

An Unexpected Pathway for Interpsychic Exchange: Music in the Analysis of a Young Adult

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We usually consider creativity and art accordingly, as a way to explore and disclose the human mind. D. Winnicott (1953) linked primary creativity with the origins of life in the primitive mother-child relationship. In his opinion (Winnicott, 1953, 1970) the baby creates the object “mother” placing her in a transitional area between me and not me, during the early months of life. The infant uses creativity to conjure an illusion using its omnipotent ability to create and find the object without any adaptation to reality. Musical creativity is different. It is a pre-verbal communication, and is present in the intrauterine life via the sounds and rhythms of the mother’s body. Quoting Di Benedetto (1991, p 418): “If we think for a moment about what music consists of, we will find that it contains elements derived from the bodily experience. The fundamental components of music are rhythm, harmony and melody. Rhythm is obviously related to the heart beat; harmony, which acts as an element of cohesion, is somewhat analogous to the experiencing of connective tissue, of a sustaining web. Melody, which consists of rising and falling sounds, could be like air traveling along a sinus and can be regarded as the breathing of music. Music is also a set of sound stimuli, which strike our receptive organs not only acoustically, but also at a tactile level, so that it reproduces the primeval “bath of sounds” (Anzieu 1985), one of the earliest experiences which defines the limits of the body. In such a physical space, representations, let alone thinkable elements, can’t yet exist.”

Thus the musical receptivity precedes the creation of a transitional space. This means that the power of musical creativity, and above all its

powerful communication, is not connected to the transitional phenomena nor to the cognitive process. The neuroscience of affect today outlines that: “Music derives its affective charge directly from dynamic aspects of brain systems that normally control real emotions and which are distinct from, albeit highly interactive with, cognitive processes.” (Panksepp & Bernatzky, 2002, p. 135). Throughout the psychoanalytic treatment we spend a lot of time in an affective area (transference/countertransference phenomenon) out of consciousness, with any possibility to take control of what happens inward. Being in contact with our and the patient’s inner world would mean living together in a double register wherein, usually, no one loses his subjectivity. Sometimes, with patients who adopt primitive defenses music helps us to restore contact when it seems lost. Music has the ability to dwell in a physical space without belonging to anyone, and this allows everybody to use it in a subjective emotional way. What I’m proposing is to enhance the concept of transitional space. Brody’s paper in 1980 showed the limits of Winnicott’s statements on illusion and transitional phenomenon, thereby elucidating the concept of interpsychic realm (Bolognini 2004).

It is within this space/psychic extension that S. Bolognini (2004) has placed his studies on the interpsychic dimension which he describes as follows: “The ‘interpsychic’ is an extended psychic dimension, regarding the joint functioning and reciprocal influences of two minds. The concepts of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘person’ can be included in the ‘interpsychic’. They can sometimes overlap with each other, and sometimes all three together can overlap, but they do not necessarily coincide” (Bolognini 2004, p. 337).

We could describe the interpsychic not only as a corridor through which to convey information, but also as a transition zone between different psychic dimensions (those marked by subjectivity). Let’s consider the example of the collective dimension of the virtual space network, which has assumed the characteristics of a planetary interpsychic extended among millions of people, which do not belong to anyone, but which is co-produced by everyone and influences the individual psyche transforming it continually. This “‘wide-band’ functioning (The interpsychic), in that it allows the natural, uninterrupted and not dissociated coexistence of

mental states in which the object is recognized in its separateness alongside others in which the recognition is less clear” (Bolognini 2004, p.345). Learning more about the features of the interpsychic could provide us with tools for further exploration so that we might be able to access this extended psychic network more easily. In particular, becoming familiar with visiting the area of the interpsychic can be essential with those patients who will not allow the analyst to enter the working chambers of the psyche (the intrapsychic), therefore requiring long halts in the antechamber of the Self waiting for “something to happen”.

Starting from these two top issues, the interpsychic (Bolognini 2004, 2011) and music, which: “*Like dreams, serves as a point of entry to affect and the unconscious*” (Nagel J.J., 2008, p.508), we will explore the potential of the latter to stretch along as an interpsychic conduit between the analyst and the patient.

Through the clinical material presented, we will reflect on a young patient’s analysis, in which music has given us the opportunity to open an unexpected pathway of exchange between two closed minds unable to communicate. This openness, unexpectedly introduced by rock music,¹ has allowed the transmission of reciprocal information (emotions, affections, traces of memories) capable of restarting those intrapsychic processes that sometimes appeared to be blocked by an excessive recurrence (recursive use) of the same images.

