be unreachable by speech, logic, and sensations.… It is necessary to sharpen our ability to capture them with analytic hearing, which doesn't follow logic, guidelines, a protocol, but the unconscious, just as Alì Babà does, and his brother does not. (p. 93)

Ascoltare con tutti i sensi is a song in three parts that imparts a tireless spirit of investigation, encouraging the analyst to shuttle among clinical experiences and to dialogue with the literature of analytic thought in attempting to bring into focus the impalpable and unthinkable that are experienced in session. This book is an example of the creative capacity of group work in which even the prelude to the preface and the epilogue of the afterword play essential and by no means secondary roles.

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Violet Pietrantonio, Ph.D.
Via Donzelle, 1
40126 Bologna, Italy
(39) 333-3824715
violetpietrantonio@gmail.com