THE RELATIONAL ARCHITECTURE MADE BY SECRETS

DISCUSSION ON THE WORK ***“SECRET OF LIFE, SECRET OF DEATH”***

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Despite the fact that the secret was not the subject of psychoanalytical research and therefore the term was not indexed, we come across it in day-to-day life, in many aspects and many relationships. It appears in the discourse of patients in psychotherapy clinics, but also in the patient-psychoanalyst and transference-countertransference relationships. We find it woven in many defence mechanisms and processes of symptom creation or expression of unconscious life. In clinical practice, “Secret of life, secret of death” reveals the secret in relationships (in professional relationships, familial ones, and in the therapeutic relationship). It explores the limit that makes the difference between that which structures, organizes and integrates (of life) and what deconstructs, is unhealthy, mortiferous (of death), between the secret of the analyst and the secret of the patient, between the unconscious silence and the conscious silence, between the secret that wants to be lost and the secret that is visible in psychic and psychosomatic symptoms and in acting out.

Joining in on the investigation meant to uncover what is the limit that makes the difference between the sanogenic secret and the mortiferous secret,

²⁹ Luca, D., *Secret of life, secret of death*, in Conference “*The Secret*” organised by The Romanian Society of Psychoanalysis, Bucharest, 26-27 oct. 2019; published in RJP 2/2020, p 71-88.

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I differentiate between the secret and the trauma and describe the organization of a relational architecture around the secret.

I recall a lady that asked for only one meeting with me in order to ask a specialist for advice on whether it would be best to keep hiding from her 5 year old daughter that her grandmother had passed. The latter had been deceased for 6 months, but the mother had decided not to tell her daughter, afraid to cause her pain. However, the young girl had begun asking about her grandmother, wanting to speak to her over the phone, thinking that her grandmother had passed away and asking where those who die go and if she can meet them. Clearly, the mother had reached a cul-de-sac. No matter how much she had tried to protect her daughter from death, an important event of life, the child eventually started exploring it on her own. The mother feel guilty and “wronged by fate” for having to feel guilty, despite wanting to preserve the purity of her daughter’s childhood. This lady, let’s call her Clara, with a noble reason behind her kept secret, had two scenarios: one in which she revealed the truth to her daughter, and another in which she continued to keep it secret.

I was aware of the importance of this meeting, which would help her chose between truth and lie, between reality and the denial of reality, between knowledge and anti-knowledge, between having a secret and developing a secretive life style. I realized that she expected this meeting to transform the cul-de-sac with this crossroad. I asked her whether this crossroad presented any alternative, if she would choose between alternatives, reflecting on the consequences of her selection.

The secret is intrinsically tied to the truth. The truth is that Clara’s mother had died, and this truth is written, inscribed, in a register at the Population Registry Office. No matter how much she denied the information, the proof lies in the “annals of history”. From this point of view, of reality, the information is hidden (by Clara) and remains waiting to be discovered (by Clara’s daughter, but also by Clara herself).

However, she fears that another information could be discovered along with the reality of her mother’s passing: that she had magically killed her

mother, through thought. Her secret is that she is a murderer and could marry the father may be revealed. Clara is afraid that her own self will be discovered, her own self standing in a secret that cannot be communicated. This is a real secret, an “act of secrecy”, and the other (that the grandmother yet lives) is not a secret, it is a denial of reality.

Pierre Janet, 1927, R. Meares, (1988, p. 246) speaks of an “act of secrecy” as being an act of thought, of differentiation between what can be said and what cannot be said, and on the decision of saying it or not. In other words, the Superego does not authorise an information to be utilised by the Ego. It is not just a secret, it is an *act* of secrecy: an intrigue in plain view, official, and another hidden, for which the person will perform eccentric actions in order not to acknowledge it. In another work (G. Romanet, 2020), I define the secret as a hidden-found process, a game of “hide-and-seek” in which information is hidden, and, alongside the information, one’s own person, one’s self. “The act of secrecy” allows an information, hard to perlaborate in a moment, to be hidden, so that, later, it can be discovered and metabolised. “It is a joy to be hidden and disaster not to be found”, as Winnicott states in his famous paradox.

Through a hidden-found process, Clara finds an Oedipal conflict at the centre of the self, long hidden, which is now uncovered and demands a means of approaching it. Her unresolved Oedipal complex is the information her Superego does not authorise to become public. It is an information that wounds her narcissism and provokes narcissistic conflicts. Without the border between the inner life and the structuring external life, because the narcissistic omnipotence of counterinvestment is maintained, she treated reality (the objective and factual event) as a subjective, emotional event.

In exchange, secretiveness places the secret as the centre of interest and becomes a way of life and a way of being secretive. If we speak of family secrets, then we take into account a relational architecture that includes several generations and that is organised around the secret, the information that is not approved for usage. We speak of violent experiences (incest, genetic anomalies, suicides, crimes), as D. Luca points out from the very beginning.

