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#### **Reviews of articles of issue no. 6, 2014, Volume 95**

Edited by *Marinella Linardos*\*

#### **Giuseppe Civitarese, *Bion and the sublime: The origins of an aesthetic paradigm***

The author investigates the influence exercised on Bion by the pre-Romantic and Romantic aesthetic of the sublime. According to Civitarese, some of Bion's concepts can be attributable to the action of the aesthetic concepts of the sublime from the treatise by Longinus (or pseudo-Longinus) to other theories over the time. Some common features among the various interpretations of the sublime are: the sense of elevation that runs along a vertical (or better diagonal) axis, places and situations that arouse feeling of the sublime in art, often places of the greater danger and elements of mourning always present as the feeling of deprivation that gives rise to a emancipating impulse. The sublime is often of a negative order because it arises from the sense of violence and danger and from the feeling of being part of it. The "terrible beauty" consists in placing oneself at the safe distance from the threatening object. Civitarese stresses that Bion's style of thinking and writing inclines toward the sublime and some of his concepts lead us directly to several *topoi* of the aesthetics of the sublime. He starts from becoming O, the most ungraspable of Bion's concepts that means knowing something emotionally. O is simultaneously "meaning" but also the "no-thing". From O, the subject can reach knowledge and thoughts but also the risk of being devoured. About nameless dread, it arises when the breast falls in its task of providing meaning. It is a terrible dread not only because we have no words to define it but because it can destroy the capacity of thinking thoughts. The concept of darkness is a possibility to move toward the unconscious by renunciation and obscuring phenomenal reality and the perceptions. Sublime lives in the tension, destined to remain unresolved.

The concept of unison, on the basis of how Bion imagines the development of the psyche, coincides with the concept of ecstasy. Ecstasy means to be out of oneself and the possibility to be enriched by the temporary merging with the other. The vividness of expression is another category developed by the aesthetics of the sublime that overlaps imagination and *rêverie*. As the sublime in art creates the distance of safety, so does analysis dramatizing the terror of madness.

The idea of the phatic sublime finds an echo in the Bionian idea of suffering. Suffering takes on the meaning of authentically living the experience of pain and pleasure, possible only if not too strong defenses against experience are activated. The passion of language in the aesthetic of the sublime reminds the negative capacity of the analyst being with the patient in a way that is authentic, a creative capacity of not understanding. The genius, a classic *topos* of the sublime, a man capable in being open, who has faith in the truth, overlaps the Bionian concept of the mystic.

Aesthetic conflict underlines how horror and truth, to which the sublime exposes us, evokes anguish. If it is tolerated (and beauty helps that), it is possible to reinstate it in the social order.

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Stupor is the mental state of voluntary weakening, a suspension of normal reactivity, condition that enables the psychoanalyst to see what patient sees, to intuit his hallucinations.

The aesthetics of the sublime is, in itself, an aesthetics of immanence of the here and now. Experience is neither separate nor independent from the event. The author links the Bionian transformations to the aesthetic ones speaking about the difference between the beautiful and the sublime. The sublime is the beautiful in the moment in which the subject becomes aware of the risk of losing the object and not only to know it unconsciously. The catastrophic paradigm corresponds to the idea that truth is given retrospectively as an unveiling. About becoming infinitive, infinitive is inflected in the form of clinical concepts. Infinity is intended as infinity of the unconscious at the beginning of the analytical session and as the relation with the no-thing. The capacity to tolerate a no-thing can allow us to use it. Infinity returns in Bion when he speaks of the object becoming infinitive by transformation in hallucinosis (where the container explodes and it is expanding itself over an infinite space).

Mourning the dead, mourning the disappeared: the enigma of the absent-presence

### **Cecilia Taiana, *Mourning the dead, mourning the disappeared: The enigma of the absent-presence***

The author reruns the theory of normal and psychopathological aspects of mourning in the Freudian text “Mourning and melancholia” that can be considered as the foundation of his theory of object relations. As it is well known, in the Freudian theory the reaction against the loss occurs by effecting a temporary introjection of the object under the intensity of the unconscious ambivalence in the attempt to “being the object”.

In melancholia, the interjected object becomes part of the ego through identification of one part of the ego with the lost object (narcissistic identification). The starting point in mourning process is the reality test of loss in the reality. Mourning the disappeared, in the case of the disappeared persons in Argentina, represents a special mourning process because there is no evidence of the death of the beloved but only of his suddenly disappearance. Such mourning represents an enigma and can be compared to the enigmatic signifier described by Laplanche in his reformulation of the Freudian seduction theory. Laplanche considers seduction theory as a general theory of the repressed unconscious. The creation of the unconscious initiates, in mental life, with the child’s encounter with the enigmatic message of the sexual unconscious of the mother. The sexual travels, as a clandestine passenger, under the message of the attachment between mother and child. The paper underlines that the situation encountered by someone who has lost a loved disappeared object is similar with the situation of the infant facing with the enigmatic message of the adult. How is possible to mourn an enigma? To the child, the experience of the primal scene and the intrusion of the third that separates the child from mother have a powerful effect but, in enigmatic mourning, the third is elaborated only as a sadistic agent.

### **Florent Poupart, *The hysterical organization***

The thesis of the paper is that ambivalence toward vaginal desire, the penetration in its passive form, is the central essence of hysteria. The author proposes to define the term hysterical as a psychic modality to express the ambivalence that comes from pre-genital valences before being elaborated, at the genital stage, as refusal of the feminine. In the hysterical conflicts, there is a fantasy of an incorporeal penetration that condenses vaginal desire and its proscription. In the hysterical psychosis, the desire is denied and penetration is realized as delusional. The internal space is occupied by the fantasy of delusion. The other is present not with his body but with his thought and influence. The hysterical feels the loss of the sense of owing the internal manifestation. The author poses the question of vaginality no longer as to be the phallus or to have it but as “to

have or not to have a vagina”. The fear being invaded by a foreign body is called centripetal. The obsessional fear of seeing that one’s own contents escape from the body is called centrifugal. “To have or not to have vagina” represented a neurotic way of formulating the ambivalence toward passive penetration. In the psychosis, the question becomes “to be or not to be the vagina”.

**Anna Christopoulos, *External and internal reality: The impact of the current socio-economic crisis on the analytical dyad***

The paper considers the effects of the socio-economic crises on the psychic functioning of the patient and of the analyst and their relationship. Crisis is supposed to create a crisis in the analysis itself. The author is referring to the moment when patient cannot (or says that he cannot) continue to pay the analysis as a result of financial losses and how the intrusion of external reality influences the transference and countertransference interplay. All major theoretical works acknowledge the mutual effect of external and internal reality. The external reality has an impact on the development of the mind and the internal reality affects perception of external life. In any case, there is an agreement the goal of analysis is to help the patient distinguish between the two and to understand their interplay. At the same time, controversies exist among analysts. On the one hand, we find the Kleinian view of the perception of external life as determined by unconscious fantasies and past experiences, and Bion with his emphasis on the analytic focus into unprocessed experiences. In contrast, other orientations give more weight to external reality *per se* as the ego psychology does. It is underlined the risk in describing only internal reality under traumatic circumstances and the possibility to deny external situation in the attempt to counteract feelings of helplessness by the analyst. Similarities on patient and on analyst are the unconscious meanings of money, the sense of personal power, threats to self-preservation. The differences are the analyst financial dependency on the patient and the analyst dependence on the patient for his professional identity. The creation and maintenance of analytic stance is difficult as illustrated in the three clinical cases. The role of the analyst must be considered at the light of collective external trauma as crises and war.

