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The aesthetic and affective matrix of pre-reflective sensemaking at the origins of the relationship between subject and world: A dialogue between Kant's *Third Critique* and psychoanalysis

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ABSTRACT

The authors discuss the relevance of aesthetic and affective experience at the heart of the human being's capability to relate to the world and to found relations of sense. Faced with anguish that the world can be meaningless and with fear of uncertainty/chaos, trust and hope are needed for the world to be a hospitable place for existence. Such experience is aesthetic, sensitive and affective before being rational, reflective and deliberative. Through a dialogue between Kant, Winnicott and Bion, it is shown how foundation of trust is based on two essential aspects: (1) The *illusion* that reality was created to allow us to live in it (namely, the *fictionality* is a prerequisite for each possible development of psyche) and (2) this illusion is not generated by a solipsistic activity of the human mind; rather, it is made possible starting from the primordial relationship with the other, by containing anguish, nourishing trust and hope, and supporting psychic development and elaboration of progressive forms of symbolisation. The authors discuss how these points have a profound aesthetic implication through deepening the reflection on the ontogenetic development of the psyche, the complex intertwining between primary and secondary processes, and clinical implications.

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Introduction

In this article, we aim to discuss the epistemological, theoretical and clinical scopes of the phenomena of the pre-reflective sphere of experience as supports for sensemaking processes. We start from two specific perspectives, one related to philosophy and the other to psychoanalysis: on the one hand, the valorisation of the pre-reflective matrix of *sense* in Kantian aesthetics (*Third Critique*) and, on the other hand, the description of psychic development in the theoretical and clinical traditions of Winnicott and Bion.

Referencing Kant is not new in psychoanalysis if we consider that the distinction between a *noumenal* (unknowable) and *phenomenal* (concerning experience and the sensitive dimension) reality has been an impetus for reflection on the conceptual and clinical framework of psychoanalysis. Freud deals with some Kantian arguments in several of his works. For example, in an essay on metapsychology, "The Unconscious," Freud says:

Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psychoanalysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be. (Freud 1915, 171)

Also, Bion often and directly invokes the Kantian notion of *thing-in-itself*, developing it in the direction of the notion of *O* – i.e. the unknowable reality – in his essay “Transformations” (Bion 1965), as highlighted throughout this article.¹

Interest in aesthetics is also not new: Psychoanalysis has variously treated the relationship between art and, for instance, the fulfilment of desire, sublimation, defence, erotic pleasure, a form of reparation and mourning work, or even valence as uncanny or aesthetic conflict. Less investigated, however, has been *sense* – which we focus on in our article – and aesthetics as the original forms of knowledge and the foundational matrix of human experience.

In this article, we intend to explore and deepen a “suspicion” that has crossed and troubled Western thought since its origins and which has progressively strengthened in psychoanalysis through the recognition of the importance of the first relationships of the human being. That is that the foundation of psychic life, for the human being, does not lie in the direct relationship of exact correspondence between knowledge and things (what the medieval and modern scholars called “*adaequatio rei et intellectus*”), but rather in the pre-reflective illusion that the world has a sense for the subject. On the basis of the trust in a world that has sense and wherein it is possible to live, there is an anticipated *wager of sense* that must be made at the beginning of life, which is never definitively earned but requires constant renewal throughout life (Valsiner 2018), which acts as an implicit and unconscious substratum of daily life. Such a wager cannot be the product of a solipsistic activity of the mind, but it is built in the context of the primary relationship with the other. This is the paradoxical *unfounded foundation* of the pre-reflective experience (unfounded because it is always in question, under construction and never assured once and for all), which disturbs and anguishes the subject and which Kant, Winnicott and Bion – each in their own way – were able to highlight and to clarify (Civitarese and Ferro 2022).

These reflections contribute to dismantling the Cartesian remnant of the autarchic vision of the subject and thought that is still present within our Western culture. This also allows for advancing our understanding of the role of relationality in the development of human beings and their forms of knowledge, especially forms of pre-reflectivity.

Fully enhancing the aesthetic value of pre-reflective experience has several implications. On the one hand, it offers a new background and deepens the coexistence and constant interrelation between primary and secondary processes, in terms of both genetic analysis and dynamic description of these phenomena.

¹Although, according to some authors, Bion misunderstands Kantian concepts (Green 1998; Noel-Smith 2013), Bion surprisingly argues for the importance of “intuiting” – while recognising the impossibility for the intellect and rational knowledge – the ultimate reality of the patient’s mind and what is occurring in psychoanalytic sessions. André Green states, “Kant was an important reference for Bion. But contemporary philosophers will probably complain of Bion’s misunderstandings when interpreting Kant’s conceptions for his own use” (Green 1998, 653).

From a clinical point of view, the arguments broaden the range of perspectives, experiences and tools available to the therapist for accompanying and supporting the patient's processes of care, development and transformation throughout analytic treatment.

Finally, we present and discuss a clinical case to show how the aesthetic dimension can evoke, in the patient's life, the quality of their primary affects and typical patterns of primary psychic organisation in order to promote the recovery of repressed elements of the self and to improve the quality of their relational and social life.

Pre-reflective experience: A recent field of investigation

For many centuries, the equation between *knowledge* and *consciousness*, intended as *reflective awareness*, was considered a tautology. From Plato to Descartes, the privilege assigned to the rational component, which was expressed mostly in the logical–linguistic forms of reflective thought, defined the field of “true” knowledge, while unconscious components were consigned to the domain of art and poetry, devoid of any real truthful function.

Significantly, from the Platonic *thought* (*nous*²) to intuitive logic, philosophers have always considered intuition to be a form of sensitivity endowed with a specific epistemological status. However, the discoveries of twentieth-century psychology and the evidence produced by affective neuroscience at the beginning of the new millennium have shown how arbitrary this distinction between intuition and emotion truly is (Tossici and De Luca Picione 2023). Recently, even in mainstream thinking, the view of cognition and knowledge has become more complex and comprehensive, including emotional components as phenomena with specific epistemological value (Salvatore et al. 2021, 2022).

The result has been a renewed interest in the investigation of the pre-reflective dimension, a term that designates a modality of approach to the world that precedes and makes possible the establishment of the so-called reflective functions and their typical tools: the triad composed of articulated language (the word), rational thought (the concept) and their combined arrangement, i.e. narrative self-description (namely the development of explicit memory of an autobiographical nature). Pre-reflexivity in general is distinguished from thematic self-awareness, which is the result of a voluntary attentional process. Pre-reflexivity, on the other hand, is tacit; it is not self-observational, it does not consist in the introspective observation of oneself, and it is not objectifying (i.e. it does not transform one's experience into a perceived, distinct and observed object) (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008; Zahavi 2009).

Therefore, the authors began a broad investigation of the pre-reflective dimension of experience, intending to discover a specific approach to the world and pre-empting the institution of the *reflective function*. This is a challenging investigation because these phenomena elude our autobiographical memory and conscious perception of ourselves and our relationship with the environment (physical, social and relational). Indeed, the pre-reflective field of experience is more original than discursive thought, making it

²The “*nous*” in Plato and Aristotle indicates a type of direct, immediate, timeless understanding – a thought, we would say today, intuitive, holistic and naturally “synthetic,” that captures the links and connections between things beyond the mediation of language and the analytical construction of discourse.

necessary to go beyond the resources of traditional meaning and logic to describe it. However, it is also an everyday experience, working constantly in the background of our natural living, never being recognised and thematised as the foundation of living itself.

