

Romanian Society for Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalytic understanding of ageing (from midlife and beyond)

Maturescence:

Doorways Towards New Insights for a Never Ending Debate

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This paper is a compilation of new ideas about *maturescence* which I want to debate with you now. As I don't want a closed paper, but an opportunity to think all together, you will find a true free text —open to different resonances in everybody and with the spirit of a work-in-progress— working as the «naked» version of a future paper. Moreover, I intend to offer this delivery as if it were «fresh water», in order to «refresh» old repeated ideas changing them for new doors to think and debate. In this case I acknowledge the eventual weaknesses this paper may have, but my idea is simply to work together under the realm of «uncertainty», the most friendly companion for scientific debate —and perhaps the most friendly companion for midlife and beyond as we'll see in the rest of this delivery.

Of course, I assume all of you have already read my previous paper: *Maturescence: Definition, Metapsychology and Clinical Practice* —as I asked you— because this delivery intends to be its natural continuity. If you didn't read it, I could answer any questions after the presentation. Tomorrow morning we'll also see the connections of this work-in-progress with the clinical cases I will present.

First Door

A Dog that Can't Understand Psychoanalysis

I will begin with a funny story which will help us understand where I am aiming at with this paper. After I read it I will inform where I took it from:

«If your dog had your brain and could speak, and if you asked it what it thought of your sex life, you might be surprised by its response. It would be something like this:

Those disgusting humans have sex any day of the month! Barbara proposes sex even when she knows perfectly well that she isn't fertile —like just after her period. John is eager for sex all the time, without caring whether his efforts could result in a baby or not. But if you want to hear

something really gross —Barbara and John kept on having sex while she was pregnant! That's as bad as all the times when John's parents come for a visit, and I can hear them too having sex, although John's mother went through this thing they call menopause years ago. Now she can't have babies anymore, but she still wants sex, and John's father obliges her. What a waste of effort! Here's the weirdest thing of all: Barbara and John, and John's parents, close the bedroom and have sex in private, instead of doing it in front of their friends like any self-respecting dog!»

This story comes from the first lines of the book *Why is Sex Fun?* (1995) by Jared Diamond, the most famous US living biologist who introduces his work about human sexuality with this funny statement. We can acknowledge it as something showing the supposed big difference between human and non-human sexuality. But this can't be the proper perspective, because if we think of human and non-human terms, we will be avoiding one of the most important problems of narcissism: we, humans, are and remain being also one of the animal species, though years and years of the so called «humanization» and «civilization» —with a lot of pros and cons— who tried to cover this reality with a lot of strange ideas attempting to show a big difference —which in fact really exists— but something that DNA composition denies (less than 2% in DNA composition differentiates «humans» from the so called «animals»).

We can assume that «our» dog can't understand our sexual life because it lacks the concept of human psychic drives (*trieb*, instead of *instinkt*, Freud *dixit*). But beyond drives... Why do human beings most of the times have sexual relations trying to avoid pregnancy and —the worst of all— they remain having sexual relations when pregnancy is not possible any more?

Will we dare to discuss this statement?

Second Door

Why Nobody Wants to Be «Old» ?

Have you ever thought why nobody wants to consider him/herself as «old»? Why is so common to listen to sentences like:

«You are such age, but you don't look like that age»

«Unbelievable: I thought you were younger than the age your ID shows!»

«My body may be old, but my soul remains younger as ever, and that's what really matters»...

Why do we need to hide our biological age or —if we accept it— why must we immediately assume something called youth («my soul remains younger as ever»)?

I repeat: Why nobody wants to be «old»?

Let's see The Washington Post, last December 29, 2017. Psychologist Laura Carstensten from Stanford University writes her article *In Search of a Word that Won't Offend "Old" People*. We can think that the headline was not her idea; for sure, the editorial board of the newspaper tried to find an attractive one for their readers... but the body of the news story is written by her!