**David Meghnagi, *Silvano Arieti’s novel The Parnas: A scene from the Holocaust***

The paper examines the Italian psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Silvano Arieti and his novel *The Parnas* published in 1979. Silvano Arieti left Italy in 1939, at the age 24, following the Race Laws and moved to United States where he became Professor of Psychiatry at the *New York Medical College* and training psychoanalyst, and where he remained until his death in 1981. He is known for applying psychoanalysis to the treatment of schizophrenic patients and for overcoming the dichotomies between psychoanalysis and neurobiological research. He is also well known for his works on creativity. The paper underlines, as theoretical contribution, his conceptualization on the cognitive dimension of unconscious processes. Classic psychoanalysis tended neither to address unconscious thought processes nor to mention social features as elements in understanding the mental illness. In Arieti’s thinking, psychic conflict can derive from equally structured opposing visions of the self and of others. The unconscious is created through the accumulation of experiences, intended not only as affective but subject to “cognitive distortions” which form the basis of specific internal “ideology” intended as the way we read the world as a result of progressive deposit of thoughts in the unconscious.

The novel *The Parnas*, written at the end of his life, can be considered his spiritual testament, based on events really happened during the Nazi extermination of Jews in World War II. *The Parnas* (it means “head” in Hebrew) is written in the shape of a partly-fictionalized account based on the real story of Giuseppe Pardo Roques, the pre-eminent figure of the Jewish community in Pisa during the war. Pardo was killed by Nazi soldiers in his home. He suffered, all his life, of mental illness. Before leaving Pisa, Arieti had a final conversation with Pardo who asked him to shed light on the secret of the evil with which he was afflicted.

He lived all his life with a nightmare that aggressive animals could, at any moment, attack him. He always carried a walking stick that he passed behind his back in order to control that there were no animals or wild beasts nearby. Few days before being killed, Pardo received the visit of his doctor, Arieti's father, who tried to convince him to leave his home. Pardo decided to stay and became a prison in his own house with some other people. According to the novel, Pardo discovered the secret of his illness in that occasion as a grandiose creation of the mind which foresee dangers that normal people cannot imagine. The symptoms express the ancestral fears of Jews of destructive violence and their inclination as ideal scapegoats. The Pardo's disturbance was a benign substitution for a greater fear and the need to keep intact a positive image of humanity. In the final scene of *The Parnas*, Pardo speaks to the soldiers which had persecuted him all his life, finally in front of them, and evokes the light of the *Memorah* as a symbol still capable to illuminate the future. The experience of the *Shoah*, a break in the collective consciousness, can be read as the eclipse of humankind which regards the very concept of the divine.

In the last part of the paper, Meghnagi designs a parallel between Arieti and Freud and the profound interplay of symmetries between the the Parnas and the Moses and Monotheism. Both Arieti and Freud considered their final works as testament, written by Freud just before the catastrophe of Holocaust and by Arieti many years after the Jews extermination. As with Freud, Arieti published *The Parnas* after an entire life spent in understanding the mourning processes, depression and creativity mechanisms. Putting words into the Pardo's mouth, Arieti has tried to push his personal mourning working through process as far as possible. As Freud said in *Civilization and its Discontents*, the higher level of civilization has come at the cost of neurosis. Having emerged from profound levels of Jewish life, psychoanalysis can only render discontent more tolerable.

### **John J. Hartman, *Anna Freud and the Holocaust: Mourning and survival guilt***

The paper aims to understand the role of Holocaust in Anna Freud's mourning process after she was informed of the deaths of her aunts (the sisters of his father) in concentration camps during World War II. The circumstances of Freud's family escape to London are well known but it is not clear why the Freud's four sisters did not leave Austria. When Anna received the information by the Red Cross, around January 1946 she was recovering from a serious illness. The author highlights aspects of this period by investigating several dreams that Anna recorded and filed. Considering the loss of her aunts as a day's residue, it is argued that the unconscious reproached against her father led to identification with him and with his decision to leave his sisters in Vienna. Survivor's guilt is considered as one of the complicating factors in the mourning process and on the base of her interest in working with concentration camps survivors' children. In "Losing and being lost", a paper Anna Freud wrote in 1948, she compares the experience of children losing possessions with the mourning of a loved one. She observed that we first feel deprived but then we feel guilty as if we intentionally discarded it rather than it was lost unintentionally. Finally, it is important to remind that Anna Freud never wrote directly about her personal experience in the Holocaust. The survivors experience can cause a process called "encryption", a sealed off buried experience that becomes almost impossible to share with others.

