

Pain and Beauty —

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Abstract: In this lecture I will outline the experiential territory that is named by the main title of this conference.

Just like „heaven“ and „hell“, the words „beauty“ and „pain“ designate polar qualities of human experience. However, both of these qualities are more than what they appear to be at first sight. In addition to their immediate feel, each of them includes a pointer at an existential dimension of the human condition:

Whereas „beauty is nothing but the promise of happiness“ (Stendhal), pain is the herald of dying and death. When we immerse in the experience of beauty, we joyfully abandon our separate individuality and gladly become part of the transcendence to which beauty invites us. In contrast, when pain dominates our experience, we tend to feel overwhelmed by an adversary force that is stronger than we are ourselves and that threatens to reduce or even destroy our individuality.

“Pain and Beauty”! — What a provocative title! When I first read it, it generated all kinds of memories, fantasies, and thoughts in me. Among them were the happiest as well as the most difficult situations in my life. I will give you two examples:

First Example

One day at school, when I was eighteen years old, I suddenly experienced a terrible headache. (Slide 2) My entire brain felt like a cramp with glowing knives cutting through it. The stabbing pain reached forward, into my eyes, and turned my vision into a firework of countless little explosions, each of which felt like a pinprick. I tried to relax, to breathe slowly, to focus my attention on something else, but nothing helped. I was completely exposed to the demon that was going berserk in my head, torturing me brutally and without any mercy. I felt increasingly forlorn and desperate as I realized that my body began to get paralyzed and I became unable to speak. I fainted.

After some time, the duration of which I did not know, I woke up in a white and sterile room I had not been in before. Apparently

I was lying in a hospital bed. The sheets felt like sandpaper on my skin. I had to keep my eyes shut to protect them from the incredibly bright sunlight that appeared to burn my eyes when I tried to open them. I still could not move and speak. There was nobody there, and I had no idea how to make somebody pay attention to me. I was hopeless and lonely. As I dared to open my eyes for a second, I saw a black cross at the wall. I thought, I would die.

Second Example

At another point in my life, my wife and I were meditating in the countryside. We watched a flock of swallows darting across the bright blue summer sky in Provence. (Slide 3) As the swallows entered our field of vision we also heard the gentle whirring sound of the birds' wings as they flew through the hot air. The air vibrated gently and our bare skin tingled.

In this moment, which seemed to last an eternity, the external events coincided with what we experienced. Or, to be more precise, our sensations and thoughts were *one* aspect, and the external events the *other* aspect of one and the same happening. It was not that the swallows had come along first, generating our thoughts and perceptions, nor was it our thoughts and perceptions that had preceded or even caused the appearance of the swallows. Everything happened at absolutely the same time and seemed both spontaneous and natural. The whole situation seemed to be a wonderful work of art, the creation of which involved our participation in exactly the same way as that of the swallows, the sun, the air and the landscape.

I give you these personal examples, since they illustrate the more general characteristics of pain and beauty. In addition, their juxtaposition evokes the intuition that the two are something like polarities, although the strict opposite of pain would be physical pleasure or lust, whereas the opposite of beauty would be ugliness. — But let us leave this aspect aside for the time being and let us first look at pain itself. (Slide 4)

Physical Pain

At the beginning we need to acknowledge that it seems to be an intrinsic part of the human condition to be able to experience pain and to actually experience it from time to time. Pain is one of the constraints and givens, under which human life takes place. Therefore, the hermeneutic philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer said: “What a man has to learn through suffering is not this or that particular thing, but insight into the limitations of humanity, into the absoluteness of the barrier that separates man from the divine” (1989, 357).

The properties of pain can be described phenomenologically. I will point out some of its major characteristics:

Usually, “pain is not just a sensation or a feeling, it is an *adversary*, with which one *must* deal. As soon as this coercion has stopped to exist, the pain does not really hurt anymore” (Schmitz 2011, 4 — italics added). The signaling function¹ of pain attributes an urgency to it that can hardly be ignored. In other words, as soon as the pain we experience has reached a certain degree of intensity, it takes possession of us; we are *captured* by it and *must* grapple with it in one way or another.

