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BEAUTY, FENESTRALITY, CALLING.

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CURRENT AESTHETIC DEBATE*

ABSTRACT. Among the plastic features housed within the nebulous conceptual realm of beauty, there is one that has not yet received due consideration. Yet its emergency occurs in a familiar setting: the discussion on the etymology of *καλόν*, beautiful, in Plato's *Cratylus* (416BD). This contribution can be understood as a continuation of the etymological play that Plato unfolds therein with τὸ καλόν; and its purpose is to demonstrate that the calling-summoning trait of beauty, especially in connection with the transcendental fenestration philosopheme, can prove to be speculatively fruitful for the contemporary aesthetic discourse. With this in mind, such aspect is then brought into interaction with those paradigmatic ingredients of beauty properly summarized by Remo Bodei in his work *Le forme del bello* (1995).
KEYWORDS: Beauty. Call, Con-vocation. Fenestra. Plato.

1. *The Fenestra and the Famous Platonic Philosophems of Beauty*

There is, therefore, this window that has always been open, and that in reality no human has ever been able to close, exclude, or elude. And it is in the space of the window, occupied by a strange mirrored surface, that the infinite spectacle of all that exists never ceases to appear to us, lo gran mar de l'essere (Dante, *Par. I*, 113) – in

* Lecture given on 6 August 2024 within the framework of the XXV World Congress of Philosophy – Rome 2024 (Topic: “Aesthetics and Philosophies of Art”), in the Aula Magna of the Department of Letters and Philosophy, La Sapienza University.

the polyrhythmic interweavings of times and in the ever-changing overlays of places¹.

So, every discourse on beauty and any direct experience of *beautiful* phenomena and constructs presuppose the original window, which I will henceforth call by the Latin term: the *fenestra*, whose construction cannot be attributed to human initiative, and can be called, perhaps not inadequately, divine, if not even ultradivine. It is, however, a recent philosophical attempt to think of the *fenestra* in the sense of the Christic Logos, the divine Word through which – according to the beginning of the book of *Genesis* and the prologue of the *Gospel* of John – all things were created².

Beauty, for its part, beauty itself, outside of any experience and discourse that may concern it – αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, as expressed by Plato in the *Cratylus* (439CD) – has a unique bond with the *fenestra*, thanks to which even the reconsideration of the most well-known Platonic philosophems on beautiful shows their extraordinary actuality.

Thus, in the *Philebus* (65A), beauty is one of the three metaideas (together with symmetry and truth) in which τὸ ἀγαθόν, the optimum³, is poured. And while the

¹ For the transcendental fenestrality, see Cicero 2006a: 288 ff., especially 2023a §§ 8 and 13.

² See Cicero 2023a § 8: 56-58, and § 13: 109.

³ For the interpretation of *Philebus*, 65A, see Cicero 2023b: 82 ff.

latter remains epistemically unspeakable *in itself*, as it turns out to be not only ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, beyond being (*Respublica* 509B), but above all – I mean – ἐπέκεινα τῆς θυρίδος, *beyond* the fenestra; instead, its three eidetic circles *cross* the fenestra to give themselves either to thinking alone – symmetry and truth as noumena – or to thinking together with sensible perception – beauty as phenomenon⁴, a unique case among the ideas (*Phaedrus* 250D: “only beauty [τὸ κάλλος] has received this destiny of being the most manifest and lovable reality”).

So, in the *Symposium* it is said (210A-212A): to the one who, inflamed by love, philosophizes and reaches the climax of the ladder of Eros, may suddenly [ἐξαίφνης] happen not simply to contemplate a beautiful human body, a beautiful soul, beautiful legislation, or beautiful knowledge, but αὐτὸ τὸ καλόν, beauty itself. Now, the contemplation of the beautiful in itself, which for Plato is the worthiest moment of human life, can only take place *inside* the fenestra; it’s not possible for it to ascend through and beyond this very strange “closed opening”, sealed by mirrored films⁵. But the lucid consciousness of such impossibility also offers the purest opportunity

⁴ That is, as a noumenon destined to be incarnated in concrete bearers, so as to manifest itself in intuition to the human mind (see Cicero 2006b: XIII ff.; Cicero 2023a § 7: 50 ff., n. 159).

⁵ See Cicero 2023a § 8: 57.

to plausibly think the ultrafenestral, that is, the “region” of the non-manifestedness of the optimum, thanks precisely to the beauty which, according to Plato, constitutes its phenomenal moment.

2. Beauty as Calling and Convoke

However, there is another Platonic philosophem of beauty, whose relevance has not been diminished at all by being hitherto overlooked (perhaps due to its playful context). In the *Cratylus* (416BD) it is indeed stated that the omicron of καλόν would be an ancient abbreviation of the diphthong οῦ of καλοῦν (“calling”; from καλέω, “I call”). Therefore, etymologically, τὸ καλόν would mean: “that which calls” beings and acts, and thus makes them καλά, beautiful.

If we now confer speculative dignity to this suggestion, then beauty in itself that today, at the beginning of the third millennium, we would like to *glimpse* again among the reflections of the mirror, beauty itself that we would like to *watch* at again and again – in the authentic sense of watching, that is: to guard it, protect it, keep it –, then we should first learn to *listen to* beauty *again*. Because beauty, before anything else, is: *call*⁶. Beauty *calls*, together with (and through) individual

⁶ For a first exposition of beauty as a call, see Cicero 2018: 82-83.

existences, the entire community to which they belong.

In fact, beautiful things – a face, a sunset, an alley, a painting, a cathedral, a song, a movie, a videogame, etc. – beauties are such because they attract us, they draw us to them like magnets, in a way that is almost impossible to resist; think, for example, of Stendhal’s syndrome, that panic attack, that mixture of depression and euphoria, with dizziness, palpitations, vertigo, and hallucinations, which struck the French writer in 1817 during his visit to Santa Croce in Florence!

