

Beauty, ugliness and the sublime

Martin Schmidt 

First published: 07 January 2019

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1111/1468-5922.12468>

Citations: 4

[Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Abstract

EN FR DE IT RU ES ZH

Jung and Freud had very different ideas about the nature of analysis. This paper begins by exploring how Jung's gnostic approach, with its goal of individuation, is deeply informed by Buddhist and Taoist principles. His pluralistic, relational model regards truth as subjective and co-constructed with the patient. In contrast, Freud's secular methodology has objective truth as its goal. His classical psychoanalysis is a form of reality testing where the analyst claims to know the painful, singular, objective reality which the patient tries to evade. The theory of aesthetic development (see Piaget 1951, Baldwin 1975, Parsons 1980, Housen 1992, Harris Williams 2010) proposes that artistic appreciation is linked to human development. The paper looks at how the apperception of beauty, related to both truth and meaning, acts as an indicator and facilitator of individuation in the clinical encounter. This is illustrated by a clinical case study. Through empirical research, support is given to the argument (Bollas 1978, Meltzer 1988) that our early experience of the feminine/maternal plays a central role in developing an aesthetic capacity. The experience of the *sublime* in analysis is examined and portrayed as a means by which aesthetic development may be reignited and narcissistic isolation shattered.

Beauty and the truth

It seems to me that all spiritual practices and therapies, both East and West, are predicated on finding meaning and the truth. However, what they consider to be 'the truth' is fundamentally different.

not beautiful. Beautiful words are not truthful' (2011, p. 81). Lacan concurred, warning that the truth is sometimes ugly and that it is not necessarily beneficial to learn it (1959, p. 217).

Jung held meaning as more important than truth (Schmidt 2014, p. 675). For him, the goal of analysis, and life, is to find meaning: 'As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light of meaning in the darkness of mere being' (Jung 1963, p. 326). Meltzer envisaged meaning always in relation to beauty: 'Meaning is, in the first instance, the fundamental manifestation of the passions of intimate relationship with the beauty of the world' (1988, p. 14). He observed, in his work with psychopathic patients, a correlation between those who found it difficult to discriminate between good and evil and those who could not recognise something as beautiful or ugly. Beauty is an affective experience which moderates our relation to the world.

Jung and Freud: differing approaches to analysis

Jung's approach to the world and to analytic work was underpinned by his own personal, subjective experience of a self that transcends the ego. He was a gnostic, where personal wisdom acquired from experience is considered more important than knowledge attained from books and articles of faith. Jung was the first psychoanalyst to integrate these insights that come from religious practice into his philosophy.

Freud (1907), by contrast, was deeply sceptical of God and spirituality. He famously proclaimed that neurosis, with its obsessive-compulsive characteristics, is an individual religion, and that religion, with its repetitive rituals, is a universal obsessional neurosis. Therefore, in classical psychoanalysis, God and religion are seen as neurotic consolations, illusions used to refute the inevitability of death (Schmidt 2013). Spiritual experiences are understood in terms of projective identification and psychotic mechanisms.

Freud's secular psychoanalysis is based on the notion that there is one true objective reality, which the patient refuses to accept. Neurosis can be understood as the unnecessary suffering we create for ourselves, in the vain attempt to avoid the inevitable pain we do not wish to confront. In this classical psychoanalytic approach, the goal is reality testing. Psychoanalysis aims to help the patient come to terms with a singular, objective, bitter truth which the analyst claims to know and, in so doing, transform 'hysterical misery into common unhappiness' (Freud 1895, p. 305). Acknowledging the truth involves the painstaking process of assisting the patient in peeling away layers of neurotic defences which have congealed to conceal this uncomfortable reality. This truth is epitomized by Freud's reality principle which, in its most elevated form, is articulated by science. In this extraverted, heterocentric model, a successful

Jung's introverted approach is fundamentally different, although he shared Freud's homophobia (perhaps, in part, because the androphilic dynamics between them were never resolved). The goal of Jung's analysis is not reality testing but individuation: self-realisation; the becoming of all that one can be. For him, there is no singular, objective reality but many truths which are not revealed by the analyst but are discovered and co-constructed with the patient.

This relational, constructivist, pluralistic approach is closer to art than science. Synchronistic events, numinous experiences, emergent phenomena, moments of meeting and states of grace (Crowther & Schmidt 2018) are considered guides in this process. Here we see Jung being influenced by the beauty of religious thinking, particularly from the East.

Analytical psychology, Buddhism and Taoism

Buddhism teaches that suffering (*dukkha*) is caused by desire (*tanha*) which includes being attached to beauty (*subha*) of the body. However, the Buddha did not renounce beauty. On the contrary, the Buddha espoused recognition of beauty as an incentive for more enlightened living. The beauty of nature is a common theme in Buddhist texts and beauty is seen as an intrinsic quality of all things. He advocated that one should find joy in beauty without attaching external value to it. Buddhism recognizes that all beings are part of a whole, and that the whole is beautiful. Beauty is without any specific form, and in effect could be called formless, yet it also serves as a unifying meaningful force. Buddhists argue that as all beings are meaningfully interconnected, all beings have intrinsic beauty. Jung shares this view of an interconnected meaningful world of all things with his use of the concept *unus mundus* (1955, para 660).