Y., is 20 years old, has black hair and eyes, and he is tall and strong. He finished high school with outstanding grades and now lives at home, isolated, trying to figure out what he wants to do. He spends the day wondering what would make him happy and what the best choice for his future might be. Ever since our first talk he has been repeating to himself, and to

¹ “It should also be noted that some rock music, with its often subversive, antiestablishment, counterculture lyrics and performance practices, can play an important role, especially in adolescence and early adulthood (transitional developmental stages that entail the relinquishing of previously held self-object representations), in providing a Kohutian-like mirroring and affirmation of experience, and in serving to lessen feelings of isolation or alienation. Here music contains and assuages overwhelming affects and thus can serve a consoling function similar to that of more conventional mourning music” A. Stein, (2004, p. 795).

me, that he fails to feel convinced of any choice made. His mother, with whom he has lived since his parents separated when he was about 10 years old, has just decided to move to another country, leaving him alone.

In the psychotic temptation, the withdrawal of the ego from external reality and the weakening of reality itself play an important role in the organization of an early stage of psychosis (Freud 1924). When I meet him, he was coming fast down a narrow ridge that leads straight to psychotic withdrawal. I can perceive the possible occurrence of a structural form of psychosis, as described by Monniello (2012): “They are the psychosis without a delusional or hallucinatory episode, at least initially. They are often much more present in the second part, or the end of adolescence, that is, between 16 and 20 years old ... Being on top of the list here the problem of narcissistic withdrawal, autoerotic negativizing and instinctual de-fusion. The aggressive drive unrelated to those erotic ones will attack, in this case especially, ... thought as a whole”.

Throughout the first months of therapy he rarely spoke of his parents. His voice was low, monotonous, without any emotional color. He spoke about his few friends and his lack of desire around attending university. He would oscillate continuously between an extremely passive interactive closure and timid attempts at emotional contact with his lonely and suffering core. As soon as contact with his core takes place, Y., who is gifted with a high level of intelligence, spots the source of suffering and deletes it through a crescendo of obsessive thoughts, a sort of: “Undoing what has been done and isolating” (Freud 1926), saying: “*The problem has gone, it no longer exists – solved.*” My words, which he apparently agrees with, follow the same fate, being cleared through this crescendo of obsessive thoughts centered around one idea: “*This is not a problem.*”

Months have gone by and we are close to the summer break. We are exactly at the same point of departure. Then, one day, in the middle of the session, my mobile phone ringtone went off breaking in on our session, as I had left it turned on in the next room. He jumped up in his chair saying, with much emphasis: “*But, they’re the Muse, Starlight. But you don’t listen to this music, do you?*” “*Well! Sorry, but why not?*” I replied immediately and spontaneously. And he goes on: “*Well, it is just that I believed psychoanalysts*

were those ancient things that listen to Jethro Tull, or sort of Ian Anderson's flute, or at most Pink Floyd, crying over "wish you were here", but the Muse...no way! Are you telling me that you are going to the concert in July!" Then I say: "So, you, what kind of music do you listen to?" "Rolling Stones." Disbelievingly, thinking I had failed to get it right, I add: "You mean Rolling Stones from the 60/70s?" "Yeah! The one and only, the unbeatable ones!" He replies with a broad smile. As I smile back to him, I add: "It seems that we have swapped positions! Sorry, but you should listen to Muse, Green Day, Linkin Park whereas I, the old one, should be a fan of Jethro Tull, Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, and enjoy the company of The Rolling Stones, I am the one who belongs to the last century." He laughs amused, surprised by the ringtone and my reaction. It was the first time I have seen him laughing. He adds: "I'm going to Mom's for two months, but then I'll be back in July for The Rolling Stones concert, if you're still here, I'll see you." And so it will be.

The ringtone has been our "cat-flap"² and after this brief interaction, his treatment takes a different pace, sometimes slow, sometimes fast and relentless. Together we manage to climb onto the first step towards confidence in the treatment (he no longer asked why analysis) and then towards the sharing of dreams, emotions and affects. However, there will be long dark halts to progress, in which he actively locks all forms of communication in an attempt to contain the suffering that envelops him. Music manages to open, sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly, an interpsychic corridor through which there is a flow to the exchange of thoughts between us. This starts clandestinely somewhere (impossible to know in advance who will start and what the subject of trade will be) and has the power to reboot both the intrapsychic communication and the inter-subjective exchange. V. Zuckerkandl (1973) claims, in several passages, that music dissolves the boundaries between the self and