### **Adele Tutter, *Under the mirror of the sleeping water: Poussin's Narcissus***

The paper connects the four Nicolas Poussin's paintings of Narcissus with the use of the myth of Narcissus in psychoanalytical theory. In fact, no myth, except Oedipus, has captured the interest of psychoanalysis like Narcissus, beginning with Freud and his distinction between primary and secondary narcissism defined as the condition in which the ego retains the libido. Poussin, a French artist arrived in Rome in the 1620s, painted the theme of Narcissus at least four times, a possibly

more, in conjunction with a close reading of Ovid, the author of *Metamorphoses*. One of the most discussed aspects of Ovid's text is the oscillation between seeing his image as self and seeing it as other and referring to Narcissus as both subject and object. In psychoanalysis, it is possible to distinguish the mirror stage as formative of the function of the ego (Lacan) from the precursor of the mirror in the mother's face (Winnicott). The roots of identity go back to the first self-recognition coupled with a mutual recognition (Erikson). In the mirror transference, the analyst is the target of patient's demands that must reflect, as an echo, his greatness (Kohut). Beyond the differences, all theories stress the importance of maternal mirroring.

Mirroring can be intended as the mirror of the "sleeping water" to underline maternal fascination under the image of the self (Bonaparte) or as the mirror of Nature to stress the discovery that One is not All, the primal psychic injury (Andreas Salomé). Narcissus cannot see himself because he cannot accept that mother is "not me" and therefore "not mine". According to the author, Narcissus does not accept his image as his own because of the latent desire of the other. Narcissus has to deny the absence of the other. Trauma, depression and other problems can disturb a mother's capacity for reliable mirroring, interfering with the development of identity. The author stresses how in her own practice she was struck by the depth of empathy and object relations in many people otherwise classifiable as narcissists. She argues that the concept of primary narcissism must yield to the innate seeking for the other.

### ***Psychoanalytic controversies:***

#### ***Lucy Lafarge, How and why unconscious phantasy and transference are the defining features of psychoanalytic practice***

The author puts in evidence how phantasy and transference are the defining features of psychoanalysis. Every aspect of human experience can be seen to have a dual aspect, to be stimulated and shaped by conscious, contemporary experience and by memories and phantasies residing in the unconscious. The psychoanalytic setting provides a unique arena in which this duality can emerge and be recognized. The multiple meaning of the unconscious can be traced and, to some degrees, changed. This process continues after the termination of analysis. Although many elements draw upon historical events, the most are not simple replicas. They are organizations of phantasy. The author sees phantasy as a total unconscious form by which wish, fears and external reality try reconciliation, a representation of self and object. Phantasy may be fantastical, distorted, split or projected. Phantasies mostly have to do with early memories, dreaded anxieties pertaining to the body and the self in relation with early objects. They are forged within object relations; transference is intended to indicate the emergence of phantasies and object relations that are bound up with them. The idea that all human experience comprehends dual aspect has two implications. The first has to do with the nature of transference and countertransference; they cannot be seen as a simple replicas of external reality. The second implication is the unfolding process that emerges is itself a central object of analysis. A third implication is that reciprocal influence has to do with the status of analyst's experience.

A clinical vignette is reported. The first session begins with the description of an extremely powerful experience of connectedness shared by the analyst and the patient. The analyst had understood perfectly the patient's pain through identification (or phantasy) with her sense of being excluded and failure. The feeling of connectedness assumes, in the second part of the session, the meaning to feel inferior. The analyst appears now as immeasurably superior and competitive to the patient. The analyst feels herself unable to resonate with the patient's phantasy. As reading the patient's internal world as so similar to analyst's world it is likely excluding aspects of the patient's experience. In the second session, the patient for the first time brings into the analysis a physical pain above her heart connected with the idea of competitive success and failure. The pain is full of meaning and contains a host of phantasies of guilt and punishment which now can be interpreted.