In other words, pain does not only *attract* attention, it adamantly *demand*s attention; it does not tolerate to be ignored. Its demand character can be so strong that our whole being is physically as well as mentally ‘drawn’ towards the center of the pain that we sense somewhere in our body: We experience an involuntary *contraction* in our muscles or in other organs, and at the same time we become *introverted*, occupied more or less exclusively with ourselves: We get hurtfully *self-centered*.

¹ I use this term *phenomenologically*, i.e. to designate the fact that pain demands attention. Biologists have also talked of a signaling function, but in the sense that the meaning of pain is to alert the sufferer to some underlying disease. This assumption has been convincingly questioned on the basis of numerous reasons; it is apparently only true in *some* cases, especially for pain elicited by lesions and inflammations.

This self-centeredness goes along with a far-reaching restriction and reduction of the self. The stronger the pain, the more the suffering person becomes *less* than what she or he normally is. Under the condition of serious pain, the self that can be defined as “the system of contacts at any moment” (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman 1951, 235), remains in touch with only a section of its possible contacts, the awareness of the pain being dominantly and unquestionably in the foreground. We are confronted with what Schmitz calls “personal regression,” i.e. we are *forced* into a Here and Now that we cannot escape easily. Under the condition of extreme pain, we are in danger of losing both our individuality and our dignity; we turn into a mere ‘picture of misery.’

Even in less extreme situations, the reduction in the number of present contacts frequently includes the interruption of *interpersonal* contacts and can result in an extensive sense of solitude. This loneliness may show itself also in the belief that nobody else will ever be capable of understanding the kind of pain the person feels; the sense of connectedness, which we usually establish through the co-creation of meaning with others (see Tronick 2007, 499), breaks down.

This has to do with the fact that physical pain is hard to communicate in words; our capability of verbalizing our experience is impoverished too. Pain brings about “an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (Scarry 1985, 4). If we find words at all, we have to rely on fictitious comparisons: “The sheets felt like sandpaper on my skin.”

I did not say that in pain we are “concerned” with ourselves, since that would be an understatement. Instead, I used the word “occupied,” because in fact pain can hold us in its claws — just like an occupation army can seize a foreign country. That is to say that we typically have a sense of being *victimized* by pain. Although it arises from our own body, in most cases we do not experience ourselves as its originators.

In pain, we tend to regard our body in a peculiar way as something we both *have* and *are* — a condition that the phenomenologists have described as a general phenomenon in great detail. Pain forces us to experience this general human condition in a most salient way:

Since physical pain appears as our tormentor, to whom we are subjected, *on the one hand* we tend to *disidentify* with it; we rather identify with the suffering. And although this suffering has immediately palpable qualities *in* our bodies, it seems to be something that is done *to* us *by* our bodies. We, to whom the pain is ‘done,’ find ourselves being the *sufferers*, i.e. when in pain, we usually identify more with the *psychological* aspect of our being than with the physical.²

Overstating it a little, one might say that strong pain can put us into the *extraordinary* situation of experiencing exactly the split that Descartes mistakenly thought to be the *general* human condition.

However, that is only half of the truth of the body-mind relation in pain, since *on the other hand* it is exactly the coercive character of pain that tells us we cannot avoid *being* the body we are (see Couceiro-Bueno 2009). Ultimately and relentlessly we are physical beings, whose weal and woe depends essentially on their bodies and on their physical fates. So if the pain feels unbearable for even just a short span of time, and if we do not expect any relief to occur soon, we easily are ready to abandon our bodies and prefer to die — just to put an end to the suffering. Therefore, as well as because of the fact that pain frequently goes along with disease, pain can be understood as the herald of death.

So generally speaking, physical pain is an experience we both urgently and hopelessly try to *avoid*. This tendency to avoid pain can become dangerous, if the signal character of pain is ignored, for instance by the use of drugs. We all know that physical pain cannot only be a symptom of an illness, but can also be a manifestation of

² This is possible probably because the sensory qualities of pain are processed in a different part of the brain than the affective qualities (see Singer, Seymour, O’Doherty, Kaube, Dolan & Frith 2004).

psychic problems that can only be overcome by conscious psychological or social activities.

