

The beauty of psychoanalysis. Marginal notes on beauty as process

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But a day will come when revolutions
will have need of beauty.

(CAMUS, 1951)

BACKGROUND

«I like the place very much... the gymnasium on the water is open-sided: there's only the roof, while the rest is entirely open. Now it looks like they're going to close it, but I hope they leave gaps so there'll be a current. I like the place because it's so beautiful! I've moved up to the two-man canoe, which is a bit harder to manage than the single one, but the instructor is there to help. Then if you manage to do well with the two-man one, you can try the four-man and eight-man one and you can race at a higher level!»

INTRODUCTION

I will try to show how analysis and any process of psychotherapy generally, whether carried out in the private consulting room or in the health service, has the search for beauty among its aims. I will not consider the generic beauty which can connote and describe precise objects, but will focus more in the transformation of objects which occupy the analytic field. These transformations obviously involve the representations which the patient has of herself or of the analyst, as well as of the analytic process. I am interested in the process which continually leads the objects of the analytic field to acquire beauty. I will differentiate *the beautiful* from *beauty*. By «beauty» I mean the happy relational configuration of transitory and fleeting attunement between the minds of the subjects in the field, whereas I regard «the beautiful» as the stable sedimentation of elements derived from the process of beauty. What especially interests me about beauty is the way it intersects with the psychoanalytic field, and

how it can be one of the aims of analysis. I will not be dwelling on the sedimentation of beauty which happens in the wider social field that is occupied above all by objects which can turn out to be more or less beautiful in the stability of their organization. In short, I consider beauty a continuous process of an object's creative evolution, whereas the beautiful is the suspension of the process of beauty. This suspension can be happily transitory or traumatically definitive. The job of the analytic process is to keep soliciting the transitory beautiful. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* gives us a profoundly relevant reminder in Nikolai Rostov's words to his wife Maria when she feels ugly because she is pregnant: «One isn't loved because one is beautiful, but beautiful because one is loved» (Tolstoy, 1869).

I will try to suggest that beauty is a potential element of the field, pre-existing as a «thing»,¹ but that a series of relational events leads to its being shared by the subjects in the field.² By saying «sharing» rather than «awareness» I mean to emphasize that beauty is not particularly concerned with the emergence of the repressed unconscious, while «sharing» stresses the shared, symbiotic, narcissistic function by which an element comes simultaneously to satisfy the narcissistic economies of the subjects in the field.

THE PROCESS OF BEAUTY...

I believe that dwelling too much on beautiful objects can be tantamount to a compulsion to repeat. As soon as we believe we have attained something that feels beautiful for us and for the patient and are delighted by the result we have achieved, then in that moment we have stopped concerning ourselves with beauty. The problem that especially concerns the analyst is not whether a beautiful or ugly *thing* is better (which is obvious) but in what way *things* are modified and may relate to processes: a thing is ugly if it remains a *thing* for the Self. I intend to consider the constant movement organized around the axis thing ↔ object. If we exclude beauty from the level of process, it can become a prison, something Bollas (1999) would call «objectification»: that is, being constrained in a position which the subject has not chosen and which compels him to adopt an identity that is not his own. The beautiful obviously exists, but it does not attain the psychoanalytic condition because, at bottom, we know very well how «the world is full of... good-looking boys and girls who've been dealt the best possible genetic hand by parents and grandparents and great-grandparents... for generations» (Cunningham, 2010). But analysts are concerned with something else. Moreover, it is

¹ «Considered with sympathetic attention, any thing can yield different paths of curiosity (and here I am using the word in its noble, etymological sense: from the Latin *cura*, denoting zeal or desire to learn» (Bodei, 2015, 113).

² Borges suggests that a poem does not communicate only through its content, but in the infinite potential elements which the poem brings into being: «I know for a fact that we *feel* the beauty of a poem before we even begin to think of a meaning» (Borges, 2000, 84). In a psychoanalytic context, Ogden (2001) would share this position.

often observed that well-known people who have founded their existence on being «beautiful» become sad and less appealing as soon as, through wretched aesthetic operations or exercises of power, they attempt to keep hold of their beauty to the bitter end, excluding it from inevitable processes of transformation «because youth and beauty are two passwords of the present and at the same time are the nucleus from which the representations of power originate» (Niola, 2008, 53).

