The Unconscious Body Image

Françoise Dolto
Translated by Sharmini Bailly

ROUTLEDGE

The Unconscious Body Image

The Unconscious Body Image espouses a completely original view of the links between physical and psychic development, providing fresh insight into our understanding of psychosomatic symptoms and child development.

Françoise Dolto describes how unconsciously held mental images of the body and its functioning impact upon the subject's feelings and ideas of themself, and conversely how emotions and ideas impact upon the body's functioning by way of these unconscious images. *The Unconscious Body Image* also presents Dolto's view of the development of mind in relation to unconscious body images generated at each stage of development (oral, anal, genital, latency and puberty), and ideas about psychic castration at each developmental stage and children's socialisation, filling a significant gap in psychoanalytic understanding of the mental integration of social law.

This book will be a key text for psychoanalysts in practice and in training, particularly those working with children, psychoanalytic psychotherapists and psychodynamic practitioners in the social sciences, childcare and education.

Françoise Dolto (1908–1988) was an acclaimed French psychoanalyst and paediatrician. In her early career, she was mentored by Sophie Morgenstern, and she later became a close friend of Jacques Lacan. She had a regular radio programme on the French national broadcast station France Inter and made many appearances on television and in print.

Sharmini Bailly is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist based in the UK. Her previous books include *The Lacan Tradition* (Routledge, 2018).

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Françoise Dolto
Translated by Sharmini Bailly

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Preface

As Françoise Dolto's daughter, I inherited both the immense honour and considerable responsibility of holding the copyright to my mother's works, and in this role my greatest challenge and duty has been to commission the English translation of *L'image Inconsciente du Corps*. This is why the publication of this translation brings me immense joy. I am profoundly grateful to all involved in this project: Sham Bailly, who took on the daunting task of translating the book; Anne Marie Canu, who persuaded Sham to accept this task; and Lionel Bailly, who supported them. Anne Marie has been by my side since my mother's death. As a psychoanalyst who worked with my mother, was close to her and is bilingual in English and French, she had an important role this project. After completing the translation, Sham Bailly reworked the text with the help of Lionel Bailly and Anne Marie Canu. Without it being planned from the beginning, three people therefore contributed to this translation, and it happens that in the Dolto Archives Association, it has been our practice for three or more people to work together to produce definitive versions of the texts. This is because Françoise Dolto had a very particular use of language, in which when she failed to find a word, which perhaps did not exist, she would invent it; and she also used expressions and stylistic formulations that were completely original, which makes it easy for a translator, even with the best intentions, to misunderstand and misrepresent her thinking.

Françoise Dolto was among those analysts, like D.W. Winnicott, who worked to embed psychoanalysis in society. Very early on, she published many articles in the mainstream press, and later, she presented a show on national radio: 'While a Child Appears' was a huge success. She held public conferences to packed halls and published several books, some – like this one – more theoretical, and others that were easier reads. Very much ahead of her time, she became an important personality beyond psychoanalysis, having enormous influence upon how children are viewed in society. She began in paediatrics and was one of the first to consider the child, however tiny, as an intelligent being always in a quest for meaning. Before her, children in France were thought of as vaguely more sophisticated digestive tubes; after her, they are thought of as sensitive beings in the process of becoming, to be respected and understood.

The impact in the media of her death was enormous, and such were the crowds that surged forward at her funeral that police had to close the road. Now, numerous roads, schools, libraries, nurseries and hospital departments bear her name. This notoriety undoubtedly attracted some jealousy, and she found herself marginalised by academic colleagues – not for the first time. In 1939, when she published her thesis, *Psychoanalysis and Paediatrics*, many of her psychoanalytic colleagues sneered at her way of considering the baby to be capable of understanding and interaction. This was revolutionary at the time.

In the tumultuous history of psychoanalysis, she held a unique, somewhat solitary place, even if she remained close to Jacques Lacan in friendship and in institutional matters to do with the transmission of psychoanalysis. While her seminars were well attended, she said she had no students and did not want to create a school, and would often say: 'Listen to what I say, listen to what others say to you and then do as you like.' However, at Armand Trousseau Hospital she revived the principle of the public consultation, at which she would see children in the presence of trainee psychoanalysts who functioned like a Greek chorus, with whom the children would sometimes interact. Until the end of her life, she tenaciously maintained this unique tool of transmission, doing her final consultations with the help of a portable oxygen tank. It was of great importance to her to help very small children and their parents to prevent the appearance of psychological disturbances. This is why she invented the Maisons Vertes – psychoanalytic spaces for parents and children – that have proliferated the world over.