In both cases it does not make sense to just turn off the warning signal by numbing oneself, getting drunk or taking painkillers. This may be an admonition of special importance in a culture like ours, in which the easy availability of analgesic drugs has sometimes produced the assumption that there was a remedy for all kinds of pain and that, therefore, the experience of pain had become obsolete entirely (see Saner 1992). However, Perls, Hefferline and Goodman are also right when they emphasize that

there is no virtue in enduring the continuation of a warning signal after it has been heeded. If one has a toothache and has made an appointment with the dentist . . . , then the painkiller comes in handy as a way of avoiding *suffering that can do no good*. (1951, 30f. — original italics)

Psychic Pain

With respect to *psychic* pain it can sometimes be even more difficult to make a wise distinction between the kind of suffering that is meaningfully endured and the kind of suffering that does not do any good. I would now like to look at three categories of psychic pain that are most prevalent and that in many cases require this difficult distinction.

Ordinary suffering and psychopathology (Slide 5)

The first category is the most widely spread kind of pain; it is one that almost everybody has experienced in her life many times. We may not always call it “pain,” we may just call it “frustration” or “disappointment” or the like. It is an aspect of our common humanity. As the Rolling Stones once sang: *You can’t always get what you want*. Life can be hard at times, and it can also be unjust. Some of our wishes come true, some others don’t.

For some of these frustrations nobody is to blame. It is just the way life is, and at many occasions it can be wise to accept the facts of life with humility and to acknowledge the common human fate. Self-pity can make things even worse, since thinking of oneself

as “poor me” is a way of seeing oneself as separate from the rest of humanity and, thereby, adding additional pain to the one that is already there. But the ordinary suffering from life’s hardships is something we all have in common.

With respect to other frustrations, there are causes that may be worth inspecting thoroughly. Maybe one finds out that they have to do with societal and political conditions that make it appear useful to take some public action. But one may also discover that one’s disappointments have their cause in one’s own psychological functioning. In this case, some psychotherapists speak of “psychopathology” or “neurosis.” Simply speaking, psychopathology refers to the way in which we make sure *not* to get what we want — in most cases without being aware of it.

Not too rarely, people add secondary pain to the primary one by criticizing themselves harshly for being so neurotic and incapable of getting their needs met. Perls has called this the perspective of the “topdog,” with which people can relate to themselves; they blame themselves, put themselves down and sometimes even express their hatred against the undesired aspects of themselves. This may include an aversion against their physical appearance and lead to all kinds of attempts at making themselves more beautiful including painful surgery. So a certain understanding of beauty can turn into an ideal, with which people terrorize themselves. They rail against how they look and how they are; they rather shame or cruelly hurt and punish themselves than giving themselves the self-compassion and friendly support that would enable them to live peacefully with themselves.

The pain that results from all these self-obstructing activities may be difficult to bear. But without being aware of the self-created suffering and without assuming responsibility for it, it is hard to bring about any changes. Avoiding this sort of pain can easily result in stagnation and a continuous repetition of what creates the suffering in the first place — a vicious circle that can only be escaped by a cordial and compassionate attention to one’s emotions (see Neff 2011).

The second kind of psychic pain that I would like to address has to do with loss.

Loss (Slide 6)

Without any doubt it is a most painful experience, if a loved person dies. We say that it can break one's heart. The heartfelt, loving connectedness with that person as somebody you can hear, smell and touch is disrupted in an irrevocable way. Although you can remember the loved person as well as the times you have spent together with her, your contact with her will never be the same. The pain that goes along with the awareness of such a loss can be overwhelming and devastating, it can shatter one's way of being in the world, it can feel like the ground is being pulled away from under one's feet. It can appear too hard to take.

So people sometimes tend to damp down the intensity of the pain. In extreme cases they even ignore or deny the loved person's death in the attempt to avoid the suffering. Some people try to cushion their pain by distorting reality. They tell themselves that the deceased person is only sleeping or gone to a place from where she will return sooner or later. And others become depressed as a means to obviate the grief. Some cherish the illusion that holding on to the deceased person by not grieving might help them to stay connected.

They all pay the price of a life that lacks the excitement and vividness which life can have, if it is lived with the full vibrancy of one's emotions. The avoidance of the pain brings about a flattening of one's vitality contours (see Stern 1999); it benumbs the freshness of sensory awareness and decolorizes life's beauty. The results can be the abuse of alcohol, excessive consumption of TV, resignation, fatigue, depression, boredom etc. — in short, a life that does not feel worth living anymore.