In my clinical work I constantly cultivate an interest in a series of themes such as surprise (Riefolo, 2010), curiosity, authenticity (Riefolo, 2013), and dissociation as a founding principle, even a physiological one, of mental organization (Riefolo, 2011; 2012). I believe these themes stand in a transverse relation to the various psychoanalytic theories and I think beauty may be another of these transverse avenues. However, this is not a question of adding yet another new concept to all the others but something we can trace in any theoretical approach, and it describes the position of the analyst in the therapeutic process. I think it is a position which allows us to concern ourselves above all with *sequences* rather than with *stations*: in other words, with the steps that are continually being taken in treatment rather than having an objective or being pleased with an objective once it has been achieved. The process of beauty would be persistent attention to something which may be constantly modifying itself. The situations in which dissociated configurations are recomposed or new associative aggregations³ are created come to be felt as moments of beauty; situations where we are concerned with something new which emerges from the resumption of a process which had been traumatically blocked.

Mauro is a young teacher, an only child who has lived in London for many years «to get away from a difficult situation» at home with his parents. He has repeatedly told me about the guilt he feels towards his mother for moving away and abandoning her to his father's violence. Since he was a child his mother has filled the house with paintings and photos of him. These pictures, hanging on the walls, have always made me feel claustrophobic. The session I report here follows an absence on his part. In addition, a fortnight earlier, I had had to cancel an entire week – three sessions – because of a significant bereavement about which, on the concrete plane, Mauro should have known nothing. I believe that my state of deep mourning represented a powerful element of happy attunement of suspended mental elements in both of us.

Dream: «My cousin Barbara is organizing the crossing of a river (like in Dante's *Commedia*...). I have to make a choice. I can choose whether or not to cross, but I know

³ Elsewhere (Riefolo, 2011; 2012) in line with Bromberg (1998; 2006; 2010) I have described this as *Dissociative Process*, the continual decomposition of the associative nexuses between configurations of the Self which, in the analytic process, recombine themselves according to previously experienced associations (*Defensive Process*) or associations never experienced before (*Creative Dissociations*).

that not crossing means death. When I cross to the other side I can take some pasta with me, a rosary, and some books!» Last week I couldn't come to the session because I was in the country with my parents... I told you that I've been working with my father since I came back from London. My cousin Barbara had been like a sister to me: she was very unhappy whenever I missed an appointment with her. I wouldn't know... the pasta! It makes me think of something alive that you have to take on a journey... to survive. The books make me think of the illustrated books for children that I often find myself consulting recently for my work. I connect the illustrations to my mother's paintings. These days, when I go home to my parents, I stop and look at the paintings hanging on the walls.

(I am surprised by the thought that paintings of him are still on the walls... I have the precise image of a corridor covered in paintings... I feel a certain claustrophobic anxiety).

I stopped for a while in front of a painting that's been there ever since I was born... upsetting! It's a portrait of a ghost. This time, I have to say, it actually was beautiful... a light figure instead of a burdensome one! Then there's a painting showing a man from behind, he seems to be waiting for somebody, wearily resting on a divan... Who knows, it might be me, but it could also be my mother waiting!...

(I follow Mauro's words though the images evoked in me by his story. I notice that I am seeing well-made paintings, whereas I had until now imagined them as naïve, essentially ugly... aimed at making up for an absence.) I say:

Analyst: They're paintings that tell stories now: your birth, your travels! I admit it surprised me, now that I realise that your mother's paintings may have a certain artistic value... so they are beautiful! Maybe it's also about what happens between you and me: if one of us is absent we can imagine what's going on with the other: but if not, if we can't imagine, everything's blocked and it's upsetting!

Mauro: Yes, my mother's good!... The paintings are beautiful and she has had exhibitions and sold some! It's what she would have liked to do with her life and she's partly succeeded!

In this step, the process of beauty signals how some «objects» are re-invested by the associative movement both in the patient's life and in mine in the session. In this case in particular, «the paintings» are no longer traumatically located in the place of absence as concrete substitutes for impossible mourning but, through the analytic experience, represent the possibility that the absence can be imagined. Lastly, the pas-

ta, rosary, and illustrated books describe «something alive that you have to take on a journey» which makes you absent, as had happened between the patient and me in the past two weeks. The transformations towards the beauty of the objects with which the analytic dialogue is populated in Mauro's case are caught especially by the analyst and, through a delicate self-disclosure, presented to the patient and shared with him.

... AND THE BEAUTIFUL PRISON

In analysis we often have to deal with people who are objectively beautiful but, despite this, are imprisoned in their beauty or, on the contrary, in their ugliness (Maffei, 2012). In my opinion, this second feature, if we exclude certain patients whom we call dysmorphicophobic, is something we have to address above all in our work for public health services. Indeed, in these services one is very often imprisoned by ugliness, weariness, the difficulty in looking for beauty. In these situations, the psychoanalytic position allows us finally to know that this «ugliness» is not objective, but dependant on the blockage of the transformative processes. The dynamic that concerns us is the constant flow which exists – and is never given once and for all – between the *thing* and the *object*, where by *object* I mean the *thing* placed within a relational process which renders it ever more complex.

