

## **Therapeutic Labour - Special Framework of Transformation and Repairment in the Integrative-Unifying Psychotherapeutic Approach. A Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** *In the dynamic of the exploratory and enactment process of the life scenario accomplished within the integrative-unifying psychotherapeutic approach, the discovery of the informational contaminations, emotionally in particular, from one generation to another, constitutes a basic practical-applicative objective. In some therapeutic contexts the most difficult and lengthy process is forgiveness. Blockages induced by the impossibility of forgiveness (both of others and, especially, of oneself) maintain habitual neurotic schemes which constitute real traps in personal development.*

**Objectives:** *The overall aim of this paper is to highlight, through a psychotherapeutic framework (case study), the necessity to achieve and, especially, to correlate the therapeutic labour of separation, mourning, forgiveness within the integrative-unifying psychotherapeutic approach. The practical-applicative objective is to offer a possible methodological framework concerning the integration of these labours within the psychotherapeutic approach.*

**Results:** *While the patient works with himself within the therapeutic labour, his insights clarify and break the existing neurotic schemes in his current life scenario, schemes which disturb his personal development. As a result of these insights, and through a supportive and securing therapeutic assistance which plays a transformative and releasing role in this process, the patient changes cognitively, affectively and behaviourally.*

**Conclusion:** *During the transgenerational plan analysis, therapeutic labours (of separation, mourning, forgiveness), as a methodological phase within the integrative-unifying psychotherapeutic approach, are repairing labours of the trap relationships which generate identity confusions associated with emotional addictions which frequently appear in the life scenario of the individuals involved in the psychotherapeutic approach. Therapeutic labours lead to the emotional release, acceptance of the past, restructuring and gaining a new sense of life experience.*

**Keywords:** *separation, mourning, forgiveness, personal development*

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## **I. Introduction**

The integrating and unifying psychotherapeutic process is creative and dynamic, providing a unique possibility of relating to the client due to its three main elements: reconstruction (exploration and repair), signification (to give meaning to experience) and re-signification. Thus, the connections present-past, past-present and present-future are established, interconnecting the existential and transgenerational aspects. Each psychotherapeutic process can be individualized, focused on the map of the client and it ensures the latter's access to clarification, alternative solutions and spontaneous transfiguration of experience, so as to develop realistic and mature behaviours, applicable to the newly constructed life plan.

In the dynamics of the exploring and reconstructing process of the life scenario created during the integrative-unifying psychotherapeutic process, the discovery of informational contaminations, especially of an emotional nature, from one generation to another is a major practical and applicative objective. In certain therapeutic contexts, the most difficult and long-lasting process is that of forgiveness. The blockages induced by the impossibility of achieving forgiveness (both of others, as well as, and especially of one's self) maintain the neurotic habitual schemes which are actual traps in the process of personal development.

The general objective of this paper is to underline, by means of a psychotherapeutic fragment (case study) the necessity of realizing and, more particularly, of correlating the therapeutic labour of separation, mourning, forgiveness within the integrative-unifying psychotherapeutic process. The practical-applicative objective consists in the provision of a possible methodological representation of these labour types' integration within the psychotherapeutic process.

The general hypothesis states that the therapeutic labours of separation, mourning and forgiveness lead to repairing and transforming the client's life scenario, especially when the latter is in an unintegrated traumatic scenario.

The therapeutic labour of separation repairs the trap relationships that generate identity confusions associated with emotional dependencies which often appear in the clients' life scenarios. Within the unifying psychotherapeutic process, the above mentioned labour has the role of integrating, in the client's life plan, a perspective of acceptance, with liberating emotional meaning, in regards to a predecessor or a symbol-object which completes, significantly, the client's identity experience. In certain contexts, when unfinalized and unintegrated emotional aspects appear,

maintaining anxiety in the existential space of the client, the separation labour is associated with the psychotherapeutic labour of forgiveness.

The necessity of realizing these labours in the unifying psychotherapeutic process is explained by Iolanda Mitrofan and Denisa Stoica, 2005, as follows: "a person who is psychologically anchored in the identity and unintegrated karma burdens of an ancestor or parent behaves in everyday life as if 'haunted', inhabited, parasitized by the latter's 'phantom' or, better said, by his subtle energetic-informational configuration. The clarification and forgiveness labour, followed by the amiable separation through role-play (either by applying the technique of the empty chair, or by means of the dialogue between the parts and improvisational drama-therapy) is the only solution that actually presupposes a therapeutic ritualization of separation. The forgiveness labour occasions mutual gratification and the finalization of the blocking phantasmatic relation."

The in-depth analysis of the role dynamics allows the client to sort out his needs and expectations in connection to various family members and to become aware of the way they entered or he created the key-roles that maintain the transgenerational transmission of the relational patterns. For example, the significant key-roles in maintaining transgenerationally-maintained anxiety are: a parent who is constraining, manipulative, anxious, overprotective, anxiogenic (hyper-authoritarian, aggressive, abusive), neurotic (saviour, victim, persecutor), discriminating in terms of the children's gender, a parent invested with prestige or social recognition, a resigning parent (who abandoned); parental child, child-achiever, neurotic (victim), unwanted child (rejected); unaccepted, dependant, neurotic partner.

The polarized roles are also found on individual level. By means of dramatization, the client discovers, for example, that the weakness, anxiety he rejected in a relative excluded by the family, also belongs to him. Or that, by the contrary, he has a tendency to repeat, out of familial loyalty, the behaviours and choices of those with whom he identified himself, even though, sometimes, this leads him to an unsuccessful, unhappy way of life (for instance, he is dependent on hyper-controlled work, done to perfection, on continuous professional evolution just like his father/ mother, grandfather/ grandmother, or another member of his family with whom he identified even though this brings anxiety, depression and it distances him from his own desires).

Thus, the forgiveness, separation and mourning labours become, during the psychotherapeutic process, a pretext for integrating polarities and restructuring the life scenario.

## II. Method

We present below a therapeutic scenario to illustrate the manner in which these labours can be correlated so as to repair and transform an unintegrated traumatic life scenario.

### Case study

*The Matei Case – “the man with two brains”*

Matei, 38 years old, married, one son, 8 years old, manager of his own business

### *Elements for case decryption*

He came to the consulting room without an appointment, in full anxious crisis and he insisted to start immediately a psychotherapeutic treatment. Since I was working with another client at the time and since my agenda offered no possibility of rapid integration, as the client requested, I presented him with the alternative of working with a colleague, who would have been able to take over the case sooner. All of a sudden, time was no longer an issue since he chose to wait and to accept the appointment we fixed together. He seemed adamant in his decision to leave the consulting room only with a fixed appointment. The somatic (bodily) symbolism revealed a hounded, tired man, stone-faced and with a mind riddled with thoughts. Wearing sportswear, he looked as if he had dressed in a hurry, upon a sudden decision to leave the house.

We presented these aspects so as to underline, on the one hand, the fact that the first meeting with the client is very useful in providing information and, on the other hand, so as to show that the questions that resulted in these few moments from focusing on my would-be client, were the basis for the first working hypotheses. These proved very important for the subsequent therapeutic process, as well as being confirmed during its course.

How important was it for my client to own control? Was this connected to his manifest anxiety? What did change mean for my client? The determination he had helped me understand the importance of fulfilling the scenario previously chosen by him (“I choose my therapist and follow this line”) and led to two possible explorations: the polarity inertia/stagnation/familiar vs. motion/unknown/change.

The first session confirmed the anxiety-depressive symptomatology, the client complaining of an anxious disposition, strong and persistent pain in the back of the head (a vice sensation), inner agitation, disquiet, a sensation of lack of air, sleep disorders, night terrors. He had no physiological problems and he was under no medication. The triggering factor was connected to change (as we assumed in our first

hypothesis). He was in a moment when he was “fighting” to obtain an authorisation which would have changed his professional activity where he was already involved in a much larger project (a line of evolution following the idea of accumulation, so as to have security and to start something that would allow him to stop working in ten years, was one objective; the analysis proved that one of the themes was connected to accumulation vs. loss).

The multitude of documents and the incertitude of the decisions to be made by the bureaucratic apparatus, over which Matei had no control, successfully maintained anxiety. The existential aggravating factors were: insufficient rest, in effect, the absence of relaxation, he was tense most of the times, the agenda filled with activities whose prior schedule could be altered at any time. As the client was stating, change was harder to accept than the multitude and complexity of the outstanding tasks, for which, of course, he could find no replacement.

“I remain in a state of panic, I have a terrible headache, it’s as if my heart stops, as if I have two brains in my head and now the negative one is present, it’s as if someone is holding my head in a grip, I’m suffocating, I cannot detach myself, I cannot concentrate.” Here is an example of the client communicating to the therapist a great amount of information in one sentence that, on first sight, seems to describe symptoms. This was the basis for establishing the work methodology on three levels: symptomatological, existential and transgenerational, emphasizing their interconnection and the means by which they moved one into the other, establishing the past-present-future continuity on the grounds of the therapeutic equation: one starts from the present so as to reach into the past, then from the past, one moves on to the present and from here into the future (the creation of an anchor in the concrete life area). As a next step, the gestalt techniques and those with creative support were employed so as to discover who phantomized my client.

*Who consumed his air? Whose is the “second brain”?* “Why exactly can’t he detach?” “On what can’t he concentrate?” (“I suffocate” is different from “I cannot breathe”, “I don’t have enough air”, “no air is coming within me”). In Matei’s case, anxiety accompanied any change of plans, any problem to be solved for himself, but especially for others (this being another line of exploration).

Matei added to the information by recounting a dream: “I sensed robbers breaking in, I yelled loudly, I woke up and, for five minutes, I couldn’t feel in control, then I realised everything was quiet and for two hours I was in shock.” What cannot be controlled and “robs” Matei of his sleep and peace?

Experiential analysis revealed the profound aspects of Matei's anxiety on the transgenerational level. His paternal grandfather used to lose money at cards and, at one point, he wagered his house at the poker table; his paternal grandmother committed suicide by throwing herself in a well, when Matei's father was six months old. His father was found on the edge of the well and people said (like a prescript) that he would "die in the water". When Matei was sixteen years old, his father was found drowned. It could not be established whether it was suicide or murder.

The transgenerational settings, established in "family myths and legends" specific to each psychogenealogic tree are transmitted by means of the family unconscious, as well as by means of prescriptions with major emotional impact. Matei was in a highly traumatic trans-familial scenario, which, therefore, presented a significant risk of transmission and unintegration. The anxiogenic themes (threat, fatal risk, death, associated with loss and meaninglessness, familial secret and survival failure) are transparent in the dynamics of the client's scenario and they are greatly connected symbolically to his current symptomatology.

In the dynamics of the exploring and reconstructing process of the life scenario, Matei remembers a moment connected to his father "in the morning, before this happened, I noticed his hands and it was as if I had thought I would never see him again. I couldn't save him." The father's depressive episodes are developed by Matei, also revealing the role of the mother who saved him every time, but who drew his attention telling him "be careful what you do, because I don't feel like saving you again". The fear of depression, of suicide, led him to work hard, as if to prove to himself that he has enough energy, that he can handle things, that he does not lie idle, that he has control over his own emotional states. He kept busy so as not to be in too much contact with himself. He loves water, as if he wanted to become its friend, owning a boat, he knows the secrets of the small channels in the delta, travelling in the wildest places: "you need to know what to do to avoid danger".

Other important elements provided by Matei for experiential analysis: "I cannot look at my past, there is something left unfinished there, I would go back there to clean up"; "I can no longer feel anything stable around me", "I don't accept to make conscious mistakes, I try to repair things", "I think for others because they are not capable of finding the solution", "I enjoy being active, I don't ask for help, I find the solution on my own, step by step, if I am patient". Matei spoke of solutions, of thinking a lot for others, of

solving other people's problems on his own initiative, even without an explicit request from those around him. A perfectionist, he exercised his excessive control over all his activities, finding it extremely difficult to delegate responsibility, and when he did delegate he, naturally, had the occasion to criticise what the other person did. Lacking his father's validation, moving from a protection that was given to him until quite a grown age (16 years old) to its brutal "severance", he did not accept his bosses, he started building his own road.

The saviour scenario that continued existentially and which was paired with anxious symptoms: worries, unrest, doubts, back pains could be explained, explored and resignified only transgenerationally, by means of the drama-genogram.

Thus, the anxious surge, that seemed to be determined by the situation of professional growth in which Matei found himself, concealed an older trauma, strengthened, mentally and emotionally concealed, which developed self-destructive neurotic states in the present. In this case, anxiety built around a strong core of depression compensated and sublimated in bursts of activity without a break. The energy deficit set in gradually, Matei spending his inner resources (creativity, efficiency, intelligence, kindness) in a permanent attempt to save the world and, thus, save himself.

The insights made by the client at his own pace (this time finding *the solution for him, step by step, patiently*, in this way activating his own resources through therapy), by the labours of separation, mourning and forgiveness, clarified the aspects that he needed to put through a "cleaning" process. The idea that he could do the impossible, that he needed to be ready for anything which should have made him feel secure, made him anxious and continually tired. He constructed alternative scenarios in his mind so as not to be caught unprepared, for fear that he would not handle things if he did not imagine a safety net beforehand.

*The obsessive search for security gave birth to insecurity.* Excessive control over every aspect of life produced anxiety; "lest I forget anything", "lest I am caught unprepared" (as he was caught unprepared by his father's death, one might continue the client's train of thought). He answered the question "why am I meddling into other people's problems?" when his own role of saviour became clear.

The transmission was made according to the mechanism of double transgenerational counter-identification. By counter-identification with the father, Matei is full of energy, he abuses himself by "overworking". By counter-identification with his paternal grandfather (loser and gambling addict) he is an avid collector of material goods and money, being in a

continuous professional and material evolution. If the grandfather lost, he builds (he built his own business, he renovated his flat, he demolished his previous business headquarters and built a new one, twice as big). If his father could not manage, he can.

### III. Results

The labours of mourning and separation from the father freed Matei of the “inner phantom” and he became visible to himself, he was able to relax. He found release from the phantasmatic scenario: *the alternative security plans that “tormented” him confirmed obsessively, neurotically that suicide is not a solution, on the principle that there is a solution to every problem*. However, to find solutions for all people and to all problems still means an “emotional suicide”, another type of suicide, which brings the client in a subtle risk zone of the “familial loyalty” syndrome.

The labour of forgiving his paternal grandmother and his mother led to forgiving himself. The emotional growth and becoming unblocked from the age adolescence fuelled the spontaneous adult, flexible, resourceful, using the resources of the child: creativity and energy. By accepting the past and “settling the accounts”, he was freed, he was able to do the cleaning, as he proposed to do, he could resignify and put into practice the new decisions taken which also concerned the attention he paid to his own person.

Relaxing consciously, by simply connecting to his personal needs that he previously disregarded, he managed to no longer activate his anxiety as a means of breaking the rhythm.

### IV. Discussions

The casuistry employed allowed the observation of close connections between the role behaviours of some clients’ predecessors and their reconfiguration in the clients’ life scenarios. Accordingly, we can rely on the therapeutic strength of the labours of separation and forgiveness in the psychotherapeutic process for the purpose of identifying the dynamic mechanisms of the client’s problematics. For example, when the borders are very permeable or undefined, anxiety can contaminate the behaviour of the family members or of several generations, if it spreads on the tree.

The result is a hard to be broken chain, with a hardness and length that can be easily prognosticated if one follows an obvious psychological logic. For instance, if the parent is anxious, he will have an exaggerate care for the child, he will be overprotective, which will lead to an assimilation of the parent’s fear by the child and to its extension due to identity being constructed on prudence, rejection of change, worries, restlessness (so that nothing bad may happen, so as not

to disappoint, so as not to injure, so as not to upset someone, so as not to find himself in situations for which he did not plan ahead, over which he has no control etc.). The parent’s lack of confidence in the capability of taking care of the child on his own (hence the protection of his own lack of confidence and of the unintegration of polarities) will delay the growth and it will amplify his need of validation for his simple actions, as well as for his more important plans. By means of the separation, mourning and forgiveness labours, while beginning to understand what is happening to him, why it is happening and, especially, what he can do for himself, the client unloads, separates, forgives, finalizes and reconfigures his existential plan.

### V. Conclusions

In the analysis of the transgenerational level, as methodological stage in the integrating and unifying therapeutic process, the therapeutic labours (of separation, mourning, forgiveness) are labours that repair the trap relationships which generate identity confusions associated with emotional dependences which often appear in the life scenarios of those integrated in the psychotherapeutic process.

The labours can be used in the following situations: when the “phantomization” phenomenon appears, when the person is not in contact with himself, but with a predecessor, fulfilling the “trajectory” established by the latter, when he cannot achieve self-forgiveness, when he punishes himself, he is a victim and, at the same time, persecutor, when the person is not connected to his personal objectives, when he functions according to prescripts, when there are problems connected to “familial loyalty”.

Therapeutic labours lead to emotional unblocking, to acceptance of the past, to the restructuring and re-signification of life experience. Through them, appropriate awareness is achieved, which releases the client from an area of confusion and which teaches him to be more discriminating, to accept his limits and to channel his resources efficiently.

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