So it may be wiser to confront the pain, to expose oneself to the experience of it, at least step by step in ways that feel tolerable — and, if necessary, in close connection and with the support of a person in whom we trust. To be able to say Yes to the pain, it may

be helpful to remember that one of life's most basic properties, called "impermanence," cannot only give rise to the death of people we love, but also makes any feeling recede over time. That does, however, presuppose that we are ready to experience the hurtful feeling fully. If we do so, the grief will transform the dead person's presence into a part of ourselves that we hold in our hearts dearly, as we go on living in animate, though at times sad, spirit.

Insult

Fritz Perls, the founder of gestalt therapy, once said: "The enemy of development is . . . pain phobia" (1969, 52). This statement is particularly true for the third example of psychic pain I would like to discuss: the pain of feeling offended. (Slide 7)

I remember a client, who once arrived early to a session and rang the bell of our office. Since I had not yet expected her, I made a phone call and did not hear the doorbell. Shortly before the time of our appointment my client rang again. I opened the door and let her in. She was in a rage and yelled at me: "Who do you think you are? If you hoped I would go down on my knees to be let in and to be helped, you are damned wrong. I will never return" — upon which she left slamming the door.

It is easy to see that my client had felt insulted by me and had experienced herself as a mortified victim. She experienced humiliation and a loss of dignity, and this humiliation formed the basis of the aggressive behavior she showed. The experienced offence provided her with an almost moral justification for her aggressiveness.

Everybody knows this kind of experience: If we feel the pain that goes along with the impression of not being seen or even of being depreciated, we tend to hold the other person accountable and rather fight against her than attend to the hurt. In my view, apart from economic reasons, the majority of aggression and violence in the world springs from the sense of devaluation in conjunction with the avoidance of the pain that is associated with it. This pain, however, is the pain of disconnectedness and isolation.

If avoided and transformed into anger, it does physical and psychological harm both to the offended person herself and to those who are attacked. Moreover, the likability and the intelligence of the person are impaired and her appearance tends to become ugly (see Staemmler & Staemmler 2009).

Nevertheless, most people in our culture find it easier to attack the alleged offender and to destroy the human connection even further, than to look for ways of processing the insult to the effect that their sense of self-esteem and dignity is maintained, while the respect for, and the integrity of, the other is held in high regard too. Both aspects together form the preconditions for the feeling of connectedness. In other words, the aggressiveness that results from an experienced offence can be understood as an avoidance of the pain that the slight has elicited and as an attempt to inflict it upon the other. However, personal growth can only accrue, if the pain is confronted and adequately dealt with, so that the psychic vulnerability of the person is moderated or, if possible, overcome, while the connection is reestablished.

Unfortunately, the notion of “positive aggression” that gestalt therapy has held for much too long, has frequently contributed to the destruction of human connections and relationships; it did not help to cultivate the aesthetics of contact. Perls failed to point out nice and peaceful alternatives for dealing with the pain of invalidation. But luckily mankind has different role models at hand: Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama and many others have demonstrated that, even in the face of severe disrespect, there is a chance to maintain one’s dignity in assertive but non-aggressive ways.

Not surprisingly, in the dignified forms of assertiveness, which these people embody, we can see the grace of uprightness, the clarity of non-irritability, the flexibility of choice, and the vitality of the joy of life: We see *beauty*.

This takes me to the second term in the title of this conference. But before I talk about beauty, I would like to sum up briefly the

major points I have mentioned with respect to pain (Slide 8). They were:

- Pain *demand*s attention.
- It has a *contractive* quality.
- It evokes *self-centeredness*.
- It results in *personal regression*.
- It easily leads to *social isolation*, partly because it is impossible to find the right words.
- It triggers a strong inclination of *avoidance*.
- And it supports an *introverted* stance.

Last but not least, it challenges the person to make a wise *distinction* about whether or not to give in to the tendency of avoiding the pain.

Now let us look at beauty (Slide 9).

Beauty

In his book *Beauty and the Soul*, the Italian psychotherapist Piero Ferrucci writes:

Beauty is a primary principle that touches all parts and functions of our being. It opens us to the world and brings harmony to our relation with others and with nature; it helps us reach out and touch the entire universe. (2009, xxvii)

And he goes on:

The moment we perceive beauty in its fullness and we are filled with it, in that moment . . . we are not paranoid anymore, we are not depressed, we are not obsessive, we are not bitter. . . . It may be just that one moment, but *we have reached perfect health*. (ibid., 128 — original italics)

He concludes that “beauty is the affirmation of life” (ibid., 5).