She endeavors to find a word that «won't offend "old" people» —where the «offensive» word is «old». The news story seems to begin very well, in my way of thinking the problem:

«Most people in their 60s, 70s and older still don't think of themselves as «old». We often refer to old people in the third person... By failing to identify with "old", the story about old people remains a dreary one about loss and decline. Language matters: we need a term that aging people can embrace... Over the past 40 years I've tried to persuade people to use the word "old" proudly, but I have so far failed to get a single person to do so. In fact, even I avoid "old" for fear that the term might offend.»

She declares herself against alternative terms —we'll speak later in this delivery about these «alternative terms»— such as «senior citizens», «retirees», «the elderly», «elders», and other derogatory: «geezers», «coots», and the apparently acknowledging «sage» (she also states: «plenty of old people are far cry from wise»). Up to this point I absolutely agree with Carstensten, but... her effort to name things by its name finally fails because she proposes another new term to refer to «old» people: «perennials». At this point of the reading I felt disappointed because she concludes:

«The symbolism it connotes is perfect. For one, "perennials" makes clear that we're still here, blossoming again and again.»

Again, with the word *perennial* «old» is set apart because old age remains closely related to death, that unspeakable thing!!!

More —I continue— the antonym for «old» is «young», but why social representation takes «young» as a brilliant word, full of meaning... and «old» as a kind of word that has negative resonances?

Fifty year-old people think as old people in their sixties; sixty-year old people think as old people in their seventies; seventy year-old people think as old people in their eighties... Finally why is so hard to acknowledge old age.

Now we'll see the video: *Millennials Show Us What "Old" Looks Like* recorded by the AARP (American Association of Retired People) where you can find this, again and again, in this case promoted by an official organization.

Did you notice that in the video everybody states that «old» is something that happens later in the life cycle? Why this official video doesn't state what must be understood as old?

Regarding this subject the US regional IPA's *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Ageing Committee* —through our colleagues Audrey Kavka and Mi Yu— is going under a research project trying to find a proper psychoanalytical definition for the word «old».

Finally, you may answer that everybody tries to put old age later in their vital cycle not only for defensive purposes, but also because life expectancy has increased in later decades. Are we sure this is the truth? I'm not so sure.

Third Door

Does *Maturescence* Happen Later than Fifty Years Ago?

It's common to hear colleagues of ours stating that nowadays *maturescence* or midlife comes delayed in respect of old times. They assume that as the human life cycle is supposed to last longer than before, this would be its cause. I don't agree with this because I don't think that the life cycle has suffered important changes in the last fifty years or so. Let's see some examples.

Several years ago I found a funny and interesting book: *The Book of Dead Philosophers* (2009), by Simon Critchley. In the words of the author:

«The book comprises short, sometimes very short, entries on various philosophers, cataloguing the manner of their demise and often linking this to their central ideas» (p. xvii)

I suggest reading this book because it allows us to «feel» how the idea of death was worked-through from ancient times and we could take these ideas as part of our never ending tension with what inhabits within ourselves: *the painful riddle of death*, about which I'll speak in a while.

But... I mention the book because it allowed me to change the idea that human vital cycle was not so long in ancient times and that we are now «defeating» age because life expectancy — supposedly— has increased, as media inform daily everywhere.

Critchley doesn't mention the subject of the ages of death because he is focused in different matters, but I found this resonance in me. Let's remain with the idea and see what follows.

In *The Book of the Dead Philosophers* there are mentioned 212 philosophers, most of which lived a long life, but we can find others that died really young... not because an illness, but because they were killed! Unbelievable! Let's see the age they were when died:

Among Pre-Socratics, Physiologists, Sages and Sophists:

Solon 70

Anaximander 66

Pythagoras 80

Heracleitus 61

Aeschylus 65

Anaxagoras 73

Zeno of Elea 65

Empedocles 61

Protagoras 75

Democritus 90

Plato 79

Arcesilaus 75

Aristotle 62

Theophrastus 85

Anthistenes 80

Crates de Thebes 80

Among Sceptics, Stoics and Epicureans:

Pyrrho 98

Zeno of Citium 73

Cleanthes 99

Chrisippus 73

Epicurus 71

Among Classical Chinese Philosophers:

Kongzi or Confucius 72

Mozi 80

Mengzi or Mencius 84

Zhuangzi or Chuang Tzu 85

Among Romans (Serious and Ridiculous) and Neoplatonists:

Marcus Tullius Cicero 63

Lucius Anneos Seneca 69

Titus Niger Petronius 66

Epictetus 80

Plotinus 65

So and so... and more and more!

These philosophers —just to refer to a few among a lot in the book— lived when antibiotics weren't found yet... far beyond their 60s and 70s.

Why did they have such long lives? An easy answer may imply the consideration that they weren't common people: most of them were related to politics and emperors and lived wealthy lives protected by them, but I'm not sure their long lives could depend on this.

In order to deep in this idea, let's see another thing I found when I was preparing these *Doorways Towards New Insights for a Never Ending Debate*. ABC News last January 3rd, 2018 titled: *Archaeologist debunking myth that most people died young prior to modern medicine*. Great!!!

Australian archaeologist Christine Cave (Australian National University) demonstrated that it's not so true that people in the Middle Ages did not live much past 40 years. ABC News brings a sketch report of her research *Sex and the Elderly* published in *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*. She developed a new method for determining how old people were when they died, based on how worn their teeth were!

«And her research suggests many more people lived to a ripe old age in medieval times than previously thought.»

She examined the teeth of 300 people buried in Anglo Saxon English cemeteries between 475 and 625 AC. She states:

«People sometimes think that in those days if you lived up to 40 that was about as good as it got. But that's not true. For people living traditional lives, without modern medicine or markets, *the most common age of death is about 70*. I want to examine the invisible elderly —that's what I call them— people who don't get noticed in most cemetery reports.»

She demonstrates that old people had been ignored in archaeological studies because there was no accurate way to identify them beyond the age of 50!!!

My conclusions about the age most philosophers died matched with Christine Cave's research about the age of death in ancient times, lead me to think that we must doubt about our ideas related to the average years human life cycle encompass. Could we think that these ideas may be part of a consolation to smooth *the painful riddle of death*, which I will mention soon?

As we think of modern societies living longer, why can't we think of ancient societies with the same idea. Perhaps, why not?... I think each epoch brings with itself its intrinsic myth that they are defeating age in some way — a way that living individuals at the moment could feel themselves with the hope of a longer life!

Coming back to our subject:

When will we find someone simply saying: «I'm old»... and no more? Of course, I'm not speaking of a maniac state of the mind in this assumption, but a true commitment to oneself — which is something really different.

The first rational answer to the question about why is not easy simply to state «I'm old» is the common statement that we don't want to be old because the acknowledgement of «oldness» is a way to accept the nearness of our future death. But this is something that psychoanalytic theory can't stand. Freud (1915*b*) states that there is nothing in the unconscious with a negative content, in this case the idea of death can't exist, because its negative intrinsic meaning.

I want to pay attention to this: When someone is speaking of death (manifest content) what is he/she trying to truly convey (latent content) with the feeling of death?

Fourth Door

Which Are the «Deviant of Thought»?

Common language and popular expressions also have something to do with this.

Twenty years ago I bought *Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk* (1995) (there's no such a dictionary in Spanish and I don't know if there's an equivalent in Romanian), an unbelievable book with hundreds of entries with euphemisms and doubletalk with explanations. I could confirm with this dictionary the reality of psychoanalytical truths: euphemisms and doubletalk have to do mostly with sex and death! There are no contents so frequently mentioned as sex and death!

You may argue against these statements that psychoanalysis discovered that sex and death are the most important topics to be considered —I'm stating nothing new—, but I hope that when I end this delivery you will agree with me that these concepts are also the two core concepts for *maturescence*.

The author defines euphemisms:

«Mild, agreeable or roundabout words used in place of coarse, painful, of offensive ones. The term comes from the Greek *eu*, meaning "well" or "sounding good", and *pheme*, "speech"... Yet euphemisms have very serious reasons for existing. They conceal the things people fear the most —death, the dead, the supernatural. They cover up the facts of life —of sex and reproduction and excretion— which inevitably remind even the most refined people that they are made for clay, or worse... As such, they are outward and visible signs of our inward anxieties, conflicts, fears, and shames» (p. 1)

I think and propose naming euphemisms and doubletalk as «deviants of thought» because they try to express (indirectly) but can't express (directly) what they want: both with the same word.

It's really interesting to think that this dictionary can't have a reversal version. If it were the case, there would be so few entries, all of them related to sexual content —especially the genitals (male and female sex organs: penis and vagina, and reproduction of the human species)— and death content —especially death (with all its variations: illness, convalescence, death itself, the so called afterlife, etc.).

The printed version with the euphemisms and doubletalk —as I already stated— has hundred of entries... and we can think of these entries as something always being renewed because language is a «living thing» and these transformations are permanently updated, turned into the aftermaths that show the unconscious hints that reveal the omnipresent and «eternal» unconscious contents: sex and death.

Let's see several examples:

Related to **sex**:

organ: Women have internal organs but as a rule only men have external, euphemistic *organs*, i.e., the penis (a.k.a. the *male generative organ* or the *reproductive organ*), the testicles (or *male organs*), and the collective *organs or generation*. (p. 301)

commerce: A mercantile metaphor for sex —what *The Oxford English Dictionary* primly defines as «intercourse of the sexes: *esp.* in the bad sense.» (p. 86)

parts: Sexual parts. (p. 309)

romance: Love outside marriage or, more specifically, sex (with or without marriage). (p. 361)

tool: The penis (p. 425)

panties: Women's underpants; the diminutive minimizes the sexual associations by casting the adult wearers in the roles of children or little girls. (p. 306)

menstruation has a lot of euphemisms sometimes conveying the idea of illness or inconvenience, also called «the color red», «periodicity», «visit», «sexual unavailability», etc. (p. 274)

Related to **death**:

deceased: Dead, the dead person. This is probably the most popular way of not saying «dead» (p. 112)

pass away: To die; an old euphemism. (p. 309) [also «depart», «loss», etc.]

loved one, the: Dead person, the. (p.261)

sunset years: Old age. (p. 407)

space: A grave site. (p. 395)

slumber cot/robe/room: The «slumber» is very deep, for this is the sleep of the dead. A **slumber cot** is a coffin, a **slumber robe** is a shroud, and a **slumber room** is a lying-out room in a funeral room. (p. 388)

Interestingly, we can find some euphemisms that condensate both **sex and death**:

die: To experience sexual orgasm; a predecessor of the modern «come». (p. 123)

off: To kill or to «screw», the commingling of death and sex in a single word being fairly standard practice. (p. 299)

Where does this need to transform a proper word come from? Why is it necessary to change a word to speak specifically about subjects of sex and death? Why these «deviants of thought» are necessary? What do you think about this?

For sure, you may also find a contradiction in these statements, because in Second Door I spoke about the unconscious' impossibility of conceiving the idea of death. Again, what I mean by sex and death are the words that depict unconscious feelings (latent content) and euphemisms and doubletalk are words that try to show unconscious reality —but without anxiety (manifest content).

Fifth Door

Which Are the «Intruders of Thought» ?

In the same line to euphemisms we can find two other transformations of language that also show something equivalent. I name these transformations as «intruders of thought», because they divert the proper meaning and commitment with one's own feelings. I am referring now to the so called «common sense» and «common places»' expressions, in some way «close relatives» to euphemisms and doubletalk.