² "I would like to pause briefly on this element of the 'cat-flap'. In my opinion, it is a good symbol for a structural (it is part of the door) and functional device (it was specifically designed so that the cat can carry out its function of catching mice inside and outside the house) that is not only intra-psychic, but also Interpsychic. The cat-flap is quite distinct from the door, which allows the passage of people, and from incidental cracks, which allow the passage of mice, clandestine, parasitical guests that harm the community/inter-psychic-relational apparatus" (Bolognini 2004, p.343).

others; thesis taken from Rose in 2004, when he asserts that music can be used as an important indicator of the permeability of psychic boundaries (Dimitrijevic, A. 2008). When this boundary-fading occurs during the session, the therapist must have the analytical skill to make a space for the exchange of information that flows freely, and to prepare to capture the material to make it operative within the analytical process as well as to mobilize new therapeutic resources.

Let's go back to the analysis of our clinical material. The patient began to attend university. He expressed his unresolved reluctance to attend through the performance of exhausting rituals (how to get there, which lectures to attend, what number of pages must be studied) he will mention and describe in detail. I sometimes joke about his obsessive style only to lighten the suffocation I feel during the session. I also try to bypass the resistance to look for new resources, saying, for example, that the best part of going to university is the encounter with that world of varied characters that he describes but, it seems to me, he keeps away from meeting new people. He will defend himself from these invitations, having perceived them as too seductive, so the next time he will attend our meeting with his headphones and the music turned on: "*Sorry, I got hooked on Bauhaus;*" then I will listen to a bit and I comment: "*Wow I can't tell if they are just sad or deeply mourning.*"

He tells me that he would like to talk about this, but he feels ashamed because he feels he is as sick as the singer. I look at him in silence for a long time while the colorful images of a varied university world and this sad music run across my mind. Meanwhile I realize that he is having a minor panic attack (he sweats, he suffers shortness of breath and he asks if the window is open or closed). I look at him intently, and I tell him: "*We are not Peter Murphy wedged between sadness and death, alone in the dark ... we also have other instruments that we know and we can play.*"

Then he calmed down and talked about his panic attacks. On this occasion, while stopping in the interpsychic transition of music listening, we have been able to "fish" lived experiences (and symptoms) of malaise never expressed before.

"Additionally, music can function as a surrogate or auxiliary cry or wail, an externalization of an intolerably overwhelming, incomprehensible, or

crushing internal state. It can give voice to feelings otherwise inexpressible, to the vast areas of overwhelming affect for which spoken and written language may be inadequate. Music is in essence speaking for the self that is obliterated or muted by despair, or symbolizing experiences and affects otherwise too intense or overwhelming to express directly” (Stein A., 2004, p. 807).

The close contact with such experiences was still intolerable at that time. Therefore, during the subsequent sessions, he would arrange for a cancellation of affects, undoing what has been done (*ungeschehenmachen*, Freud 1926). In the patient’s words: *“What has been said is not a problem, I am able to control everything by thinking while talking about it that it is all absolutely useless. I’d better put it all under the rug”*.

We went on like this until one day he came to his session seemingly alarmed and he complained about not getting any warmth, that our relationship is not a human one. *“There are no hugs or caresses or any sort of contact. It is not an even exchange, there is nothing human.”*

I sensed that he was coming into contact with bizarre objects (Bion, 1992), hard, stinging objects which he usually kept away. However, at this point they were breaking into our room, harassing him (he looked like he was suffering) and he added hastily: *“I’d better keep everything hidden under the rug otherwise I might feel like those bits of dust... that are tossed around the room....later it is going to be too tiring for me to put all this back under the rug.”*

Very cautiously, I try to put together all these sensations and images (the dust floating in silence) and I realize that he seems to want to show me something of himself (the dust floating) and/or his relationship with Mom or Dad (the human relationship with me), but it seems also that the only thing I can do is pick up the carpet and help him hide everything. He calms down and talks to me about his Mom. Young, beautiful. *“Mom is so changeable, I’m sometimes afraid that you might be the same. She is capable of great closeness, but then she is so hypercritical she will not miss a thing or let you go with it. You cannot say “no” to her or she will dig her heels in and cling to the death. Dad is fluid and evanescent, inconsistent always ready to doubt everything, in constant conflict with her. I carry these two halves inside and sometimes I do not know how to keep them together.”*