In *Don Quixote* there is a passage which I think is a good explanation of what I am trying to assert. It is the story of Grisóstomo who kills himself because of his unrequited love for Marcela, a shepherdess «so beautiful that her beauty surpasses its reputation». Marcela is accused by Grisóstomo's companions of being responsible for their friend's death. Marcela defends herself against this accusation by retorting that being beautiful may actually become a trap insofar as this beauty is not brought into a relational field.

Heaven made me beautiful, and to such a degree that you are compelled to fall in love with me, being powerless to do otherwise... not all types of beauty engender love... true love is indivisible and must be voluntary rather than forced... I did not choose the beauty I possess... If desire thrives upon hope – and I have given none to Grisóstomo or to any other – it is fair to say that his persistence killed him rather than my cruelty... Had I encouraged him, I should have been false. Had I gratified him, I should have gone against my better intent and resolve... Let no one call me cruel or murderous whom I have not encouraged, deceived, summoned, or accepted» (XIV, 89-90).

Following Marcela's line of thinking, I am reminded of a clinical situation I learned about from a supervision. It concerns a young woman whose relationship with her parents has always been centred on her beauty. The therapist reports this passage from a session:

She always arrives a few minutes late; simply and sportily dressed as usual, a choice that's certainly linked to her work, but also I think to a difficulty in appreciating and highlighting her beauty and femininity. I notice that she has a sweet in her mouth which she realises is making it hard for her to talk, so she clumsily and awkwardly puts it back in its wrapping and apologizes. She sniffs, also clumsily, and busies herself for a moment at pulling off her cuticles from her fingers, and I see they are starting to bleed...

The therapist is struck by these elements by which this patient – «who has organized her life around her own indisputable physical beauty» – can finally introduce her ugly aspects into the session.

The activation of the process of beauty allows us to consider *static* beauty as a concrete element which inhibits the process of beauty by which it is possible to bring aspects of the Self «without make-up» into the session to be appreciated, so that they can challenge the elements of beauty which everybody looks at and which make the patient feel «used by her mother».⁴

I am trying to suggest that the beautiful lays itself down through the outcomes of the process of beauty: strictly speaking, a beautiful object should not exist for an analyst, and whenever we rely on the power of the beautiful we resile from our position as therapists.

PSYCHOANALYTIC BEAUTY

The concept of *process* is absolutely rooted in the psychoanalytic position. It concerns the movement of the subject's consciousness as it continually recomposes itself – depending on the theoretical models adopted – or through the emergence of the unconscious, or the transformations activated by the analytic or relational or intersubjective field in which the subject has been located. In a general sense, for Freud the process of beauty is connected with the emergence of the unconscious; for Klein it is the experience of contact with reality by means of splitting/*i*dentification and the acknowledgement of the capacity for depression. For Winnicott it is psycho-somatic aesthetic sensory experience, and for Bion a matter of constant striving towards «O» by means of L, K, H, whose *dimensions* are the senses, passion, and myth.

Some writers have concerned themselves specifically with the concept of beauty. Meltzer and Harris Williams (1988) write about the «theory of aesthetic conflict» continually present in life, from falling in love to art. Aesthetic conflict has to do with the difference between what we observe and what we intuit, which creates a potential difference and hence a continual tension. The resultant striving towards beauty would be «a contribution to the Model of the Mind for use in analytic consulting rooms» (*ibid.*,

⁴ My thanks to Dr A. Mennella for this case.

204). This being the case, each of us, moved by this conflict, is continually reaching out towards the other because we feel there is something beyond what we see.⁵ Meltzer and Harris Williams speak about «the sensibility to beauty and the engagement in the aesthetic conflict» which can be attenuated or even suspended following traumatic experiences in childhood.

In the analytic process the recovery of aesthetic sensibilities is of a rather quiet nature, having a noticeable crescendo only at the threshold of the depressive position and during the weaning process. But in more ill patients or those in whom the denial of psychic reality has become very extensive and with whom acting out is so persistent in analysis... the recovery of the aesthetic object and the experience of aesthetic conflict is far more abrupt, at times quite explosive (*ibid.*, 159-160).