Despite its substratum nature that is taken as established and so much for granted as to fall into the oblivion of the *unperceived* and *unthought*, many disciplines and knowledges have tried to explore the boundaries and peculiarities of pre-reflexivity. Modern philosophy has defined it in terms of aesthetic experience, as a distinct and preliminary form of thought compared to logics. Psychoanalysis, a few centuries later, has translated this relationship onto the level of psychic investigation through the binomial of primary and secondary processes, introducing a decisive element to advance the understanding of the domain of pre-reflexivity: the largely unconscious nature of its phenomena. At the beginning of the 2000s, neuroscience carried out a further translation of the discussion, this time from the level of the psyche to that of the brain, through research on implicit memory as a form of learning and categorisation prior to the development of explicit or declarative memory. In this article we have chosen to focus on discussing the first two declinations of the pre-reflexive – in particular, combining the notion of Kantian aesthetics of the *Third Critique* with psychoanalytic concepts of Winnicott's *transitionality* and Bion's *rêverie*. From this dialogue, we certainly do not expect to exhaust the discussion on the role and status of pre-reflexivity in human experience. The peculiar status of this primordial dimension of experience, to which its elusiveness and fundamental ambivalence is linked, suggests that it is precisely by starting from an interdisciplinary dialogue that further understanding can more easily be achieved.

A philosophical perspective on pre-reflective experience: The aesthetic dimension

The first discussion about this domain of experience emerged with Immanuel Kant within his critical-phenomenological research on *transcendental aesthetics*, intended as *thought of sensitivity*, which describes the most original way in which humans relate to the world. In the *Critique of Judgment*, generally known as *Third Critique* (Kant 1790), he suggests the field of transcendental aesthetics be widened to include the problem of sense (conceived of as a pre-condition of meaning).

This involves thinking about the foundations of knowledge, namely how it is possible for humans to enclose the infinite heterogeneity of reality in well-defined and delineated categories, such as concepts, which are at the basis of traditional logic. This also involves questioning how we can eliminate the possibility that the world is so rich and diversified in its multiplicity that it would expose humans to the distressing risk of nonsense and chaos if the heterogeneity of its components was not reducible or in line with the categories of our mind. In the "First Introduction" to *Third Critique*, Kant transposes this doubt onto a more general reflection:

For the empirical laws might be so diverse and heterogeneous that, though we might on occasion discover particular laws in terms of which we could connect some perceptions to [form] an experience, we could never bring these empirical laws themselves under a common principle [and so] to the unity (characteristic) of kinship. We would be unable to do this if – as is surely possible intrinsically (at least insofar as understanding can tell a

priori) – these laws, as well as the natural forms conforming to them, were infinitely diverse and heterogeneous and manifested themselves to us as a crude chaotic aggregate without the slightest trace of a system. Yet, according to transcendental laws, we must presuppose such a system [even as one that can be manifested to us], i.e. a system of experience. (Kant 1790, 397–398)

In this case, any cognitive ordering of the world would be impracticable for humans, and the entire scientific system would become useless (Garroni 1976, 1992). It is, therefore, necessary to conduct a preliminary investigation of the pre-conditions of any cognitive purpose to clarify how it is possible for our cognitive faculties to develop concepts, schematise highly complex contexts and classify events according to rules that make them intelligible.

According to Kant (1787), *imagination*³ is the faculty that acts as the synthetic function that integrates the intuitive–sensible dimension with the discursive–intellectual dimension in our experience. Through the ability to construct *schemata* of what happens in experience, imagination elaborates “a method for representing a multitude (e.g. a thousand) in accordance with a certain concept” (Kant 1787, 273, B179–A140), creating general and generalisable representations from the singularities encountered in empirical experience. The secret handling of this art, which is “hidden in the depths of the human soul” (Kant 1787, 273, B181) is decisive for knowledge and the development of meaning.

Now, we must ask how the imagination manages to handle this task, and what guidelines it follows. In the *First Critique* (Kant 1787, Bk. II, Ch. I), the synthetic function of the imagination is supported by intellectual determinations that direct its actions. In the *Critique of Judgment* (Kant 1790), the inquiry becomes far more radical from a semiotic point of view, questioning the primal conditions of experience.

The issues to be addressed now are as follows: When the subject first relates to the limitless heterogeneity of the real, what type of sensemaking is at work? How is this first impact with the world articulated? Under what conditions is this multiform plurality, at least in principle, schematisable and amenable to cognitive determinations?

In free schematism, the imagination has no concepts to guide and model its syntheses. Therefore, it cannot determine anything about reality but can only openly reflect on the sensible manifold encountered in experience to verify that “the object may offer it just the sort of form in the combination of its manifold as the imagination, if it were left to itself [and] free, would design in harmony with the understanding’s lawfulness in general” (Kant 1790, 91).

In aesthetic judging, the subject does not view reality theoretically, like a logician or scientist, to make cognitive determinations about nature. Rather, the attitude is that of artisan/artist – matter encountered in the world is considered the result of a potential project, the possible product of an artistic–technical intention, or the occasion of a creative process. This is not to say that it actually is, only that an unspoken artistic presupposition must be assumed to be at the root of scientific knowledge, according to which nature must be necessarily considered, through the eyes of the artist, as a product that would be

³Kant defines imagination (*Einbildung, Einbildungskraft*) as “the faculty of representing an object even without its presence, in intuition” (see *Critique of Pure Reason*; Kant 1787, 185–187). It is the synthetic faculty *par excellence* that is responsible for providing concepts with a corresponding sensitive intuition and even, in the *Third Critique*, for making any type of synthesis possible in general. Imagination is considered an intermediate and mediating faculty between sensitivity and intellect, always straddling these two dimensions and at the same time irreducible to them.

designed by the imagination of a creator-intellect in order to make it determinable from the point of view of knowledge. This is an entirely fictional assumption, a presupposition that is useful, but not for determining anything about nature:

Now this principle can only be the following: Since universal natural laws have their basis in our understanding, which prescribes them to nature (though only according to the universal concept of it as a nature), the particular empirical laws must, as regards what the universal laws have left undetermined in them, be viewed in terms of such a unity as [they would have] if they too had been given by an understanding (even though not ours) so as to assist our cognitive powers by making possible a system of experience in terms of particular natural laws. That does not mean that we must actually assume such an understanding (for it is only reflective judgment that uses this idea as a principle, for reflection rather than determination); rather, in using this principle, judgment gives a law only to itself, not to nature. (Kant 1790, 19–20)

The Kantian hypothesis never goes beyond the line of an *as if* (*als ob*), arguing not that nature was created for the benefit and in the function of human knowledge, but only that human beings must necessarily think of it as such. This reveals to us an important truth: Humans, in order to consider their existence in the world to be feasible and explorable, must cultivate the illusion that reality is made to allow them to live in it. This illusion acts as a prerequisite for approaching reality and representing the *conditio sine qua non* of our knowledge in its entirety.

Kant is not proposing here to return to Leibniz and his principle of *sufficient reason* – that is, to God as the creator of the world and the guarantor of human knowledge (Ferrario 2009). His questioning, however, is no less subversive. Underlying the aesthetic question, and its *as if*, is the ontological question of *adaequatio rei et intellectus*⁴ (namely, the exact correlation between reality and intellect) and the long debate between rationalists and empiricists about what legitimises the correspondence between the world in itself and our knowledge of it.

The third way that Kant proposed with his set of *Three Critiques* provides a new solution for modern science. On the one hand, due to the Copernican revolution, which limits the scope of the validity of science to the phenomenal world alone, human knowledge is autonomised from any noumenal–religious foundation (God). On the other hand, aesthetic reflection is placed at the foundation of any future development of logic and scientific knowledge. The focus of *adequatio* is thus refocused from the search for a solid ontological foundation to an epistemological inquiry into meaning.