The Tao too is a beautiful concept. Part of its beauty comes from its enigmatic elusiveness. Like every true Jungian symbol, it defies definition. Heyong Shen (2016, p. 173) identifies 'equilibrium with time' as key to the Tao. Harmony, equilibrium and symmetry are often seen as vital components of that which is considered beautiful (Dubrov 1989). Interestingly, the etymology of the word 'ugly' has two roots: one meaning ill-shaped, lacking symmetry and harmony (Greek *dyseides*, Latin *deformis*), whereas the other (from Old Norse, *uggligr*) means dreadful and fearful.

Although trying to compare eastern metaphysical philosophies with western psychology is fraught with difficulties, if we look at the essentials of Taoism and Buddhism we find much that resounds with Jung's analytical psychology. All three are gnostic traditions based on paradoxes, where the foundation lies not in knowledge of the written word, but in lived experience. They all value doubting, all reject dogma and have no external saviour. Each values ritual, meditative,

one of the main interests of Taoism and of Zen Buddhism' (1934, para 602). They all recognise that we hold misconceptions about the nature of reality because of the inadequacy of the ego with which we perceive it, but all consider the psyche as having within itself the potential for liberation as well as danger. A healthy man is understood to be one who desires self-realisation. They all profess that in bringing together the 'the union of opposites through the middle path' (Jung 1928, para. 327), duality can be transcended into an absolute unity. Taoism, in common with analytical psychology, is a philosophy of the art of living and relationships. Both share an adherence to the beauty of the rhythm of nature, to the attainment of balance between opposites, to harmony, spontaneity and the absence of calculated activity.

Jung's psychology, like Buddhism, holds dear the goal of becoming who we truly are. However, although they both see personal and spiritual growth as dependent upon relinquishing egocentric pursuits, the pure consciousness Buddhists seek through renouncing the ego, Jung feels is unattainable. In Buddhism, the overriding concern is the termination of suffering through achieving Buddhahood. For Jung, suffering remains in the nature of being, and individuation can never be attained. He said in an interview with Zen Master Hisamatsu, 'We need suffering. Otherwise life would be no longer interesting' (Young-Eisendrath and Muramoto 2002, p. 115). Buddhists wish to dissolve the very notion of selfhood, whereas Jung promotes individuality. Although he recommends the *disappearance of egohood* (by which he means the dominion of the ego over the individual (Jung 1939, para. 904)), he champions a strong, differentiated ego that can then enter into the service of the greater Self, particularly after mid-life.

Buddhist Lama Govinda sounds like a Jungian describing the collective unconscious when he states: 'Such penetration and transformation is only possible through the compelling power of inner vision, whose primordial images or 'archetypes' are the formative principles of our mind' (Govinda 1969, p. 91-92). He goes on to say that underlying consciousness is the 'store unconscious' (*alaya-vijnana*) which is the '... source of all consciousness, the Universal Mind, in which primordial forms and all experiences since beginningless (sic) time are stored' (ibid., p. 71-77). Similarly, Jung sounds like a Taoist or Zen master when he says: 'Nothingness is the same as fullness. In infinity, full is no better than empty. Nothingness is both empty and full ... A thing that is infinite and eternal hath no qualities, since it hath all qualities' (1963, p. 379).

Although Jung was heavily influenced by both spiritual systems, I see analytical psychology as closer to Taoism than Buddhism in that it sees virtue not in moral laws, but in an inward quality of obedience to natural law, in simplicity and spontaneity. Buddhism is based on the premises known as The Four Noble truths which proclaim that all life is suffering; suffering is caused by desire and attachment; freedom from desire is possible and that this can be achieved by

but some, like Hinayana Buddhism, demand strict moral regulations and adherence to austere rules of conduct (Moacanin, [1986](#)). Taoism, like Jungian analysis, offers no pursuit of a goal, just 'the path' or 'the Way' where the path is no path. This is the 'Tao', also translated as 'meaning', the 'formless' and the 'great', which resonates with Keats' notion of Negative Capability precious to Jungian analysts: '... that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason' (Keats 1817, p. 193-4).

In both Eastern spiritual traditions, man's position is as mediator between the two great powers, heaven and earth. We see this too in Greek mythology, where the world is born out of chaos and the original parents are also heaven and earth in the guise of father sky (Uranus) and mother earth (Gaia). These opposites represent the physical and spiritual worlds, the conscious and the unconscious. Man is positioned in the middle point, the Mean, from whence we get 'meaning' (as Heyong Shen points out: 'meaning includes the idea of finding the Mean' ([2016](#), p. 163)). This is expressed in both Taoism and Buddhism as the Middle Way and is attained by balancing the feminine, dark, negative, physical, cerebral Yin and the light, masculine, positive, spiritual Yang. Similarly, the polarity of male and female principles is a basic Vajrayana Buddhist concept and their union is the goal of all Tantric practices. The feminine aspect of the Buddha is Tara. She is revered in Tibet as the mother of all Buddhas. To Neumann, Tara symbolises the highest form of the mother archetype, whom he refers to as the Great Goddess (Neumann [1963](#)).