Even so, the striving would be towards «the recovery of the aesthetic object» linked to sensory experiences of the first relationship with the mother. I would like to broaden this thesis by suggesting that some beautiful objects do not exist *before*, but are created within an absolutely original context which is what Aulagnier (1975) would call «the violence of the encounter». Our patients are not beautiful simply because they started out with an early experience of attunement with an object in which they were «felt to be beautiful and loveable» (Lemma, 2009, 753; Lynch, *The Elephant Man*, 1980). This is true, but it is not sufficient because I believe that they can become beautiful at certain moments, not only because this experience is renewed in the analytic encounter, but also because this encounter brings new relational configurations of mental coupling which take the form of beauty. It is a matter of having *faith* (Neri, 2005) that the analytic apparatus, irrespective of the setting being used, has the potential to create beautiful objects continually within the therapeutic relationship.

Francesco is a patient now in his sixties who has been in psychotherapy for many years. He is an intelligent person and successful in his professional life. Despite the constant theme of how tired he is of life, I have always found our meetings very enjoyable. He had contacted me because of a blockage affecting his emotional life and sexual relationships. The previous week he was with his sister at the old family home in Tuscany. He hadn't been there for a long time. They opened the house and immediately felt a sensation of abandonment. The windows were dropping off their hinges and

⁵ In a recent film, *Le Hérisson* [*The Hedgehog*] (Mona Achache, 2009) the protagonist Renée, an awkward concierge, is discovered in her true beauty by a new tenant, Kakuro Ozu. The process of beauty in the film is generated by the chance fact of their shared passions for literature and art. This leads to the discovery of an unexpected richness of character which Renée was hiding behind her poor existence as a concierge. The emergence of beauty is reciprocal in the two protagonists, and for Renée it has the qualities of curiosity and the rediscovery of her own femininity thanks to the encounter with Kakuro Ozu. In the finale, Renée and Kakuro Ozu meet another tenant of the apartment block who does not recognize Renée who, now that she is accompanied by Ozu, can present herself as «splendid». Renée is disturbed by this: «she didn't recognize me!» Kakuro Ozu however is able to underline the process of beauty which, has been blocked in the tenant: «it's because she's never seen you!»

on the balcony they found a bed of excrement created by the pigeons who had made themselves at home! The estate agent seemed to brush aside the state of deterioration and maintained that in its present state, and with the market as it is, the property was worth half of what it had been two years before! It could be refurbished, but this would cost too much and they wouldn't recover their expenditure. On the way back, Francesco was able to talk to his sister who told him about her own «constant feeling of death» and how she had started psychotherapy six months earlier. Francesco was very touched and felt that at last his sister was also participating on what he calls «the family illness». He had the strange and positive sensation that he was no longer alone in feeling this illness. It happened that the motorway took them past the area where he had built a house in Sabina a few years previously and his sister, recognizing the place and knowing he had a house there, exclaimed, «Look, we're home!» He thought about how it was a house he had built in recent years and had been much taken up with, and how other people – including his sister – like it a lot and enjoy visiting it.

I thought, it's a beautiful house, not so much because I built it, but because other people like coming to it... they're the ones who make it feel beautiful for me. Up till now, though, other people always made me tired and fed up... they didn't like coming to see me. If they did visit me it was only because I had to do things for them: I'm the eldest son... the family call me «the Prior». Later, back in Rome, I thought about the family home and I decided we should contact someone who would tidy it up and renovate the windows and doors, not spending too much, but making it presentable. I was happy with this decision because it would be upsetting to sell the house for a knock-down price... getting rid of it as if it was a burden, as the estate agent said, and we didn't go back to him because he hadn't been positive about it. My sister agreed and we already have a good estimate. In this way we could show it to some possible purchasers and then it would be presentable!

I feel very moved. It is obvious that he is talking about therapy, about himself and me. So I admit to him that while he was describing the family home I was realizing that I had never imagined it in this way. «Today,» I tell him, «I felt exactly as if I were going into that house you've told me about so many times. I could see the high ceilings and a big window in the drawing room that you've never told me about. I felt that that window and that room must be very beautiful!»

«That's the room I moved to so I could study. You used to be able to see a big meadow from it before they blocked the view with flats».

«I was thinking», I say, «that in the exchange with your sister and in the positive sharing with her of the “family illness”, you've been able to catch the beauty of feeling that you're really with another person by going together through something that has always been painful... what's under the pigeon shit! This time it isn't a way to feel

blocked, as has happened to you so often in your life, but feeling that under the shit there has always been the beauty that is possible now!»

He replies, «I wouldn't know about that! I understand what you're suggesting, but I think it's different! I have always known that house was beautiful, so the pigeon shit comes into it up to a point... I mean I would never have thought the house could be sold... that anyone could be interested in buying it».

«In what way?»

«I think the new house is relevant... the one in Sabina my sister mentioned when we were passing on the motorway. I was surprised that a house of mine could make my sister happy... that she could feel "at home"».

(I think of my surprise at having *seen* the big window and the big brightly lit room for the first time.) «You're right!» I tell him. «Maybe you're talking about something new that you've never experienced before. That might even be what's happening now between you and me, where you feel my curiosity and interest in what you tell me... in what you have».

This exchange with my patient allowed me to reflect on the dual level at which the process of beauty unfolds. On the one hand the rediscovery of repressed elements waiting to be recovered by means of libidinal reinvestment but, simultaneously, a process which creates new configurations of the object which continue to be represented as «ugly and painful». At this level, as the patient himself suggests to me, it is not only a question of discovering the beautiful (repressed) aspect of the object, but of grasping how a painful dimension, which remains such, may produce intimacy and harmony. In this case, it is the patient who feels, in spite of his pain, that he has a vital function in relation to the other. Indeed, like the sister who was excited by passing the place where the new house was, I had found myself deeply and unusually excited during the description of the family home. The process of beauty did not only bring a beautiful house which could be cleansed of the pigeon droppings accumulated over time, but also a particular intimacy between the patient and me which came about reciprocally in the here and now of the session by evoking a place which was its potential depository (Riefolo, 2009).

THE BEAUTY OF INTERSUBJECTIVE SHARING

Some analysts have recently tried to expand Meltzer and Harris Williams's idea of aesthetic conflict, specifically emphasizing its relational dimension. Silverman (2000) speaks of an intersubjective project in which one is seen «anew» by someone else to the extent that the subject has achieved a change which until that moment had only been potential. Sweetnam (2007) dwells on the communication brought to her by a patient who happened to meet her in a supermarket and describes having seen her as «almost beautiful». It is not a question of whether the analyst has been seen as beauti-

ful or ugly but of a reaction that is sensory (psycho-somatic) in type and communicates the happy, shared emotion of a chance encounter which, when brought back into the analytic field, assumes a potential and finally accessible meaning which finds the dimension of beauty in the sharing of a concrete and unforeseen event. In reality, how many times does the same event, a chance encounter with a patient outside the setting, take the form not of a happy shared meeting but rather an embarrassment, a sense of intrusion, dismissal, etc? Intersubjective sharing allows us to catch infinite – all unrepeatable – configurations in which beauty can manifest itself and which only emerge from the contingency of elements in the field.

To sum up: beauty is a process carried out in a relational field which enables configurations of happy «mental coupling» to emerge (Ferro, 2007) or permits intersubjective sharing which some authors (Stern, 2004) trace in «now moments». In these cases, beauty is configured as a fleeting *kairos* event, the «sign of an authentic coupling» (BCPSG, 2010). In part this is something experienced earlier by Freud when, in *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1913), he emphasizes the infinite mutations of the «beautiful» in relation to the infinite variables which bring him into contact with it: «How often have I mounted the steep steps from the unlovely Corso Cavour to the lonely piazza where the deserted church stands, and have essayed to support the angry scorn of the hero's glance!» (*ibid.*, 213). As a thing, beauty can be an idealized object excluded from the realm of process and hence symmetrical to the experience of trauma.

In this respect, I have in mind several patients whom I encounter in rigorously analytic or psychotherapeutic contexts and who, as in the following case, present severe depressive states founded on the compulsive conviction of having lost the opportunity to «possess beauty». However, this is less a search for *beauty* than the compulsive and exhausting search for *beautiful objects*, idealized and excluded from any relational field, a magical antidote to depression whose absence makes one unrepresentable. In the short clinical episode which follows, I believe it may actually be the intimate sharing of the sense of *unrepresentable ugliness* that activates the happy process of beauty.

Giovanni consults me a year after the death of his father, a famous lawyer with a political role on the national level. He complains about a serious depressive phase which he himself connects with the impossibility of ridding himself of a compulsive self-pity at not having agreed to leave his family and live with B., with whom he had had a long-lasting and intense romantic and sexual relationship kept rigorously dissociated from and parallel to his family life. Wearisome sessions follow one after the other, in which the dissociation is maintained by his constant complaining. I don't know what to say. The most automatic thing would have been reassurance but, as we well know, reassurance is a violent collusion which further blocks the field. After some months, very demanding for us both, he finally says, «I'm sorry, doctor, but I realize I come here to bore you with my complaints! But imagine how I must feel, never being able to think of anything else!»

This communication strikes me particularly and has the function of activating a lively interest in the patient on my part. I don't really know what has happened and I reflect on the shared emotion he has finally permitted. Above all, I am struck by a dialogue which finally describes me as a living subject capable of feeling the effort of an encounter with him, whereas up until then I have felt like a dustbin for his complaints. In addition, I immediately connect the vitality of this communication with some thoughts I had been pursuing during his repetitive talk, and which concerned possible training runs I might be able to do that afternoon. Still not really knowing what I wanted to say to him, I try to explain my emotion: «Today I think today you want to rescue me from a very painful condition in which you feel you're the ugliest and most unapproachable person in the world! You want to rescue me because you're afraid I won't be able to bear any more of your complaints and you would lose the only hope that somebody might feel that you are interesting and alive!»

He answers that actually he has no problems about me, seeing as it's my job! But today, as he was coming to the session, he was thinking of asking me to break off the analysis because «it's not going anywhere!» So he tells me a dream he had a few days earlier: «I was on a bus full of horrible Japanese tourists with all their camera equipment. But the driver is Putin, and he asks me where to take all those Japanese people.» He associates that he recently saw a group of Japanese tourists and it was a pain seeing them all together! He is surprised that the bus driver was Putin, who asked him where to go! He is surprised that he should be on such an unlikely bus himself.

I suggest to him that he can at last allow himself to be seen by me as a poor Japanese tourist and that he is not condemned to measure himself continually with an analyst/Putin. «Coming into the session today», I tell him, «maybe you were wondering if I would be able to allow you the beauty of being seen and accepted for who you are! Otherwise you'd rescue me by not letting me see you as ugly and then leave the analysis».

What I want to emphasize in this brief clinical vignette is the sharp turn which the analytic field can take after a shared emotion which, by means of an enactment, can be seen as the emergence of living elements. The patient feels me as a person who can find him tedious and unbearable, and I unexpectedly feel all his transference violence on me. I am able to catch the sense of my countertransference enactment in which I keep myself alive through my training programmes. So the patient and I can see each other for who we are *inside* the analytic field, whereas we had both been trying to avoid this awareness, one with his compulsion to self-denigration and the other through boredom. The intersubjective process of beauty in this case finally produces the mutual recognition of the «ugliness» in which the two of us find ourselves mutually objectified by the other.

Of course, it is possible to retort that this is simply psychoanalysis when the processes of treatment are simply doing their job! It's true. However, I believe that at a cer-

tain point a transformative process intervenes so that finally (even concretely) the objects in the field become «beautiful» in a dimension shared by the analytic couple. With my patient Giovanni I was pointlessly trying every possible interpretation, but he had the right to present himself as ugly to a father/analyst/Putin because, in his projective identification, I was guarding a concept of «beautiful» which entirely excluded him from a relationship with me. In all honesty, I do not believe I made particular errors from a technical point of view: I was interpreting my countertransference and my intersubjective contributions; I was analysing my numerous enactments; I was empathizing with his despair, but to no effect. I think it simply wasn't time for a happy «coupling» which the patient offers me while he feels that I am a poor creature, incapable of helping him. The analytic process has its seasons when beauty can produce its outcomes: «If you aren't an enthusiast, mathematics can seem a cold subject. Its beauty is only revealed to the most patient» (Mirzakhani 2014, 31).

Treatments are especially beautiful when they are felt by the patient as wholly specific to his or her distinctiveness. Beauty in this sense is a *defect*, as Pamuk (1998) puts it: in other words, something extremely singular which is not serially repeated. In the work of art, it is often the defect that attests its maker's identity (Ferro, 2015; 2016). In treatments, beauty has to do with a *defect* which speaks of the originality of that process and of the subjects involved.⁶ In this respect, I was struck by the episode some years ago when they tried at great expense to reconstruct the hand of Venus in the sculpture *Mars and Venus* which is in the Palazzo Chigi in Rome (Bucci, 2010). The process of beauty – as is the case in the *Venus and Mars* – lies exactly in feeling that the defect is the essence of that artwork's beauty which comes to us after so much time (Eco, 2012). It is what I must have succeeded in communicating to my patient: his compulsive complaining was something that made him unapproachable but, within the analytic process, it was the very acknowledgement of this «nastiness» which allowed him and me to feel interesting and distinctive for the other.

