What form of violence?
From the violence of over-simplification to the complexity of violence. A theoretical viewpoint

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ABSTRACT. – Beginning with a critique of the concept of *gender-based violence* as a privileged lens for understanding violence in relationships, and with the aim of opening up useful questions for clinical intervention, the hypothesis of an intimate link between life and violence is proposed, which becomes a psychopathological condition when it is attested as a rigid and exclusive mode of survival of one's identity structure. In our society, the denial of difference, of femininity, of *heteros*, produced by a patriarchal culture and the reactive efforts to cope with it, such as the intervention of the *politically correct*, are an example of this. In this sense, the goal of psychoanalytic intervention confronting "the violent" should be to foster the process of complexification of subjectivity – whether of the patient or of our culture. As analysts, we then have the task of working psychically – within ourselves and in the relationship with the other – to keep violence in dialectical tension with its opposite: tenderness. Making tenderness happen involves investing, with love and dedication, the moments of *pause* – a potential space between the tension to complexify and the tension to maintain one's identity. It means, in other words, taking on the experiences that violence evokes as terms of ongoing dialogue with self and other, keeping alive a *symbolic thinking* that can accompany us in welcoming and transforming it.

Key words: violence; gender-based violence; identity structure; subjectivity; symbolic thinking; tenderness.

Violence and life

My contribution starts with a question: what form of violence?

I would like to open a discussion here prompted by some reflections arising from theoretical and clinical dialogues on violence. My intention is not to present a fully comprehensive research paper, but rather to consider a certain position towards violence, a stance that I believe psychoanalysis should hold, or at least keep in mind, when exploring this delicate and complex territory.

Gender-based violence, or the term violence with its complement of specification, inevitably deals with a very specific phenomenon that has been investigated on several fronts and from different psychological per-

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spectives. These perspectives can be summarized thus: individual theories in which psychic disorders or particular personality characteristics account for violent behaviour; systemic theories in which the focus of explanation is on problematic family relationships; cognitive and social learning theories with learned dysfunctional patterns at the basis of violent conduct; profeminist theories which suggest that violence can be interpreted as an expression of patriarchal power. 'Viewpoints tending to be used within a single explanation and, therefore, unicausally.' (Botta, 2016, p. 15).

In order to understand the phenomenon of violence, rather than starting from its complement of specification, the specification 'gender', which is customary in today's society – we might ask ourselves whether it is not more appropriate to investigate the phenomenon from personal experience, and how violence relates to ourselves.

I wonder about the wisdom of investigating the phenomenon of violence from its apex, *i.e.*, intimate partner violence. Edgar Morin's theory (2017) is particularly compelling when he states that 'by isolating and/or fragmenting objects' this approach to knowing 'negates not only context, but also singularity, locality, temporality, existence'. This approach to studying phenomena 'more generally, atrophies our ability to connect (information, data, knowledge, ideas) and only furthers our ability to separate' (p. 28). It must be said that this inclination is often inevitable in language and speech. In this sense, I believe that by taking gender-based violence as a starting point when we address the theme of violence in relationships, we violently separate violence from life. Therefore, I will begin by addressing the complex territory of violence and its connection to life.

I suggest that violence is part of life, the life of each one of us, and that we expel this idea from ourselves in order to survive the trauma that the social and moral discourse about violence often produces. In this regard, Emanuele Severino, a prominent Italian philosopher, whose driving force for his studies is the general nature of violence, comes to our aid.