Although this Taoist and Buddhist concept of 'balancing opposites' is core to Jung's thinking, his contrasexual polarities of masculine, rational logos and feminine, relational eros, do not coincide with Yin and Yang, nor do his notions of a soulful anima and antagonistic animus. Here we see the difficulties inherent in imposing Western ideas on Eastern ones. As Cooper warns: 'It is a mistake to translate the opposites into "male" and "female" ... it is better to see Yin and Yang as passive and active, receptive and creative forces in Nature' ([1981](#), p. 14).

Also, in the Jungian clinical encounter, the analyst is expected to be affected, even contaminated to some degree, by the patient, however the spiritual teacher, or guru, in Buddhism and Taoism is expected to be 'immune to such contamination and cannot be affected by his students' negativities' (Moacanin [1986](#), p. 58).

As Yasuhiro Tanaka (2017) elucidates, Jung ultimately fails in applying Western ideas of consciousness and unconscious structures to Buddhist ideas of *satori* (enlightenment). Jung describes *satori* or *emyo* (empty infinity) as 'the detachment of consciousness from the world and a withdrawal to a point outside it...' (1938, para 65). However, as Kawai ([1996](#)) and Tanaka point out, enlightenment is not the 'detachment of consciousness from the object', but

and Eastern philosophies: 'Jung located himself in-between, clinging in the air, not grounded somewhere real' (ibid., p. 5).

Though this may be true, it cannot be denied that Jung was profoundly influenced by Eastern philosophies. We know of his fascination with Taoism, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Zen Buddhism and Kundalini yoga. He painted mandalas and proclaimed that 'Lao Tzu reads exquisitely, unsurpassingly well in the Tao Te Ching' (Jung 1944, para. 954). What is more, Jung first referred to his 'synchronistic principle' in relation to the I Ching (Jung 1930, para. 81) and his closing reflections on his own life (in 'Retrospect', 1963) refer to Lao Tzu's brilliance.

Beauty

I have become fascinated by the experience of beauty, ugliness and the sublime in analysis and individuation. Beauty can be defined as the quality present in a thing or person that gives intense pleasure or deep satisfaction to the mind. It is derived from the French *beauté* and Vulgar Latin *bellitas* meaning 'state of being pleasing to the senses' and from Latin *bellus* 'pretty'. Man's quest for pleasure and for beauty are intrinsically linked. We seek beauty and the pleasure it evokes. As Jung proclaimed, 'beauty is one of the most excellent of God's creations' (Jung 1944, para. 954).

I have noticed that, as my patients become healthier, they report becoming more aware of beauty, whether this is a tree in blossom or a painting on my wall. Psychoanalysts, such as Milner and Winnicott, have emphasized the way in which creative and aesthetic experience foster psychic growth in both the analyst and patient (Glover 1998). Analysis itself can be understood as a beautiful endeavour. In our paper, 'States of grace in analysis' (2018), Catherine Crowther and I attempt to describe aesthetic moments of meeting between analyst and patient, where there is a profound sense of connection accompanied by sublime experience. These can take the shape of shared realisations, where it feels as if an insight is received, rather than produced by the ego (of either patient or analyst). In these embodied aesthetic experiences, the atmosphere in the room changes dramatically and the relational experience is transformed. As Joe Cambray (2006) describes, such experiences can also be understood in terms of synchronicities, meaningful co-incidences that emerge between analyst and patient.

Bion's vertices

to Jung remained unconscious). He was heavily influenced by Jung without acknowledging him, e.g. he developed his ideas of the container and contained after listening to Jung discuss this theme at the Tavistock lectures in 1935. Bion, somewhat unusually, invited one of his patients at that time, Samuel Beckett, to hear Jung's lectures (see Maier [2016](#)).

Bion advocated that analysts should aspire to beautiful interpretations:

“ It is very important to be aware that you may never be satisfied with your analytic career if you feel that you are restricted to what is called a ‘scientific’ approach. You will have to be able to have a chance of feeling that the interpretation you give is a beautiful one, or that you get a beautiful response from the patient. This aesthetic element of beauty makes a very difficult situation tolerable. It is so important to dare to think or feel whatever you do think or feel, never mind how un-scientific it is. (Bion [1999](#) in Winborn 2018, p. 86)

”

He also argued that to do analysis well, we need to approach the patient from three different vertices (Bion [1974](#)). The ‘scientific’ vertex is the one taught on most analytic and psychotherapeutic trainings. It is paternalistic, weighted heavily on interpretation, thinking and rationality. It is reductive and tries to explain the present by looking at patterns of behaviour and attachments from the past.

However, equally important is the ‘artistic or aesthetic’ vertex. This is quintessentially maternal and focused on reverie, attunement, containment, negative capability and resonance. Connolly designates Jungian analysis as a ‘more maternal method of therapy’ ([2018](#), p. 80). The aesthetic vertex revels in the meeting of two embodied presences, here and now. What becomes important is the aesthetic of the room and the objects therein, e.g. the furniture, the light from the window, the clothes we wear, our aroma, the depth of our breathing, the silence, the rhythm of our speaking and the tone of our voices.

