

## Reply to: *Interview with Corrado Pontalti in conversation with Fabio Vanni*

*Corrado Pontalti\**

### An unexpected fieldtrip

Fabio Vanni had a cheeky idea. He wanted to get four of our colleagues involved in our interview. The idea of an interview in the first place had stimulated me. Given my age (in two months' time I'll turn eighty), the idea of writing an article on <complexity and clinical work> seemed like a real drag. It's the being alone that exhausts me. I have already given all I can. The idea of an interview, with Fabio and also with my younger colleague Elisabetta, whom I would like to thank for her precious help with transcription and formatting, brought me to a community setting, a dialogue among friends, in free narration. It was as though I could say: "I have arrived up to this point, now others must go on." I initially thought, these "others" would have been the readers of the Journal, if they were interested in understanding the reasoning behind my research. Instead, these anonymous readers acquired a name, words, a presence, a conversation, Alessandro, Veronica and the two Rita. Would we ever meet on the same page? Who knows? We had actually already met. It was not something I was expecting, it was not foreseeable. But slowly, as their texts filtered in, I realised that they were not in opposition to Fabio and I, but rather positioned alongside us. I am used to the fact that often my way of thinking generates discomfort and a vague sense of danger, as though intangible principles are being challenged, so ontologized that they touch sacred codes. The kindest objection is that by thinking in this manner, I chiselled away at the confidence of young people in training. But this is a whole other discussion for another time. So, in reading my colleagues' texts I was placed in an unexpected

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setting. It was as though we had known each other for a long time, and as though every one of us was carrying a long, honest, and ethical journey, so finding ourselves in harmony was a significant discovery. Each colleague took on mine and Fabio's reflections underlining them and relaunching them, opening up contents that I had not touched upon but that are familiar to me and my theorizations. Many years ago, I had written an article in which I stated that society had identified us as adequate shamans of historical culture. The Director at the time had gotten angry, because by stating this I was debasing the <scientificity> of our work. I refused to modify it and the article migrated elsewhere. Today, in Alessandro Ciardi's text I read: "In this sense the image of clinical work as a place-threshold is very beautiful... as a sacred threshold between what is visible and invisible, and as it is a threshold, it is a place of opening and a place of meeting between two spaces. The idea of the psychotherapist as a custodian of the sacred space arises on its own. The one who knows how to stay on the threshold...". Rita Cavalieri responds: "From an etymological point of view, the word <case> comes from the Latin *casus* and from the verb *cadere* (to fall) and there are various definitions... a mysterious and remote cause of human events...". This is how the sacred space is declared with force, as the threshold between the known and unknown world, it opens up to mystery, to the etiological impredicability, to linear sequences, to the search for culprits. Thus, my colleagues had clearly spelled out what I had left as something very blurry. In these sequences the basic significant, the zero significant is manifested in our task in current society. It is like this, or it is not. It is like this, or we do not have legitimacy. And in going on this fieldtrip the dialogue makes other coherent and consequential dimensions emerge. It is not possible to reason on the meeting between historically emerging humanities (our humanity and that of our interlocutors) without anchoring ourselves to philosophy and first of all to phenomenological philosophy. Veronica Pasetti writes: "The symptom is the peculiar solution that the subject puts into play to try to stay balanced in the world, in a social world and not just a proximal one." In these words, we can perceive a reference to Biswanger and his geometric and spatial balance between position and equilibrium, or disequilibrium, between the size of the support base and the height of the tasks and the experiences in the presence of the world. Hypothesizing the crisis of presence (de Martino) and conceptualizing it not only for the patient but as an institutional crisis in our historical era, allows us to understand my second surprising finding in listening to my colleagues. They brought me to some precious moorings, the philosopher Byung-Chul Han (who I highly recommend), and the French psychoanalyst and group analyst René Kaës. Rita Verzari writes: "As Kaës states, metaphysical guarantors are necessary as they act as the plot between the subject and the social context in which he/she lives... the rifts, the disorganizations and the recompositions of these meta-social guarantors of

social life encounter the meta-physical guarantors of psychic life...” Even Alessandro Ciardi cites Kaës, as proof of the harmony not only within our interview, but also with other colleagues, autonomously.

This is the experience that my colleagues gifted me with, together with the twists of an unexpected but real dialogue. I would like to share with the reader that every dialogue, to be generative, must also have atmosphere and landscapes. My atmospheres, my landscapes were those of an oxygenating fieldtrip, where the gaze can look freely and openly on every surprise. And a small group in harmony is part of it all and makes everything exist. Our profession is in need of this, and we have a human need to not become fossilised in solitudes and self-referential paranoias. Thus, it is apt to conclude with Rita Cavalieri’s plea: “In reading the encounter I felt myself emerged in a stifling cloud of solitude. Parents are alone, children are alone. And grandparents have been left alone” but, a few paragraphs before she reminded us of the etymology of the word <complex>. “It derives from Latin, from the participle of *complecti*, <embracing>. I conclude “embrace the sacred mystery of human existence”.

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