Severino proposes an experiment:

> 'Try to go back, as far as each of us is able, to the memory of our most distant past, as far back as we can. This experiment should draw us into experiencing a situation in which our will meets resistance. I use the term 'our will', but I could have said 'we', because we are above all will. Will that wants what? Will that wants to live. And what does it mean to want to live? Wanting to continue wanting. But a will that does not immediately get what it wants is a will that clashes with a context that creates resistance.' (Severino, 2016-2017, pp. 61-63)

The philosopher continues, saying that from this perspective, we, as Westerners,[1] are a will: a will expressed in the will to transform the situation

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[1]   According to Severino, in Western society there is an idea, a basic belief, whic

which we are currently experiencing. Therefore, a will for something other than what one is, other than what lies before us. But he adds: there exists a kind of barrier that prevents us from willing or wanting for something other. It is easy for a psychoanalyst to associate this idea with the reality principle; in fact, we recognise this barrier as reality, and the limits reality places on us. Severino tells us, using a personal example – in the sense that it derives from personal experience – that the first kind of willing or wanting something other is breathing. 'Breathing means making space, it means becoming something other, it means making into something other the resistance that, in the beginning, prevents the dilation of life-giving breath' (*ibid*).

As far as we know, human life began when space was created, that is, when human beings were no longer restrained by the resistance of a barrier. Think of childbirth, of being born. But also think of our species' evolutionary emancipation in how we broke down the barrier of instinct by means of language. Maki'ng space then, means breaking something: it is a penetrating, a tearing down of the barrier. Again, referring back to Severino, we can say that becoming something other implies tearing oneself away from what one is in order to evolve into something other. That tearing away is an act of violence.

I wonder, then, whether we should not think of violence first and foremost as a form of life. An experience that serves to affirm life. Let us assume that this is the case. We could ask ourselves whether, in intimate relationships, assigning a complement of specification, such as gender-based, to violence, is not also an act of will, to make space, to separate, to remove from one's life, to place the violence in a more specific, more separate, more distant place. We know that when we touch an exposed nerve instinctively our first reaction is to stop the pain (Minolli, 2016).

It follows that expelling the violence and fragility we experience by the limits placed on us by reality, and projecting them onto something other, is necessary, since, when we experience violence, it seems to be a negation of the roots and the paradigms on which our very structure is built. The function of the quest for naming, *e.g.*, gender-based violence, may be to ward off fear and violence, and by giving it a name we distance ourselves from it and can then instead, point the finger at barbarians, those who are different; the phenomena becomes an object of study and not an experience that is part of us.

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presupposes the nothingness of beings, from which the Christian concept of creation ex nihilo emerges. This belief – which has been part of our culture for centuries – seems to be saying to beings, unconsciously: you are nothing, you do not exist! 'The ontology of mortal is exactly that which releases the greatest violence. Where, by violence, we do not mean simply something horrendous, but an extreme horror which is an extreme error. And it is an extreme error because it is the negation of that being self whose negation is self-negation' (Severino, 2016-2017, p. 122).

'Some interpretations of violence, historically supported by theories that place it within a pathological frame, and, in some way render the cultural imagination of the time absolute. In its attempt to find meaning in violence, it is no wonder that humanity has always struggled in its search for an explanation, even a scientific one (…) Recognizing human violence, and above all one's own, without justifying it by calling primordial instincts into question, would already be a not inconsiderable acquisition.' (*ibidem*, pp. 65-66)

It is not my intention to deny the existence of gender-based violence; however, I think it is important to ask whether classifying violence in intimate relationships as *something*-based (*e.g.,* gender-based) does not lead to the over-simplification of a delicate and complex phenomenon that concerns us all closely. Obviously, denying so-called gender-based violence is equally simplistic, so how should we view violence?

It follows from what we have said that violence is not in itself a problem, or a deviance, but becomes so when it assumes a specific, indisputable identity; from a force attempting to make space for itself, it takes on a fixed role, an indisputable identity: essential Truth.

Patriarchal identity and denial of *heteros*

Michele Minolli (2016) considers the nature of violence, and like other psychoanalysts he interprets it in his own way. He states: 'Only when the objective is to force the other to act according to one's desire, or to bend their will to ours, can we speak of violence' (p. 61). But he warns: 'The crucial question is not so much the use of force - which is only the means - as rendering one's will absolute (...) Violence arises from the desire to bend the other to our will' (*ibid.*).

If we think of violence as a kind of affirmation of life, and if we think of the other, not only as a subjective other, *i.e.,* the object of our projections, introjections and identifications, but also as a real-other, imbued with the infinite nuances and irreducibility of otherness, the idea of violence as something that arises from the desire to bend the other to our will sounds not dissimilar to Severino's idea.

I would like to analyse the theory that violence is a fundamental experience concerning life and may be considered pathological when, in a relationship with the other, it crystallises into being the sole modality for the survival of one's individual or socio-cultural identity (provided that a clear division is possible between these two dimensions).

Massimo Recalcati (2017) argues that in our patriarchal society woman represents difference, *heteros*. Referring to Lacan who underlines the fact that the female organ is not immediately visible, Recalcati invites us to consider femininity as representing the unknown, the hidden and the unrepre-

sentable. He suggests that we reflect on the fact that, in our social structure, there exists a model of motherhood, but not of femininity, because the feminine is nameless. In language, the masculine represents the universal, while the feminine is the 'singular', the particular. And precisely because woman is representative of heteros, man's violence against her becomes a way of trying to control and confine heteros, which by its nature is irreducible.

According to 'man's phallic logic' which determines the patriarchal society identity, there is a total rejection of the heteros, of the feminine. Recalcati identifies three operations resulting from this logic: the identification of femininity as an object of anguish and its consequent expulsion; the categorical identification of femininity with motherhood, as the only possible destiny of a woman, who is obliged to accept it, flattening her evolutionary path to a culturally preordained, one-dimensional identity; the reification of heteros in the brutal formula 'They are all whores' legitimates the use of violence against women.

Violence then becomes repetitive and restless because heteros, the place of anguish, with its potential for indeterminacy and irreducibility threatens our steady, undisputed faith in a patriarchal identity.

Recalcati then asks himself why a woman who suffers violence stays with a violent man. The psychoanalyst replies that in a patriarchal culture women have difficulty inhabiting heteros. Femininity, according to the author, is basically everything that goes beyond what is already known and is beyond any classification or symbolisation. Therefore, heteros, being an unknown factor even for the woman herself, leads to continually seeking points of reference for her identity. So, a woman stays with a violent man because a man supplies answers with regard to her identity in relation to heteros; in the sense that he frees the woman from the risk of subjectifying heteros.

Basically, 'offering oneself' to a man as an object to possess is a pathologically identifiable way of understanding what a woman is.

Recalcati's consideration brings us face-to-face with the ever-present consequences of our patriarchal society. At the same time, in a world where the consumption of objects (women, men, the planet) is first on our list of priorities, and counts more than relationships, many patriarchal convictions have fallen by the wayside, to create abstract, dangerous weapons such as the *politically correct*.

The reactive violence of political correctness

The philosopher, Rocco Ronchi (2021), tells us that the term, *politically correct* is a 'play on words' and a 'form of life' (p. 2): its purpose is to stem the tangible violence exerted by the majorities over the minorities and is a constraint on the dictatorship of majorities towards those who have no

material power (*ibidem*). A politically correct action, therefore, is a preventive measure. Its strength lies in the immaterial level of form, the philosophers would call it the *a-priori* form as it is unencumbered by experience but capable of shaping it. 'The reason for the extraordinary effectiveness of this immaterial weapon lies in the fact that in this play on words (...) one plays with the most sublime of abilities inherent in language: its ability to 'say what is true' ' (*ibid.*). In order to be understood and to have some influence even those who lie must presume to say or pretend to say how things stand objectively; they must express themselves communicatively, and honour the truth even when they bend it.

So what does it mean to be politically correct in a communicative exchange? It means not allowing in communication anything that transgresses the universality of truth, implicitly conceding that there is a universal and unequivocal truth (*ibidem*). Assuming that the universality of the truth means assuming the implicit obligation to cancel all those words that evoke particularity, historical determination, the irrational and violent contingency of events. Hence, from newspaper articles to social networks asterisks appear in place of masculine/feminine gender words; the word 'holidays' appears in place of Christmas, and so on.

