

The body creates the head: sensations inventions and affective transformations in gruoups of children

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Abstract

The body with its resources of sensoriality, expressions and gestures is at the centre of the scene in children's groups, the heart of the action, imagination, invention and exchange. An individual and collective process of ongoing creation and redefinition of relations between the body, the mind and the external world is initiated around this stimulus and common catalyst.

For psyche to really become creative without being limited to reality, the child needs to experiment through his body the mesh between sensory and imagination, shape and symbol, playing imaginary roles allowing him to embed the quality of objects, turning them into his own, reinventing his inside world.

Through the clinical material we can follow the ways of transforming and modulating excitement, fears, desires, the image of oneself and of others, to start feeling and thinking in a more original and creative manner.

Key words: body-mind relation, imagination, excitement, mimesis, syncretic sociality, creativity.

As I reflected on the theme of the body represented in thousands of ways in the groups of children that I have conducted, by association I was reminded of a book that fascinated me when I was young, "Monsieur Teste" by Paul Valéry (1896), which offers a sharp-witted account of the ideals, torments and contradictions of an original intellectual immersed in our Western culture. The image of Monsieur Teste, retrieved from memory, was perhaps the only one that could fully explain, by contrast, the favourite game of Matteo, an eight-year-old boy, during the group's first year: he would draw a big body, filling up almost the entire page, without a head. The latter, instead, was made out of putty: he would attach it to the body, then lift up the sheet of paper, and the head, which was heavier, would fall off, making all the group participants laugh. He would stick the head back on, and so it would go over an over again. Sometimes Matteo pretended his own head was too heavy and would roll off, always to amuse everyone.

We are so accustomed to considering the head as the center of identity, attributing to it an undisputed primacy in the organization, control, and development of the person and its highest functions, that at times we are worried by or intolerant of the way in

which children, especially in a group, express the body-mind relationship during play. It is not the mind – as it is more and more in adolescents and later in adults – that invents the body, its image, style, the character to play with others, but the body that must gradually create a head capable of understanding it, holding it together, wrestling with the different parts and instances that press forcefully, disruptively, often in contrast with each other and with the world. It is a difficult endeavour, which proceeds by trial and error, and often requires letting an ineffective and cumbersome head roll off in order to try on a new one.

With this paper and the clinical material presented, I would like to show how the body constitutes the authentic centre of action, imagination, invention, exchange in groups of children, and how this common stimulus and catalyst triggers a process of ongoing creation and redefinition of relations between body, mind and the outside world. The head has to reckon with all of this in order to accompany the body in its growth, without incurring excessive dysmorphisms and contrasts.

If “in the course of development, and apparently by different degrees,” A. Phillips (1995) writes, “the body must lose its oppressive immediacy for the child in order to become its most paradoxical property,” in childhood it is not yet the object of the mind, what generally becomes eclipsed, as described by A. Ferrari (1992), and rises to awareness through fatigue, pain and desire, but on the contrary, it is the first true subject, the ‘employer’ of a mind that is still in the making, which initiates the narrative.

There is a special bond between the group and the body, a symbolic bond, which powerfully evokes emotional and cognitive processes. The image of the group as a body, its members being the limbs, “being and constituting a body”, has always been the most widespread and effective metaphor of the group in different social and cultural contexts, from politics to sports, from work to religion (the Body of the State, Institutional Organs, the arm of the Church, Organic Plan, etc.). According to R. Kaës (1976), “the image of the body organizes in a special way the group-object representation.”

The group, in fact, stirs up instinctive and intense fantasies linked with the original bonds, characterized by fusion and indistinction, incorporation and devouring mechanisms, which are easily associated with bodily functions, especially primitive ones. On the other hand, the physical body is often experienced and thought of as a group, a set of mutually interacting parts and organs.

Body-groups, therefore, which identify with the large group-bodies, taking on their power and value, but which must defend themselves from the risk of loss of individuality, from the monstrosity of confusion and absence of limits, mirroring themselves in them and projecting onto them their internal stage, their irreducible bodiliness and organicness.

“Constituting a body,” Kaës continues in the same text, “means, first of all, being a body in the group, through the group and its reflections: this imaginary incarnation, which is the foundation of the social bond, is worked through in a hypothetical subject of this body, which the spirit of the group, its “word”, its “discourse”, its

“thought”, its “emotions” must take on: “the group thinks, wills, decides” not yet as a we, but first of all as a “one”, (“on”), that of the phantom».

But let us come back to Matteo’s game, the body that mocks the head, that lets it fall off in an irreverent way, only to pick it up again.

Clinical material and reflections

The glued man, excitement and emotion

The glued man is the title of a drawing made by Davide, aged 7, also in his first year with the group: he cuts the sheet of paper almost in half and glues the drawing of a head on to the middle of one of the two halves. In this way, he can express the affective fracture he experiences, immersed as he is in a broken home (he lives with his grandparents and mother) and in a highly mutually ambivalent relationship with a father who is a drug addict.