This book, *The Unconscious Body Image*, is the culmination of her life's work, having been published only four years before her death. It is a confusing book for some, shifting as it does between theory and clinical work and written in an academic style. Françoise Dolto neither refers to nor quotes anyone, even if evidence suggests that she read everything published at the time. When asked who were her teachers, she replied: 'Babies are my teachers.' In this book, Françoise Dolto follows the thread of the of desiring subject and of identity in the process of construction, while giving an essential importance to the perceptive apparatus as the receptor and filter for the small human who is always in search of meaning. Her 'person in becoming' is structured within the quest for linkage, which is inseparable from his dependence while he is in the charge of his tutelary adults. She places in the foreground the role played by the senses in the elaboration of meaning, in other words the Symbolic, essential for the humanisation, of which symboligenic castrations would then be indispensable stages. In this, her theory as well as her clinical practice are profoundly original and innovative, perhaps too much so for them to find a place in academia, which she anyway never sought out. This probably explains why it is only now, more than 30 years after her death, that the English-speaking public is being presented here with the chance to discover this valedictory book, the culmination of her works, while it was all there in seminal form in her 1939 thesis, *Psychoanalysis and Paediatrics*.

Catherine Dolto

Foreword

This is not the first attempt at translating *L'image Inconsciente du Corps*. Previous attempts have been unsatisfactory, less because of the linguistic skills of the translators than because of their ability to understand Dolto's thinking.

When Sham Bailly sent me the first draft of her translation of Chapter 1 of this book, I was moved and fascinated: I felt I was hearing Dolto's own voice, but in a form I had not heard before. I wrote to Sham as follows:

> It is, to me, more than a translation, it is a transmission. it brings to my mind the words of Françoise Dolto when she said '*J'ai parlé anglais avant de parler français. Mes parents devaient me parler anglais pour que je comprenne*'. ('I spoke English before speaking French. My parents had to speak to me in English for me to understand.') It seems to me you are giving back to her her original language: reading you, it seems to me I am hearing her, in this first chapter where from the whole book will flow, talking from this very archaic place that made her so exceptionally attuned to the very young child (present in children and adults as well), this very archaic place in her that had been wounded when her Irish nanny was sent away, the open wound maybe being what allowed all through her life for this amazing communication with the archaic in her patient, so immediate and really amazing that it was sometimes deemed brutal (it happened to me at my first session with her, at the second session I told her '*vous allez trop vite*!' and she said 'Yes, I know.'). But that wound in her, that open wound that allowed free communication with the unconscious, happened when the words in her ears, when she had yet no speech but was in total communication with one person, this young Irish nanny who had such a love of life, were English words: it seems to me you are giving her back those words. Putting the reader in communication with this archaic was so hard for her in French (I think that is why writing was so difficult to her), and now it comes so naturally, so to speak, in your Chapter One. . . . To the end of her life she talked about her Irish nanny, whose name she did not even know, whenever she was asked how she had become an analyst.

Translation is first of all listening – each one of us with his or her own ears, such as our parents have made them, listening in the way an analyst listens. Listening to babies, newborns, infants before the age of words, their language unspoiled by words, which are always insufficient. I remember discussing this with FD during analysis. 'Yes,' she said, 'it is not words that have to be listened to but the spaces between words.' All analytic listening is an act of translation – the translation of meanings that come into being in the act of being heard.

Later, when discussing with Sham and Lionel the intellectual background to Dolto's ideas, I wrote to them again:

> Dolto did not have ideas, I mean preconceived ideas about any of her patients, adult or child. She listened to a baby as closely as she possibly could. And when she wanted to talk about it and no words were sufficient, she grabbed at whatever word came along to her on the spot, and the ambient words, considering Lacan's predominance at the time, were often Lacan-words. Of course. But she trusted her audience to not take them in the Lacan-sense but to try to listen, with her, to the baby she was talking about. A famous example is the mirror stage. When she attended his seminar, she told Lacan: 'I don't understand a word of what you say,' and he responded 'No matter. What I talk about is what you practice'. And he would send to her patients he found himself unable to deal with.

Late in her life, she would say, 'Lacan never had any influence on me. I was a fully fledged analyst when I met him.' But she would add, 'However, I have to say, when Lacan sent to me young analysts who had been in analysis with him, they understood what I told them.' And to these young analysts who had been attending Lacan's seminars and listening religiously to his discourse, the advice she gave them was 'Go to the park, sit on a bench close to the sandpit and stay there at least two hours, listening to the babies and the toddlers. They will teach you.'

If I were asked to describe Françoise Dolto, what I would say is that 'I have never, never, never, seen anyone listen to a child the way she listened to a child.' When questioned as to how she did it, she would answer, 'I don't know. Maybe I have always remained a baby.'

I am sure you know, having worked with babies, how they talk to each other, how they understand each other. How, in a family where one child poses difficulties and cannot make himself understood (because of an undiagnosed hearing difficulty, for instance, causing his language to be totally incomprehensible), it is the brother or sister closest in age who can become his interpreter.

Maybe FD had never left that place, where babies talk to each other, where body and mind are still one, where the whole body speaks, where words of course are always insufficient. It is a language we have all of us known at some point, and maybe some of us have remained closer to it than others. Language before words.

But then, when you try to put that into words, it can well seem obscure, unless the reader can put himself back into that stage as well. Not all analysts are there.