Although born of the noblest intentions, *i.e.,* to curb violence by promoting respect for rights, and the political and social equality of different subjectivities, expressing itself and polarising through the implicit function inherent in language, 'its ability to 'say what is true' ' (*ibid.*), from being a communicative tool whose purpose is to curb tangible violence, the politically correct becomes a rigidly defensive idea, a modality that is a re-active mirror-image of violence; it absolutises its aspirations into a Truth which one must adhere and conform to, negating differences. 'Violence is not only the force exerted but the belief that the other must accept one's point of view without reservation' (Minolli, 2016, p. 62).

Conformism is a manner for mass functioning,[2] and the mass presupposes individuals that are non-differentiated (Ambrosiano, 2021). We could say that conformism has an adaptive function, since it presupposes the construction of a vision of the common world, but at the same time, when it pursues its ideals rigidly and exclusively, electing them as Truth, Identity and Uniformity, it can lead to dangerous ideologies, levelling into a rigidly egoic mass modality which gives abstract equality to all speakers in the face of an impersonal, objective and ahistorical truth (Ronchi, 2021).

A truth that erases diversity, endorses fantasies of omnipotence and self-

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[2]   In *Psychology of the masses and analysis of the Ego* (Freud, 1921), 'For Freud the mass represents a particular type of social connection which indicates a functioning that eludes individual thought and pushes individuals into sharing dominant ideas without compunction ' (Ambrosiano, 2022, p. 2).

sufficiency, producing a world in which one is the double of the other, in which all of us are instantly twins and individual curiosity and singularity is silenced (Ambrosiano, 2021).

> 'Desecrating acquired truths is a group task (…) in its evolution, the group needs to review, disassemble and investigate, feed on the dialectic between tradition and betrayal, between continuity and rupture. From this dialectic the group evolves, from the group-mass it moves towards more complex and articulated positions, its mental functioning transforms and organises large cultural structures.' (Ambrosiano, 2022, p. 6)

From Ronchi's words we can appreciate the connection between conformity and violence: conformity and violence in the sense of negation of the complexity of reality.

Today we live in an age that is highly sensitive and reactive to the patriarchal approach and at the same time we notice that social and political efforts to confront complexity in order to embrace heteros often have unfortunate outcomes, such as the reactive violence of political correctness.

In my view, both patriarchal culture and the reactive function of political correctness have a common matrix: an unconscious desire that has, as its absolute objective (or absolutised meaning) wanting what one is not, or does not have, starting - paradoxically - from the suppression of otherness as a rigid and reiterated affirmation of one's identity.

And here the countenance of violence re-emerges as the absolutisation of a certain identity, of a certain point of view.

I would like to clarify that conceiving violence as an absolutisation of one's viewpoint …

> '… means affirming that there is no guilt, but only an understandable closure in a need. If one is caught up in the need to redress an injustice suffered, it goes without saying that one expects the whole world to understand. However, if one feels that one has a sore spot inside, in an inaccessible part of oneself, then one naturally assumes that everyone should appreciate this.' (Minolli 2016, p. 68)

This implies that violence - in one way or another - is a part of us not as a destructive force, which if anything, is an effect, but as faith in the principle of true identity. In this sense, I agree with Recalcati: a man or woman who submits to it and/or inflicts it, the violence bears down as if it were an epidemic wiping out the difference which testifies to its limits and shortcomings.

The complexity of violence in relation to subjective development

We know that when one's identity image crystallises into an indisputable truth in the system of acquired meanings and in previously-adopted solu-

tions, this arrests the evolutionary process of the subject and causes an unease identified as a disorder. In this sense, the condition is not so much a departure from an *a priori* criterion of normality, but more the pain and suffering of both the individual and their environment (Tricoli, 2018). In other words, at a given moment in an individual's development, psychopathology develops into total identification and a two-dimensional flattening of the processual and transformative nature of subjectivity with the Ego.

However, accepting otherness and allowing oneself to be transformed by it is an inevitable necessity of human beings who in this manner remain vital and 'in the making'. I believe that individual development is by its nature – or rather by its culture – intrinsically conflictual, since it moves between affirmations and denials, that is, between opposite polarities (dependence-autonomy; activity-passivity; separateness-symbiosis; individuation-approval…). But 'any psychic event, in order to be defined as complex, must include at least a possibility that the opposite is equally true, otherwise it would produce neither change nor growth but only emptiness and death (Pinkus, 1979)' (Tricoli, 2018, p. 35).

We should clarify that these opposing polarities are extremes on a continuum of psycho-physical development and should be viewed from an intersubjective position, since they are dimensions that are defined and materialise within relationality and do not concern aspects circumscribable to the mind of a single individual. We are dealing, therefore, with all valid 'positions' of subjectivity, which become pathologically conflictual and disturbing for the subject and for others only when the Ego treats them as exclusive, making them absolute and imposing them on others.

I agree with Maria Luisa Tricoli (2018) when she states that conflict is not to be collocated between the extreme polarities of the continuum of individual characteristics; for example, activity *versus* passivity, but in a more systemic sense, between the perception of self, hitherto acquired by the subject, and any other aspect that determines identity within subjective development. It follows that the subject perceives these positions as in conflict with each other only when they take on the appearance of rigid alternatives on which it is not possible not to base one's own egoic position.

The goal of psychoanalytic intervention should be to encourage or 'jumpstart' the process of complexifying subjectivity. The process involves – in times, ways and content that cannot be standardised – a satisfactory, evolving integration of the constitutive aspects of subjectivity: the totality of an undifferentiated unconscious state (function of thought, irreducible to the implicit and repressed), the implicit, reflective and self-reflective aspects, and an increasingly fluid and profound intersubjective dialogue. When I say fluid, this does not mean free from conflict, but rather, tending to assimilate within one's make-up the tensions and the stimuli from outside and inside, via continual, productive crises, using the means that one's subjectivity has at its disposal.

From this perspective, the phenomenon of violence is not simply a pathological mechanism, but a more complex phenomenon, a phenomenon that, of course, gives voice to inmost discomfort and suffering, to a certain state, to a certain psychopathological condition, but also to a change of state, to a potential move on the part of the subject: the desire to continue to make and unmake oneself, as well as to communicate and maintain a connection with what they know, and, at the same time, with what deeply disturbs them.

To achieve this the individual has need of the other. And one's relationship with the other requires work: psychic work.

The unexpected guest in the encounter with violence: tenderness

By psychic work, I mean, among other things, the possibility of tolerating and investing in productive precariousness and indeterminacy that is part of our make-up as living beings. It is a matter of 'passionately investing in the pause rather than the ravenous rush to make objects your own' (Ambrosiano, 2021, p. 11), whether they are subjects, representations, or phenomena. In this *pause*, that I see as a potential space between the tension to complexify and the tension to preserve one's identity, I believe a function of the mind, which is open to welcoming the multiple contradictions of reality, might emerge.

To understand violence, we must be willing to accept it, and to accept it we must *turn into suspended individuals*, engaged in relationships with others (internal and external) in the thought-provoking, 'heartfelt' search for new senses of experience. In this way, new thinking can emerge by itself without the familiar thinking that is known to us *a priori.* 'But, open, associative thinking means tolerating passivity, which is something we do not always agree to. It means tolerating a dependence on thoughts that emerge spontaneously through discourse with the other. It means tolerating the extraneousness of thought: the otherness' (Ambrosiano, 2022).

I think that, thanks to this *pause,* the other side of the moon may emerge: the other side of violence; what Laura Ambrosiano (2021) calls the 'T factor': a current of tenderness towards the diversity of the other and towards common frailty' (p. 11). Indeed, human frailty is a concept which is intimately intertwined with the stuff we are made of: infinite textures of relationships rather than matter.

Tenderness is a feeling that makes us reach out to the other with no expectation of fidelity, participation or submission; it means making room for the other, without claiming the satisfaction of our own desires.