... AND FINALLY

Yesterday, for the first time in a long while, I met a seriously ill patient for whom the Mental Health Service tries *to do only the minimum* because otherwise he may feel excessively exposed to levels of frustration, and so nobody expects any developmental from him; there is a collusion in which the whole service participates to treat him as a chronic case. Yesterday, as he does from time to time, he called in at the service and told me, «Doctor, did you know I've fallen in love?» My surprise must have been so great that I let slip an obviously highly aggressive question. I asked him, «But

⁶ With Giovanni, the defect concerned my inability to tolerate impotence, reacting in the clumsiest imaginable ways...

does the girl know?» He replied, «I had an affair with her a while ago!» Later, thinking back over this scene, I was very pleased with the importance (and the grave responsibility) of my enactment. I could understand the extent to which I may strongly have been the depository of a sterile, absolutely blocked representation of this *ugly* patient whom everyone tried to avoid, not because he was dangerous but because of an intrinsic and evident ugliness connected to his serious psychosis. For the first time after years of knowing him as a very seriously ill patient, I could imagine him capable of being in love and even of having an affair!

Beauty as a process has to do with contingent, transitory and unpredictable configurations which intersect in the relational field. Every now and then we are able to insert a little joint which makes itself known through a sensation of surprise or an aesthetic feeling. This is a process of movement and of the Self making itself continually more complex. The surprise and aesthetic emotion emerge unexpectedly on the heels of re-compositions of dissociated configurations or of new associative compositions which enrich the Self. In some stages, this continuous movement of dissociative compositions and re-compositions requires the analyst's active participation by means of outright enactment and a delicate use of self-disclosure. In clinical work we know that many patients, irrespective of how ill they are, turn out to be more or less interesting than we expected. We use a variety of adjectives to describe these situations: the patient feels *alive* to us, *arouses* us, we discover ourselves waiting for the session with pleasure, or on the contrary we feel a certain *weariness* and *fatigue* about some patients and recognize that they aren't changing. What moves these situations on is the ever-contingent resonance with elements available to the encounter, irrespective of its clinical seriousness, and able to be deployed in a process of continual creation of beauty because the process of beauty concerns a genuine mental coupling between the subjects in the field.

Lastly, I think that one of the pathological outcomes of the process of beauty is narcissistic personality disorder. Melzer and Harris Williams suggest that, on the clinical level, the suspension of aesthetic conflict may give rise to «cynicism, perversity and the vulgarisation of taste» (1988, 145ff). The pathologically narcissistic patient has co-opted the beauty for himself and, like Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, has removed it from the process, suspending the fertile dialogue with the context of reality. In Ogden's sense (1989), in subjects who try compulsively to be worthy of love, «beauty is a gift of the admirer... and this represents a particular form of narcissistic disturbance» in that what is sought is not mirroring but the significant dependence on the observer who gives the subject value. The drama of the narcissistic patient is the enigma of resonance. This is probably connected to early experiences of traumatic resonances which have prevented invested in the process of beauty and authenticity. The narcissistic reward is a serious depression which is often organized around the avoidance of contact with the world and substance abuse or surgical interventions aimed at

suspending any process of resonance with external objects by introducing prostheses of beauty into the Self. Substance abuse and surgery are devices which remain external and extraneous to the Self and, as such, are deputed to the avoidance of the Self's mobility, which is felt as traumatic. The substances and the surgery try to co-opt the *beauty*, avoiding the process (Time, Kim Ki- Duk, 2006). The process of beauty is constantly cultivated by a sufficiently unsaturated relational field where therapists avoid the «prostheses» or the restoration of something which has inevitably changed in the interim. It is a process which is continually monitored and sustained by *surprise* (Reik 1935), *authenticity* (Neri, 2008; Boccara, Gaddini, Riefolo, 2009; Riefolo, 2013), *lightness* (Calvino, 1988) and *curiosity* (Boesky, 1989, Stern, 2015). These are crucial moments in the process of beauty and, if things go well, we will inevitably and fortunately be exposed to these positions which continually catch and are founded on the *vitality* (Stern, 2010) of the processes of treatment.

«beauty characterizes one aspect (and what is more, a provisional one) of the object or of the being, not its totality»

(TODOROV, 2006)

SUMMARY AND KEY WORDS

The beauty of psychoanalysis. Some considerations about beauty as a process. The author proposes that there is a structural difference between the concepts of Beautiful and Beauty. Therefore, the position of beauty does not relate to the specific and descriptive characteristics of an object or a relationship, but rather to the constant and oscillating movement that takes place in the intersubjective field. The beautiful describes, instead, the suspension of the process of beauty which represents a continuous tension in the analytic process. In some brief clinical vignettes two levels of the beauty process are described. On the first level there is the discovery of lively elements within libidinally disinvested or never invested objects. At a subsequent level the continuous fluctuation of the field allows for the creation of new relational configurations, which never existed before. These configurations acknowledge beauty in features that are extraneous to the Self because they were felt unrepresentable by the patient. The process of beauty, when suspended, describes a specific pathology in narcissistic personality disorder.