FD put it, in the end, like this: '*L'analyste, c'est l'enfant. Mais l'enfant tout petit, avant les mots*' – 'the analyst is the child, but a very small child, before words.'

Words are always so insufficient, yet we have to use them – they are all we have. French words? English words? Or any other language, but 'true words,' those that follow the mother's life-giving milk – 'the mother tongue,' so rightly named.

Anne Marie Canu

Introduction

Sharmini Bailly

This book is a singular attempt to form a theory of how interpersonal dynamics structure the human mind and, in turn, how that governs the functioning of the body, within the mid-century French psychoanalytic tradition. It is perhaps Françoise Dolto's most ambitious book, in which she tries to set out her own unified theory of the psychic development of human beings in relation to the development of their bodies. Her writing reflects her conceptual processes, which are brilliantly intuitive interpretations of clinical material but not always closely and logically argued. She offers a boldly abstract concept – the unconscious body image – together with the clinical cases from which she has derived her ideas about it, or vice versa, but often leaves it to the reader to build the logical, theoretical bridge between her metapsychological construct and the clinical example.

Dolto is far from being alone in this way of writing: her contemporaries Lacan, Winnicott and Bion all did the same, which is what makes reading them difficult and slow but ultimately, if you put in the work of figuring out the links, very rewarding. It could be that with all these great theorists, the lack of explanation or logical argument of their insights is due to their historical period. In the mid-twentieth century, psychoanalysis was developing with the full untutored vigour of a latency period child, and despite the quite extraordinary achievements of Freud and others of the founding generation, the mid-century analysts were still working with a quite rough-hewn set of psychoanalytic theories, all of which needed further refining; moreover, they copied the methods of their predecessors in hacking out their ideas from clinical rock – stating what they thought without always explaining how the thought was derived. In my view this is not for want of trying, as I think Lacan and Bion in particular tried very hard in their different ways to explain themselves, though without full success; but it is to their daring to venture their insights without stringent justification that we owe most psychoanalytic theory.

When Françoise Dolto was training in psychoanalysis and beginning to practice it in the 1930s and 1940s, there was little psychoanalytic theory available in translation in France. Her ideas continued to develop throughout the rest of her life, but Anne Marie Canu, who knew her very well, has told me that Dolto stated with some pride that apart from Freud, she had 'learned nothing' from any

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living psychoanalyst with the exception of Winnicott. This I find both very hard to believe in one way, and completely credible in another.

I find it hard to believe she remained completely untouched by the thinking of others because the terminology she uses and the concepts encoded therein reflect a strong Lacanian influence; while her followers may dispute that she 'learned' this from Lacan in any formal sense, his teachings in the mid-twentieth century formed the standard framework of reference for French psychoanalysis, and she might quite simply have absorbed them by social osmosis. Whether by intention or by accident, her writing is imbued with the Lacanian concepts of the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary orders, signifiers and signification, the mirror stage, the trace of desire, fantasy, libido and a nirvana-ish death drive devoid of aggression, the phallus and castration.

If, on the other hand, I find it *easy* to believe she was little influenced by anyone else, it is because she is writing here about the interpersonal space in a way that seems completely unaware of the British object relations tradition, or of American ideas of self- and other-representations – all of which pre-date this book. And it is from this peculiar blend of Lacanian-theory-by-exposure-if-not-design and Dolto's intuitive clinical brilliance that arises the importance of this book. It is a sort of object relations theory without ever a mention of objects; instead, the interpersonal dynamic is tethered closely to the mid-century French psychoanalytic concepts listed previously. And the result she arrives at is the unconscious body image.

So, what exactly is this? In the first chapter alone, Dolto gives more than ten different definitions of the unconscious body image, and nearly as many of its counterpart, the bodily schema. And it seems that the harder she tries to explain what it is and how it is constituted, the more obscure it becomes. These are some quotations from the section 'The Body Image Is Not the Bodily Schema':

> The body image is specific to a libido in a situation, to a type of libidinal relationship.
>
> the bodily schema is partly unconscious but also preconscious and conscious, while the body image is eminently unconscious; it can become partly preconscious only when it is associated with conscious language, which uses metaphors and metonymy referring to the body image, as much in facial as in verbal expressions.
>
> The body image is the living synthesis of our emotional experiences: interhuman, repetitively experienced through elective erogenous sensations, archaic or current. It can be considered as *the unconscious symbolic embodiment of the desiring subject*.
>
> The body image is at every moment the unconscious memory of all the relational experience and at the same time is present, alive and in a dynamic

> situation that is both narcissistic and inter-relational: it can be camouflaged or revealed in the here-and-now of a relationship, through any expression – linguistic, in drawing, modelling, musical invention, in plastic creations but also in facial expression and gesture.
>
> it is in the body image, which underlies narcissism, that time is interwoven with space, that the unconscious past resonates in the present relationship. In the present moment, something of a past relationship always shows itself, like a watermark. The libido is mobilised in the immediate relationship but an archaic relational image can be awakened, resuscitated; the image that was repressed returns.