Last, but not least, is the ‘religious’ vertex. Here we are reverent and embrace the uncanny, the mystery of the unknown and unknowable. We open ourselves to sublime experiences of awe (the awesome and the awful), the inexplicable, the numinous and the future. Questions about God or what life means are not reduced or dismissed merely as pathology.

Beautiful research

not so simple, question: 'Tell me something you find beautiful'.

Approximately 55% of all answers were those which I would describe as collective or impersonal. Examples of these included experiences of nature, e.g. night skies, landscapes, seascapes, flowers and art. The other 45% were specific answers which pertained to the personal life of the person. Examples of these included, e.g. 'my wife's face' and 'my freshly made bed'.

I observed that most of the answers to the question seemed timeless, as if they would have been the same if asked 2,000 years ago. Only eight, of the 427 responses, were relatively modern pleasures such as 'my first cup of coffee of the day' or 'my motorbike'. One answer that stayed with me was 'the movement of the musculature of a big cat under its skin as it sprints'.

Most striking was the gender difference in personal responses. Altogether, 192 people (101 women and 91 men) gave personal answers. Astonishingly, 86% of the men gave the same response. This was: 'A woman or part of a woman's body'. Interestingly, not one of the 101 women who gave personal answers, mentioned 'a man or part of a man's body'! Instead, 88% of these women gave the same answer: 'an infant, a child or part of baby's body'.

It is from these results that I make a hypothetical leap. I propose that all the responses are referring to the maternal, the feminine, as the source of beauty and aesthetic experience. The impersonal/collective answers could be seen to be all referring to aspects of mother nature. Universally, in folklore and creation myths, nature is portrayed as maternal/feminine. Jung describes mother as the 'primary object' but sees nature as, 'the secondary object ... which imperceptibly usurps the mother's place and takes over the sounds first heard from her, together with all those feelings we later rediscover in ourselves in our warm love for Mother Nature' (1912, para. 500).

The personal responses similarly refer to the maternal. I suggest that the men, in responding with 'a woman or part of a woman's body', are referring to their early experience of the maternal, whereas the women, in responding with 'an infant, a child or part of baby's body', are identifying with the maternal. But, as Alice Thomas Ellis poignantly stated, sadly love is never reciprocated: 'Men love women, women love children and children love hamsters!' (2014, p. 21).

Beauty and the maternal

appreciation of beauty. Meltzer delineates how the original, primary experience of beauty transpires in the baby's encounter with the mother's eyes and body. He portrays an aesthetic conflict between the 'outside of the beautiful mother available to the senses and the enigmatic inside which must be construed by creative imagination' (1988, p. 22). Mark Winborn (2018) summarises Bollas who frames this beautifully:

“ The epistemology of the aesthetic moment is prior to representational cognition, and speaks that part of us where the experience of rapport with the other was the essence of being ... The mother's idiom of care and the infant's experience of this handling is the first human aesthetic. It is the most profound occasion where the content of the self is formed and transformed by the environment. The uncanny pleasure of being held by a poem, a composition, a painting, or, for that matter any object, rests on these moments when the infant's internal world is given form by the mother. This first human aesthetic informs the development of personal character ... and will predispose all future aesthetic experiences that place the person in subjective rapport with an object.

(Bollas 1978 in Winborn, p. 92)

”

Aesthetics and ugliness

Jung was sceptical of an aesthetic approach to the problem of man's split nature. He stated that 'the beautiful cannot coincide with the aesthetic ... human nature is simply what it is; it has its dark and its light sides' (Jung 1921, para. 206). Aestheticism for Jung '... hinders a deeper investigation of the problem, because it always averts its face from anything evil, ugly and difficult' (ibid., para. 194). 'The problem then remains stuck in aesthetics – the 'ugly' is also beautiful, even beastliness and evil shine forth enticingly in the false glamour of aesthetic beauty' (1921a, para. 230).

The Tao Te Ching reminds us, 'Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness' (Lao Tzu 2011, p. 2). Jung is in complete accord, 'Only an incorrigible idealist or optimist could conceive the totality of human nature as simply beautiful' (1921, para. 206).

As Segal reminds us, our clinical work confronts us with ugliness and brutality every day: 'Ugliness is what expresses the state of the internal world in depression. It includes tension, hatred and its results – the destruction of the good and whole objects and their change into persecutory fragments. ... both beauty and ugliness must be present for a full aesthetic

without aggression.

Mark Winborn, who writes eloquently on aesthetics from a Jungian perspective, distinguishes, like Jung himself, between 'a meditation on beauty and a sensitivity to aesthetics' (2018, p. 89). Jung cautioned that an aesthetic approach to analysis removes us into spectators of beauty and ugliness at a safe distance: 'The aesthetic attitude guards against any real participation, prevents one from being personally implicated, which is what a religious understanding of the problem would mean' (1921a, para. 232).

