



The Sounds of Individuation: Joining Body and Psyche

by Massimilla Harris

In 1978 I met Dr. Alfred Tomatis in Paris. At the time I knew little about him and his dynamic use of music and the connection between how we listen and individuation. Meeting him I immediately knew he was a unique man and a genuine seeker. In learning about his program I can see how, in a different but similar way to that of Carl Jung, he is offering a precious contribution for our healing and growth.

Dr. Tomatis developed a unique, noninvasive program of sound stimulation that is used to enhance our capacities for living and to overcome problems that are listening related as most psychological problems are to some extent. He emphasized that listening to our inner world is as important as listening to the outer world. His programs are helpful in dealing with emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety and the control of stress. They also can aid in getting in touch with our own unique voice, inner strength, emotions, and the creativity buried in our shadows. In general, specialized programs also facilitate integrating the deep, hidden emotions from trauma, loneliness, and isolation. I have often found in analysis that bringing in the dimensions of listening helps us move our complexes to where they may be more easily integrated, transformed, and thereby release new amounts of energy. The

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Tomatis program acts much like the Transcendent Function.

Born prematurely at six and half months, Dr. Tomatis' difficult birth conditions greatly influenced the direction of his ground breaking scientific investigations of prenatal life. Similar to Jung, Tomatis was ill for a large part of his childhood. One particular doctor who had examined him said, "I don't know what is the matter with him. I must search for the answer." The doctor was eventually able to help him, but "I must search for the answer" became the guiding motif for Tomatis' life.

At the age of 11 he was sent alone to Paris to live, go to school and fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor. With no parents, friends, or adult support, he was entirely responsible for himself. While this was a difficult period he saw it as an opportunity that shaped his future.

He became an Ear-Nose-Throat specialist at the University of Paris, and toward the end of 1940s Dr. Tomatis made his first experiments on audio-vocal counter-reactions. The results he discovered were quite significant. Dr. Tomatis observed that his patients were presenting unusual changes according to specific sound frequency zones. With the sounds that were more on the high frequency zones, people adopted a more upright posture, began to breathe deeply, and to speak or sing more easily. On the other hand, when they were hearing low frequency sounds, they experienced fatigue and quickly entered into a state of torpor from which they had difficulty withdrawing.

Furthermore, Dr. Tomatis made a distinction between "listening" and "hearing." While hearing is essentially a passive action, listening is an active process and requires voluntary adaptation. Listening is the skill that we need if we want to cut through the noise of the surrounding world and reconnect with the vital parts of ourselves from which we often feel alienated. Good concentration and memory are testimonies to our listening ability. Listening is the ability to use our hearing in a voluntary and attentive man-

ner. It is linked to the mental interpretation of the sensory information that our ear transmits to us. Dr. Tomatis discovered that poor listening will definitely compromise the balance of the body and the vitality of the brain, because of the essential role played by the ear.

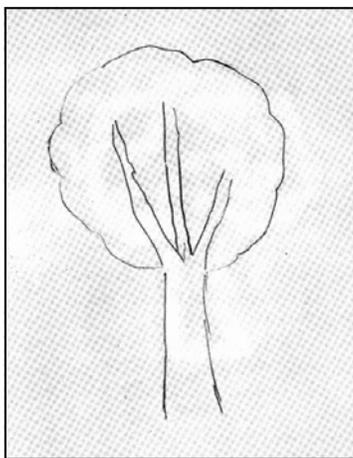
Dr. Tomatis came to the realization that the voice can only reproduce what the ear can hear and what it *consents* to hear.

He also saw that inducing people to favor the perception of high-pitched sounds made them more capable of permanently re-energizing themselves through their own voice.

Sounds that are rich in high-pitched harmonics have the effect of stimulating a vast nervous network called the “reticular formation,” that controls the overall level of cerebral activity. These sounds play an important role in the increase of activity in our cerebral cortex, participating in the efficiency of a high number of important processes involved in memory, concentration, and learning. As we grow older, our faculty of listening weakens, and it is important to nourish and stimulate our cortex, that is filled with knowledge and enriched by a lifetime of experience.

This kind of nourishment and stimulation is now possible with the help of his programs. The benefits of the Tomatis method are aimed at educating or re-educating the ear to sufficiently perceive the high harmonic components of the sound messages which reach it. The music programs provided by the Tomatis method undergo a phenomenon of appropriate filtering by the ear that minimizes the impact of its low-pitched sounds and emphasizes the high-pitched sounds. The effect is to stimulate the brain in a way that invigorates the whole person, body and mind, and improves the general state of the cerebral dynamic, enabling a person prone to fatigue or depression to regain his or her full functional potential.

We also see the same dynamic in children who have learned to “tune out” or limit their listening capacity in an effort to be self-protective. Shown below is an example of a tree drawn by a 12 years old boy before the Tomatis music therapy, and again after two weeks of listening to the Tomatis music therapy:



Before



After

We can see how well the stimulation worked: the trunk is bigger, the roots are visible, the foliage is fuller and more alive and shows movement. The boy that was awkward, dyslexic, had a monotone voice and poor verbal expressions, became more open, more alert, and his dyslexia improved dramatically.