For the sake of non-Lacanian readers who like to be able to fit a new concept into their existing conceptual framework, I would like to suggest a definition of the unconscious body image as follows: *the unconscious body image is a self-representation created through interactive communication with the object*, the object being at first maternal and later including all other adults responsible for the child's upbringing. The communication is at first mostly through physical interactions (holding and handling in Winnicottian terms); affective value is added to these interactions through the consistency of linkage of what Dolto calls 'subtle' factors with the gross 'substantial' value of the interaction (subtle = the smell and sound of mother and the words she gives to familiar things, as opposed to substantial = the milk provided by her breast that satisfies hunger); the affective value of these 'subtle' factors creates in the child *desire as distinct from need*; then a series of 'castrations' (privations of previous modes of satisfaction of desires) channels the infant's desire into increasingly socially appropriate activities until the child is fully 'humanised.'

This book puts the complex nature of interpersonal interactions squarely in the centre of French psychoanalytic theory, where it had been missing. While Lacan may have devoted a whole seminar to 'the Object Relation' (1956–57), his 'object' is an object of desire, an abstraction derived from the imaginary phallus, rather than an ideational representation founded upon lived interactions. In my view, it is the British school's 'object' that more closely describes the mother and other 'tutelary adults' who loom so large in Dolto's work. The repeated, consistent interactions and characteristics (smell, touch, sound) unique to the mother are that which structure the baby's desire and unconscious bodily image, in the same way that the object relation structures the infant's expectations, anxieties and ultimately its self-representation. This form of object relating closely resembles Daniel Stern's Representation of an Interaction that has become Generalised (RIG), while the object itself may be the 'evoked companion' that accompanies an RIG.[1]

1 Stern, D. N. (1985). *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*. Chapter four, section titled 'Integrating the Self-Invariants.'

So, what does Dolto's formulation of the interpersonal in the structuring of the child's subject bring to the sum of our knowledge, given that other schools have already focused so much attention upon it? A great deal, I would suggest.

Firstly, Dolto clarifies how the distinction between desire and need arises at the earliest stage of infancy. Dolto has desire deriving from the affective charge attached to 'the subtle' (smell, sound, touch of mother) that consistently accompanies 'the substantial' interactions of feeding and handling. This has implications for the construction of the primordial signifier, as it is 'the subtle' that becomes its transitional phenomena and carries the trace of desire. Dolto's infants' desire is for *the mother in communication with them*, even if their need at the beginning of life is still for feeding and cleaning, and this desire is far more important than need in the structuring of the subject as a unique human being – the Lacanian 'desiring subject' – as distinct from an animal representative of a species whose needs are instinctively and stereotypically satisfied. From the outset of human life, desire is coded in the subtle phenomena of mother–baby communicative exchange, and not in the phenomena of the satisfaction of physiological need. Lacanians struggling with his graph of desire and formula of fantasy may find that Dolto's ideas on these matters could resolve some questions.

Secondly, where the cornerstone of psychoanalysis in both its practice and its ideas of infant development is the communication and interplay of minds, Dolto takes this a step further into the purely physical realm of early infancy, even of foetushood. While it is a Lacanian truism that it is through language that the human subject is formed, she insists we broaden our ideas about language to include all attempts to communicate, whether by physiological functioning (e.g. infantile diarrhoea), physical gestures, facial expressions, sounds or later speech. Drawing upon her experience as a paediatrician as well as psychoanalyst, she describes case after case of childhood functional disturbance in which the body has tried, with varying degrees of desperation, to communicate what could not be formed into a thought.

Thirdly, the unconscious body image is a conceptualisation of self-representation unlike any other in its emphasis upon and detailed explanation of how it is grounded in the physical. It is not a body image in the familiar sense used so popularly today by young people who feel social pressure to look a certain way (although a Doltonian understanding may help elucidate these concerns); it is an unconscious and imaginary self-representation founded at the outset of life by perception, proprioception and interoception, then elaborated through the affective and communicative aspects of holding and handling, and finally by the more flexible and powerful tool of speech. Dolto points out how ideational representation in the form of speech can override even the limitations of the real body so that people born with a severe disability can have an unconscious body image capable of running, leaping, playing music and flying, if their parents always spoke to them about these things as if they could imagine what they felt like; and she contrasts this with able-bodied people who are functionally crippled because of pathologies in their unconscious body image. It is therefore in the pathology of

the unconscious body image that we need to look for direction in our treatment of psychosomatic disorders, eating disorders, hysterical conversion disorders and certain sexual disorders. The section in Chapter 3 in which she distinguishes between psychosomatic disorders and hysteria is illuminating, and the argument here depends entirely on understanding *who the object of communication is in each case* – whether it is another person (or object in the British sense) with whom the subject is in communication via the symptom, or if the symptom creates an entirely narcissistic communication in which the ill body-part represents for the subject a constantly communicating, libidinally invested part object.

Fourthly and finally (though only for the purposes of this introduction, as I am certain that readers will discover many other ramifications of her theory), the second chapter of this book, 'The Body Images and Their Destiny: The Castrations,' illuminates the whole vexed question of how children come to accept the law and become socialised, as opposed to dissocial, human beings. In my view, this issue has been a kind of holy grail for psychoanalysis ever since Freud postulated the dissolution of the Oedipus complex as the mechanism by which the child comes to accept that he cannot marry his mother out of a fear of castration – literally having his penis chopped off. He says that although this renouncement of desire comes about firstly through fear, it becomes acceptable through an identification with paternal authority: 'The authority of the father or the parents is introjected into the ego, and there it forms the nucleus of the super-ego.'[2] This proposition has caused controversy since its publication, but few have argued very hard against the basic clinical observation that children do go through a phase of wishing to 'claim' partnership with the parent of the opposite sex and rejecting their same-sex parent, followed by an acquiescence to the state of affairs in the home; or that this is accompanied by an often stronger identification with the same-sex parent and usually ends the period of turbulence and heralds the onset of a more creative and productive latency phase. Because of these commonplace observations, it is hard entirely to dismiss the Oedipus complex as the gateway through which a child must pass in order to integrate social law into his or her mind.

Lacan took up the challenge of making the Freudian formulation work better, by treating the ideas of phallus and castration as purely imaginary and symbolic. His paternal metaphor and Law-of-the-Father are more satisfactory formulations of how the subject submits to a symbolic castration that in reality means accepting a language-based explanation for why he or she cannot always have mummy to him- or herself, but this still requires a certain suspension of disbelief and turning a blind eye to the practical realities of children and their families. There is something rather mystical about the idea of the castration as an initiatic experience that magically creates a barred subject submitted to the law.

2 Freud, S. (1924). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, 171–180.

With incredible observational common sense, Dolto demystifies this. Instead of castration, she writes of 'castrations' in the plural and shows us how every prohibition of the satisfaction of desire in a particular way that was once permitted constitutes a castration, which can be 'symboligenic' and lead to the 'promotion' (developmental forward-movement) of the child, or can be experienced as purely painful, distressing and pathogenic. She writes of well-delivered castrations as having an effect similar to that of the pruning of a plant, where by the snipping off of the early blooms of libidinal pleasure, the libidinal drive is redirected into the next phase of development. Every phase of development involves a castration, even the birth phase: there is umbilical castration, oral, anal, pre-Oedipal genital and then Oedipal castration. She is also clear that badly administered castrations are not symboligenic and may cause psycho-pathological outcomes, including perversions and the antisocial mindset. I will go no further in précising what is well set out in this book, but want only to say that when I taught Dolto's views on how a child integrates social law in his mind to a group of non-psychoanalytically trained practitioners working with disturbed latency-age children (teachers, teachings assistants and residential care workers), they showed an immediate, gut-level understanding of it and could relate to the theory with practical examples of their own. I can think of no higher recommendation of this piece of work than that.

Readers from the British and American IPA traditions unfamiliar with Lacanian ideas and use of words that they may understand differently may be inspired by this book to try to find out more about those terms of reference. I am just going to elaborate on one thing, for the sake of disambiguation. It is Dolto's neologism 'symboligenic' that is crucial to understanding her ideas about castration and the acceptance of social laws. I do not think this should be understood as 'symbol creating' in the sense that Kleinians speak of symbol formation.[3] Rather, it should be understood in reference to Lacan's Borromean knot of Real, Symbolic and Imaginary orders that structure the human psyche; it is therefore something that contributes to the development of the Symbolic realm in the child's mind.

Incidentally, in proposing a process whereby the castrations become symboligenic, Dolto illuminates also the mechanism of sublimation, which eluded Freud all his life (or at least is missing from his published work). By way of the linkage of drive and desire, she suggests that it is by the deviation of desire from the now-forbidden means of its gratification that the drive bound up with it becomes refocused and reinvested in other, more culturally and socially valued and valuable means of gratification:

> The drive thus repressed undergoes a dynamic modification and desire, the initial goal of which has been forbidden, and aims at its satisfaction through new means, sublimations – means which demand for their satisfaction a process of elaboration that was not demanded by the object first aimed at.

3 Segal, H. (1957). Notes on Symbol Formation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 38: 391–397.

Dolto's writing style is discursive – at times she seems to be speaking out loud to students and talks around a subject (usually a clinical case) until her discourse brings her naturally to the next idea. The book is by turns an easy, fluid read or so dense with complex ideas that pause for a great deal of thought is required. I wish readers as much enjoyment, enrichment and satisfaction in reading this book as I obtained out of translating it.

Chapter 1

The unconscious body image

Bodily schema and body image

At the start of my child psychoanalytic practice (1938), on the advice of Sophie Morgenstern,[1] the first child psychoanalyst in France, I offered paper, colour pencils and a little later plasticine to children who wished to understand the unknown internal causes of their known and lived difficulties.

Drawings, smudged colours and shapes are spontaneous means of self-expression for most children. They like to talk about what their hands have translated of their fantasies, and to verbalise what they have drawn or modelled to those who listen to them. It is sometimes without logical connection (for the adult) with what the adult believes she sees in it. But what is most surprising has been imposed on me, little by little: that the agencies of the Freudian theory of the psychic apparatus – the id, ego and superego – are detectable in all free compositions, be they graphic (drawings) or plastic (models) etc. These productions of the child are indeed true represented fantasies in which the unconscious structures are decipherable. They are decipherable as such only by way of the discourse of the child, which, when spoken to the analyst, anthropomorphises and gives life to the different parts of the drawing. This is what is particular in child analysis: what in adults is deciphered from their associations of ideas upon a recounted dream, for instance, can in children be illustrated by what they say about their drawings and plastic compositions, which lend support to their fantasies and the confabulations of their transference relationships.

The mediator of the three psychic agencies (id, ego and superego), in the allegorical representations provided by the subject, showed itself to be specific: I have called it the body image.

Example 1

Two drawings of an 11-year-old child with serious tics.

1 Who committed suicide in 1940 when the Germans entered Paris.

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The first drawing: a horse whose head could not fit into the frame of the paper, on which there was a rider who fought with an enemy who was not totally visible but whose sword could be seen arriving from the top left of the picture, threatening the rider's head, while to the lower right part of the picture a venomous snake could be seen, which (according to the child) was going to bite the rider's horse. In this picture, the horse has no head while the rider has one.

The second drawing, made at another session, was a variation on the previous motif. The head of the rider was not completely on the sheet of paper; the horse had a head but there was no space on the paper for its tail. The snake was replaced by the head of a tiger to the bottom left that was ready to attack the horse. The tiger's head is in fact on the side where the horse's head should be, but lower down.

At the invitation of the analyst, the young boy talked about his drawings, putting himself in the place of all the characters and, from the position of each of them, could imagine and talk about what they represented. Thus, what appeared successively was a head that signified oral devouring – the head of the tiger; a head that mastered the anal musculature, represented by the horse's head; while the mastery of the rider's head signified the human being. While the three heads could be present interchangeably, the child excluded the possibility of them all being present in the drawing at the same time. Also, there was always a danger for the rider, represented either as the orality inherent in a body (that of the tiger) or by the venomous snake that from behind shows the earthy and anal forces that could avenge themselves on the individual; and at the same time, the sword of a hierarchically superior human that takes aim at him.

Subsequently, in the last drawing of this child, the danger is represented by a lightning bolt that destroys simultaneously the rider, the horse and probably other animals that were there, and which found themselves in conflict with the living agencies, a conflict represented by the attack.

The explanation of these different dangers could be discovered through free association about enemies, storms, venomous or devouring dangers – figurative themes linked with a family drama.

This involved the death of the child's paternal grandfather, which was followed by family conflicts linked with inheritance, and the child's father being witness to a murder attempt on one of his brothers by the eldest of the sibling group. The child had learned about this by overhearing the conversation of his parents while sleeping in their bedroom at his grandparents' house. Everything had been telescoped in his mind – the oral greed of the inheritance, the murder taboo and the astonishment at his parents' connivance as they spoke in his presence in low tones in the conjugal bed, siding with the would-be murderer – who fortunately had only injured the other (in an apparent hunting accident) – and agreeing to hide it. The child's tics had begun on their return home after the grandfather's funeral.

Thanks to the sequential drawings, we can see how the analysis of the unconsciously represented memories and associations allowed the freeing of what seemed like irresolvable contradictions for the boy, who could not at the same

time keep his head, his muscular vitality and control of his behaviour. He found himself a silent witness and therefore complicit in the parental conversation, which had a dehumanising effect with regard to the code of law. But, importantly, what allows us to see that the psychoanalysis of children is possible is that he himself brought the data for interpretation in what he said about his phantasmagorical drawings: he was the snake who thought like that, he the tiger's head, which represented the dangerous mother (whom his father called the tigress) with whom he identified, and who was dangerous to the horse, which in this case represented the father; and all the while, the sword of God, replaced by the lightning, comes to strike the child and injure his humanisation, as by judging his father, the accomplice of his murderous uncle, he too appears guilty in the eyes of the law. What he heard in their speech was that his parents, especially his father (as his mother was agonised about being in the secret), were in their desire also transgressors of the law. In addition, as the chance witness of the conjugal discussions in the house of his paternal family line, he became in the moment an incestuous child.

Example 2

Concerns a highly inhibited child of around 10 years of age who had almost no voice and a fixed, anguished smile. He could say nothing about himself and apparently didn't dream. When asked to express himself in drawing, he started to make graphic representations of 'tank battles.' In fact, all the drawings of his first sessions represented this theme in a way that showed clearly the magnitude of his inhibition in relation to others. For instance, in one of his drawings there was a tank drawn pale and tremblingly in the middle of the page, and only at the extreme right-hand side, the end of the cannon of another. That cannon fired nothing; the only shell discharged in the picture was from the visible tank, though directed away from the other so that the invisible tank could not be damaged.

Session after session, this impossible combat between two tanks continued like this until it was replaced by one between two boxers drawn in profile each with only one arm visible, keeping a respectable distance from each other. The problem of rivalry was thus confirmed in the form of the impossibility of body-to-body contact. From the start of this series of drawings, the boxers lacked either a head or feet, because both could not be accommodated in the space of the paper. Realising this, he re-drew the boxers on their knees before each other, but their arms, even when extended, could not touch each other.

When at last, after several sessions, he managed to make the two boxers stand face to face, what appeared in the drawing was that one had a stripy top, and in response to my question, if he were in the drawing, he would be that one. However, the associations he made with the striped shirt showed it was the shirt of a classmate, who having taken home a bad report, received a spanking from his father.

> I asked: 'You would like your father to give you a spanking?'
> 'Ah! That's not what I mean, but he has a dad who looks after him.'

In fact, this child had a father who was completely indifferent to him and who had never recognised the child as someone valuable. All the inhibitions of the child could be explained as the self-destruction of his virile libido by the absence of a possible identification with a father who did not recognise himself as such, and who did not recognise in his son a boy increasing in value, as he had no interest in him. There was even a reversal of the Oedipal situation: it was the father who was jealous of his son and would not allow him to construct his identity in reference to himself in elaborating the psychic agencies of ego, superego and ego-ideal, because he was not an interlocutor for his son, nor had he a superego that inhibited the non-observance of the law of work. He only knew how to say 'be quiet,' 'go away,' 'leave me alone.' This means he could not bear the ego-ideal of a phallic-oral boy who had the right to speak to his father and to be in a dialogue with him. The child therefore felt he was too big a danger for his father as he (the father) was scared of him; at the very least, the father, in negating him, behaved as if he was.

It was the interpretation by way of these drawings that brought to light the libidinal self-inhibition because of the insecurity of the father with regard to his child, which was resolved by the child in a puerile life of no competition and therefore no creativity, all libido blocked by the danger the child felt he posed to his father. The desired ego was to be the son of a strong father capable of controlling the inhibition of his son towards work and formative of a superego that inhibits laziness: a father who could be an ego-ideal. His dream was to be like the boy with the striped sweater, with a father who was interested in whatever interested his son (the father of the boy with the striped sweater also rewarded him whenever he got good school reports). It was the boy's mother who had herself knitted him that beautiful striped sweater, so there was in that family a mother who could love her child without making her husband non-existent, while he continued to be a father who controlled and at the same time supported the energy of his son, so that he becomes a social being, armed for life.

It is in these volumes of representation in space – volumes that express intentionality – that the child expresses himself. At the start, it seemed to be about drawing a scene, but in reality, by the ways in which he interpreted himself, in which he spoke of his drawings, he showed in these graphic stagings how he was managing the part instincts of his desire that were in conflict with the part instincts of his desire at another level. These levels of the psyche are what Freud described as the ego, ego-ideal and the superego. And the energy brought to light in these imaginary scenarios of the drawings and models is nothing other than libido expressed passively or actively by the body – passively in a psychosomatic balance or actively in relationships with others.

Let us give an example of a situation where plasticine modelling is the representational support.

Example 3

A young man in lycée class 3, a brilliant but 'very nervous' 14-year-old pupil, was brought to me for a consultation. The complaint was that at school, he was

compulsively kicking the tables until they came apart. The mother who accompanied the boy herself had bruised legs with ulcers on her shins. She told me that aside from her own legs, his strange acts targeted the foot of her side of the conjugal bed and the family dining table leg on the side where she usually sat.

During this first contact, all that the boy could tell me about his symptom was, 'I can't help it, it's stronger than me.'
'But how come this always targets your mum and not your dad?'
'I don't know. I don't do it on purpose.'
Saying that he couldn't draw, he chose to make a plasticine model and created an old well, very artistically reproduced. I said, 'A well – what have you to say about that?'
'Well, there's water at the bottom, it's an old-fashioned well. Nowadays there aren't any wells.'
'Yes. And what can be hidden in wells?'
And together, we came to talk about wells and the truth that is supposed to spring naked from them. As the session came to an end, we had to arrange the subsequent meetings, and the young man, who seemed quite capable to me, said, 'Ah, you have to ask Mum.'
'Why do I have to ask your mother? Don't you know when you are free?'
'No, you have to ask Mum.'
Mother then came and sat on his left. While she talked to me about dates for subsequent sessions, the young man took his mother's right hand in his left and used her index finger to stroke the inside of the model well, apparently without her noticing this. Instead of letting him leave with his mother, I said to her, 'Please wait a moment, I need to speak to your son again.'
She left and I asked the boy, 'What was the meaning of the gesture you made with the index finger of your mother in your model?'
'Me? What? I don't know . . .' He looked surprised, flustered, answering as if he had forgotten or had noticed nothing.
I described to him what I had seen him do, and added, 'What does it make you think about – your mum's finger in the hole of the well?'
'Well, I can't go to the loo . . . Mum doesn't let me go to the loo at school because she has to see, she still supervises my poo.'
'Why? Have you got a long-term intestinal problem?'
'No, but she wants to, and she creates scenes if I have a poo at school.'
'Go and get your mother.'
The mother returned and confirmed that she too had not noticed him playing with her finger in the well. I told her that her son, who was still present, had told me that she found it necessary to check his excrements.
'Well, Madame, is it not the duty of a mother to maintain the good functioning of her children's bodies? Even my eldest son [a 21-year-old boy] – I massage his anus every time he goes to pass a motion.'
'Ah, yes – and why?'