These are grand words that show the enthusiasm beauty can evoke. But let us take a closer look:

Whenever you experience something that you find beautiful, your attention is drawn to it, but not in the occupying way in which pain draws your attention to itself, but in the manner of what is

called “fascination”: You are enchanted by what you see or hear, and although you feel still free to turn anywhere else, you do *not want* to let yourself be distracted from what you find beautiful. You are strongly attracted; you have a sense of expansion, of reaching out.

Gadamer once wrote: “Beauty is . . . related to the idea of ‘shining’ Beauty has the mode of being of light” (1989, 482 — original italics). Becoming aware of the shine of beauty is almost tantamount to experiencing the impulse of wanting to bathe in that light, to participate in the radiance of beauty and to immerse oneself in it. It feels pretty similar to how Perls, Hefferline and Goodman described the “middle mode” of awareness: When one encounters beauty, one tends to forget oneself as the person, as whom one usually experiences oneself; “one is engaged and carried along, not in spite of oneself, but beyond oneself” (1951, 382).

When we immerse in the experience of beauty, we joyfully abandon our separate individuality and gladly become part of the transcendence to which beauty invites us. In this situation, we can overcome the narrow confines of individuality and get a strong sense of connection with other people and the world as a whole; this is one of the most enriching experiences we can have. Therefore, the French poet Stendhal once said that „beauty is nothing but the promise of happiness.“

The connection with other people may already be created by the beautiful object we experience, for instance when we are fascinated by the look of somebody’s face or body or by a piece of art that tellingly expresses a certain human way of being in the world; imagine, for example, Rodin’s *Thinker* (Slide 10). In addition, however, the experience of beauty typically elicits a response that aims at *sharing* this experience with other people: When you are aware of something extraordinarily pretty, you tend to alert other people’s attention to it. You say: “Look!” or “listen!” You try to have the person next to you indulge in the experience of beauty too. You do not wish to keep it for yourself; instead, you have an immediate

sense that sharing the experience with another person will bring about the closeness of a significant joint situation.

The experience of beauty “bursts the compartmenting of mind, body, and external world” (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman 1951, 389) and results in a certain kind of personal widening and merger; it has an intense connecting force that links the person so intensely with the fascinating object that the distinction between subject and object recedes into the background of awareness, whereas the oneness of the experience, which unites subject and object, forms a strong figure: “‘I,’ ‘now,’ and the object of awareness constitute a unified experience” (ibid., 84). As Perls, Hefferline and Goodman put it, if one is absolutely

engaged with the situation, . . . there is no sense of oneself or of other things other than one’s experience of the situation. . . . The self is not aware of itself abstractly, but is aware of itself *as contacting* something. (ibid., 377 — italics added)

The quality of this contacting something, or someone, beautiful gives rise to the spirit of Eros, which throws us into an *erotic relation* with the world in general (Slide 11) — and sometimes, in particular, even with what we call the spiritual realm or transcendence. The erotic attitude always implies a sense of awe and respect. It does not intend to possess or to assimilate (= to make similar to oneself) the beautiful. It differs entirely from the greed of ordinary neediness and desire.

Obviously, I am not talking about sexual desire here. Far from it!

Desire seeks to *consume* the world, to transform what is other into what is mine. [In contrast,] Eros *loves* the world and reverences its beauty. It wants to merge or join with the beauty of its objects, not consume them. Like desire, eros begins in lack, but what it seeks is not this or that satisfaction but the completion of the soul itself. (Riker 2005, p. 5 — italics added)

As in the case of *any* kind of contact, especially in the case of erotic contact, contacting beauty is first of all a *sensory* adventure, to which we find access through our eyes, ears, skin, nose and tongue,

and which demonstrates without any doubt that our primary way of being in the world is through perception (see Merleau-Ponty 1962). At the same time, beauty reveals impressively that the sensory avenue to an erotic contact with the world cannot be reduced to any sort of sensualism. Beauty does not exhaust itself in stimulating our senses; it goes far beyond that:

- The *connection* with the world that beauty creates,
- the *attraction* it radiates
- as well as the *being-driven-towards-it* that it evokes,
- the *curiosity* it triggers,
- the *access to people*, concepts and works of art that beauty facilitates,
- the *love* it can create,
- the *emotional movement*, the excitement and the being-touched by it, which it can bring about,
- as well as the *holistic understanding* of essential aspects of the world that beauty can convey —

all of these characteristics transcend the pure sensory dimension, although they do include it, of course.