Here, we see how Jung pre-empts (or perhaps informed?) Bion's thinking on the religious and aesthetic vertices, for Jung saw analysis as a beautiful religious rite:

“ In ritual action man places himself at the disposal of an autonomous and eternal agency operating outside the categories of human consciousness The beauty of the ritual action is one of its essential properties, for man has not served God rightly unless he has also served him in beauty.
(Jung 1940/41, para. 379)

”

Jung saw individuation as an emergence from a 'state of barbarism' where we struggle with both carnal and aesthetic cultured ambitions. He recommended that man must 'partake of both instincts, yet must also differentiate himself from them in such a way that, though he must suffer them and in some cases submit to them, he can also use them' (1921, para. 173). This is far from a philosophy of abstinence and disavowal of desire. However, true to his paradoxical self, he also states that:

“ in order to help man out of his conflict another attitude other than the aesthetic is needed. This is shown nowhere more clearly than in the parallel with Oriental ideas. The religious philosophy of India grasped this problem in all its profundity and showed the kind of remedy needed to solve the conflict. What is needed is a supreme moral effort, the greatest self-denial and sacrifice, the most intense austerity and true saintliness.
(Jung 1921, para. 194)

”

A case example

Polly loved her beautiful, red-haired mother. She was the brightest, and only, star in her firmament. Father disappeared before Polly knew him. When she tried to contact him in her teens, he didn't want to see her. She was reliant on this resplendent mother. Dazzled and blinded by her beauty, Polly felt plain and ugly in comparison. She felt that she had to avert her gaze from this overwhelming vision of loveliness.

Mother loved Polly too, at first, when she was a baby and whilst Polly reflected her brilliance. However, when she started to walk, talk and say 'no', mother cruelly rejected her. She became a repository for all that was ugly and dysfunctional in mother's inner world.

Mother's unpredictable mood swings meant that Polly could never find a reliable, stable sense of herself. One moment Polly was '*my beautiful little princess, the only thing I truly love in this world*' and the next '*you ugly ungrateful cow, I wish you had never been born ... you have ruined my life!*' These contradictory messages generated anxieties which Polly could not reconcile. In the absence of any consistent, emotional regulation from mother, symbolic space failed to develop and a borderline organisation emerged. This was early relational trauma, a living hell for the little girl. Polly introjected her mother's concrete, fundamentalist tyranny. All was seen through the binary lens of good or bad; for me or against me; nothing was able to represent anything else. What is more, Polly lived in constant fear of being abandoned by mother who threatened her with suicide for being such a demanding child.

She came into therapy in her late twenties after mother had taken another (not life-threatening) overdose. Almost immediately, the infantile dynamics came to life in the transference. One moment I was gentle, kind: '*what a beautiful face you have ... and such a soft voice like a warm bath*', the next: '*why are you are so clinical and sadistic? ... you look so ugly!*'. This theme was also reflected in my countertransference. One moment I saw a pretty, sad, little girl trying to make mummy happy, then I would feel punched by an ugly, heartless thug who took pleasure in persecuting me. Mother's idiom of care had not transformed Polly's experience into an aesthetic world of whole objects. Any good, whole objects had shattered into persecutory fragments. I came to understand why the antonym of *symbolic* (that which brings together) is *diabolic* (that which splits asunder). These ugly, fractured part objects became the currency of the analysis. My interpretations were received like shrapnel. She reciprocated by projecting the paranoid particles, which tormented her, into me. We both felt extremely controlled and claustrophobic. Polly had body piercings, short cropped hair and sported Dr Marten's 'bowver

Much of our early work involved vainly trying to meet at a place where neither of us felt persecuted by the other. Mindful of Bion's aesthetic vertex, I tried to attune to her, to imagine what she was feeling, to pay attention to her breathing, her body movements, her gaze. Whilst recoiling, I tried to remember Meltzer's axiom that beauty happens in the baby's encounter with mother's eyes and body. I tried to see the lonely, lost, little girl who is understandably furious and distraught. However, I felt 'intimidated' (a despotic form of intimacy) by her stare. Under constant scrutiny, everything I said, every facial expression and every gesture was dissected. I became an inconsistent, defensive figure as my own infantile wounds opened up under the pressure I experienced. It was a struggle not to retaliate (by making unwelcome interpretations, denying my inconsistency, justifying my behaviour or withdrawing into silence). I feel very grateful to Polly, and other patients, who have demonstrated to me, through their own courage, ways for me to face these narcissistic shortcomings. My inconsistency created lack of trust and fear of abandonment which she managed in three principal ways: she would either seek to fuse with me (so that we were one mind); or threaten to abandon me; or provoke me to abandon her (at least in this way she would be in control of the abandonment and would feel vindicated in discarding me for being the untrustworthy parent she experienced me to be).

Seven years elapsed and the reliable, consistent, commitment to the analytic process, by both of us, rounded the edges of the persecutory fragments. I had noticed that the experience of beauty for Polly was excruciating. There were many pieces of music which she could not bear to hear. Certain films would be avoided, or watched repeatedly, because they made her break down into tears. The apperception of beauty for Polly was intrinsically linked to the shattering quality of her early experience of mother's tantalising radiance. This offered her both the hope of an ecstatic union, where she could bathe in the gorgeousness of mother's love, but also, at the same time, expressed the anguish of it forever remaining exquisitely out of reach.