> 'The doctor ordered me to do that. When my eldest son was 18 months old, he had a prolapse of the rectum and the doctor told me to massage his anus after every motion, to push back the prolapse.'

It was around this problem – that the mother could not bear that the vegetative functioning of her sons become autonomous – that the apparently 'nervous' illness of the 14-year-old boy had been organised, first at pre-puberty and then at puberty.

The boy was also expressing his jealousy of his older brother, who had the right and prerogative to their mother's anal massage, while he only got his mother's visual inspection of his excrement – he had never had the 'luck' of having a rectal prolapse when he was small.

The well was the projection of a part image of the anal body: it represented the boy's rectum, with which he linked the 'truth' about a woman's sexuality in her enjoyment of excrement. Overall, he had remained stuck at an anal sexuality, fixed that way by the perverted desire of a mother, innocently incestuous towards her sons under the cover of 'medicine' and 'duty,' touching the 'good functioning' of the object-body of her children.

This also allowed us to understand the meaning of the motor symptom of aggression by kicking. The motor functioning that, when socially adapted, is an expression of the sublimated anal pleasure, was altered in this boy. His two bottom limbs came up and behaved in his symptom as a substitute for the third lower member – the penile member. His legs kicked the legs of his mother as he was not able to penetrate her vagina with his penis.

Finally, one can see played out the rivalry with the eldest son, an eldest son who could only imperfectly take the part of an ego-ideal, being more a regressive model that the younger, since earliest times, would have liked to supplant.

Example 4

This was also an example using modelling. An 8-year-old boy created an armchair during a session. I asked him, 'Where would this be?'

> 'In the attic.'
> 'But it looks quite solid, and very solid armchairs don't get put in the attic.'
> 'Yes, that's true.'
> 'So, who would it be, this armchair, if it were someone?'
> 'It would be Grandpa . . . because they say he is old and he doesn't want to die.'
> 'And is that annoying, that he won't die?'
> 'Well, yes, because we haven't got room at home and we have to be in Dad and Mum's bedroom, he doesn't want anyone to sleep with him in the other room.'

So here you have an inconvenient old person whom the parents had taken on in the hope that he would die soon, a paralysed old man who was always sitting in

an armchair and whom they would have liked to put in the attic with other broken objects. The armchair represented the encumbering body of the overly well old man who was impinging on the lives of a family in a small dwelling. It seems certain that the child could not have told this story in any way other than by this fantasy, which illustrates an anal fixation with the seat, literally speaking, which had also made this child soil himself. It was because of his encopresia that he had come for the psychotherapy consultation.

There again, one can see how a child with the help of a plastic production anthropomorphises what Freud distinguished of the psychic agencies. The grandfather incarnated an anal superego (guilt about doing, about dynamic and progressive action). The problem was to eject this being while keeping and respecting him. This was probably the reason why the child had anal retentions that were evacuated by the non-control of the sphincter, at the same time as failing in the sublimation of oral and anal drives, the mental manipulations that represent scholarity for a child.

These examples are interesting because they show us how in all free composition the body image is represented and recounted: the associations supplied by the child come to actualise the conflictual link between the three agencies of the psychic apparatus.

With children (and psychotics), who unlike adults engaging in free association, cannot speak directly about their dreams and fantasies, the body image is for the subject a medium for expressing them, and for the analyst the medium for recognising them. It is, therefore, a 'said' – a 'said' to be decoded, and for which the analyst alone has not got the key. It is the associations of the child that bring the key; it is by this that he finds himself to be, at the end of the day, the analyst. For it is he who manages to apprehend himself as the lieu of the contradictions that inhibit the mental, social, sexual and emotional powers appropriate for his age.

Let it be understood: the body image is not the image that is drawn here, or represented in models; it is what is revealed in the analytic dialogue with the child. This is why, contrary to what one believes in general, the analyst cannot know how to interpret straightaway the graphic or plastic material brought to her by the child; but it is that, which in association with her work, can give the elements of a psychoanalytic interpretation of his symptoms; and there again, not directly but in association with the spoken narrative (e.g. the striped sweater of the boxer). This means that talking about the image – the body image – doesn't imply that it is only of the imaginary order, since it is also of the symbolic order, being the sign of a certain level of libidinal structure involved in a conflict that is to be disentangled by the narrative of the child. And the listener must receive it through the narrated events of the child's personal history.

The bodily schema is not the body image

The preceding examples allow us to focus on these two terms: one must not confuse body image with bodily schema.