Yet a minimum of resistance to the attraction of beauty is indispensable: otherwise, allowing oneself to be carried away and lost in aesthetic rapture would dull our ability to listen to the beauty-that-calls-us, and thus prevent us from responding to it. “Beauty calls”, in Greek sounds: τὸ καλὸν καλεῖ – it’s easy to grasp in the phrase that consonance that we can hear in the English verb *to call*.

τὸ καλὸν καλεῖ διὰ καλῶν: *beauty calls us*, appeals to us with a magnetic voice, *primarily* through beautiful things, *through beautiful beings and acts*. To replicate in English the monody of the verbal family of καλεῖν, one could say: *the Voice convokes through vocations*. Beauty is *con-vocation gratiis*, a powerful invitation, direct or indirect – but not imposition – to listening. And this means, in compliance with that *cum* of *cum-vocatio*, that it is essentially communal. Even when the process that

conveys beauty appears individual – the so-called “creative process of the artist” –, the entire community is, in fact and substance, involved, including elements that show no aesthetic sensitivity. Beauty always calls the entire *polis*, the entire network of communities linked by geopolitical and historical-cultural affinities – indirectly claiming a dialogue with non-Western worlds.

3. Traditional (Western) Paradigms of Beauty and Fenestral Convocation Today

The enudation of the unique, eccentric bond between fenestra and beauty prompts a remodulation of the traditional paradigmatic notions of the beautiful. Remo Bodei – in his 1995 text, *Le forme del bello*, while lacking the technically reproducible beauty and, for obvious chronological reasons, the digital one – identified seven main conceptual clusters typical of Western civilization, variously opposing or intersecting with each other. I will briefly show how each can be reshaped by the philosophem of fenestral beauty.

a) Beauty as *commensurability* concerns the proportional order among the parts of a whole, their overall equilibrium, essentially linked to the senses of sight and hearing (visible symmetry, sonorous harmony). But every commensurability and

every order (*kosmos*) depend on the proportional superstructure inherently possessed by the window: thus, beauty properly calls through the analogon or the *as* – better: beauty properly calls *starting from* the analogical medium as the unique recursive self-binding, self-triplication (as as as, *inquantum inquantum inquantum*) that is a law unto itself and to which nothing can escape – not even being as being, nor τὸ καλὸν ἢ καλόν – the matrix of all possible statements and thus the formal law of every living logos, as well as of every being and acting vocation⁷.

b) Beauty as *vagueness* is characterized by the enchantment of the imponderable, incalculable, boundless, indeterminate. But even every imponderability and boundlessness has its formal origin in the *as*, while its sensible genesis lies in the encounter of the numinous flows of the parts involved (the “objective” energy of the *numen*, the human “subjective” disposition a priori): thus, beauty calls starting from the analogon, by virtue of the “divine” numinous power – coming, in Platonic terms, from the superabundance of the optimum – and towards the numinous steminal energy of the human being that is willing to listen to it⁸.

c) Beauty as teleological *functionality* refers to cases where finality has its

⁷ For the “as” as a recursive medium, see Cicero 2024 §§ 25, 29.

⁸ For this interpretation of the numinous, see Cicero 2010: 109 ff., and 122 ff.

intrinsic necessity or a functional specificity. This conceptual model has been relevant for over a century (see industrial design). But it also includes the use of beauty and the *καλά* for formative purposes: thus, beauty also calls the generations to co-form themselves, and in the current situation, intergenerational dialectic is only embarrassed in choosing what to listen to among the countless artistically well-made filmic products⁹.

d) Beauty as *simplicity* arises from the total removal of the ordered correspondence of parts, while as (increase of) *complexity*, it makes the translatability of the sensible into simple forms more difficult. But every opposition, even the most polarized – from one–many to being–non-being, from rest–movement to sensible–ultrasensible to simple–complex – plays between the poles of monochrome (or grayscale) and polychrome of fenestral specularity: thus, beauty calls to the analogical mirror, to the fenestra as such, so that the inner ear may be diverted from the melancholy of too leaden winters or the vividness of merely polemical spectacles.

e) Beauty as *luminosity* is traditionally corroborated through the brightness of the ultrasensitive glow, while

⁹ On didactic method of filmanalysis see Cicero 2023a: 73 ff., n. 217.

f) Beauty as fascinating *umbrality* holds under its aegis the notion of the ugly, whereby this appears as a kind of inseparable phenomenal doppelgänger of the beautiful. But only the *lucus/locus*, never illuminable nor obscurable, where the voice of silence prevails, befits the fenestra as such: thus, beauty calls within the *lucus/locus* where the voice of silence rules¹⁰.

g) Beauty as *eroticism* structurally extends from the depth of sensual attraction, through enthusiastic delirium, to rationally ungraspable ulteriority. But if the germ of every kind of (human) love indissolubly inhabits the flesh, then beauty calls for the force of carnality, penetrating that silence, can endure sensuality and sublimity, to finally listen to the vocation of death¹¹.

And then: Are we humans still capable of hearing and recreatively responding to the call of beauty? Today, as we are fatally immersed in the dizzying promiscuity of devices, can we still grasp that every old and new screen (cinematic, television, PC monitor, tablet, smartphone) is an eminent metaphor for the fenestra from which the call of beauty erupts?

¹⁰ On the *lucus*, see Cicero 2024 §§ 3-5.

¹¹ Regarding sentient flesh, see Cicero 2023a § 13.

τὸ καλὸν καλεῖ διὰ καλῶν: beauty calls us through beautiful things. Beauty intimately transforms the ones who listen to it, and above all the face and flesh of the ones who respond to it. The original Voice convokes us through vocations: even today.

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