Gradually, we began to find a safer place to meet. I learned that my interpretations were not only futile but iatrogenic. West (2016) succinctly delineates the means by which trauma-related patterns of interaction become installed in implicit memory and are relived as the analyst inevitably becomes the re-traumatising other. I think that this re-traumatising is inevitable because the narcissistic wounds of the analyst are activated, producing inconsistent and defensive behaviours which re-traumatise the patient. As we became more forgiving of each other, it felt as if we were able to begin to emerge from the darkest places of early relational trauma which West describes. Polly and I found ourselves noticing, and commenting on, the way the shadows played on the wall of the consulting room and the sound of birdsong in the garden. I became aware that she had stopped wearing bowver boots and had changed her hairstyle.

very first day she came. It was as if a veil had been lifted, a scale removed from her inner eye. She associated to the painting (which was a colourful, abstract landscape). Now there was some room to play. We were able to tentatively share and enjoy this new symbolic arena. Even some interpretations became possible, partly because I was able to find a way to frame them more empathically and partly because she trusted me more. Fusion became less compulsory, freedom to be separate permitted. The experience of beauty became no longer excruciating and overwhelming but a mediator of the horror she encountered in the world. There was a sublime moment when she conveyed the sense of awe she experienced in looking at a baby's tiny fingers on the bus on the way to the session. I was invited into this experience and we were both profoundly moved by this vision she recreated of the child. She explained how small and humbled she felt in the presence of such awesome beauty. This was very different in quality to the overwhelming feelings of anguish she experienced in relation to mother's magnificence. Mother's beauty was awe-full to Polly whereas that of the baby was awesome. Reports of Polly's newfound appreciation of beauty in the world punctuated the sessions from then on. She became ready to risk whole object relating and, after a while, met a man whom she started to date. Although at times fraught with anxiety, this relationship grew in parallel with her aesthetic development.

The sublime

The concept of the sublime brings together this struggle between beauty and ugliness, the awesome and awful, and provides another dimension to our thinking about aesthetic conflict. The sublime describes the aesthetic feeling of being elevated in the presence of a spectacle which exceeds the common parameters of the beautiful. It comes from the Latin 'sublimis' which means 'uplifted, exalted, awe inspiring' and 'sloping up to the lintel', from 'sub' meaning 'up to' and 'limen' meaning 'lintel, threshold'. Freud (1930) saw creativity itself as a *sublimation* of a basic instinct into an exalted, civilized achievement in the sublime world of symbols. In chemistry and alchemy, sublimation refers to the transcendent process of transforming a solid into gas without it first becoming a liquid.

The sublime is associated with the ineffable and an element of mourning is always present. As Joseph Campbell proclaims, 'Beauty (the *mysterium fascinans*) invokes; the sublime (the *mysterium tremendum*) shatters and overpowers' (1990, p. 88).

As was the case with Polly, sometimes beauty, whether in the form of mother's sensuality or artistic masterpieces, is overwhelming. In the 1970s, Dr. Graziella Magherini (chief psychiatrist at Florence's Santa Maria Nuova Hospital), observed that many tourists visiting Florence appeared to be overcome with a range of psychosomatic symptoms as a result of having been

confusion and even hallucinations. She called this condition Stendhal syndrome (also known as hyperkulturemia and Florence syndrome), after the French novelist who had a similar experience when he visited Florence for the first time a century before:

“ I was in a sort of ecstasy, from the idea of being in Florence ... Absorbed in the contemplation of sublime beauty ... I reached the point where one encounters celestial sensations ... Everything spoke so vividly to my soul. Ah, if I could only forget. I had palpitations of the heart, what in Berlin they call 'nerves'. Life was drained from me. I walked with the fear of falling.
(Stendhal 1817, p. 271)

”

Rilke too understood another aspect of the nature of the sublime:

“ Whoever does not, sometime or other, give his full consent to the dreadfulness of life, can never take possession of the unutterable abundance and power of our existence; can only walk on its edge, and one day when the judgement is given, will have been neither alive nor dead.
(Rilke 1923, p. 317)

”

The sublime reveals the fracture that has been created between man and nature, between infinite and finite, between the immeasurably large and the incredibly small.

“ From a psychoanalytic perspective it is easy to translate this experience (of the sublime) in terms of a feeling of unison or at-one-ment with the object when an ideal distance is reached sheltering us from the threat represented alternatively by the absence of the object or by its excessive presence.
(Civitarese 2018, p.1)

”

This beautifully describes Polly's experience of mother, which vacillated between absence and overwhelming presence. By contrast, the humbling, sublime experience of the beauty of the baby's fingers elevated Polly (and myself) out of a narcissistic defensive confinement and reignited an aesthetic development. Aesthetic development is the theory that artistic

capacity to appreciate and mediate beauty was confluent with her capacity to symbolise and begin whole object relations. This was facilitated by finding beauty together within, between and outside ourselves. She felt that 'something feminine and maternal' in me allowed this to happen. The analytic method fosters and constitutes an aesthetic development. In the words of Meltzer's stepdaughter:

“ The quest to reconnect with the 'inward sense' that makes our lives beautiful is achieved not through direct action on the part of the analyst, but, rather, by facilitating renewed contact with the mind-feeding roots of the psychoanalytic method as aesthetic object. Thwarted development, mental illness, dis- and un-integration can all be seen in a new light: that of failure to maintain this aesthetic contact. The 'principle of beauty' requires to be re-established. This switches the focus from the minute variations of psychopathology to the mysterious complexities of aesthetic reciprocity which regulates the individual's ethical development in a way analogous to poetic inspiration.

(Harris Williams 2010, p. xvi)

”

Death and transcendence

Like Kant (1783), Schopenhauer (1818) saw all experience as divided between a noumenal, presentational, world of things-in-themselves (which can never be known) and the phenomenal world which we perceive, which is merely a representation of these original forms. One can never be sure that what one perceives is the same as someone else. He argued that this dissonance, this gap between what is and what one perceives, causes man to suffer. Aesthetic contemplation and appreciation of beauty allows us to transcend this pain, albeit temporarily, because it stops us perceiving the world as mere representation. Instead, we no longer perceive the world as an object of perception, from which we are separated, but rather we become one with that perception. He felt this was particularly true of music owing to its immediate, ethereal and ephemeral qualities.

As Christopher Bollas (2013) extols in his wonderful book *China on the Mind*, there is also a divide between East and West. He sees the idiom of the East as *transcendence* whereas in the West it is *heroism*. Jung's model of individuation attempts to bridge these Eastern and Western paradigms. He champions both the heroic ego (which needs to separate from mother, leave home and build its own identity) and, after mid-life, the transcendent Self which seeks meaning and prepares for death. Transcendence can be understood as a sublime, presentational, poetic

‘In the end, the true sublime is death itself’ (Sertoli 2002, p. 24). The sublime reminds us of the inevitability of dying, whereas beauty alerts us to the danger of losing the object. It is no surprise that one of our most sublime, transcendent experiences, the orgasm, is called the ‘*petit mort*’. ‘The sublime unveils the abyss ... where death is not physical but the loss of meaning’ (Civitarese 2018, p. 90). For Jung, death needs to become a goal rather than something to be feared:

“ ...seen in correct psychological perspective, death is not an end but a goal, and life's inclination towards death begins as soon as the meridian is passed.
(Jung 1938, para. 68)

”

“ The negation of life's fulfilment is synonymous with the refusal to accept its ending. Both mean not wanting to live, and not wanting to live is identical with not wanting to die.
(Jung 1934a, para. 800)

”

We see, time and again, how in art beauty renders tolerable the unspeakable horror and shock to which the spectacle of the other exposes us. As Jung poetically opines, ‘Beauty spreads her shimmer only when soaring above a reality full of misery, pain and squalor’ (1921, para. 127).

Conclusion

This paper attempts to shed some light on the themes of beauty, ugliness and the sublime in analysis. Original empirical research is presented which supports the argument (Bollas 1978; Meltzer 1988) that our early experience of the feminine/maternal plays a central role in developing an aesthetic capacity. Beauty can be experienced as both awesome and awe-ful. A case study is presented to illustrate how, through finding and reciprocating experiences of the beautiful and sublime, the analytic method can foster and constitute aesthetic development. Aesthetic development is the theory that artistic appreciation is linked to human development. The sublime can bridge the beautiful and the ugly, the awesome and the awful and the gap between noumenal and phenomenal worlds. It is understood here ‘in terms of a feeling of unison or at-one-ment with the object when an ideal distance is reached sheltering us from the threat represented alternatively by the absence of the object or by its excessive presence’

this paper was originally presented at the conference 'Enlightenment and Individuation: East and West' in Xian, China, it began by comparing differences between Jung's and Freud's approaches to analysis and then went on to compare Jung's analytical psychology to Buddhist and Taoist notions concerning individuation.

References



Baldwin, J. M. (1975). *Thought and Things: A Study of the Development and Meaning of Thought or Generic Logic, (Volumes III and IV)*. New York: Arno Press.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Bion, W. (1974). *Brazilian Lectures*, 2 vols. Rio de Janeiro: Imago.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Bion, W. (1999). 'Wilfrid Bion: A Seminar in Paris 1978' in 'The aesthetics of being', Winborn, M. (2018). in *Moments of Meeting in Psychoanalysis*. S Lord. (Ed.). London and New York: Routledge.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Bollas, C. (1978). The aesthetic moment and the search for transformation. *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 6, 385-394.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Bollas, C. (2013). *China on the Mind*. London and New York: Routledge.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Cambray, J. (2006). 'Towards the feeling of emergence'. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 51, 1-20.

[CAS](#) | [PubMed](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Campbell, J. (1990). *The hero's journey, Joseph Campbell on his life and work*. (Ed. P. Cousineau) San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Connolly, A. (2018). 'Sea changes: The iconic and aesthetic turns in depth psychology'. In *Re-encountering Jung*. (Ed. R. Brown) London and New York: Routledge.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Civitaresse, G. (2018). *Sublime Subjects: Aesthetic Experience and Intersubjectivity in Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Cooper, J.C. (1981). *Yin and Yang: The Taoist harmony of Opposites*. Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Dubrov, A.P. (1989). *Symmetry of Biorhythms and reactivity*. London and New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Ellis, A.T. (2014). *Words of Wisdom (volume 49) 1001 Quotes and Quotations*. (Ed. Purushothaman). Sankar Nagar: Centre for Human Perfection.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Freud, S. (1895). 'Psychotherapy of Hysteria'. *Studies on Hysteria*. SE 2.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Freud, S. (1907). 'Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices' (1906-1908): *Jensen's Gradiva and Other Works*, SE 9.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Freud, S. (1930). 'The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works'. SE 21.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Glover, N. (1998). *Psychoanalytic Aesthetics: The British School*. London: Free Association Books.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Harris Williams, M. (2010). *The Aesthetic Development: the poetic spirit of psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Housen, A. (1992). 'Validating a measure of aesthetic development for museums and schools'. *ILVS Review*, 2(2), 1-19.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1912). ' The Dual Mother'. CW5.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1921). ' Schiller's ideas on the type problem'. CW6.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1921a). ' The Apollonian and the Dionysian'. CW6.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1928). ' Anima and animus'. CW7.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1930). ' Richard Wilhelm. In Memoriam'. CW15.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1934a). 'The Soul and Death'. CW8.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1938). 'Commentary on "The Secret of the Golden Flower"'. CW13.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1939). 'Foreword to "Introduction to Zen Buddhism"'. CW11.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1940/41). 'Transformation Symbolism in the Mass'. CW11.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1944). 'The Holy men of India'. CW11.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1955). 'The Conjunction'. CW14.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Jung, C.G. (1963). *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. London: Collins and Rouledge & Kegan Paul.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Kant, I. (1783). *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. (Ed. G. Hatfield (2004)). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Kawai, H. (1996). *Buddhism and the Art of Psychotherapy*. Texas: University Press.

Keats, J. (1819/1973). 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' in *John Keats's The Complete Poems*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Keats, J. (1817/1958). *The Letters of John Keats*, (Ed. H. E. Rollins, 2 vols). i, pp. 193-4. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Lacan, J. (1959/60). 'The seminar: Book VII' in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. (Trans. Dennis Potter). London: Routledge.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Maier, C. (2016). 'Bion and C.G. Jung. How did the container-contained model find its thinker? The fate of a cryptomnesia.' *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 61, 2, 134-154.

[PubMed](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Meltzer, D. & Williams, M. (1988). *The Apprehension of Beauty*. Old Ballechin: Clunie Press.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Mitriani, J. (1998). 'Unbearable ecstasy, reverence and awe and the perpetuation of an aesthetic conflict'. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 67: 102-127.

[PubMed](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Moacanin, R. (1986). *Jung's Psychology & Tibetan Buddhism*. London: Wisdom Publications.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Neumann, E. (1963). *The Great Mother*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 332-335.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

[Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Piaget, J. (1951). *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood*. New York: W.W. Norton.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Rilke, R.M. (1923). *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*. 1987. (Ed. S. Mitchell) New York: Random House.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Schmidt, M. (2013). 'Freud's cancer' in *The Topic of Cancer* (Ed. J. Burke). London: Karnac books.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Schmidt, M. (2014). 'Influences on my clinical practice and identity. Jungian Analysis on the couch – what and where is the truth of it'. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 59, 5, 661-679.

[CAS](#) | [PubMed](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Schmidt, M & Crowther, C. (2018). 'States of Grace' in *Moments of Meeting in Psychoanalysis*. Ed. S. Lord. London and New York: Routledge.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Schopenhauer, A. (1818/2014). *The World as Will and Representation*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Segal, H. (1952). A psycho-analytical approach to aesthetics. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 33: 196-207.

[CAS](#) | [PubMed](#) | [Web of Science®](#) | [Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Sertoli, G. (2002). Introduzione. In E. Burke (1796) *Inchiesta sul bello e il sublime*. (Eds. G. Miglietta and G. Sertoli) Palermo Italy: Aesthetica edizioni.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Stendhal (1817). *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to Reggio*. Trans. Coe, R. 1959. Richmond: Calder Publications.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Tanaka, Y. (2017). 'Hic Rhodus, hic salta!': Where is 'Rhodes' for Jung's psychology? Paper presented at IAAP Prague Symposium.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Tzu, L. (2011). *Tao Te Ching*. (Trans. Gia-Fu Feng, English, J.) New York: Vintage Books.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

West, M. (2016). *Into the Darkest Places: Early Relational Trauma and Borderline States of Mind*. London: Karnac Books.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Winborn, W. (2018). 'The aesthetics of being', in *Moments of Meeting in Psychoanalysis*. Ed. S. Lord. London and New York: Routledge.

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

Young-Eisendrath, P. & S. Muramoto Eds. (2002). *Awakening and Insight: Zen Buddhism and Psychotherapy*. East Sussex: Brunner Routledge

[Google Scholar](#) | [Find @ Graduate Center](#)

ABOUT WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY

[Privacy Policy](#)
[Terms of Use](#)
[About Cookies](#)
[Manage Cookies](#)
[Accessibility](#)

[Wiley Research DE&I Statement and Publishing Policies](#)
[Developing World Access](#)

HELP & SUPPORT

[Contact Us](#)
[Training and Support](#)
[DMCA & Reporting Piracy](#)

OPPORTUNITIES

[Subscription Agents](#)
[Advertisers & Corporate Partners](#)

CONNECT WITH WILEY

[The Wiley Network](#)
[Wiley Press Room](#)