This means admitting that our entire experience of the world (including the science we have constructed regarding it over time) rests on an indispensable and fictional assumption, a *wager of sense* that is essentially finalistic.

However illusory, artificial and unverifiable it may be, this type of wager of sense, this promise that appears to be so finalistic, is the milestone of entire scientific systems, acting as an aesthetic anticipation of the representability of the world as a place inhabitable, knowable and liveable. We add that this assumption also makes the world an explorable place, as we will argue later in this article.

⁴By this formula, in philosophy, the realistic conception of truth is expressed as an agreement or correspondence between reality and our knowledge, linguistic and conceptual representation of it. This is a conception of Aristotelian origin, taken up in the Middle Ages by St Thomas Aquinas and widely present in modern and contemporary philosophy, in particular in the rationalistic tradition (Leibniz and Hegel) but also in analytical philosophy.

A psychoanalytic perspective of pre-reflective experience and transitional processes

The epistemological framework in which Kantian reflection inscribes the dimension of pre-reflectivity reconnects, around the question of sense, the unspoken but inescapable relationship between two apparently distant domains of our experience: the *aesthetics* and the *sacred* as paradigmatic manifestations of the same *necessary illusion*. Christopher Bollas (1988) focuses on this relationship, according to whom aesthetic fruition and the dimension of the sacred are united precisely by making the person experience “absolute certainty that he has been cradled by, and dwelled with, the spirit of the object, a rendezvous of mute recognition that defies representation” (15). In both domains of experience, the human being would be prey to a type of “magical spell” in which

[t]he aesthetic moment is a caesura in time when the subject feels held in symmetry and solitude by the spirit of the object. “What would characterize experience as aesthetic rather than either cognitive or moral,” writes Murray Krieger, “would be its self-sufficiency, its capacity to trap us within itself, to keep us from moving beyond it to further knowledge or to practical effort.” Whether this moment occurs in a Christian’s conversion experience, a poet’s reverie with his landscape, a listener’s rapture in a symphony, or a reader’s spell with his poem, such experiences crystallize time into a space where subject and object appear to achieve an intimate rendezvous. (Bollas 1988, 15–16)

According to Bollas (1988), the intimate encounter is reactivated in the aesthetic experience as in the religious one. This encounter refers to the primary relationship with the maternal, as well as to an ego state typical of early psychic life in which the subject would have experienced an uncanny fusion with the object (the mother), a profound subjective relationship prior to the birth of language. Bollas argues that the aesthetic experience is an existential memory of a time when communication mainly occurred through this illusion of a profound relationship between subject and object. Being-with as a form of dialogue allows the child to adequately elaborate on existence before possessing the ability to do so with thought:

The uncanny pleasure of being held by a poem, a composition, a painting, or, for that matter, any object rests on those moments when the infant’s internal world is partly given form by the mother, since he cannot shape them or link them together without her coverage. (Bollas 1988, 18)

Therefore, there is a dimension of aesthetic experience (Bollas names this *the first human aesthetic*) that has a prelogical, prelinguistic nature; it is antecedent to the symbolic-reflective development of the subject. In this dimension, maternal care is responsible for giving shape to the infantile character through an apparatus of acts based on the body (holding, handling, bodily manipulations, gestures and vocal exchanges), articulated in forms of pre-verbal communication. The *idiom of maternal care*, in this stage, exercises towards the object (the child) an integrative action, an organising form, a transformative action, to help them, through an exchange with their mother, to make sense of their own experience in support of their pre-reflective sensemaking processes.

At the basis of this possibility, there is then the necessary illusion – in Bollas as in the Kantian *als ob* – that the world we are talking about exists to be experienced by us (Bollas 1988, 19). It is a fundamental illusion in supporting the subsequent development of the

psyche and, in particular, to make possible the child's transition from this first pre-reflective aesthetic to a form of relationship centred on the mother's language and words as new and powerful transformative objects. For this passage to take place, however, according to Bollas, a transitional phase of experience needs to open for the child, that *infancy of the world* that, according to the psychoanalyst Winnicott (1971), we would all have gone through before entering the objectifying modality of the reflective age.

The *transitional process*, for Winnicott (1971), describes a primary mental functioning from an ontogenetic point of view that occurs between four and 12 months of life and allows the creation of a *third psychic area* (called the *area of illusion*), whose function is to build a buffer or intermediate zone that relates fantasy and reality, the internal world and external reality, the subjective with the objective. This is a neutral area of experience that does not belong to either internal or external (shared) reality (Winnicott 1971); it is an area in which *magical thinking* still largely exists, i.e. the child's illusion that they are, in a sense, the creator of their own world. Due to the promptness of maternal primary care, the objects are presented to the child with an almost perfect match with their needs. The correspondence between the presentation of the object and the feeling of a need is aimed at containing the experience of an *unthinkable anguish*, which characterises the original emotional condition of the child. Such a correspondence allows for temporarily reinforcing a sense of narcissistic omnipotence mediated by doing "as if this object is a subjective object, and created by the baby" (Winnicott 1971, 141) and as if "the infant [has] the illusion that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create"⁵ (Winnicott 1971, 35).

As in Kantian aesthetics, and even in Winnicott's transitional experience, an *as if* enters that encloses, within itself, a preliminary *request of sense*, the possibility of feeling at home in the world and being able to inhabit it – being able to explore it in safety and ease. Notably, as in Kant, what is at stake here is the trust that reality is a place made for us, for our benefit, in line with our needs. On closer inspection, Winnicott's child poses to the mother–environment – the mother who acts as a container and laboratory for the child's relationship with the outside world – the same question that the Kantian subject, in a more theoretical position, poses to the nature in which he has always been immersed.

Beyond the difference in actors (the human–divine intellect dyad vs. the mother–child dyad), beyond the difference in analyses (epistemological vs. ontogenetic), and beyond the difference in observational perspectives (transcendental vs. psychological), there is a close affinity between the Kantian and psychoanalytic discourses. First, both originate from a condition of strong anguish that the child and the knowing subject face by asking for *sense*. In both perspectives, the response is based on the fictionality of an *as if* world, where the product is of the creative intentionality of the child rather than of a creator and guarantor of the intellect of the world.⁶ Such a position is similar to an illusion that must be maintained for the cognitive and exploratory process to be activated and constantly supported (De Luca Picione 2020; De Luca Picione and Lozzi 2021).

⁵In this context, the mother is not only the *mother-object* but also the *mother–environment* as she can ensure the conditions of the experience of the infant.

⁶As Civitarese and Ferro (2022) notably argue, the fictionality is the real basis of making experience and of growing both in play and in analysis.

Second is the role assigned to the imagination in the subject's pre-reflective life. It is this faculty that projects its creative modalities onto the world: limitedly to the form of aesthetic experience for Kant, and onto the same matter of thought in the narcissistic–hallucinatory phases for Winnicott. Such a strong centrality in the vicissitudes and development of pre-reflective experience leads Winnicott to integrate it into the very definition of *transitionality* under the title of *primary creativity*:

From birth, therefore, the human being is concerned with the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived of, and in the solution of this problem, there is no health for the human being who has not been started off well enough by the mother. The intermediate area to which I am referring is the area that is allowed to the infant between primary creativity and objective perception based on reality testing. The transitional phenomena represent the early stages of the use of illusion, without which there is no meaning for the human being in the idea of a relationship with an object that is perceived by others as external to that being. (Winnicott 1971, 29)

However, from a symbolic point of view, even in the most developed exploratory phases, such as those of making use, play and cultural experience, Winnicott believes that imaginative creativity continues to generate new opportunities and possibilities for the child who accesses the objective world. This means that the human being never ceases to feel somewhat like an artist or, rather, like the creator and builder of their own world of objects, affects and relationships, similar to the Kantian subject who is (and remains), at its core, aesthetic – an artisan/artist.