But what we find beautiful is not just determined by the properties of the object. As the proverb has it, beauty is also in the eye of the beholder; it is co-determined by what we *judge* to find pretty. Therefore, classical Humanism, which tried to revitalize the world-view of the ancient Greeks, thought of “the true, the beautiful, and the good” as *interrelated* values.

However, when we decide to judge somebody or something as beautiful, the dynamics of *idealization* may contribute to that judgment. Therefore in psychoanalytic discussions of beauty, the notion of idealization plays a major role, and the psychoanalytic theory of both healthy and pathological narcissism rests upon it in various aspects. Not only within these theories, idealization plays a two-edged role: We may regard something as beautiful, just because we idealize it, or we may idealize it, because we find it so beautiful. And very often we do not really know how to distinguish the one from the other.

On an interpersonal level, this two-sidedness may lead to both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, for instance, an initial idealization can provide a strong primary bond that allows a relationship to develop that would otherwise not have formed in the first place; later, the initial idealization may be transformed into more reliable foundations for a stable relationship. On the other hand, idealizations can, of course, also become problematic easily, particularly in human relationships. They are always in danger of being shattered by the sobering facts of ordinary life; very likely disappointment and resentment will follow and may result in less than beautiful interactions.

Moreover, the idealization of another person may also make me want to take possession of her, to make her part of my image of myself, without which I think I am not able to go on living. This has negative consequences for the erotic dimension, about which I have talked before, since „nothing is further from Eros than possession,“ as Lévinas (1991, p. 265) aptly states.

To say it even more harshly: Utilizing the physical or spiritual beauty of another person as a cause for taking possession of her does not merely mean to act against the erotic nature of beauty; it means to abuse beauty and to put it into the service of control and domination. It means to do harm to the aesthetics — as well as the ethics! — of interhuman contact that cannot be fostered without respect for the dignity of the other and for the freedom of her expressive self-determination.

Of course, the attraction that beauty exerts can be tempting. But in my view, that is precisely the challenge with which beauty confronts us: To maintain the erotic attitude and not to give in to the temptation of trying to take possession of what we find beautiful in the other. It may not be easy to always be ready to let go of what we find fascinating, but that is the only way in which we can keep up the fascination.

Now I would like to sum up briefly the major points I have mentioned with respect to beauty (Slide 12). They were:

- Beauty invites *fascination*.

- It has an *expansive* quality.
- It evokes *self-forgetfulness*.
- It results in *personal widening*.
- It easily leads to *social connection* as well as the impulse of wanting to *share* the experience.
- It triggers a strong *attraction*.
- And it supports an *extraverted* stance.

Finally, beauty challenges us in a way that differs greatly from the challenge of pain. Since pain is so aversive, it confronts us with the question of avoidance. Not so with beauty; since beauty is so attractive, it demands from us not to succumb to the temptation of taking possession of what we find beautiful, especially with respect to other people.

The next slide gives you an overview on the respective characteristics of pain and of beauty that I have described (Slide 13): The juxtaposition is to show that pain and beauty are not polarities in the narrow sense of the term, but many of their respective features have polar qualities. Pain, which can be understood as the herald of death and dying, belongs to a different category than beauty, which can be seen as the promise of happiness.

Nevertheless, there are occasions, at which pain can turn into beauty and vice versa. On the one hand, for instance, emotional pain sometimes has its own aesthetic quality: The grief I feel over the death of a loved one may be as painful as it can be, and yet, if I accept it, it can take me to the truth of my deep connection with the deceased person that has its own tearful beauty. On the other hand, the forcefulness of the impression that something extraordinarily beauty can bring about and the passionate longing for a merger with that beauty can reach a climax which can be painfully intense and may even inspire the idea of wanting to die in just that moment of bliss:

I have been told that in the Italian language you have an idiom that connects beauty with dying: You can find something so won-

derful that you say: “BELLO DA MORIRE” (“Beautiful to die for” — Slide 14).