

Tony T. Gaillard

Heal Yourself Unveiling Your Hidden Heritage

Transgenerational Therapy and the Wisdom of the Ages



We are linked to our ancestors like trees attached to their roots. Their qualities and their DNA live in us, just like their uncompleted stories do. Indeed, traumas, unfinished mourning, family secrets and conflicts reverberate from generation to generation, shaping the lives of the descendants.

However, and despite the influences of these transgenerational inheritances, the author reminds us that we are not a simple product of the past, nor just the fruit of our family tree. We can integrate our hidden heritage instead of having them unconsciously driving our lives. We can also rewrite the false or missing parts of our genealogy. With many illustrations the author shows how analyzing our ancestors' lives helps to understand problematic conditions, and heals all kinds of symptoms. Goethe already explained: *What we have received from our ancestors, we must assimilate until it becomes a part of ourselves if we want it to be an enrichment instead of a burden.*

This is the first time an author has merged contemporary transgenerational healing and traditional wisdom. This book reveals how modern therapy can benefit from mythological teachings, in line with the ancient maxim: *Know Thyself.*



Tony T. Gaillard is an experienced Swiss psychotherapist specializing in Depth Psychology. He matches avantgarde transgenerational therapy with ancient wisdom to develop new outstanding prospects.

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ECODITION

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Preface

This book is intended for both professionals and all those who wish to learn more about transgenerational integration. It is the English translation of my French book, “Intégrer ses héritages transgénérationnels”, that summarizes twenty years of practices and research that I have presented in other more extensive French books.

The purpose of this book is twofold: it aims to make readers more aware of the importance of transgenerational issues, and it presents a new approach that I have called “Transgenerational Integration.”

Because transgenerational healing deals with the unconscious, it automatically belongs to the more general domain of Depth Psychology, which itself should be related to the ancient teachings and initiations. Thus, unlike other transgenerational approaches, which paradoxically do not integrate what they are historically grounded in, *Transgenerational Integration* refers to ancient wisdom, simultaneously renewing them and enlarging the field of contemporary Depth Psychology.

This book would not have been possible without my clients, whom I sincerely thank for having agreed to share their experiences. I also would like to express all my gratitude to those who participated and helped to translate this work: Carolyn Trine, John Paval, Dea Butcher, Brian Levin, James Spears and Tobias Knobloch.

Tony T. Gaillard, February 2019.

*Many things would be explained if
we could know our real genealogy!*
Gustave Flaubert

Introduction

Unfinished stories have a surprising tendency to repeat themselves, as if destiny were urging us to understand them better. For once we understand their true meaning, we can integrate these stories and stop repeating them. Only then can we turn a page of our history and start a new chapter in our lives. This principle can be observed not only at the individual level, but also on a larger, familial and collective scale. In the words of Winston Churchill, “those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

By repeatedly playing out the same issues, this principle of repetition makes us attentive to unresolved stories. While we may finally be able to solve some of these difficulties, others remain enigmas, whose solutions seems to elude us. However, today transgenerational analysis can widen our horizon, as some of our problems are repetitions of the unfinished stories of our ancestors!

For example, a father can pass on to his children the psychological consequences of a trauma he suffered during his childhood, and a family can leave as an inheritance the

consequences of a secret lineage. Similarly, a whole community can pass on to the next generation its unsolved issues. Such can be the case with pollution, where former generations neither knew of, nor wanted to solve this problem, and left it behind for their kin to take on.

Here is a first example from my therapeutic practice in transgenerational analysis. Since her youngest days Caroline could not bear to be in a room when the door was closed. At work, at home or even in public places such as lavatories, Caroline had to keep the doors open to manage her anxiety. To help her, we started to work on her family tree and so the unfinished stories concerning her parents and grandparents started to come to light. And one day, she arrived highly excited and relieved as she told me that her issue with closed doors was finally resolved! Her mother recently told her how when she herself was little, her own mother (Caroline's grandmother) would systematically lock her in a room in their apartment as a punishment. For Caroline's mother, these punishments produced emotional trauma in the form of despair and feelings of abandonment. Caroline told me, "While my mother was telling me this, not only did I finally understand why I was so afraid of closed doors, but I also felt a physical change, as if something was evaporating from me. Indeed, without even thinking about it, that same night and the days after, I closed the door to my bedroom and to other rooms as if it had never been a problem! Since then, I haven't had any more problems with closed doors!"

I can't even begin to think of the number of people, who like Caroline, could benefit from having their parents and grandparents explain their difficult stories to them. If these

events are not talked about, later generations may be confronted with the same problems without knowing that they might have been passed down from previous generations! It is only with hindsight that such things become obvious.

Of course, Caroline had already worked on her fear of closed doors in other therapies, and she was ready for healing. However, only a transgenerational analysis, and the attention that we brought to her family history, allowed her to discover the origin of her problem. This example confirms what Depth Psychology¹ has understood for over a century: giving meaning to one's symptoms remains the core requirement for healing once and for all.

Consequences of incomplete mourning

In an article as part of our collective book², Salomon Sellam tells of a particularly interesting situation. A young girl named Aurélie, age six, presented symptoms of asthmatic bronchitis. Her father went to doctor Sellam to find a solution for his daughter. In the discussion, he began talking about the disappearance of his own father when he was only seven years old. Trembling with emotion, he described, with Aurélie by his side, how his father had committed suicide by asphyxiation with gas. Given the intensity of his

¹ At the beginning of the 20th century, Depth Psychology qualified all the approaches integrating the unconscious. They then split because of theoretical dogmatic conflicts, and Freudians reserved the right to the term “psychoanalyst.”

² Salomon Sellam (2014), « Le transgénérationnel dans les maladies pulmonaires » in *Exemple d'intégration transgénérationnelle*, Ecodition, Geneva.

emotion and how difficult it was to talk about, it was clear that he had not yet fully mourned the death of his father.

As Salomon Sellam wrote, “Unsurprisingly, all these unspoken and unintegrated feelings have led the child to develop psychosomatic symptoms; she has involuntarily inherited a difficult family history and her pathology reflects her unconscious heritage, all that has never been spoken of. To speak the truth without feeling that its content is taboo is the first step towards a reconciliation. Such a reconciliation will erase the build-up of negative emotions that underlie their transformation into psychosomatic symptoms. Aurélie no longer needs to show her parents that she has unconsciously taken on their problems by exhibiting asthmatic symptoms. The next stage was very simple: anti-asthmatic medication proved very efficient, and then, progressively, after six months, she stopped taking her medication.” This example shows how unfinished mourning like that of Aurélie’s father, can lead to the development of pulmonary symptoms, which were an unconscious referral to her grandfather’s asphyxiation by gas.

When considering the transgenerational inheritances of unfinished mourning, Serge Tisseron³, following the work done by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, talks of a “ghost therapy.” In *Les fantômes familiaux*⁴, literally “*The*

³ Serge Tisseron (1995), *Le psychisme à l'épreuve des générations : clinique du fantôme*, Dunod, Paris. Serge Tisseron (1996), *Secrets de famille, mode d'emploi*, Ramsay, Paris. Jean-Claude Rouchy (2001), *La psychanalyse avec Nicolas Abraham et Maria Torok*, Éditions Érès, Paris.

⁴ Bruno Clavier (2013), *Les fantômes familiaux*, Payot, Paris.

Ghosts in the Family”, Bruno Clavier also looks at the impact incomplete grief, on the part of parents, has on their descendants. Suicidal attempts and, according to Maria Torok⁵, panic attacks, are manifestations of the presence of an unconsciously inherited ghost. That is why it is important when doing transgenerational therapy, to identify the “skeltons in the closet” and clarify their life and the circumstances of their death.

About the consequences of incomplete mourning, Marc Wolynn recalls the story of Jesse, a young man who has suffered from insomnia for over a year. “Before, he had been a star athlete and a model student, but his lack of sleep had initiated a spiral into depression and despair. Consequently, he abandoned his studies and quit playing sports. In just one year he had consulted three doctors, two psychologists, a sleep clinic, and a naturopath, all without success. His problems began just after his nineteenth birthday. His body became ice cold. Shivering, he was unable to warm himself up, and he felt gripped by a strange fear that he had never felt before. He was afraid that something awful could happen if he let himself fall asleep again, “if I go to sleep, I’ll never wake up.””⁶ Wolynn recalls, “every time he felt himself drifting off, the fear would jolt him back into wakefulness. The pattern repeated itself the next night, and the night after that. Soon insomnia became a nightly ordeal. Jesse knew his fear was irrational, yet he felt helpless to put an end to it.”

⁵ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, 1994, University of Chicago Press.

⁶ Marc Wolynn (2016), *It didn't start with you*, Viking, New York.

One bit of information stood out for Wolynn, that of the sensation of cold and feeling he was about to freeze. He asked Jesse if anyone in his family had ever had a traumatic experience involving “cold” or being “asleep.” Jesse then remembered that his mother had recently spoken of the tragic death of his uncle, whom he had never known. This Uncle Colin was nineteen years old when he died, frozen in a winter storm when checking the power lines in Northwest Canada. He was found dead from hypothermia. Traces in the snow showed that he had been struggling to hang on to the power lines. For Colin, letting go meant dying. It was a tragic loss and the family had never spoke of him since. Now, three decades later, Jesse who was the same age as his uncle, was unconsciously experiencing the non-integrated story of his family, and dealing with the same fear of letting go. The association between his symptoms and his uncle’s death was a turning point for Jesse. He finally understood what had brought about his fear of sleeping, and he was able to begin healing. Not only was Jesse able to free himself of his insomnia, he was also able to reconnect with his family, both past and present.

This last point is very interesting too, and I will develop it in later chapters. For now, let us understand that transgenerational analyses are not only effective for healing symptoms, they also reconnect us to our origins, that is to say, to the life forces, here and now.

An unconscious transmission

Surprising as it may seem, we need to understand that unfinished stories do not just evaporate into thin air. When we repress or forget these kinds of stories, this does not

mean that they are finished or that we have dealt with them. On the contrary, they are more likely to be transferred onto the next generation because of the efforts to suppress, deny, or forget them. These unfinished stories make up a “past that is not past,” like a debt that will have to be payed one day or another. Transformed into something unconscious, these unfinished stories also become timeless by remaining suspended, and they hide behind all kinds of symptoms present in later generations. Since people are rarely conscious of the transgenerational origins of their problems, they may very well also transmit them onto their children.

Through many examples, we shall see how similar and symbolically related problems are found over several generations. It's rather as though our ancestors were asking us to solve these unfinished family stories more effectively for ourselves, and for the sake of future generations.

Strictly rational minds may doubt such a transmission of unfinished stories between the generations, yet the idea is not new. On the contrary, it goes back very far in the history of humanity. The ancient Greeks for example, were fully aware of such transmission across generations. For them, families were bonded together by blood, and they formed distinct units in which the later members inherited material goods, as well as unfinished stories from their ancestors. As we shall see in the second chapter, it is one of these traditional forms of knowledge that our modern civilization has lost. But today, these knowledges are gradually being rediscovered.

More than thirty years after the first transgenerational analyses, epigenetic research shows how much our heritage can influence our DNA. For example, it has demonstrated

an increased vulnerability to stress in descendants of Holocaust survivors.⁷

Epigenetic evidence of the transgenerational

Biologists measure the importance and complexity of that which is perpetuated by way of blood and DNA ties. Their research⁸ indicates the presence of transgenerational consequences when ancestors have suffered trauma or other extreme living conditions. For example, descendants of people born to parents who experienced the famine of 1943-1944 in Holland are significantly more obese. Other research has shown that negative experiences and fears⁹ have an impact on our psyche, and that they can leave their marks over several generations. It would be interesting to delve deeper into the subject to better understand the importance of somatic manifestations in relation to a person's ability to recount his or her transgenerational history. Individuals who ignore the unintegrated stories of their ancestors might be the worst affected. In contrast, those who have been able to engage in transgenerational integration are more likely to develop a stronger immunity against potentially pathogenic genetic heritages.

⁷ Yehuda, R, Schmeidler, & al. T. *Vulnerability to posttraumatic stress disorder in adult offspring of Holocaust survivors*. Am J Psychiatry, 1998 ; 155 : 1163–1171.

⁸ Marine Courniou, « Nos états d'âmes modifient notre ADN », Sciences et Vie, 1110 (03/2010), Paris ; Veenendaal M, & al. *Transgenerational effects of prenatal exposure to the 1944–45 Dutch famine*. BJOG 2013 ; 120 :548–554.

⁹ Katharina Gapp & al. Implication of sperm RNAs in transgenerational inheritance of the effects of early trauma in mice, Nature Neuroscience 17, 667–669 (2014).

These epigenetic discoveries have liberated significant financial resources. However, if psychological factors are neglected, then their therapeutic applications will be limited. If we do not recognize ourselves as the primary actor in our healing, we risk losing the use of our own potential as a source of resilience, and we may become more and more dependent on mere provisional solutions to deal with growing and persistent problems. Indeed, traces left on our DNA depend on the way life experiences have been responded to, and people will react to similar experiences in different ways. In that field too, transgenerational integration could make a difference in terms of sustainable healing.

Reconnecting with our roots, from transgenerational to intergenerational

Nowadays, because DNA testing has become so accessible to many people, gathering information about our ancestors is a far less challenging task. The success of DNA tests also reveals a deep desire to know where one comes from in broader terms, and indeed, it can reveal the identity of unknown parents. Actually, the more we ignore the history of our ancestors, the greater the chances that we have unconsciously inherited their unfinished stories.

In that perspective, unveiling our transgenerational heritage help us to understand how much our relationship with the world, and our way of life, are unconsciously conditioned by our family and culture. In our world of profound changes, transgenerational analysis meets today's therapeutic needs. Faced with the risk of over-adaptation to the virtual world, transgenerational integration offers to restore a certain balance. In this context, the rediscovery of

transgenerational laws comes right on time to invite us to re-centre on ourselves, to integrate our roots, to better understand where we come from, to know where we stand, and to know where we are going.

Today, we begin to recognize the importance of what is passed from one generation to the next. Thanks to transgenerational analysis, we know that what our ancestors were not able to integrate, such as traumas, secrets, and emotional burdens can become unconscious heritages. These can continue to be handed down to future generations unless they are dealt with, hence the term "transgenerational," used to qualify these types of inheritances.

In addition to observable forms of heritage (morphology, patrimony, talents, *savoir-faire*, etc.) therapeutic experiences have taught us about the existence of "invisible" transmissions, associated with non-integrated events and conflicts that once belonged to our ancestors. In accordance with the admitted vocabulary, we need to clearly differentiate between ***intergenerational*** transmissions that are voluntary, conscious, and verbalized, and ***transgenerational*** transmissions that are unconscious, nonverbal, involuntary, and potentially pathological.

We are not just a result of our past

In the face of this historical predetermination, the question of self-knowledge, that is, of our true Self, is essential. As I will show in my analysis, it is the Self that lies at the heart of the integration processes. *This Self is that part of oneself that is tied to the present moment, from where we can integrate the "past that is not past", rewrite it, and recapture it.*

One consequence of transgenerational unconscious heritages is to render us alien to ourselves, to drive us away from ourselves. It always starts with a difficulty to be one's true Self. If unintegrated the unconscious forces will operate despite our best intentions and will make us less authentically ourselves. From an etymological perspective, "alienation"¹⁰ is the term which best describes this process of losing oneself. It is derived from the Latin *alienure*, "make other" or "make stranger" to oneself. It refers to a "state in which human beings are somewhat detached from themselves," and in a more general sense, to the "loss of one's authenticity." "I am another," said Rimbaud, to signify that one can be alienated by someone other than oneself, by an unfinished story tied to our family or to our culture. Most of the time we are not authentically ourselves, but rather, we are conditioned by our education and we adapt to our surroundings. Freud also shared that idea, "the Ego is not master in its own home."

More specifically, integration work focuses on bringing to light the unconscious (or our dark side), so that the Self in us can be given a place. Certain psychological schools of thought also talk about "sub-personalities," which are not to be confused with the true Self. For Jung, "fulfilment has no other goal than to release the Self from the false envelopes of the persona."

As we shall see, because it is rooted in the present moment and independent of time, the true Self has the quality of being unalienable, irreducible to any past events. It exists in the present time, in the flow of life, which connects us to

¹⁰ See the complete definition of alienation in the glossary.

the sources of the living. In a more symbolic language, I also call it the origins. These are not to be found in some ancient time, but beyond time, in a timeless symbolic dimension, like the unconscious. In other words, it is in the present moment that our Self meets the forces of life, which are inseparable from our origins. However, this Self is generally unconscious and left in a potential state, waiting to take place. This is why the Ancient Greeks exhorted us to discover that part of ourselves that is essential: Know Thyself!

With transgenerational analysis, unveiling what lies unconsciously inside us, also simultaneously reveals the presence of a true Self waiting to befall us. In other words, becoming aware of our alienations is a first step towards becoming our real Self, towards that inalienable part of ourselves that can integrate its prehistory. To achieve this, explanations are not enough here, although they may constitute a first step to integration. Here, the support of a transgenerational analyst will make the difference to help integrating transgenerational heritage. And as I will develop it in the last chapter, the “par excellence” analysis of the unconscious remains that of a hermeneutic of the Self, a way of recognizing what is not visible at first.

Once we become aware of these legacies, the way in which we react to them will naturally change. By differentiating what alienates us from our authentic Self, a process of becoming our real Self can begin. As we shall see in the following examples, it is then possible to have a positive impact on symptoms and other existential problems.

1

Where Do We Come From?

Every birth is a story that begins well before the day of delivery. We do not come to life out of nowhere. The personal, material and cultural conditions of our parents and families have already influenced the circumstances of our conception and birth. What do we really know about our prehistory, and to what extent does it connect us or cut us off from where we come from?

In therapy I have often observed that when clients turn their attention to their ancient family stories, beyond that of their relationship with their parents, they stop resisting their own past. It is as if the possibility to speak about their ancestors' lives, helps to overcome their resistance to talking about their own unfinished stories, and this allows their wounds to find words. As a matter of fact, enlarging the reflection on several generations reveals new perspectives which catches our attention. In a way, the ability to talk about transgenerational history satisfies a natural desire to clarify our patrimony, to free one's Self from the hidden heritages, and to transmit a positive intergenerational heritage.

With the transgenerational approach, parents are more likely to talk about their lives, recalling childhood memories, as though they finally dared to put words onto difficult experiences that have forever lurked in the back of their

minds. Moreover, when death knocks at their door, people often feel the need to reveal their secrets, suspecting that this could provide them with a sense of peace. Some people also feel the need to ascertain their genealogy, if for example, they are unsure of their paternity. However, what they may not realize is that by clarifying these unknowns, they also leave behind a tremendous gift for their descendants.

Unfortunately, our modern culture rather encourages us to keep up appearances as opposed to being transparent about our true stories. Consequently, instead of parents passing down their real-life stories and family secrets to their children, they often bequeath them with material goods. However, if these goods serve the purpose of hiding secrets and repressing guilt, they turn into a poisonous gift. Listening to my clients, I understand to what extent big material inheritances can be alienating for descendants of wealthy families. Caught up in unconscious conflicts of loyalty, they often are victims of heavy secrets that betray the reality behind the appearance of glamor. Indeed, nothing is more important than what can be transmitted through consciousness and the spoken word.

When these transmissions are lacking, we need to find in ourselves the appropriate resources to assimilate our prehistory. This is where we all can count on our true Self to integrate our transgenerational heritages. This is the meaning of the Greek poet Aesop's famous saying, "help yourself and the sky will help you!" In other words, "waken your true Self and life forces will participate." Indeed, if transgenerational integration brings remedy to the lack of transmissions, it can also, as we shall see, put us back in

touch with the forces of life, our origins, traditionally symbolized by Father-Sky and Mother Earth.

The consequences of a family secret

Here is example that shows the impact a family secret had on another client of mine. Delphine asked for help to deal with a family secret that had had devastating consequences for her. After her divorce from a miserable marriage, one family member revealed to Delphine that her father was not the biological father of her eldest sister Arlette. When Delphine asked her father about that secret, he explained to her, "When your mother was pregnant, she went to her priest to confess, and then we got married anyway! But she was haunted by shame and guilt for the rest of her life, so that when you sister Arlette passed away, your mother screamed out, 'God is punishing me!'"

Discovering her mother's secret had been a shock for Delphine because she finally understood why her mother had forced her to marry the man who had just made her pregnant. Delphine had to obey, even though she did not want to get married and felt she was too young. On discovering her mother's secret, Delphine understood that she had been obliged to do what her mother had not done, and marry the man who had made her pregnant! Her mother's guilt had forced her into an unwanted marriage. "By getting married, I re-enacted my parents' secret, I couldn't say, "No, I don't want to get married, it's unfair, it's monstrous." When I got married, I was a party to their secret at my own expense, by making my mother's unfinished story visible. I always told myself that I was living my life inside out, that the cards I had been dealt were scrambled. The day of my

wedding I felt like everyone was present except for me... now I must make peace with what I have found out..."

By going back several generations, our transgenerational analysis allowed Delphine to reconsider the nature of the bonds between her different family members, as well as the context in which the secret was enacted. The broader outlook on the situation enabled her to make sense of life experience she could not explain to herself so far. To restore a certain sense of balance I suggested that she break the silence and talk about the secret and share her views on it.

One day as she was visiting her mother, Delphine summoned up the courage to speak out. Here is what she told me: "It was really difficult for me to speak to my mother - she's old now, she's not very well, and she's losing her memory. But she listened to me, and she said: 'I didn't know you were feeling like that.' I felt she was sincere. Ten days later, she called me and asked me to forgive her for all the suffering her silence had caused. I'll remember that day as full of sunshine. I told her that her reaching out to me would no doubt help me and other family members to heal. She replied: 'Yes, I also want to heal'."

To be able to talk with her mother about her secret opened up to new integration perspectives. Delphine now knows she can rely on her partner, on the thawing of the relations in her family, and even on her elder sister's children and grandchildren who appreciate the work she did to heal. Putting into words the unspoken family secret, was the first most crucial step to assimilate the consequences of her mother's secret. Thanks to this, she became able to assimilate her past, and protect succeeding generations from the consequences of this family secret. A year later she wrote

me that, "by putting words on my pain, and writing a letter about it, read by my whole family, I have now found a deep peace in the relation with my mother."

Dealing with her mother's unfinished story

Another example demonstrates how unfinished conflicts can be transmitted across three generations of women. A mother came to consult me in order to better understand why she kept on reliving experiences similar to those of her grandmother. Since she was a child, Micheline had been constantly compared to her grandmother. The parallels between her life and her grandmother's life were so uncanny that she and those around her could not help noticing them. In particular, after they had each lost their husband, they both became mistresses to wealthy men who did not want to leave their depressive and medicated wives. When Micheline underwent screening for pancreatic cancer, she became terribly afraid she might suffer the same fate as her grandmother, who died from pancreatic cancer at the age of fifty-four. While the earlier resemblances surprised and amused her, this one was a very serious warning, and she decided to seek help since she no longer felt in control of her own destiny.

Micheline's transgenerational analysis allowed her to better understand how the conflictual relationship between her mother and her grandmother, had been repeated by her mother in her relation to Micheline, and this was especially apparent in her feelings of abandonment. With hindsight, she remembers feeling at a young age that it was her responsibility to help her mother. She felt so strongly that it

was her mission to help her mother repair her relationship with her own mother that she had put her own needs aside.

Then, during one session, Micheline recounts a surprising slip of the tongue her mother had made. Introducing Micheline and Micheline's father to some acquaintances, she said, "this is my daughter and her husband," instead of "this is my daughter and *my* husband." To understand this lapse, one must know that the mother had projected onto her husband her own father who had been deported to Siberia. This was a traumatic experience which we had worked on previously. This slip of the tongue betrayed the fact that the mother, rather than talking to Micheline herself, was actually "talking" to her own mother - "This is my mother and her husband." Indeed, if her husband represented her father, then her daughter would represent her mother. The lapse was indicative of the unconscious transfer of her mother. Such a revelation was ground-breaking for Micheline, as she could now better understand how her mother unconsciously saw her as her grandmother.

To explain these types of situations, specialists in this field describe a process known as "parentification." Caught up in his parents' transferences, a child can conform to these unconscious expectancies and play out the unfinished stories of his ancestors, thus unconsciously programming his own future.

By clarifying her grandmother's past, and the conflictual relationship between her grandmother and her mother, Micheline was progressively able to free herself from her role as her mother's helper. Such an awareness allowed her to view herself as an independent woman, who did not need to carry the burden of what went wrong between her mother

and her grandmother. She learned to differentiate herself from her grandmother, and better understand the troubling events that had impacted on her life. Indeed, becoming her own Self allowed Micheline to rewrite unexplained parts of her story, relegating them to her past, and preventing them from spilling over into her present life.

Another example of transgenerational analysis will allow us to gain a better understanding of unconscious inheritances. Marc Wolynn describes the situation of Gretchen, a woman who suffered from depression and anxiety despite years of antidepressant medication and multiple group therapies. “Gretchen told me she no longer wanted to live. For as long as she could remember, she had struggled with emotions so intense she could barely contain the surges in her body. Gretchen had been admitted several times to a psychiatric hospital where she was diagnosed as bipolar with a severe anxiety disorder. Medication brought her slight relief, but never touched the powerful suicidal urges that lived inside her. Her depression and anxiety, she said, had prevented her from ever marrying and having children. In a surprisingly matter-of-fact tone of voice, she told me that she was planning to commit suicide before her next birthday.”¹¹

Marc Wolynn decided to dig deeper and ask how she planned to commit suicide. Gretchen said she wanted to evaporate. Her plan was to jump into a molten steel tank at a factory where her brother worked. “My body will incinerate in seconds,” she said. Marc Wolynn had often heard

¹¹ Marc Wolynn (2016), *It didn't start with you*, Viking, New York.

words such as these from his patients who were descendants of victims of the Holocaust. As a result, he asked Gretchen if someone in her family was Jewish or had been involved in the Holocaust. After a moment of hesitation, Gretchen remembered her grandmother's story. Born into a Jewish family in Poland, her grandmother later converted to Catholicism when she moved to America and married Gretchen's grandfather in 1946. Two years earlier, her whole family had died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. They were, quite literally, gassed, sprayed with toxic gas and then incinerated. However, this story was never passed down. No one ever talked of the war, nor of the family members who were incinerated. On the contrary, the events were trivialized.

For Marc Wolynn, it became clear that the symptoms Gretchen presented were rooted in her grandmother's tragic story. It seemed as if no one in the family had ever considered grieving all these ancestors who died in such tragic circumstances. "As I explained the connection, Gretchen listened intently. Her eyes widened and color rose in her cheeks. I could tell that what I said was resonating. For the first time, Gretchen had an explanation for her suffering that made sense to her."

To help Gretchen assimilate her unconscious reality, Wolynn asked her to imagine how her grandmother might feel regarding the situation she had described. This exercise brought up very difficult feelings of loss, pain, solitude and isolation, as well as very strong feelings of guilt (which many descendants of victims of extermination feel). "When Gretchen was able to access these sensations, she realized that her wish to annihilate herself was deeply entwined with

her lost family members. She also realized that she had taken on some element of her grandmother's desire to die. As Gretchen absorbed this understanding, seeing the family story in a new light, her body began to soften, as if something inside her that had long been coiled up could now relax."

Claude Nachin provides another example that shows how events that had not been properly integrated by one's ancestors can have an impact on their descendants. A woman consulted him on account of a phobia of the cold and frigidity issues¹². One day, in contrast to her usual manner of speaking, she said that she had suicidal thoughts and mentioned that her aunt was depressed again. On deeper exploration, it appeared that neither her mother nor her aunts had grieved the loss of their father, who had been hydrocuted¹³ while on vacation with his mistress (long before the birth of the patient). Her symptoms thus took on a new meaning: they unconsciously referred to a story that had not been integrated by her mother and her aunts. Indeed, through her symptoms (precautions against the cold and sexual inhibition) she was expressing the context of the death of her grandfather. The unspeakable context surrounding his death prevented the mother and the family from mourning. Indeed, her symptoms demonstrated that the death of her grandfather had not yet been integrated and was still unconsciously present. It manifested itself

¹² Claude Nachin (2001), "Unité duelle, crypte et fantômes", in *La psychanalyse avec Nicolas Abraham et Maria Torok*, under the direction of Jean-Claude Rouchy, Éres, Paris, p. 47.

¹³ Death provoked by immersion in freezing water.

through the difficulties the descendant faced. Once the significance of her symptoms was brought to light, she could start to assimilate them.

These examples demonstrate the therapeutic potential of unveiling the unconscious heritage of unfinished family stories. They reveal the existence of a link between conflicts inherited from ancestors and current symptoms. Such associations, which characterize all approaches said to be “transgenerational,” give the symptoms new meaning, and are an important step for transgenerational integration and healing.

The value of transgenerational integration is not limited to its therapeutic use. This work may also be viewed as a form of personal development, and a way in which to know one’s Self better. In ancient times, the inheritor was regarded not just as a victim, but also as someone through whom a family, or a unit of individuals, could heal from unfinished stories stemming back to their ancestors. In this context, Pierre Ramaut explains that “the ancient Chinese believed that a ‘transgenerational mandate’, originating from a person’s connection to their ancestors, could be given, by fate, to one of the last descendants of the line. This person is ‘mandated’ to heal the unfinished stories of his or her family tree.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Pierre Ramaut (2016), « Transgenerational Psychoanalysis and Shamanism to Heal from Ghosts», in *Shamanism, Ancestors and Transgenerational Integration*, collective book, Ecodition, Geneva.

Depth Psychology and transgenerational

Although it is commonly believed that the transgenerational perspective implies that we should turn to the past, one must understand that it is not the past itself which affects the descendants, but rather its current unconscious consequences. These are even more present - here and now - as they have become unconscious. In therapy, this encompasses deciphering the unconscious meaning behind the symptoms. So, our attentions primarily goes on analysing the action of the unconscious in the present moment, and only symbolically to the unfinished stories of our ancestors.

The timelessness of the unconscious resonated with the discoveries of the Depth Psychology pioneers. They had previously explained how non-integrated problems could persist over time, like a debt waiting to be settled. Freud had observed that there existed a tendency to repeat the same problems, which he named “repetition compulsion.” The repetition of problems seemed to indicate a need to bring unconscious memories to the forefront. Towards the end of his life, Freud put his finger on what today we recognize as the transgenerational unconscious. “The archaic heritage of man is not only composed of predispositions, but also of ideological contexts and traces of memory, left behind by the experiences of previous generations.”¹⁵ In this excerpt from his last book, Freud was clearly planting a new seed for his readers to sow. Ironically, while defending Freudian dogmas against Jung’s notion of the collective unconscious,

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism, three essays*, Hogarth Press, (1878), London, p.99.

Freud's supporters missed out on his last important perspectives.

For his part, Jung had analyzed his own genealogy and was able to determine the importance of the transgenerational for himself. "While working on my family tree, I understood how my destiny attached me to my ancestors. I very much feel that I am under the influence of things and problems that were left incomplete and unanswered by my parents, my grandparents and my other ancestors. I have always thought that I, too, had to answer to the same questions that destiny had already posed to my ancestors, and for which they had not found the answers, or that I had to solve or pursue the same problems."¹⁶ Although he himself had done a significant amount of transgenerational integration work, Jung had not theorized it as thoroughly as he might have. Nevertheless, his work contributed to the growing field of transgenerational analysis. For example, he explained that whatever does not emerge into conscious form will come back in the form of destiny.

Each in their own way, Freud, Jung, and other pioneers of Depth Psychology, have put forward natural laws suggesting how the psyche functions and how to access its secrets. In order to analyze the transgenerational unconscious, these pioneers have left us the best tools possible, the analysis of transferences¹⁷ and listening more intently to the unconscious and symbolic meaning behind symptoms.

¹⁶ Carl Jung (1966), *Memories, Dream, Reflections*, Vintage, NY.

¹⁷ The definition and functioning of transferences will be developed in chapter four.

While Depth Psychology established the link between repressed and denied experiences and unconscious contents, it had not gone beyond studying the unconscious and its link to childhood. Since then, we have been able to better recognize the impact of the intrauterine experience, allowing a more complete understanding of the bonds of filiation. Today, we know that our unconscious is also made up of the transgenerational legacies left to us by our ancestors. The debts we may contract during our own lives can repeat and amplify the ones we inherited from our forefathers. Famous in psychoanalytical literature, the “return of the repressed” (otherwise known as the awakening of the unconscious in the form of symptoms) is also tied to these transgenerational legacies.

The clarification of our genealogy helps to know what alienates us - our shadows. Transgenerational analysis facilitates access to these unconscious parts to know oneself better and to distinguish our Self from these transgenerational heritages. As therapeutic experience demonstrate, family trees are an excellent source of information to shed light onto the present.

Transgenerational analysis also offers a relatively simple and effective way to start introspective work. Solutions are then found within, replacing the need to project our unconscious conflicts onto the outside world. As will be discussed in another chapter, the lack of integration is at the origin of our projections. The transgenerational approach allows us to unveil the sources that influence our perception of reality. This form of analysis comes at a time when it is necessary to provide new answers to current hypermodern world problems, both at the individual and collective levels.

This discipline offers an alternative approach to the classic “explanatory” therapy, and overcomes the shortcomings of the medical model, as well as the all too general standards established by the DSM¹⁸.

Early transgenerational analyses

Leopold Szondi (1893-1986), a Hungarian doctor and psychologist who lived in Switzerland, and influenced by Freud and Binswanger, was a precursor of the analysis of hereditary factors. He created a new discipline, *fate analysis*, which studies the influence of hereditary dispositions in the choices and destiny of man. His *Psychology of Destiny* seeks to “unveil the patterns and the family figures transmitted in the hereditary lot of the person as regressive ancestral constraints that guide choices in love and friendship, choice of profession, the form of sickness and the kind of death, in short, the destiny of the individual.”¹⁹ Szondi recounts the case of a worker who, in order to obtain the money necessary for his planned expatriation, killed the cashier of his factory. Captured and sentenced to life imprisonment, he was released after fifteen years of good behavior. Szondi explains “he then became a preacher, married, and led a model religious life. In his family, we found criminals as well as a certain number of pastors.”