The illusion and ambivalence of imaginative processes, in fact, remain fundamental parts of subjectivity. As Hans Loewald observes in the chapter entitled “Illusion” in *Sublimation* (1988), the completed work of art, the poem, symphony, painting, sculpture, drama, or novel acquires an existence of its own in a way not unlike the transitional object. The art object tends to become a significant element of the common world of the artist, as well as of the public, and begins to have a life that is no longer closely linked to the omnipotence of the artist. There are artists who struggle to separate themselves from their products, much like a child who is reluctant to give up a blanket or teddy bear, or someone who refuses to share their childhood toys with their own children (Loewald 1988). We believe that this reluctance is not only of the child or of the real artist. Human beings, in their psychic development, continue to be inhabited by primary processes and, therefore, by the typical dynamics of pre-reflectivity. The advances of the mind through the development of secondary functioning do not supplant the primary processes of the psyche. The primary processes represent the foundation upon which secondary processes are built according to forms of integration, which are one of the broadest and most fascinating fields of study in psychoanalysis.⁷

Based on these considerations, it is possible to see an original development of Kant's discourse and an investigation into the sphere of pre-reflectivity in Winnicott's description

⁷This is a distinction, fundamental for psychoanalysis, that emerges very early in Freud (1900, 1911). The primary process is unconscious and aimed directly at an immediate discharge of the drive in order to provide pleasure and alleviate bodily and psychic excitatory tension. Mainly governed by the unconscious mechanisms of condensation and displacement, it allows the psyche to move freely from one representation to another, without the constraint of the principle of non-contradiction (Freud 1900; Matte Blanco 1975; Salvatore et al. 2022) and of the others' logical links. The secondary process, which develops gradually and only subsequently, expresses the subject's nascent ability to delay the time between the need and its satisfaction. Connected to alert thinking, attention, self-monitoring, reasoning, judgement, it is characterised by stable and distinct representations, connected by logical connections.

of the transitional dimension, with some important additions. On the one hand, the declination in psychological and transitional terms has the advantage of inscribing pre-reflective phenomena into the context of concrete experience, projecting them from an abstract epistemological level of analysis to an ontogenetic level of the development of the psyche. On the other hand, this makes them more easily observable, albeit *ex post* and with a series of limitations, by studying the child's early stages of life and, in particular, their interactive dynamics with their mother, always through the filter of the secondary reworking of adult consciousness. Despite these constraints, the broadening of this field of observation through psychoanalysis has marked a fundamental advance in our current knowledge of pre-reflectivity, otherwise confined to an almost constitutive invisibility. This invisibility is also linked to the new tools used to investigate it: the language and forms of the unconscious instead of the traditional reflective categories of philosophical thought.

The psychoanalytic development of the notion of illusion has also made it possible to broaden our understanding of the relational matrix of the wager of sense. The central role attributed to the mother–environment in the events of transitionality as a thinking partner and a pole of co-constitution of the infantile experience, and not only as an object of libidinal cathexis (the mother–object), has been recognised. In reality, and even in Kantian aesthetics, as we will discuss, a primary reference to intersubjectivity is present. However, psychoanalytic contributions allow the interactive and intersubjective dynamics that are constitutive of pre-reflectivity to be connected to the concrete experience of the subject (Civitarese 2021).

Relationality at the centre of pre-reflective experience

Winnicott teaches us that there would be no transitional dimension without the opening of a potential space for a dyadic relationship between the child and the mother. The child needs the intervention of a “good enough mother” to be able to experience the stability and security of their environment and, therefore, convince themselves to abandon primary intrapsychic–hallucinatory modalities in favour of experiences with transitional objects, which gradually introduce them into the objective world.

Bollas also highlights this in the text *The Shadow of the Object* (1988), emphasising the close connection between aesthetic experience and early relationships through the notion of the idiom of maternal care, which informs the first human aesthetic.

However, we need to clarify what motivates and sustains this centrality of the other in the processes of making sense. We also need to answer the question of whether the mind of the single subject, isolated and unrelated, can follow the various passages from sense to meaning – from pre-reflectivity to reflectivity, from primary to secondary processes – without the support and intervention of another subject. That is, we need to discover what makes the intervention and advent of the other indispensable in the pre-reflective life of the subject.

Again, Kant provides us with an idea of the real issue. The theme of *intersubjectivity*, although never clearly named, already crosses and activates Kant's *Third Critique*, specifically with respect to the problem of giving a more than subjective foundation to the precondition of any logic, knowledge or scientific system: sense as a product of aesthetic accord. The question remains of how aesthetic accord (the basis of all possible

knowledge) can have the form of sense, that is, something that relates to sensitivity – a highly subjective and individual dimension, far from the universal objectivity and validity that would be required of knowledge to be such.

To answer this difficult question, Kant hypothesises the existence of the *sensus communis*, i.e. a *sui generis* feeling at the basis of aesthetic judgement and that would correspond to

[...] the idea of a communal sense, i.e., of a faculty of judgment, which in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought; in order, as it were, to compare its judgment with the collective reason of humanity and thus to escape the illusion arising from the private conditions that could be so easily taken for objective, which would injuriously affect the judgment. (Kant 1790, 170)

The need for this *ultra-subjective* reference derives from the highly particular status of aesthetic judging, in which we know that it is not possible to provide the imagination with a determined or determinable rule according to which to schematise. At the same time, to represent the foundation of all possible knowledge, this judgement (that is based on a feeling) must aspire to a “more than subjective” value. It must be a *sui generis* feeling, the feeling of pleasure (or *favour*), lived when a subject experiences the best possible proportion, the object of the relational agreement, for the sensible manifold. According to Kant, it is only when this highly particular sensation of agreement, alignment and mutual enlivening occurs between faculties that the imagination recognises a potential *conformity to purposes* against the raw, chaotic and potentially senseless empirical manifold.

Therefore, there must exist a type of *ideal proportioning* that is shareable – at least in principle – with every other human being. The ideality is not intended as a pure abstracted and already-given entity; rather, it concerns an agreement that goes beyond the subjectivity of the individual and aspires to objective validity, as the intersubjective community of judges ideally shares it. This intersubjective agreement, as an aesthetic presupposition (in itself indemonstrable), rests at the basis of all knowledge (Arendt 1978; Ferrario 2009; Garroni 1992).

Here, too, clarification is required. Kant is not saying that broad thinking, presupposed in aesthetic judgement, requires the subject to deal with the effective judgements of others, which would undermine any capacity for autonomous and individual thought. Rather, he is referring to an expansive way of thinking, which is the result of comparing one’s judgement with the possible judgements of others, thus “abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment” and “rising above his subjective conditions” (Kant 1790, 170). Due to this imaginative capacity, the subject can aspire to gain a feeling that goes beyond, at least in principle, the boundaries of the single judge (Arendt 1978) and that makes the aesthetic agreement intersubjective.

Therefore, a movement occurs at the centre of aesthetics that forces the subject to go beyond their own intrapsychic nature and leads them to relate to the minds of others.⁸ This solution is not an option freely exercisable by the individual. Rather, it is a

⁸It is in this outpouring that – beyond real purposes or Kantian intentions – the theme of empathy would be announced, which is the ability to think by putting oneself in the place of the other (Arendt 1978; Ferrario 2002, 2009; Tossici 2007). It should be emphasised, however, that in Kant’s *sensus communis*, the reference is still to the plurality of others and not to the other in its singularity, which instead characterises transitional phenomena.

spontaneous and ineliminable movement of the imaginative faculty as it operates within pre-reflectivity (in the absence of an intellectual or reflective type of guidance). This has a significant consequence: Intersubjectivity is placed at the centre of aesthetic processes and every possible objectivity (Civitarese 2021; Reis 2018). Twentieth-century philosophical, phenomenological, psychological and psychoanalytic thought examines and develops this fundamental Kantian intuition. However, already here in the *Third Critique*, it announces itself as the ideal completion of the critical system, downstream of the Copernican revolution.