As he keeps on talking about them I can picture them in my mind, almost seeing them with him, like a little baby lying between them under the rug, almost lifeless, not breathing (the same asphyxiation mutually experienced in our sessions) so that they will not get into conflict, so as to avoid having to choose. I let him talk till the end while I listen in rapt silence. When he is finally leaving I will tell him:

“I have had the impression that today there were many people in here, me, you, Mom, Dad, and even all your stuff out of the carpet and our stuff, the one we are always speaking about.” He smiles and asks for a spare minute to tell me a couple of things: *“A good one and a bad one. The first: Before coming to see you ... I had been listening to the Rolling Stones while dancing and singing along with them I managed to feel my body... the second only, -sad and mourning – is that I sometimes feel like a piece of rotting flesh to which I add some spice so as not to perceive its smell.”*

I instantly thought of an excerpt from Di Benedetto's work: “Music is a unique language, different from all other human languages. Unlike other languages, which tend to move from the body to the mind, music prompts our knowledge to shift from the mind to the body, from the symbolic to the sensory, towards a musical matrix with a wide potential and an emotional nature” (Di Benedetto, 1991, p. 424). The investment, product of the body in motion when dancing in an emotional contact with the music, involves various sensory levels forcing the mind to perceive both the inside and outside, which are confusingly intertwined. In my opinion, his tiring, hard and secret work of covering up (spices, perfumes, filters, carpets), allowed him to bear contact with the dead or inanimate parts. These parts also had their stench or sharpness and they burst into the obsessive order he had painstakingly built, making him scared. I realize that unless I managed to hold those elements, now flowing through the interpsychic corridor, they would be back under the rug becoming unavailable for further transformations. We share my concerns of that and he begins to dream.

His dreams are inhabited both by those few people he meets and the sudden irruption of bizarre elements. They are indecipherable and we hold them without rushing to shape them. There is, for instance, his dream of a strange dancing of colors in movement that has anguished

him since he was a child: *“It is a dream that comes and goes, I do not know how to describe it but it has been chasing me since I was a child. It lacks images and seems to be made up of both a calm and bustling part, the first part is yellow and I am sailing in it, the second is green / black. It is a form that hits me; as if they were punches that strike me and toss me up and down, but they are not definite forms or real things.”*

He looks around in the room searching for the boundaries between yellow and green. Next he talks about a television series “Walking Dead”. I can see that he is quite distressed. I say to him: *“Sometimes even what appears to be just virtual, formless, or unreal, like dreams and music, have the power to evoke emotions and feelings as real and deep as all the things you’re telling me today.”*

He will dwell upon describing this feeling of non-recognition. I reckon there is also a lack of recognition of parts of the self that he is still unable to contact. Next session he bears an expression of disgust on his face throughout the entire session, which alternate with an equally bizarre oral tic. They were a strange bodily choreography which matched his discourse. Every corridor has been blocked again and, except for those strange grimaces he made up rhythmically and repeatedly, nothing betrayed an unconscious discourse among parts of the Self. We know the repetition can be sometimes organized on non-symbolized relational tracks. Every analyst is expected to recognize them since they come up within the analytical session in the form of corporeal elements, such as gestures, movements, postures, prosody. So, I remain entangled in those bizarre images until his return. Y. leaves earlier for the summer holidays and reassures me that he will return because there is a concert he has to go to. It is mid-July when he texts me, during his session time, he is being taken to the hospital. He is described as being in a delirious state with panic attacks and will be given some medication. He keeps writing a lot of messages over the course of several hours. He is deeply distressed because his mother does not want to send him back to Italy and everything seems to blur around him. He does not know what to do. Being so far from him, I actually do not know what to say, and after reassuring him not to worry about his panic attacks (which were not an acute psychosis). I write: *“Why don’t you stop to think a little about your music”*.

I sent him this image



and he sent back this



When his holidays were over he returned and said: “*How did you manage to know I was thinking of the Rolling Stones? I had to go on living to be able to listen to them again!*”

From then on, we spoke more frankly about his hypochondria and his suicidal thoughts. His incoherently strange and bizarre speech that seemed express his experience of the waves of music could be acknowledged playfully: “*You are lending words to the waves so that they can also become intelligible*”; My theoretical understanding of my intervention was that I was attempting to transform traumatic hallucinatory into symbolic forms which could then be freed from the compulsion to repeat the traumatic experience of the primary relationship. I feel that the original feeble interpsychic channel has now become a corridor built up on a stronger structure through which to travel.