There is someone who forbids and will impose that the terrible information that hurts the narcissism of a family be hidden. There is someone who establish himself/herself in the role of totalitarian Superego for all members of the family and will claim to take control of each family member's Superego. There is no space for elaboration, symbolisation or healing, there is no space for knowledge, because it is forbidden to speak of something, to discover, to be curious. Anti-knowledge will spread throughout the whole relational architecture. The Bionian term of anti-K (anti-knowledge) describes the process that seeks to prevent and even destroy the process of knowledge, of relationship, of growth, of life, of existence. Thusly, anti-knowledge is a manifestation of "attacks on linking", an impediment and a prohibition of meaning. Anti-K spreads within the relational architecture, with a relational domino effect affecting all trans- and inter-generational links, generating the taboo as a pattern of understanding, of signification and of communication. Lyrically speaking, the anti-k is like a generation's funeral of a traumatic experience, a burial "within it / with it / after it" (D. Luca).

The information not authorised for use is the secret narcissism of the family, a wounded narcissism, produced by a trauma difficult to elaborate. The purpose of secretiveness is to defend against the catastrophe of annihilation. That which is hidden must remain hidden, no matter what this would involve (splitting, isolation/encryption/encystation, repression, denial, foreclosure) and no matter how many people or generations this would take. The content *must* be buried, repudiated, because it causes shame, guilt, suffering, pain, trauma, which one *must not* speak of. Everything *must* be hidden, *must not* be symbolised, *must not* be tolerated or endured. It is something that *must* magically disappear, something the mind cannot contain.

There is no space for reality or for elaboration vectorised by the principle of reality. The traumatic event destroyed the order of reality, and reality, from now on, will be avoided or, even more, all participants and descendants will be prohibited from accessing the principle of reality. I remember how, when the film "Antichrist" (2009) premiered, Lars von Trier, the writer and director, spoke in an interview about the emotional context in

which the movie came to be. After the death of his mother, he had suffered from a clinical form of depression, spending 2 years mostly in bed. What had prevented him from getting better was that his mother had taken the information on who his father is with her, to the grave. He said the film came to be during these two years, as an effort to deal with an information that had been hidden and had remained hidden. By the way “Antichrist” is a experimental psychological horror film, which Lars von Trier considers the first of his “Depression Trilogy” (followed by “Melancholia”, 2011 and by “Nymphomaniac”, 2013). There is a central female protagonist, whom brings into view as Evil Mother, Satan, with a tribe of witches in the inner universe.

The transgenerational transmission of a wounded narcissistic mandate will also produce attacks on the sense of reality, also in a domino effect. Here I am referring to a profound hatred of reality and the real aspects of life, which attack the separations inherent to human nature, the limits (internal – external, self – non-self, the difference between sexes and between generations), with a hostility aggressive towards the great interdictions of life.

The pathogenic effect of the interdiction of knowledge consists of taking control of the other’s Superego, of establishing one’s self as Superego in the minds of others and tyrannically controlling from this position. The prohibition of individual elaboration, using one’s own mind, will cause the ascension of dissociative pathologies, disruptive affects and perverse solutions. An attack and an interdiction from elaborating the attack define the trauma. The pathogenic factor of trauma is post-traumatic silence, provided by the interdiction from telling someone and the absence of a trusted adult. The intrapsychic result of trauma is generated by the post-traumatic situation, more precisely the presence or absence of trustworthy persons around the child. The traumatic event doesn’t become a secret, but a taboo, which thus tends to repeat itself. The taboo is the failure of the “act of secrecy”, of the hidden-found process, of the disaster of not being found.

When the member of a family that has *dysfunctional family secrets* enters therapy, having to work with taboo, with the prohibition from telling someone and of separating from the “thing that has always been there, despite

being foreign to them” (D. Luca), he/she starts to separate himself/herself from this relational architecture organised around anti-knowledge. Therapeutic experience is gruelling because it involves working with trauma and with de-secretisation. It is a process that takes years of metamorphoses of the self and of the relational model.

Even though, theoretically, we can suppose that the therapist is the “good guy” in this setting, one that descends in the inferno of the unconscious, slaying the beast (the internal object) and rescuing its victim, the vicissitudes of the transference-countertransference relationship reveal the difficulty of working with “a third person”. Not having basic trust, the analyst is always reduced to the second, being obligated to replay in a symbiotic, totalitarian dyad until, experience by experience, sufficient positive relationship memories will be collected and the separation from the family “secrets” will be produced.

However, through the relational domino effect, this time the differentiation, separation, search, knowledge, freedom from captivity and the fluidisation of the process of growth will be transmitted, as well as a re-learning of how to live in post-truth.

Exploring the differences between secret and secretiveness, we discover both the life dimensions of the secret (the capacity to create a secret and to reveal it, creativity, closeness in the relationship, the common effort to elaborate and the shared pleasure of finding) and the mortiferous dimensions (*to keep under secrecy*, the captivity of an interdiction, a narcissism so wounded that its hemorrhage will last over generations).

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