Now, we focus on how psychoanalytic advancements allow us to make the underlying aspects of this necessity more intelligible. From the psychoanalytic observational side, which investigates pre-reflective phenomena from the ontogenetic perspective of infantile psychic life, it emerges in fact that the other is the one who can *contain anguish, nourish trust and support the development of the child's symbolic processing processes*. By virtue of this intersubjective matrix and aesthetic rooting, the pre-reflective sphere of experience shows itself to have an unconscious, embodied, affective and profoundly relational nature (Civitarese and Ferro 2022; Grier 2019). This is why a subject must deal with the minds of others during his development, starting from the fundamental and first relationship entertained with the other in the early periods of development: that is, the maternal. Compared to this, the investigation into transitionality, introduced by Winnicott, contributes to clarifying the inescapability of the dyadic relationship of the self–other in the genesis of intersubjectivity. First, the notion of *potential space* is understood as a relational laboratory in which the specific modalities of the relationship between the child and the world are co-defined and co-constructed. Second, there is a relevant emphasis on the role of the mother–environment as the primary intersubjective matrix. From this perspective, the child gains an objective world through and as a function of the intersubjective dynamics that occur during early, shared pre-reflective experiences, in line with the quality of primary care received from the caregivers of reference.

Psychoanalysis has underlined the constitutive centrality of this intersubjective process, not only in terms of the recognition of the diversity and separateness of the other but also as an experience of profound relationality and consistency with one's own feelings. With differences, both Thomas Ogden and Christopher Bollas are attentive to this founding process of self-experience.

Ogden – recalling Winnicott's reading – states:

The intersubjectivity underlying primary maternal preoccupation involves an early form of the dialectic of oneness and two-ness: The mother is an invisible presence (invisible and yet a felt presence) [...] In the absence of the role played by the mother, it would be impossible for the infant to generate the conditions necessary for his coming to life as a subject in the sense addressed by the concept of the creation of transitional phenomena. The infant requires the experience of a particular form of intersubjectivity in which the mother's being is experienced simultaneously as an extension of himself and as other to himself. (Ogden 1994, 50–57)

Bollas himself also underlines the centrality of the intersubjective process in the earliest phases of experience, when the mother, through her own idiom of care, pre-reflectively transmits to the child a specific aesthetic of being that becomes part of the infantile self, contributing to its definition:

Every infant, therefore, internalizes into the ego those processes in which he is the Other's object, and he continues to do so for a long time [...] Through the experience of being the Other's object, which we internalize, we establish a sense of two-ness in our being, and this subject-object paradigm further allows us to address our inherited disposition, or true self, as Other. We use the structure of the mother's imagining and handling of our self to objectify and manage our true self. (Bollas 1988, 30–31)

All these reflections contribute to the dismantling of the Cartesian vision of an autarchic subject (De Luca Picione 2021; De Luca Picione 2022) whose ability to think is considered a personal, autonomous and independent skill, a type of innate device that we have available from birth, beyond our relationships with our social, cultural and affective environments (and sometimes arriving to define its development in the form of predefined stages of biological maturation). The relationality instead plays a central role for the human being and their forms of knowledge, especially in the sphere of pre-reflectivity. However, what makes this reference to otherness so structural for the subject?

Ogden (1997) underlines, by remembering Bion's famous passage, that at the beginning of life and of analysis, two people are needed to think. In his research on *maternal rêverie* and the development of thinking skills, Bion argues, in fact, that the early child has only a rudimentary development of the alpha function. This immaturity requires the support of another mind capable of rêverie that can collect and contain raw childhood experiences, then think them and return them to the child in an elaborate and assimilable form. Only through an intersubjective function of rêverie can one transform raw, unthinkable emotions and sensations into elements for thoughts.⁹

Maternal rêverie, therefore, is a fundamental intersubjective function operating during the early stages of psychic development and describes well the substratum of the dyadic phenomena that occur in Winnicott's potential space. It also explains why and how an "auxiliary" mind must necessarily intervene in the ontogenetic development of the individual – according to this reading, in fact, the most important thing that the child introjects into their primary relationships is a *thinking mind*, that is, an object capable of containing and dealing with anguish and that allows for the development of the child's ability to think. It is in this interaction with the mind of the other that the ability to think thoughts is established, which makes thought no longer something given and pre-established but a function of the relationship.

However, all this is not limited to the first stages of life, nor is it a result of only primary processes that end with the advent of reflectivity (Dell'Amico and De Luca Picione 2023; De Luca Picione 2022). Rather, the human being, throughout the course of their life, is profoundly influenced by their relationships with others, including with the analyst (Ferro 2002, 2009). A similar process of the transformation of experience also occurs during analytic treatment, in which the analyst acts as a container for all those emotions or sensory experiences that the patient is unable to process or digest on their own in order to return them to the patient – modulating and processing the experience of anguish – in elaborate

⁹According to Bion, only through an intersubjective function of rêverie (understood as a re-reading of Kleinian projective identification) can unthinkable emotions and brute sensations be transformed into elements for thoughts. This function is not dissimilar to that exercised in Kantian aesthetic judgement by the imagination which, through its concept-free schematisation, gives shape to those preliminary aggregates of sense from which thought begins. Notably, Bion (1962, 1965; see also Noel-Smith 2013) seems to be aware when defining alpha elements as phenomena, in the Kantian sense, contrasting them with beta elements, which, still in Kantian terms, the subject feels as "things in themselves" (Bion 1962).

and symbolically organised forms. In this way, the patient can progressively expand their alpha function to create elements that can be used for unconscious, preconscious and conscious psychological work, such as thinking, dreaming, rêverie and learning from experience. For this, according to Ogden:

In both the relationship of mother and infant and the relationship of analyst and analysand, the task is not to tease apart the elements constituting the relationship in an effort to determine which qualities belong to each individual participating in it; rather, from the point of view of the interdependence of subject and object, the analytic task involves an attempt to describe, as fully as one can, the specific nature of the experience of the interplay of individual subjectivity and intersubjectivity [...] The analytic experience occurs at the cusp of the past and the present and involves a "past" that is being created anew (for both analyst and analysand) by means of an experience generated between analyst and analysand (i.e. within the analytic third). (Ogden 1994, 64–76)

A clinical case: The aesthetic experiences of Mrs M.

Mrs M. is a 54-year-old woman suffering from profound depression. From her first encounters, she recounts her feeling of emptiness, a constant hunger that leads her to continually eat sweets and food (this is her constant concern), excessive smoking and a constant fear of death following the worsening of her health due to her progressive obesity (which started immediately after the birth of her two daughters, now 20 years old) and a heart attack that occurred a few years earlier. During her analytic sessions, she talks about her sense of loneliness, her unhappy marriage and her struggle to feel understood and in tune with her husband, despite his presence and willingness to take care of most of the household chores. In Mrs M.'s stories, her husband is a practical man who is present in the family, but she has never felt him to be close; rather, she feels a certain emotional detachment from him. She starts by describing a dream (including many elements of smokiness, vagueness and a lack of detail) of a room full of water and, in the following sessions, Mrs M. explains how she was born in Canada and lived there in a house on the shore of a lake for the first three years of her childhood until her parents decided to return to their small town of origin in Italy.

Mrs M. reiterates that she does not remember anything about that initial period and place of her life. Surprisingly, the moment of her return (and only this) by ship to her family's native country is well impressed in her memories. Once back in Italy, due to her parents' work, Mrs M. was entrusted to her maternal grandmother, while her twin sister remained with her mother. Faced with this separation from her family, Mrs M. remembers the sensation of her grandmother's caresses and the comfort of her affection (a type of body-to-body fusion, for example, with memories of intense tenderness while sleeping together). Subsequently, Mrs M. returned to live with her parents at the age of eight years but struggled to fit into her new family life.

Only after this remembering during her sessions did Mrs M. begin a phase of analytic work during which she often speaks about differences with her twin sister, who is dynamic, active, enterprising, sociable and sunny. Without being able to give any motivation or reason, she remembers that her twin sister was breastfed by their mother while she was not. Mrs M. often talks about her current feeling of not being understood, welcomed or recognised by her own mother, who acts judgementally and continually devalues her, even in the presence of other people.

From the point of view of the relation with the analyst, she undertakes therapy by establishing a relationship that is initially inconstant, with a certain difficulty in keeping appointments and regularly missing some sessions every two or three weeks. However, she never forgets the appointments but always warns of her absence, justifying for herself the circumstances that have arisen suddenly and that are considered more urgent and important, therefore asking to move or arrange a new meeting. The analyst soon realises that his own counter-transference reaction never takes on a feeling of anger or frustration, rather an unpleasant feeling of sadness for the missed meetings with her. He also recognises a certain availability and solicitude towards her; in fact, he recognises both the evident physical and mental fatigue that coming to the session implies, but also her need to test the other's waiting and to verify the constant presence of the other. Over time, the absences decrease (even if they are never completely eliminated) and can become the object of possible reflection and moving awareness for Mrs M., turning her gaze simultaneously to the therapeutic relationship and to the significant relationships in her life (past and present). In fact, she grasps the implication of the double and ambivalent affective movement of her inconstancy: decreeing the abandonment loss of the other and at the same time ascertaining whether the other waits for her, desires her, seeks her ("I always need to be pushed, pulled, desired"; "I want to see if someone is waiting for me").

Further along the analytic path, Mrs M. discusses some activities that she loves doing, even if she is not always able to do them regularly. Sometimes, she does these activities with great dedication and perseverance, while at other times, she feels unable to commit to them. These include reading novels (her desire as a child was to study literature at university, but her family did not allow either daughter to study – yet recently, her twin sister graduated with a degree), embroidery (she recognises that she is excellent at this) and singing in the religious choir of the church that she attends.

Such activities have a deep aesthetic value in Mrs M.'s experience, even before being intellectualised and recognised. Mrs M. experiences states of absorption and fusion in her identification with the characters of novels, in the pre-reflective concentration and absorption of the embroidery activity (as a pleasant aesthetic sensation of automatism and motor coordination) and in the melodic fusion in the experience of her voice with other voices. (Mrs M. explains that she is not a soloist and that her voice merges into the whole of the choir.) Frequently during her sessions, Mrs M. associates these moments with the sensation of existing and being in a syntonic relationship, similar to what she experienced with her grandmother. (It is appropriate to use the word "moment" here instead of "process," as it is a state in which Mrs M. experiences a certain affective condition).

At the same time, Mrs M. began to experience the analytic session as a psychic place of experience, a sort of *psychic home*. During the first year of analysis, Mrs M. experienced a certain discomfort due to the fear of feeling judged by the analyst; she often tried to reduce the gaps and pauses in speech as much as possible with stereotyped and repetitive stories; she interspersed the particularly unpleasant memories of her life with a big laugh (the laughter, although characterised by a certain melodiousness and pleasantness, struck the analyst as incongruous and disturbing). Gradually, in the following period she began to be able to remain in increasingly longer silences. Silence has now lost – for both participants in the analytic relationship – its sense of anguish and emptiness by coming to

represent the value of moments of reconnection and exchange at a level that is not just verbal but also sensorial. In these moments of silence, Mrs M. often says that she is “weaving” her thoughts and emotions.

These experiences (reading, embroidery, singing in the choir, the analytical session) are significant and interesting as they are imbued with highly aesthetic, pre-reflective and affective dimensions. These activities most likely remind her of the experiences of harmony that she had several times during the first years of her life and which were then invariably interrupted (by departing from her birthplace – her beautiful, native place but not her family’s – subsequently separating from her grandmother and creating a feeling of constant distance from her twin sister and mother).

Notably, aesthetic pre-reflectivity as a conceptual notion involves the paradox that it cannot be said and thought of as it is experienced as a preliminary condition of the work of symbolisation (and then linguistic-verbalisation). It is lived as a condition of the direct experience of the meaning of the world, allowing the world to emerge from experience through the affective, relational and pre-reflective dimension. On the other hand, we note that only when this experience fails relevantly and repeatedly does it result in a critical and potentially problematic element of loss, feelings of a lack of relationship and a sense of inconsistency with one’s experience. For instance, Mrs M. often recalls the feeling of disconnection from the world.

The activities that seem to be key to getting her out of her depressive states are novel reading, embroidery and singing in the choir, which provide the momentary recovery of an affective–relational condition in which she can experience the *mother–environment* before the *mother–object* and her distinction from it. The primary experiences of her maternal familial environment and birth in Canada and the years with her grandmother are not reflectively remembered but are experienced and remembered bodily through the aesthetic sensations of beauty, communion and harmony that she finds in her activities of reading, embroidery and singing. These activities are profoundly aesthetic in Bollas’s sense (that is, pre-reflective – known rather than thought – a sensory and somatic memory of primary fusion with the environment), and they constitute transitional experiences in which she experiences creative and vital forms and in which the border with the world is blurred. These activities constitute a *third momentary space* in which she can enjoy the creative and vital fictionality of the psyche (just as it gradually became possible in the analytic relationship) by finding, transforming and recomposing elements of the self and establishing unedited conditions of sharing and communion with others.

Conclusions

With this article, we set out to reflect on when it becomes possible for a person to experience the world and how this question occurs both in Kantian philosophical thought and epistemological reflection and in psychoanalytic clinical work. Specifically, we discussed the Kantian contribution of the *Third Critique of Judgment* to the aesthetic dimension, Winnicott’s notion of transitionality and Bion’s intersubjective function of maternal rêverie. Referencing Kant is familiar to psychoanalysis, as previously mentioned. Regarding the *Third Critique*, in particular, we point out Giuseppe Civitarese’s recent contribution thereto of the experience of the sublime:

In the “analytic of the sublime,” situated at the heart of the *Third Critique*, more than any other author, Kant (1790) explicitly treats the sublime as a theory of the subject. Departing from Longinus, first of all, Kant too neatly distinguishes between beauty and the sublime. In his view, the sublime is the feeling evoked in ourselves by the spectacle of elements so grandiose and terrible that they cannot be grasped in their totality by the senses. (Civitarese 2018, 40)

In Civitarese’s rich and inspiring reflection, the *Third Critique* enters through the grandiose and terrifying experience of the sublime, focusing on the theme of overcoming the limits and possibilities of the cognitive faculties.¹⁰ However, in this article, we have focused on the Kantian notion of beauty, namely the aesthetic experience as philosophy of *sense*, the only domain where the pre-reflective sensemaking realises itself in a constitutive and exemplary way, achieving a positive and concrete incarnation through the artistic products. Specifically, we investigate the affinity between the status and role that Kant assigns to aesthetic experience on the epistemological level, as well as the description of the ontogenetic development of the psyche, which is, in our opinion, the first aspect of originality and the focus of our contribution.