It is arbitrary, a tender rapture for the humanity of the other. Humanity that encompasses violence to make it more complex. Tenderness reaches

out and does not pause with the trauma of violence, but in the possibilities it opens up. The expression of tenderness runs along a fragile, mobile line as it cannot be produced on command, but emerges when engaged in challenging psychic, intersubjective work with the other. The work should be viewed as the procedural commitment of two subjects with equal dignity, the analyst and the patient, who share similar social and cultural problems.

Understanding and intervening in violence – as always in analysis – entails opening up to the intersubjective modality of one's relationship with oneself and the other which can only be achieved when actively using one's own experience to create a continuous dialogue with oneself and the other. It is a dialogue in which the unconscious nature of the experiences become accessible to one's consciousness as a conscious sense of what is happening (to us) (Cozzaglio, 2012).

If we accept the theory that violence is an experience that concerns life primarily, and that it is considered a pathological relationship with the other when it crystallises into an exclusive means of preserving identity, then it requires work on the psyche to keep it in a constant dialectical tension – within ourselves and in relation to the patient - with its opposite: tenderness. But tenderness is fragile. It is fragile because it happens, it cannot be willed or forced. Yet, it can happen if we are committed to dealing with the internal and relational conditions which allow it to cut across the field and the psychic work that we are creating with the other. In particular, it can happen, with the intensity of experiences that this entails, if we are willing to be touched by the violence, counting our own private, intimate, affective and representational 'correspondences' with it.

In other words, we could say that tenderness is a sentiment that characterises reverie.

> 'We often forget that according to Bion, reverie is not so much the result of an identification on the part of the primary figures, but of their willingness to let themselves be triggered by the emotions of the other, drawing on their own personal emotional experiences, similar to those that the child seems to experience, or the patient in analysis, never identical. (…) If the child, the patient, the individual feels himself an object of tenderness, he in turn develops a current of tenderness which invests not only the primary objects, but the wider environment. C. Neri (2015) defines it as an asymmetrical bond endowed with reciprocity (…) Tenderness also goes beyond the bonds indicated by W. Bion (1962), love, hate, knowledge, because it points towards the aspects of fragility and need that bring us all together.' (Ambrosiano, 2021, p. 142)

It is a question of opening up to the other and of being committed to the complex work of meeting through slow, tiring, receptive passivity. As I said earlier, tenderness cannot be produced on demand. It will only materialise through working on the psyche.

In this sense, tenderness is an unexpected guest which graces you and

occurs unexpectedly. Often rejected because it is mistaken for passivity or pity. Other times, it is opposed because mistaken for weakness (Correale, 2021). Ensuring that tenderness happens, accepting the possibility that it may not happen, means taking charge of the circumstances: engaging in a relationship with the other, in a passionate search for the symbolic significance of the experience of violence, whether considered endured or inflicted.

Accepting the symbolic significance of violence and directing a softened gaze towards the other

Thinking in symbols means having to do with a sort of compositional ability or succinctness, aimed at opposites. If rational thinking means moving through an endless separation of the oppositions, symbolic thinking is moving through the composition of the oppositions. The symbol, in fact, might be seen as an image with indefinite contours which realises the *perspective function* of the unconscious mind, putting together what already exists and what is structured in our consciousness, with any other possible determination in our unconscious mind.

According to Jungian psychology, the Unconscious[3] has a complementary and compensatory relationship with Consciousness.[4] This means that the Unconscious punctually corrects the one-sided and one-way attitude of Consciousness, proposing what, out of necessity, or rather in order to adapt to reality, is excluded or expunged from itself (Trevi, 2012). Furthermore, according to Jung, everything concerning the structure of the psyche (functions, attitudes, relationship between conscious and unconscious, *etc*.) is to be considered an aspect of the law of antitheticality, which consists in the subject's continuous alternation of pairs of opposites, which maintain a complementary and compensatory relationship.[5]

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[3]   Jungian consciousness is that function or activity which keeps psychic content and the Ego (Jung, 1921) connected. It is an ephemeral phenomenon that is useful in momentary adaptations and orientations. The ego lies on images of sensory functions which transmit stimuli from inside and outside, and it also lies on a huge accumulation of images of past processes. Consciousness has the function of holding all these different elements together. The unconscious is also a function of thought. A priority function with respect to the consciousness that emerges from it and far more complex than both the Freudian dynamic unconscious (the repressed) and what we today define as the 'implicit unconscious'.