First: «Common sense» is used generally to ease social communication: you don't say the truth about what you think not to hurt another individual —differently of euphemisms where you don't say something you feel embarrassing. Other way of defining «common sense» is referring to those ideas that show the beliefs and *weltanschauung* of a society. The use of «common sense» has the intention of hiding one's own personality into a supposed shared social idea.

Second: «Common places» are the sayings and proverbs that are repeated since ancient times. There are lots of these, but a «common place», in this case, is something implied in the sentence: «Old age is a source of wisdom» or «Old age is a source of goodness». This is false, but it's always repeated as if age in itself were a transformer that ensues wisdom and goodness: it's wrong! (but it's repeated everywhere).

Both «intruders of thought» are ways of expressing something I could name as «laziness of mind», a way of expressing blurred thoughts and locked thoughts that can't reveal true personal feelings, hiding individual ideas and inner truth.

Of course, you may ask me why I think these «intruders of thought» are useful for our subject. I hope we could find an —always relative— answer soon.

Sixth Door

Why Novelists Repeat the Frame of Midlife Crisis in their Plots?

There's another fact that called my attention last times. And it has to do with literature. There are several new books related to the so called midlife crisis, with a plot centered in this subject, and I could find not an easy answer to this phenomena. Space and time reasons make it impossible to sketch each plot for you, but you are free to get the books and see the reality of what I state.

I will quote them in the order they were appearing through amazon.com date of release:

1. *Lift and Separate*, a novel by Marilyn Simon Rothstein (63 years old) [December 1, 2016] [Lake Union Publishing, 304 pages]
2. *Balraj*, a novel by Manoj Jain (54 years old) [May 3, 2017] [Notion Press Inc, 150 pages]
3. *Love and Trouble: A Midlife Reckoning*, a novel mixed with a memoir by Claire Dederer (51 years old) [May 9, 2017] [Knopf, 256 pages]
4. *Who is Rich?*, a novel by Matthew Klam (53 years old) [July 4, 2017] [Random House, 337 pages]
5. *Less*, a novel by Andrew Sean Geer (47 years old) [July 19, 2017] [Lee Boudreaux Books, 272 pages] [I read it!]
6. *Midlife, A Philosophical Guide*, a by Kieran Setiya (41 years old) [October 3, 2017] [Princeton University Press, 200 pages] [I read it!]
7. *The Break*, a novel by Marian Keyes (54 years old) [October 24, 2017] [Michael Joseph, 400 pages]
8. *Blowfish*, a novel by Siddharth Tripathi (I couldn't find his age, but looks like a 50 something man) [October 31, 2017] [Bloomsbury India, 296 pages]
9. *I am, I am, I am*, a memoir by Maggie O'Farrell (46 years old) [February 6, 2018] [Knopf, 304 pages]

Literary critics often mention these overlapping ideas as the use of the literary cliché of midlife, but I think they're wrong, because these plots express the reality of physical and psychical need to deal with what's happening within the inner realm of each author and its insistence ever and ever. If we take into account the ages of these authors, we could find an answer to understand this —only apparent— repetition of nuclear plots.

Seventh Door

What's «The Riddle of Death» ?

«But no one is under the illusion that nature has already been vanquished; and few dare hope that she will ever be entirely subjected to man. There are the elements, which seem to mock at all human control: the earth, which quakes and is torn apart and buries all human life and its works; water, which deluges and drowns everything in a turmoil; storms, which blow everything before them; there are diseases, which we have only recently recognized as attacks by other organisms; and finally there is *the painful riddle of death*, against which no medicine has yet been found, nor probably will be. With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable; she brings to our mind once more our weakness and helplessness, which we thought to escape through the work of civilization.» [pp. 14-15] (1927c)

I fully agree with Freud: there's no medicine for *the painful riddle of death*, against which no medicine has yet been found, nor probably will be. This is a cornerstone that shows how we can understand «death»: as an open spring, always in tension and without resolution.

I think it is important to consider that the specific moment when *the painful riddle of death* begins its work coincides with the moment when reproduction is not possible any more (female climacterics) or it isn't suggested because the quality of sperm is not the same as it used to be (male climacterics).

This also coincides with Freud when he states that men have a double existence: they are an end in themselves, and they serve a purpose for the species (1914c) (1915b) (1915c) (1916–1917 [1915–1917]) (1920g) (1933a [1932]). The question here is what kind of psychic work is activated when *the purpose for the species* is not possible any more. And here is —you know it— where begins my research on *maturescence*.

There is an interesting example about this in the work of US documentarist and film maker Lori Petchers. She interviewed a lot of women over fifty and made the documentary *The Midlife Project* (2015) and the book *Old Bags: Taking a Stand* (2015). The most important statement I found in both works is the opening sentence of the 50 something first woman interviewed:

«Well, one of the things that happens it that as soon as you're not fertile anymore, men look at you differently. It's like you become invisible. It's strange but in some ways it's also liberating. You can be a crazy old lady if you want. You can stand in the street corner and say, 'That's a stop sign there!' I think it's hard-wired into humans that once you're not fertile, you somehow don't exist.» (p. 2)

Following with Freud's quotation, I try to suggest a clear perspective for psychoanalysis, because we, as psychoanalysts, can't have an answer to anything —we can listen, we can try to understand... but we can't believe we truly understand anything, please!

Psychoanalysis don't need to have and do not intend to give an answer to *the painful riddle of death*. Psychoanalysts are only expected to listen to internal voices and wishes in order to know what old age or «death» or whatever other content means for that individual —if possible without any preconception— in the same way we deal with other different psychic products —fantasies, acting-outs, dreams, and so. If we can work open to these tensions —which are just the same that worried our ancestors from the first human being to ourselves— we'd feel a kind of freedom different to any idea of «resolution».

The painful riddle of death might be thought as psychoanalysts just from an inner perspective (metapsychological) instead of an external perspective (behavioral), because we can define ourselves as psychoanalysts only when we think from a metapsychological standpoint (the inference of internal processes expressed externally through behavior).

For example, in the case of creative individuals we can't trust in what we «see», because the supposed work of art is not enough. A so called creative process, for example, might be a simple evacuative process of psychic emptying out of whatever true working-through process. This idea works just as the dream work, because the manifest content is only a way to approaching the latent (true) content. I write these lines because we can rely in art and philosophy products in the same way as we rely in manifest content: as a simple guide or hint towards the latent content in a dream, and no more —if we can't know the individual's specific psychic processes. The same happens with «death», when it is mentioned.

Regarding creativity, I want to mention the interesting project suggested by the European Region of IPA's *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Ageing* Committee, chaired by Valeria Egidi Morpurgo with Renata Sgier and Gianina Micu as members, who are beginning to work on this topic trying to find a proper way for understanding true creativity in old age.

Now coming back to the main road, please, don't trust if you by yourself or any of your patients believe they have an answer to *the painful riddle of death*, in that case resistances will be fully working to hide our nature which for our unconscious is not «human nature» but simply «nature», something we try to deny because it defies us narcissistically.

Conversely, sometimes old age is misunderstood with psychopathology. Ageing or *the painful riddle of death* are not determining factors for psychopathology in itself. When someone

complains about his/her age because it confronts with an eventual psychic illness, we may think of a defensive maneuver, an indirect way of expressing the inadequacy of the working-through processes that that individual must confront with at that moment. In the same way we can think of another kind of complaining activities, such as the consideration that old age *always* implies such or such things (loneliness, depression, for example), because those outcomes *always* depend on psychic resources at work in any individual. What is overwhelming for someone may be really worked-through for other, in both cases what changes the tip of the balance are psychic resources and no external situations.

Another Door Which Is «The Natural Position» ?

Several paragraphs before, I spoke both of the «intruders of thought» and of the «deviants of thought», brought about to the mind not so acknowledge reality —that’s their true way of functioning. Now —near the end of this delivery— I want to pose a different internal position, in line with the specific challenge that ageing demands.

I suggest naming this internal position «the natural position», with the resonance of the idea of both being in line with oneself and being in line with nature. This internal position has to do with King Lear’s sentence: «Ripeness is all!» (act 5, scene 2)

I want to highlight that from a perspective of thought «the natural position» has to do with paradox, because paradox leaves thought open to uncertainty. And this is the attitude that allows openness of mind instead of blurred limits and internal shadows. Paradox shows an antithetic reality —a kind of a tension that can’t be solved— just as what we call «death» promotes within us.

Cuonzo (2014) states:

«Paradoxes force those who study and attempt to solve them to confront strong, conflicting intuitions; discover ways in which intuitions can be misleading; and analyze ways in which our ordinary concepts are problematic. In addition, paradoxes require the adventurous souls who seek to understand and solve them to go beyond a noncommittal awareness of philosophical problems to an evaluation of solutions that are —to varying degrees— successful... Where there is progress, there is paradox. Each fuels the other.» (p. 209)

A while ago we closed our Opening Words with a familiar paradox, that I will copy here again:

We were taking care of our grand-daughter at her home —a flat in a beautiful neighborhood outside the city just in front of the local train station. We were telling her that her house was

beautiful because she could see from the lateral balcony the planes flying in the sky, she could see from the lateral balcony the cars and bicycles passing for the main avenue opposite her house as well, and that she could see from the main window the train always passing again and again opposite her house. Then we told her that in our own house it happens just the same, because we could see the planes, cars and bicycles... but we regretted that we were unable to see the train because there weren't trains where we live. Our grand-daughter answered right away with an immediate glance:

«You can't see the train because you don't have a window!»

This is a splendid example of paradox as an open-minder. In some way, we can think of paradox as something that leads our feelings to *uncertainty*. And this is another key concept for the understanding of midlife and beyond —name it ageing or any concept we could put in its place. Paradox *is* uncertainty and while being this, *leads to* uncertainty, as a never ending process. *The riddle of death* Freud poses is the central paradox that dwells within us.

«Intruders of thought» and «deviants of thought» fight against the paradox of *the riddle of death*, consequently against uncertainty. And this is the reason why I want to pose paradox as «the natural position» for the acknowledgement of ageing.

If we follow the inner line of this work-in-progress we could find a lot of paradoxes leading to uncertainty:

Why do we human beings remain having sexual relations after climacterics?

Why does nobody want to consider him/herself «old»?

Why do we assume wrong ideas about the duration of life in past times?

Why does each society need to believe they are defeating «death» assuming they conquer more time to stay alive?

Why do we defend ourselves with euphemisms and doubletalk as well as with «common sense» and «common places» related to sex and death —what I name «intruders of thought» and «deviants of thought»?

Why does it happen and where does it come from the writer's «need» to depict characters under a so called midlife crisis when they are under the same age stage?

Of course, I will tell you my tentative answer to these questions, but what I want most is to know your ideas about the whole work-in-progress.

I think that there is a special moment in the life cycle around climacterics —both in men and women— a drive (*trieb*) increase that fosters working-through psychic processes. This drive (*trieb*) increase —so brilliantly depicted by Freud four times along his works— (1910c) (1912c) (1916-1917 [1915-1917]) (1937c) comes from somatic sources and is related to the loss or diminution of reproductive function.

This drive increase is what we can find in the so called midlife crisis as well as in «the natural position» outcomes. The first outcome is defensive, the second has to do with «ripeness is all». Regarding this second outcome, come to my mind our US friends *Idiosyncratic Fashionistas* —Velerie & Jean—, two 60 something women who decided live under the motto: «grow old with verve», in order to change the widespread euphemisms «grow old graciously» and «a woman of a certain age».

It's really hard to understand which path or working-through process —when it were possible— each one chooses to refer to direct and indirect evidences of somatic natural ageing, but I think that this is the moment where the word «death» leaves the background and comes into stage for the rest of life.

When I wondered what it means the word «death» every time it is pronounced, when I wondered if the word «death» —as the dreaded thing in the world— is something that evinces a manifest content, and when I wondered which may be its true latent content, I left an open question that I'll try to answer now.

I pose Jones' concept of *aphanisis* (1927) —the fear of the disappearance of sexual desire — to understand the latent content transformed into manifest content we mean every time we say the word «death».

Jones considers *aphanisis* as a fear in both sexes more deep than castration anxiety. The word *aphanisis* comes from the Greek which means the absence or invisibility of the brilliance in an astronomical sense. Taken into psychic terms, this is the true latent name for the manifest word «death».

I don't know why the concept of *aphanisis* fell into its own intrinsic meaning: it became absent and lost its brilliance in the psychoanalytic literature. But in the sixties it was taken into account again by Lacan who made it equivalent to the concept of *fading of the subject*.

Tomorrow we'll find this concept in the clinical cases I will deliver. Of course, I don't forget that perhaps further research could allow us to infer more precisely the differences in *aphanisis* between male and female patients.

What I mean is that when we listen to the word «death» we might consider the possibility of psychoanalytically «translating» it as *aphanisis*: the patient is talking about his/her dread of the loss of sexual desire.

From this vertex, psychoanalytic concepts of sex and death appear blended again as I tried to convey all along this paper. If he/she is able to face the paradox of uncertainty that *aphanisis* brings to the forefront, for sure he/she will own «the natural position»; otherwise defensive mechanisms will work in favour of the «intruders of thought» and the «deviants of thought».

Of course, we might also wonder which could be the image —if it were possible— for *aphanisis*. My first impression is that it can't be related to any image... and this helps in our work with paradox and with uncertainty.

Last Words

Please, Odysseus, Help us!

Literature brings a beautiful example of «the natural position» in the words of Homer.

Odyssey is the account of the twenty years it took Odysseus to get back home after the Troy War. There is a chapter —the most important from my point of view— when traveling back home with a few of his sailors in his weak ship after a lot of misfortune and adventures, when he had to cope with the Mermaids. It was known that the Mermaids were sea monsters in the appearance of really beautiful women with unbelievable singing voices. They used to sing astonishing singings that made sailors go as crazy so as to throw themselves into the waters and die immediately beaten by them.

Odysseus —forever wise— asked his sailors to fill and lock their ears with wax not to listen their singings, and asked them to tie him to the main post of the ship —without wax in his ears, in this case—. More, he asked them not to untie him though he was sure he would rogue them to do so.

Dread, excited, devastated, horrified, but with the decision to be back home again after so many years, Odysseus could surpass the Mermaids and arrive in Ithaca, his homeland to join his loved wife Penelope and his son Telemachus.

The Mermaids episode show us the reality of «the natural position», the reality of paradox and uncertainty, and it allows us to find an image to understand what is it about when we speak of ageing and death.

Of course, most brilliant creative outcomes not only in artists but also in «common» people are the result of facing the Mermaids trying to acknowledge uncertainty instead of throwing into the

waters of «death» —something that opens psychic life to new horizons where the present moment is highlighted and life is felt at its fullness.

So, please, dear friends, don't forget Ulysses in your life: there's a lot of wisdom to get from that door. More, try not to mix up the idea of wisdom and creativity with artistic work —there are so few gifted people in the world and a lot of simple... mortals like us—, because we don't need to become artists to achieve this: wisdom and creativity may be «the natural position» in every day life. And wisdom and creativity is not something to be thought or taught, because it is simply something to be lived. Enjoy life! Thank you very much.

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