KEYWORDS: Beautiful, beauty, dissociative process, dysmorphophobia, narcissistic disorder, process, relational field.

LA BEAUTÉ DE LA PSYCHANALYSE. CONSIDÉRATIONS EN MARGE DE LA BEAUTÉ EN TANT QUE PROCESSUS.

Une différence structurelle est proposée entre les concepts de Beau et de Beauté. Par conséquent, la position de la beauté ne se rapporte pas aux caractéristiques spécifiques et descriptives d'un objet ou d'une relation, mais au mouvement continu et oscillant qui a lieu dans le domaine relationnel et intersubjectif. Le beau, au contraire, décrit la suspension du processus de beauté qui représente une tension continue du processus analytique. A travers de quelques étapes cliniques, on décrit deux niveaux du processus de beauté. Au premier niveau, il y a la découverte d'éléments vivants à l'intérieur d'objets désinvestis ou jamais investis libidiquement. À un autre niveau, le mouvement continu du champ permet la création de nouvelles configurations relationnelles, jamais existées auparavant. Ces configurations, à travers l'intime échange intersubjectif possible dans le champ analytique, reconnaissent la beauté à des aspects étrangers au Soi parce qu'ils sont ressentis comme non présentables par le patient. Le processus de beauté, lorsqu'il est suspendu, décrit une pathologie spécifique dans le trouble narcissique de la personnalité.

MOTS CLÉS: Beau, beauté, champ relationnel, dysmorphophobie, processus, processus dissociatif, trouble narcissique.

LA BELLEZA DEL PSICOANÁLISIS. CONSIDERACIONES AL MARGEN DE LA BELLEZA COMO PROCESO.

En este trabajo se propone una diferencia estructural entre el concepto del Bello y de Belleza. Por tanto, la condición de belleza no concierne las características específicas y descriptivas de un objeto o de una relación, sino el movimiento continuo y oscilante que se cumple en el campo relacional e intersubjetivo. Lo bello, en cambio, describe la suspensión del proceso de belleza que representa una tensión permanente del proceso analítico. A través de algunos breves ejemplos clínicos se describen dos niveles del proceso de belleza. Se descubre al primer nivel el descubrimiento de elementos vivos dentro de objetos desinvertidos o nunca invertidos libídicamente. A otro nivel, el movimiento continuo del campo permite la creación de nuevas configuraciones relacionales que nunca existieron antes. Estas configuraciones, mediante el íntimo intercambio intersubjetivo que es posible en el campo analítico, reconocen belleza a aspectos ajenos al Sí mismo, porque el paciente los percibe como impresentables. El proceso de belleza, cuando se queda suspendido, describe una específica patología en el trastorno narcisista de la personalidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Belleza, bello, campo relacional, dismorfofobia, proceso, proceso de disociación, trastorno narcisista.

DIE SCHÖNHEIT DER PSYCHOANALYSE. RANDBEMERKUNGEN ZUR SCHÖNHEIT ALS PROZESS.

Vorgeschlagen wird eine strukturelle Unterscheidung zwischen den Konzepten des Schönen und der Schönheit. Die Position der Schönheit bezieht sich somit also nicht auf spezifische und deskriptive Eigenschaften eines Objekts oder einer Relation, sondern auf die kontinuierliche und oszillierende Bewegung, die sich im intersubjektiven und Beziehungsfeld vollzieht. Das Schöne hingegen beschreibt die Aufhebung des Prozesses der Schönheit, die eine permanente Spannung des analytischen Prozesses darstellt. Über einige knappe Ausblicke in die klinische Praxis werden zwei Ebenen des Prozesses der Schönheit beschrieben. Auf einer ersten Ebene befindet sich die Entdeckung lebendiger Elemente innerhalb unbesetzter oder niemals libidinös besetzter Objekte. Auf einer weiteren Ebene erlaubt die permanente Bewegung des Feldes die Schöpfung neuer, zuvor nicht existenter Beziehungskonfigurationen. Über den im analytischen Feld möglichen intimen intersubjektiven Austausch sprechen diese Konfigurationen dem Selbst fremden, da vom Patienten als nicht präsentabel empfundenen Aspekten Schönheit zu. Der Prozess der Schönheit beschreibt eine spezifische Pathologie innerhalb der narzisstischen Persönlichkeitsstörung.

SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER: Beziehungsfeld, dissoziativer Prozess, Dysmorphophobie, narzisstische Störung, Prozess, Schönes, Schönheit.

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