When Dr. Tomatis was asked why his method worked so well he explained that the Thalamus was responsible. He compared the thalamus to a highway or intersection of many major highways that run through the brain and connect different areas of brain functions with sensory information, coming primarily from the ears and eyes. Our thalamus gets dirty just like our major highways do when people have thrown trash on them for years.

We can imagine how “our trash” might be explained in psychological terms: feelings of the past that are not related to our present situation, or emotions that do not leave us in spite of good analytical work. We reach a plateau of ineffectiveness that we cannot get out from under.

Iwould like to share some examples of dreams from my analysands after they did the Tomatis music program. My first example is from “A,” a woman who was dominated by her thinking function. This is one of her dreams:

“Some Spanish yard men show me a simpler way to connect a drainage system. The one I had worked out was more complicated. They are getting rid of things that no longer work. In addition we go ahead and remove dangerous debris in the river behind my house.”

This dream shows very clearly the cleaning effect that Tomatis was talking about. After completing her program, I could observe in “A” a softening and an openness that was not there before.

My second example is from “B”, a woman who was going through a difficult divorce. She was accommodating and passive, until she finally reached a point of explosive anger. This is her dream:

“An unknown blonde young man, 20 or so, a first year college student, is with me in the basement of a huge building. We are trying to adjust the steam of a huge boiler. We have a humidifier going and allow the pressure to be released from the boiler, but it is on the lowest setting, so we have to leave it. Meaning, we have released the smallest amount of steam possible. Nice person to take along on such a trip.”

After the program “B” was no longer frozen in her passivity or a victim of her dangerous anger. She was now calm, open and receptive, with great benefit to her and her children.

The third example is “C” who grew up in a poor, harsh, depressed family that negated feelings and values, diminishing her. In analysis she recognized these characteristics in her family, and she was struggling to free herself from the same attributes. Her dreams reflected these old qualities and were painfully banal and superficial. After she did the Tomatis program her dreams became more vivid and had more “substance.” This is one of her dreams that marks the move into a more meaningful level:

“... I arrive at a new place and the people who live there are very helpful. They seem like a large family with lots of kids and the mother is a very earthy type who is cooking a lot. She has a strange arrangement in the kitchen though - in the floor is a large circular opening and a lot of children, all girls, are sitting in a circle. Then I leave and I am in a sort of a cave and the mother has become a very strong woman because she picks my car up and places it on the next higher level in the cave so I can drive out. I turn to thank her and her family and I really am thankful as tears come to my eyes and I tell her I could never have done this by myself.”

The work in analysis with “C” has now moved to a more symbolic level, and the “trash” that was present before does not block the access. We can say that “C” had a blockage that protected her during childhood, helping her to cope with harshness and humiliation.

What actually happened here? In order to answer this question we need to go back to Tomatis’ point of view. Listening is the ability to use one’s hearing intentionally, attentively, and to be receptive on an emotional level. There are two muscles located in the inner ear, the hammer and the stirrup, that have the function to harmoniously integrate the acoustic information. When listening is disturbed, as in the case of a trauma or emotional shock, these two muscles block out the input of the information. The brain puts in place a system of protection that inhibits listening. The role of the Tomatis method is to restore the function of the hammer and the stirrup muscles to their full working ability, so as to remove these mechanisms of inhibition and reactivate a full listening potential.

In addition the Tomatis method acts on the limbic system in the medial part of the brain that is responsible for the mechanisms of emotion, memory, and learning. Also the cochlea plays the role of a cortical charger. By acting on the limbic system and prefrontal cortex, the Tomatis method intervenes in the regulation of emotional disorders related to depression, anxiety, and stress.

The work of Tomatis offers many benefits for children and adults. In this article I have considered only a few. Defining the psychological picture that is the Tomatis method, using a symbolic language that is more familiar to us, I would say the following:

There was once a King who had an illness, and no one believed that he would come out of it with his life. He had three sons who were much distressed about it, and went down into the palace-garden and wept. There they met an old man who inquired as to the cause of their grief. They told him that their father was so ill that he would most certainly die, for nothing seemed to cure him. Then the old man said: “I know of one more remedy, and that is the water of life; if he drinks of it he will become well again; but it is hard to find. The eldest said: “I will manage to find it.”

Jungian analysis and the Tomatis method work together to bring us to this fresh, clear, nourishing water.

Truth

by Brook Van Natta

As an infant

She looked to her parents

For life

For the instructions

For the way to live.

As a child

She looked to God

High above in the clouds

For guidance

For the moral way.

As a teenager

She looked to her lover

To show her the way

To womanhood

To her worth.

As a woman

She looked to education

To mentors

To friends

For direction

For definition.

And now

As she reflects on her life

She realizes their intentions

Became her masks

For they do not know her

From the inside

And that is where

She will find her truth

For herself.

Brook Van Natta is a freelance editor and writer, spending half her time in Australia. She holds an MA in Humanities with an emphasis in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute.