

**Commentary on Franco Fornari's article:
*The delivery-birth and the unconscious feeling of guilt
as pure culture of death drive***

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ABSTRACT. – The commentary regarding Fornari's unpublished article highlights his approach to myth as a tool for searching for 'historical truths'. In reference to Freud and the death drive, the author analyzes the theme of childbirth and its connection with unconscious guilt in more depth. Subsequently, the author tries to trace how, through the recovery of myth and symbolism, we can reorient ourselves in psychoanalytic contemporaneity, with regard to the risk of being crushed by theoretical hypertrophy, often distorting deeper psychic truths.

Key words: myth, guilt, childbirth, death drive.

This is the story of a discovery that contains other findings. Fornari's unpublished work, preserved in a cellar and included in a larger project of psychoanalytic work, was discovered by his wife and nephew after his death.

It was approximately 1984, and at the age of sixty-four, Fornari was considering systematizing his collection of ideas theorized over many years into a complete work. Unfortunately, due to a heart attack in 1985, his intentions were interrupted and, only long after, were they discovered.

This material symbolically underwent an archaeological recovery of what was 'buried'.

If we think of the cellar as a metaphor for the unconscious, we can say that we have brought to light a hidden thought, just like the newborn's *nascent consciousness* when the retina of his/her eyes meets light for the first time (Fagioli, 1972). Thus, does this writing exist only when we decide to read and disseminate it?

The encounter with Fornari's thoughts, which were 'suspended' for about

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forty years, produces a suggestion of sorts. It has the charm of ancient relics, but, in handling them, there is concern about how the wear and tear of time may have made it delicate and fragile. The act of digging it up and reading it follows the way in which Fornari himself begins his reflections: “As the archaeologist goes in search of a buried truth, so the analyst can unravel a buried truth, but cannot replace it with a theoretical model”.

Fornari’s intent is to emphasize how a scientific model can distort a natural truth and that, therefore, the use of analytical construction is the most appropriate method to approach a historical truth that is to be unearthed. Although, for Spence, the historical truth of the patient is never attainable, since the clinical narrative is not the truth (Spence, 1987).

Since Freud compares analytical construction to delirium, Fornari believes it is useful to go in search of the historical truth behind the manifested scene. “Just as our construction is effective only from time to time because it gives back a passage of existence that has been lost, so too does delirium owe its strength of conviction to the part of historical truth that it has inserted in place of repudiated reality” (Freud 1937). He speaks of ‘historical truths’ to distinguish between the objective reality of past events and their representation in the patient’s mind.

His research uses the myth of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden to demonstrate how symbolic analysis can reveal a deep level of psychic reality.

In the myth of Eden, the expulsion of Adam and Eve lends itself to a psychoanalytic reading in which birth is experienced as an uprooting. Childbirth is the first trauma of every human being, the moment when intrauterine symbiosis is lost to enter a separate existence, marked by scarcity.

Nostalgia for the uterine condition turns into a sense of original guilt, into an unconscious desire to return to a lost unity. Fornari links this dynamic to the Freudian death drive (1920), understood as the return to the inorganic, suggesting that the trauma of childbirth is inscribed in our psyche as a deep memory. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920), the death drive is not to be confused with aggression: “We must maintain the impression that the death drives are by their nature mute, and that the noise of life comes mainly from Eros. Destructiveness, in fact, is deafening; disinvestment from the silent object” (Valdrè, 2016).

The distress of separation is the primary nucleus of the unconscious sense of guilt, a psychic trace that permeates human relations and that, according to Fornari, is the basis of war – a paranoid elaboration of sorrow. “We feel life is good and death is an evil that we must expel in order to save ourselves”, writes Fornari (1966), and in this process, we always seek a culprit to sacrifice. Fornari offers us an analysis in which the myth is not only a narrative of the past, but a psychic device that allows us to explore deep truths. Myth, like scientific thought, does not record the truth, but can produce it (Caprettini *et al.*, 1980). He shows how the original sin, pain of

childbirth and labour are metaphors for the human condition. In the myth, Adam and Eve discover nudity and feel shame: the passage to consciousness is marked by separation and guilt. The expulsion from Eden is the loss of the original unity, the intrauterine condition, and the price of knowledge is the awareness of death.

The interpretation of this unburied article by Fornari highlights the time elapsed since it was written to today. Men are more sons of their times than of their fathers (Bloch, 1949). We are immersed in a society that we create and that constitutes a dynamic of mutual regulation within us.

Freud, in 1920, formulated the theory of the death drive within a historical framework (the end of the First World War) and a personal one consisting of numerous and profound losses (the death of his daughter Sofia, the suicide of his pupil Tausk).

In Fornari's text, it could be assumed that childbirth, with mythical and phylogenetic references, is not only a process of theoretical analysis, but perhaps also a need to deal with the theme of old age and death. It is a text that fits into the context of the beginning of the 1980s, when the end of the Years of Lead in Italy was opening up to a phase of new prosperity. The last of modernism was giving way to Lyotard's postmodernism, that of the crisis of the great narratives. I wonder if Fornari felt the urge to criticize Freud's scientific positivism, sometimes distorting 'natural truths' such as guilt, and recovering, via myth, access to symbolic and revealing narratives of 'historical truths'. The main function of myths is to provide a discursive and narrative form to a truth that cannot be told and transmitted through a direct definition, but only in an indirect and analogical language: an 'as if' (Corrao, 1992).

I always wonder about the specific timing of a subject's theory.

A subject immersed in a process of constant self-echo organization, in the living balance between the subject and the world. In this article, I encountered a use of the symbolic that is no longer widespread in psychoanalysis today. The possibility of approaching a dream-delirium-myth with a meticulous associative/symbolic sounding is something faded, and much less traceable in the psychoanalytic interstices of comparison and formation.

I have the impression that neuroscience, which is a substantial aid to research and treatment, can sometimes be inserted as a new substitute for great narratives, occupying a creative space that psychoanalysis had given us in the past. As always, the problem lies not in the thing itself, but in how it is used. In this article Fornari offers us, albeit with his personal and arbitrary connections between myth and science, the possibility of returning to the analytical construction, the ability to reach a sort of truth, without the premise of an overlapping theoretical structure, while keeping it as a reference grid, confirming what is available in the associative-symbolic process of myth.

Green (1983) put the death drive in antithesis to the mind's ability to

symbolize experiences. Who knows if, with the current tendency to saturate every corner of the world with certain meanings, we are no closer to a return to the inorganic state than to an openness to creativity and the symbol. If by death drive, we mean a tendency to 'silence' everything that makes noise (Eros), we might agree that the automation of hyper-explanatory theory may obfuscate the existing unknown, in order to placate the analyst's anxieties.

One might therefore question how the advent of hypermodernity (Lypovestsky, 2004), with its extremism, its constant tension toward hyper-efficiency and hyper-scientificism, is not a recursive process of 'eternal return' – a twist of fate – to the much-criticized positivism of the late nineteenth century. In our contemporary psychoanalytic context, therefore, one may wonder whether there is not the risk of proceeding toward an objectivating or *evidence-based* drift, where the instrument of our work in the analysis room may no longer be accompanied by the poetry of an evenly-suspended attention that allows itself to proceed toward unknown routes together with our sailor-patient.

How important it is that the 'north-theory' of the psychoanalytic compass does not guide the boat against preconceived rocks that can only see theory, and no longer the patient and themselves.

The reason I initially agreed to comment on this article was not the content, which was at the time unknown, but the analogic beauty of those pages that, although buried, kept the hand that had written them alive. The side notes on the text, the erasures, and corrections on the original copy of his typewritten article, are themselves a material representation of that creative gesture that makes visible and leaves a trace of the paths of human thought. Uncertain gestures, because in doubting, he could come back and open up new thoughts.

I therefore think that the preservation of psychoanalysis, squeezed today into a hyper-fast and synthesizing world, can be searched for and found within some distant object, within a cellar, within something that in its perhaps unrecognizable being, allows us sufficient disorientation not to feel too sure of what we are encountering, but allows our minds, together with that of the other, to bring to light something new, that is, something unknown.

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