A few months after an episode of derealization and depersonalization, to which we have repeatedly returned, he seems once again lost in his obsessions. I say something about this work of disconnection and isolation of affects from the bond with people and his defensive operation which requires so much energy to keep it going. He becomes confused, gets lost. Later he emerges talking about electronic sound systems in which using the same basic elements the musicians can produce many different effects: “*It is a real sound scaffolding that they*

manage to build even though they are combining only a few elements,” he adds while continuing to talk about the structure of the music.

I discover myself thinking of what the psychic space is made of, what kind of scaffolding supports it and whether the so-called scaffolding may be similar to that “Geomag construction” whose structure can be changed by putting on or removing metal spheres and rods. I think that even our psychic space is made up like a “Geomag”, adding or subtracting pieces to build the framework that will momentarily support our work. At the end of the session, he says: *“Today we have had a strange session, what did we talk about? Even so, I don’t know why, but it seemed very nice.”* I answer him (but maybe I am answering myself): *“We found this expression: “sound scaffolding” and we entered an interpsychic space where each of us contributed with a piece of something to build a scaffolding. Music helped us to feel that things can be shared without losing our own subjectivity”.*

When he leaves, clearly satisfied, I am completely aware of being the most grateful for this gift: the scaffolding of sounds that will definitely enable us to build new melodies which helps me hold all those bizarre elements that wait for a new transformation.

CONCLUSION

There are a lot of remarkable works regarding music and psychoanalysis such as those by Nagel (2008), Grassi (2014), Stein (2004), Di Benedetto (1991, 2001), Rose (1991, 1993, 2004), to name just a few, which discuss the interaction with each other at different levels: from the pre-symbolic constituent elements of music to music listening. Unfortunately, it would take me too long to go into each theoretical model related to artistic creation. Instead, I would like to highlight that the premise of our work, which is obviously what we have in common, is the analytic listening. I tried to bring it close to music listening. I think that the missing object might be fancied or imagined, but it can’t be heard or experienced without any sensory input.

My impression is that the patient’s primary relationship was one of marginal cathexis, or non-investment. It probably lacked music or

rhythm. For this reason, the patient could not bring the sonorous elements of speech with appropriate tone (monotone) nor any rhythm or music. Patient's living in this music-less internal world experience perceptive elements as bizarre, and this can generate an internal chaos. The analyst should read through, infer sense, and bind these traces to help him to emerge from the cacophonous chaos of his inner world. Through several sound presentations, it was possible to speak about the disharmonic affective identifications provided by his parents. From this moment on the sharing of affective states will go through the most mature expression of the linguistic structuralism of narrative style and the process will also get nourished by the words (words lent to the waves). Once the transit had been opened, by the music listening, it was possible to work on the intrapsychic register by reshuffling the present traces and new transcriptions.

I would like to conclude by returning to the two fundamental initial issues, music and the interpsychic. I am convinced that their interweaving effect has promoted that particular kind of listening together with the patient. Beside other observational vertices which could have been used to describe what was happening inside the analyst's room, such as Bion's reflections on bizarre elements (1992), I would draw a few points of contact between music and psychoanalysis that could instead be of some contribution to further investigations. First of all, melody. Aniruddh D. Patel, in his book "Music, Language and The Brain" (2008, Oxford University Press, London) defines melody by means of two strategic perspectives: on the one hand, it can be seen as sound sequences that contain a lot of affective, syntactic, pragmatic and empathetic information and on the other, it can qualify as melody by virtue of the rich mental patterns it engenders in a listener.

Here comes the clinical reference to the short musical sequence listened to on my cell phone. Its melodic structure, more complex than our own voices, may have promoted the opening of the interpsychic corridor that enabled the start of a kind of communication less related to the repetition of the usual elements (historical narrative of the same tracks).

Secondly let's not forget rhythm. L. Grassi (2014) describes the rhythm at the origin of the life where some basic rhythms combine the

visual element, the sound element and other perceptive channels. The rhythm is in the alternation from night and day, sleep and wakefulness, presence and absence. In other words, rhythm accompanies human development throughout life. For this psychoanalytic treatment it has been very important to connect the obsessive rhythm of words beaten in the same way to the chaos of some speechless and shapeless oneiric movement.

Finally, I get back to the interpsychic drawing another potentiality to be explored: “The ability to frequent the interpsychic with an acceptable degree of awareness and technical know-how, to reduce the random nature of analytic developments and open up new access routes to the intrapsychic, therefore requires constant self-analysis, a sense of respect and continuity with the work of those who have gone before us in a century of psychoanalytic research, and ‘trustful resignation’ in the extraordinary paradoxical nature of our work” (Bolognini 2004, p. 353).

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