Despite the different approach to Kantian aesthetics, the outcome of our reflection is in line with Civitarese’s thought, according to which “Aesthetic experience is, in a strong sense, the deepest element of psychoanalysis; central both in the constitution of the mind and in the construction of the sense in the analytic situation. The psychoanalytic experience is basically an aesthetic experience” (Civitarese 2017, 181, our translation).

In fact, if we return to the origins of our investigation – that is, the question of sense shared by the Kantian subject and Winnicott’s child – we notice how this question

1. precedes all possible cognitive signification and pertains to the pre-reflective dimension of experience (*aesthetic* in Kant, *primary processes* in psychoanalysis);
2. arises from a profound sense of urgency related to the condition of primary anguish that follows the first impact with reality;
3. challenges the subject who does not have, *a priori*, response patterns to refer to, neither in Kant, where the imagination cannot draw on pre-existing conceptual determinations, nor in Winnicott, where the child has no elaborative categories of experience that they can apply independently to their own experiences;
4. requires the intervention of an auxiliary mind that supports the subject, deferring to forms of learning related to the relationship with otherness, both in the form of the single other (Winnicott’s *mother–environment*) and of *every-other* (the intersubjective community of judges in Kant); and
5. considers otherness a foundational element in the development of the subject’s cognitive faculties, supporting the idea that thought has a deeply intersubjective genesis, both in its ontogenetic form (the alpha function) and in its epistemological foundations (science, logic).

In our opinion, the relevance of these affinities goes beyond mere parallelism. On the one hand, they rest on the common valorisation of the fictional element within the

¹⁰The sublime represents in Kant a specific experience, namely a setback for the imagination in the attempt to give sense to the world. In the case of the sublime, in fact, “one has to deal not with the ‘form’ of the subject, with a ‘free play of the faculties’ [as in the case of beauty], but rather with their inability to give thoroughness and legality to representations” (Garroni 1992, 212).

affective and bodily dimensions typical of the pre-reflective sphere. In aesthetic experience, the *as if* underlies the transcendental conditions that enable us to experience and know the world; for Winnicott, in psychoanalytic terms, the illusion supports the development of the human psyche and the passage from the functioning of the primary process to the secondary one. On the other hand, both aesthetic experience and primary processes share the common function of supporting and grounding one's capacity to think as constitutively relational and intersubjective.

Finally, these two dimensions – the aesthetic and transitional – exert a pervasive and persistent influence on the totality of human experience. In fact, the patterns constituted in pre-reflectivity are matrixes on which reflectivity is shaped and by which it is influenced, even in extremely sophisticated stages of psychic development. Already in Freudian thought (Freud 1985, 1900) the primary and secondary processes outline completely different ways of dealing with uncertainty as a source of excitement, frustration and anguish: the one rushes into acting and magical thinking (Ogden 2010); the other is capable of promoting transitory reflective forms aimed at the elaboration and transformation of points of view, broadening their scope, development and potential (De Luca Picione and Freda 2022; De Luca Picione et al. 2022a, 2022b). The terms “primary” and “secondary” have, first of all, a temporal and developmental meaning, and it should be noted that they do not imply a hierarchy of importance, given that they will continue in some way to be present in all psychic processes (Matte Blanco 1975). As highlighted by Loewald (1989), the primary process implies a profound and significant experience as unitary, global, indistinct and not differentiated into elements or parts: a vital prerequisite in order to transform experience from the uniqueness of unity into a differentiated multiplicity. The need for a psychic function that preserves the unity and a certain degree of the framework of reality's homogeneity continues to act against the background of the discursive and reflective articulations made by the secondary process and cooperates with it. At the basis of psychic life there is a constant dynamic intertwining between these two different modalities (Loewald 1989), through which emerges the possibility of “keeping this same original wholeness alive through an integration that articulates it and transforms a global unity into a structured totality” (Loewald 1989, p. 197). Therefore, a purely adaptive and evolutionary description is too reductive and misleading (Tossici 2009; De Luca Picione 2023a, 2023b); the aesthetic foundation of experience, its pre-reflective level, is strongly anchored to the primary process, and at the same time it represents the vital, fertile and constant matrix for the development of secondary processes, reflective thought, and symbolic and linguistic abilities (Civitaresse and Ferro 2022).

Finally, the affinities between the discourse of Kant, Winnicott and Bion go beyond mere parallelism due to the common function of foundation that is exercised by aesthetic experience and primary processes in relation to thinking skills, starting from their constitutive relationality and intersubjectivity. This is why the contribution of psychoanalysis has proved invaluable; it has enabled further progress in this investigation, focusing on childhood experiences and the aesthetic foundation of constitutive primary relationality. As Bollas underlines:

This surprise, complemented by an experience of fusion with the object (icon, poem, musical sound, landscape, etc.), of feeling held by the object's spirit, sponsors a deep conviction that

such an occasion must surely be selected for us. The object is “the hand of fate.” And in our induction by the object, we are suddenly captured in an embrace that is an experience of being rather than mind, rooted in the total involvement of the self rather than objectified via representational or abstract thought [...] Winnicott writes that this experience takes place in what he terms a “facilitating environment,” which includes the mother’s system of care that protects the infant from either internal or external impingement [...] The aesthetic experience is not something learned by the adult; it is an existential recollection of an experience where being handled by the maternal aesthetic made thinking seemingly irrelevant to survival. (Bollas 1988, 16–19)

As a result of this recognition, psychoanalysis has moved from a knowledge-enhancing perspective towards an experience-based perspective, in terms of both human development and the analytic clinical path. According to Thomas Ogden, this transformation has led to a transition from epistemological to ontological psychoanalysis, with a radical change in psychoanalytic theory and practice:

That transformation involves a shift in emphasis from *epistemological* (pertaining to knowing and understanding) psychoanalysis to *ontological* (pertaining to being and becoming) psychoanalysis. I view Freud and Klein as the founders of a form of psychoanalysis that is epistemological in nature, and I consider Winnicott and Bion as the principal contributors to the development of ontological psychoanalysis. (Ogden 2022, 10, emphasis original)

These two differing trajectories can never be isolated in pure forms, and any analysis always shows how, in some way, there are passages from either approach. However, Ogden (2022) provides the main and differential elements of the two clinical perspectives, believing that in the epistemological orientation, therapeutic actions are based on the understanding and knowledge of unconscious processes, while in the ontological orientation, the central focus of clinical action is the interpersonal context and relational experiences and states of being:

To my mind, these two aspects of psychoanalysis involve quite different modes of therapeutic action. Therapeutic action characterizing the epistemological dimension of psychoanalysis involves arriving at understandings of previously unconscious thoughts, feelings, and bodily experience, which help the patient achieve psychic change. By contrast, therapeutic action characterizing ontological psychoanalysis involves providing an interpersonal context in which forms of experiencing, states of being, come to life in the analytic relationship that were previously unimaginable by the patient. (Ogden 2022, 15)

Ogden recognises that the clinical and theoretical contributions of Winnicott and Bion are fundamental. In fact, according to Winnicott, the experience of transitional objects and phenomena allows the child (and the patient as well) to experience states of being (transformative, vital, creative) otherwise inadmissible to the conceptual categories of logical-rational understanding (Ogden 2022, 15). For Bion, the analyst’s perspective must abandon the epistemological ballast of *memory* (what is already known) and *desire* (understanding, curing and achieving the hoped-for result). Such situations are a hindrance to the intuition of the present moment of a session, an obstacle to the process of dreaming (*rêverie*) what is happening – that is, of transforming the affective-emotional elements of the analytic session into a primarily aesthetic experience in which one is fully present and that allows for the fundamental transition to symbolisation and thinkability:

Being has supplanted understanding; the analyst does not come to know or understand or comprehend or apprehend the reality of what is happening in the session, he “intuits” it,

he becomes “at one” with it, he is fully present in experiencing the present moment. (Ogden 2022, 18)

Therefore, in line with Kantian reflection in the *Third Critique*, psychoanalysis has highlighted how the experience of sense is something different from the knowledge of meaning. The aesthetic experience upon which the sense of one’s own experience of the world is based is a primary form of affective and pre-reflective relation. It is a primary and primordial experience because, since the earliest moments of life and throughout its course, one’s own being and the world of others are felt to be deeply engaged and activated through relational, somatic, visceral and sensory apprehension rather than merely through thought and being fully understood.