Having identified the importance of hereditary determinism, Szondi also recognized the function of integration

¹⁸ DSM, a medical reference for doctors, determines which symptoms should be medicalized and which should not.

¹⁹ Szondi Léopold (1972), *Introduction à l'analyse du destin*, vol. 1, éditions Nauwlaerts, Paris.

that he attributed to the “pontifex-ego,” which is close to my definition of the self in its individuation and healing properties. He also recognized the existence of a family unconscious. “Closely linked in its functioning to the personal and repressed unconscious of Freud and to the collective unconscious of Jung [...] While classic psychoanalysis works wonders with neuroses, it fails when treating specific kinds of trauma - as Freud himself admitted in 1937 – wherever the disturbance of the instinctual life and the ego is not due to personal experience of a trauma, but has been inherited from an earlier generation. For this category of psychic disease, the psychology of destiny (or fate analysis) has had to search for new ways of healing, all of which are connected with the unconscious, especially with the possibilities of hidden family stories. By this very fact we can affirm that *the psychology of destiny constitutes the bridge between genetics and the psychology of the depths.*”

In the 1970s, Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, both benefitting from phenomenological²⁰ and psychoanalytic training, also veered towards the fertile domain of transgenerational analysis. Like Ferenczi and Szondi, they are Hungarian of origin. Since their first works²¹ published in 1978, impressive transgenerational therapeutic testimony has built up. However, as surprising as it may seem,

²⁰ A branch of philosophy which focuses first and foremost the idea of being and being there (Dasein). It can evoke a sort of mindfulness but with, at its center, an authentic self who truly thinks.

²¹ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, 1994, University of Chicago Press.

the term “transgenerational” was for a long time misunderstood by most psychoanalysts. Other therapists and psychotherapists did not wait around for psychoanalysts to understand it before integrating this dimension of the unconscious into their theory. For example, after having participated in the seminar given by Nicolas Abraham, Anne Ancelin Schützenberger developed a more pragmatic analysis, known as the *Genosociogram*, a sort of family tree which depicts more psycho-affective information.

Meanwhile, and independently from each other, many therapists have deciphered the bonds between ancestors and their descendants. To name a few of the best-known: Bert Hellinger (*family constellations*), Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy (*family loyalty*), Serge Lebovici (*transgenerational mandates*), Rene Kaes (*inherited trauma*) and Alberto Eiguer, analyzing the “tribute to the ancestors.” So even if they are issued from different schools, therapists are increasingly incorporating transgenerational analysis into their practices.

Despite these important developments in private therapeutic practices, analysis of the unconscious continues to trigger considerable resistance in academic circles, which are historically bound to promote rationalism. This resistance has been further reinforced by the positivist medical model, giving rise to an even wider gap between the psychological need to give meaning to our experiences, and the growing policy of medicalizing the psyche.

The unspoken and the unthinkable

Generally speaking, working on integrating family stories relies on the symbolization of all that was unthought of

in the family tree. Elaborating psychological perspectives and seeking out rational or irrational truths, will progressively counterbalance the unfinished or unintegrated stories of our ancestors. If they are not integrated, these stories may duplicate in the same way DNA does, and the same consequences may recur. Experience has also shown that over the generations, simple unspoken words can take a heavier, unthinkable form, sometimes leading to acting out.

To analyze this transmission, Serge Tisseron²² proposed a model over three generations: whatever has not been integrated by the first generation becomes unthinkable for the next generation (which is deprived of direct verbal transmission), while the third generation may resort to acting out or other symptomatic behaviors. This view parallels that of Françoise Dolto, who believes that it takes three generations to produce a psychosis. In other words, an unspoken thought or a secret kept by the first generation, can lead to neurotic tendencies in the second generation, and psychotic tendencies and acting out in the third.

Never-ending conflicts, such as those of Sicilian vendettas, show the power of transgenerational alienation. Shakespeare illustrates this very well in his famous play *Romeo and Juliet*. Here, the Capulets and the Montagues determine their children's tragic destiny by perpetuating century-old conflicts.

²² Serge Tisseron (1995), *Le psychisme à l'épreuve des générations : clinique du fantôme*, Dunod, Paris.

Where Do We Come From?

2

An Ancient Wisdom

An awareness of and attention to the links between the generations goes a long way back in time. The co-authors of *Shamanism, Ancestors and Transgenerational Integration*²³ demonstrate the diverse manners in which traditional societies have dealt with transgenerational heritages.

Ancestor cults, for example, were practices for holding a memory of family stories and preventing them from becoming lost - in contrast to what happens in our hypermodern society. This way of remembering family histories limited the transmission of transgenerational alienation, also known as “ancestor’s syndrome.” Ancestor worship, a part of many ancient traditions, sought to maintain harmony and to assure a healthy balance with the world. As the famous Chinese proverb says, *to forget one's ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without roots.*

²³ *Shamanism, Ancestors and Transgenerational Integration*, Th. Gaillard, C. Michael Smith, Olivier Douville, Pierre Ramaut, Elisabeth Horowitz, Iona Miller, Myron Eshowsky, 2016, Ecodition, Geneva.