[4]   In the Jungian perspective, 'the psyche consists of two spheres interacting but contrasting in their qualities: the conscious and the so-called unconscious. Our ego participates in both fields' (Jacobi, 1948, p. 18). This means not that the unconscious and the conscious should be considered as two different parts of the psyche, but that they are two different states of a unitary subject which functions and expresses itself appropriately.

[5]   Jung's principle of 'obligatory opposites' appears to be consistent with the view of

In German, symbol is expressed as Sinnbild. With its two parts, the term accurately expresses the dual nature and pertinence of its content: meaning (Sinn), which is the responsibility of Consciousness, the rational; image (Bild), which comes under the jurisdiction of the Unconscious, or the irrational.

> 'These qualities make the symbol particularly suited to accounting for the processes that take place in the totality of the psyche and for expressing the most intricate and contrasting psychic states of affairs as well as for acting on them (…) The symbol is neither an allegory nor a sign, but the image of content that transcends consciousness. However, symbols can also 'degenerate' into signs and become 'dead symbols' if the hidden meaning of the symbol is completely revealed, ceasing to be meaningful, since we can then fully grasp it through reason. A true symbol can never be fully explained. Consciousness can give us the key to its rational part, but we can only 'feel' its irrational elements.' (Jacobi, 1948, pp. 123-124)

The symbol seems to perform a function, the role of medium, of 'synthesiser' of opposites, connecting the divergent conscious and unconscious polarities, which the ego would otherwise be torn between (Trevi, 2012). It follows that an analysis of the symbol should not mean returning it to rational thought (revealing its semantic correspondence with another sign) but amplifying the image or experience that characterises it, to the point of acknowledging not only the subject's cultural and personal meaning system, but also the subject's reiteration of unconscious meaning. However, we must not consider the use of the term synthesis or *synthetic function* of the symbol as something which clears any contradiction of the opposites, but rather as a tension in the composition of the opposites, in such a way that they each revitalise in relation to the other.

In these terms, I think we can consider tenderness as the polar opposite of violence. Indeed, tenderness causes us to lay down our arms because we meet the other in an unprotected territory where it is possible to feel – because it is shared – the joy of the transience and precariousness of life, but also its aspiration to last. The welcoming of tenderness and preparing the ground for its arrival implies establishing a particular relationship with the other, a relationship that invests the *pause* with love and dedication and which, through sharing work on the psyche, through symbols and symbolic thinking, creates an area in which the paradoxes of one's identity and the possibility of being transformed by them, emerges.

With the other we can experience fusion and separation at the same time:

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the human subject and his becoming which we saw previously; in this perspective, on its continuous evolutionary journey, the human subject articulates and complexifies itself through affirmations and denials, through opposite polarities.

'I am the other but I am not the other. But the other is here in his helpless state, and therefore calls to mind my own helpless state' (Correale, 2021, p. 150). In this sense, helplessness assumes the nature of a common heritage. A heritage that may be related to the violence entwined with life that we discussed earlier using the dialectic of being-becoming. A sort of 'naked life' (*ivi*) that can only emerge by sprinting between opposites; a life imbued with contradictions, limits and infinite expansions, which unites us all and which we make resonate in encounters with the other.

What I want to share with these reflections on violence is a softened gaze on the other, which may be the violent other.

I believe that a tender, theoretical, but clinical eye with regard to violence, that embraces otherness, can lead to measures that require, first and foremost, that we put ourselves in the state of being *suspended individuals* who acknowledge the tensions between opposing polarities and participate in them in order to find out where an intimate, open encounter with violence might take us.

I think the clinical implications of what has been said are easy to guess.

One could say that part of psychoanalytic commitment consists of the challenge of creating conditions in which we and our patients 'can experience tenderness in their love life' (Correale, 2021, p. 152) and in their relationship with violence.

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