For its part, the exploration of the aesthetic matrix of experience offers a precious opportunity for psychoanalytic thought to deepen the reflection on the ontogenetic development of the psyche and its clinical value. Aesthetic reflection, both in theoretical research and in clinical practice, represents for psychoanalysis an *invaluable source of rêverie to think about the unthought* that is still represented today by the pre-reflective sphere of the subject’s unconscious psychic life.

Translations of summary

La matrice esthétique et affective de la mise en sens pré-réflexive à l’origine de la relation entre le sujet et le monde : un dialogue entre la troisième critique de Kant et la psychanalyse. Les auteurs discutent de la pertinence de l’expérience esthétique et affective au cœur de la capacité de l’être humain d’être en relation avec le monde et d’instaurer des relations de sens. Face à l’angoisse d’un monde dénué de sens et à la peur de l’incertitude/chaos, la confiance et l’espoir sont des conditions nécessaires garantissant l’existence d’un monde hospitalier. Une telle expérience est esthétique, sensible et affective avant d’être rationnelle, réflexive et délibérative. Par le biais d’un dialogue entre Kant, Winnicott et Bion, les auteurs montrent comment le fondement de la confiance repose sur deux aspects essentiels : 1) l’illusion que la réalité a été créée pour nous permettre d’y vivre (à savoir, la fiction est un pré-requis du développement de la psyché) et 2) cette illusion n’est pas générée par une activité solipsiste de l’esprit humain ; elle est rendue possible grâce à la relation primordiale à l’autre, qui contient l’angoisse, nourrit la confiance et l’espoir et soutient le développement psychique et l’élaboration des formes progressives de symbolisation. Les auteurs discutent de la façon dont ces aspects entraînent des conséquences esthétiques profondes à travers l’approfondissement de la réflexion sur le développement ontogénique de la psyché, l’entrecroisement complexe entre les processus primaires et secondaires et les implications cliniques.

Die ästhetische und affektive Matrix der präreflexiven Sinneswahrnehmung an den Ursprüngen der Beziehung zwischen Subjekt und Welt: Ein Dialog zwischen Kants Dritter Kritik und der Psychoanalyse. Die Autoren erörtern die Bedeutung der ästhetischen und affektiven Erfahrung im Zusammenhang mit der Fähigkeit des Menschen, sich auf die Welt zu beziehen und Sinnesbeziehungen herzustellen. Angesichts der Angst, dass die Welt bedeutungslos sein könnte, und der Furcht vor Ungewissheit/Chaos sind Vertrauen und Hoffnung notwendig, damit die Welt ein lebenswerter Ort bleibt, um zu existieren. Eine solche Erfahrung ist ästhetisch, sensitiv und affektiv, bevor sie rational, reflektierend und abwägend ist. In einem Dialog zwischen Kant, Winnicott und Bion wird gezeigt, wie das Fundament des Vertrauens auf zwei wesentlichen Aspekten beruht: 1) Der Illusion, dass die Realität geschaffen wurde, um uns zu ermöglichen, in ihr zu leben (d.h. die Fiktionalität ist eine Voraussetzung für jede mögliche Entwicklung der Psyche). 2) Diese Illusion wird nicht durch eine solipsistische Aktivität des menschlichen Geistes erzeugt. Vielmehr wird sie ausgehend von der ursprünglichen Beziehung zum anderen ermöglicht, indem sie Ängste contained, Vertrauen und Hoffnung nährt sowie psychische Entwicklung und die Ausarbeitung progressiver Formen der Symbolisierung unterstützt. Die Autoren erörtern, wie diese Punkte eine tiefgreifende ästhetische

Implikation haben, indem sie die Reflexion über die ontogenetische Entwicklung der Psyche, die komplexe Verflechtung zwischen Primär- und Sekundärprozessen sowie die klinischen Implikationen vertiefen.

La matrice estetica e affettiva della creazione preriflessiva di senso alle origini della relazione tra soggetto e mondo. Un dialogo fra la Terza Critica di Kant e la psicoanalisi. Gli autori discutono il ruolo centrale che l'esperienza estetica e affettiva ha per la capacità dell'essere umano di rapportarsi al mondo e fondare relazioni di senso. A fronte dell'angoscia che il mondo possa essere privo di senso, e di una concomitante paura dell'incertezza e del caos, occorrono fiducia e speranza perché il mondo possa risultare un luogo ospitale per l'esistenza. Prima ancora di essere razionale, riflessiva e deliberativa, un'esperienza di tal genere è estetica, sensoriale e affettiva. Attraverso un dialogo tra Kant, Winnicott e Bion, si mostra qui come il senso di fiducia si fondi su due aspetti essenziali: 1) l'illusione che la realtà sia stata creata per permettere a noi di viverci dentro (in altre parole, la finzione è un prerequisito per qualsiasi possibile sviluppo della psiche); 2) tale illusione non è creata da un'attività solipsistica della mente umana, ma è resa possibile a partire dalla relazione primordiale con l'altro, attraverso il contenimento dell'angoscia, il nutrimento di fiducia e speranza e il sostegno dello sviluppo mentale e dell'elaborazione di forme man mano più evolute di simbolizzazione. Gli autori mostrano come questi punti implicino profondamente la dimensione estetica, concentrando la loro riflessione sullo sviluppo ontogenetico della psiche, sul complesso intrecciarsi dei processi primari e secondari e sulle implicazioni di tutto ciò a livello clinico.

La matriz estética y afectiva de la capacidad prerreflexiva de dar sentido en el origen de la relación entre el sujeto y el mundo: diálogo entre la tercera crítica de Kant y el psicoanálisis.

Los autores estudian la importancia de la experiencia estética y afectiva que es central en la capacidad de los seres humanos de vincularse con el mundo y encontrar relaciones de sentido. Frente a la angustia de que el mundo carezca de sentido y al temor a la incertidumbre o el caos, se requiere confianza y esperanza a fin de que el mundo sea un lugar hospitalario. Esa experiencia es estética, sensible y afectiva, antes que racional, reflexiva y deliberativa. Se muestra, mediante un diálogo entre Kant, Winnicott y Bion, cómo la confianza se funda en dos aspectos esenciales: 1) la ilusión de que la realidad fue creada para permitirnos vivir en ella (es decir, la ficcionalidad como prerequisito de todo desarrollo posible de la psique) y 2) esta ilusión no es generada por la actividad solipsista de la mente humana, más bien se hace posible a partir de la relación primordial con el otro, mediante la contención de la angustia, la alimentación de la confianza y la esperanza, y el apoyo al desarrollo psíquico y a la elaboración de formas progresivas de simbolización. Los autores analizan cómo estos puntos tienen una profunda implicación estética mediante la profundización de la reflexión sobre el desarrollo ontogenético de la psique, el complejo entretreído entre los procesos primarios y los secundarios, y las implicaciones clínicas.

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