But this title also accurately describes the emotional experience of many children who, overwhelmed by the devastating feelings caused by the minor or major traumas in their life, seem to perceive the head, which should comprehend, grasp nexuses and motivations, as extraneous and attached to them in a precarious way. A head which adults think should work the way they want it to work, is confused because it is often projectively filled with the demands, needs, and wishes of others, is expropriated of vital areas of independent expression and existence.

So it is the body that, though in a chaotic, contradictory and at times covert way, continues to represent the authenticity of the self, reveals the real emotions, is paralyzed by shame, by fear, withdraws, camouflages itself, or struggles to rebel, writhes, gets excited, flames up, lets itself be pulled by anger or by the need for tenderness. A body that speaks beyond the head.

Davide, who usually shields himself from emotions through stereotypes or obsessive defences, in the group, for some time, when he gets excited and becomes restless, monkeys around screaming “sausage and tomato” and everyone laughs, imitating him. When he realizes that the line works, he repeats it over and over again and the whole group joins him in this endless and incoherent racket. For them, it is a way to keep the group leader in check and to control emotions, keep them at bay through a euphoric and senseless behaviour.

Another boy in the group, Angelo, who is unable to talk about the difficulties he experiences at school, invents a game with characters and introduces into the imaginary classroom a dog that barks incessantly, contaminating the other children and even the teacher, who join in the barking. This scene too is very successful, because it allows the children to transform the school into a “kennel”, and the entire group at once becomes a barking chorus.

My attempts to make sense of these enactments fail several times, because the excitement stifles my words and my intentions. In these situations, I eventually begin to feel powerless and annihilated by the repetition and nonsense. I watch for a while, making sure that the situation does not get out of hand. Then I begin thinking

again, I remember the stories I tell them. They are distracted by the disruption, they become curious, the block dissolves and they go back to playing. In this way, Davide, who is usually very testy at school, in the group is able to make up and act out stories, like Dumbo's, in which he successfully responds to his peers' teasing and learns new skills.

In children's groups, excitement races, rises, spreads, often takes the form of a blind and apparently senseless repetition that irritates the adult, who is instinctively inclined to judge it as a symptom of silliness and regression. Yet, if the group leader succeeds in being a holding presence, without being judgmental, without letting the wish to reinstate order and to reassert his or her role prevail, but rather waits, trusting that some sense will make its way through the chaos, then the excitement and repetition gradually bring to the fore a form that otherwise would have not have appeared, a form that is perceived as being more authentic inasmuch as it originates from them.

Matteo, whom we saw playing with the head that rolls away, is usually very shy and accomodating, also as a result of his particularly traumatic and deprived childhood (though now he has finally found caregivers). Only in the group does he run wild and provoke, taking centre stage: besides the game described, he shows off by drawing dirty pictures and using coarse language, with tits, asses, willies, full of poo and piss, coming out all over the place. In this excitement he once again feels the wish to express himself, showing a little, and hiding a little. He soon finds his favourite place in the group: under the large table it shares. This is where he hides and, shielded from the eyes of the others, experiences the most spontaneous ways of expressing himself, which he then uses in his interactions with them: he plays different animals, in particular he pretends to be a hungry puppy, always searching for food and ready to steal if it is not given to him; he turns into a crocodile, a shark that is hunted down and caught, then a mole defending its hole from potential invaders, and from his hiding place he tries to grab "chicken drumsticks" (the girls' legs, which he has always said he is afraid of).

His place, under the table, becomes particularly evocative to the group: the subterranean world of the nocturnal and the oneiric, of secrets and imagination, that everyone turns to for a more intense contact with unknown parts of oneself, as if it were the most suitable place for initiation to new forms of expression. They take shelter there to invent a secret code, to write messages of war or peace, to exchange secrets or revelations. Matteo thus turns from a mutating and primitive animal into the group's "Genius Loci" (C. Neri, 1995).

The success of his "theatrical" inventions and transformations lies in the model they represent to everyone: the inhibited and denied emotions that could not be recognized and tolerated by consciousness on account of the anxiety they would elicit are "incarnated" in his characters, emerge and take *shape* as he turns into an animal that is, alternately, needy and greedy, domineering and scornful, vulnerable and alone, hidden and threatened, naughty and wishful.

The excitement that he does not know how to direct yet, that threatens his self image and control, once unleashed can be used as an energy source, also thanks to the protection and support offered by the group and the leader, giving life to many different creatures, whose features and symbolic values he takes on and experiences. Without this “transformative mimesis” (C. Neri, 1995), which helps him to metabolize the emotional experience, his inner world ran the risk of remaining trapped inside its own defenses.

As Neri says, mimesis in the group can be an essential factor of transformation which allows to *bring to the surface*, “make relevant” and not simply reveal clusters, sets of sensations, emotions, fantasies, as yet *shapeless*, which may be present in the collective ground and, little by little, can become more defined through mimesis. The body plays a crucial role in this: the child *becomes* the character, gives *substance* to imagination, acts out what cannot yet be recognized as his own but, through *miming*, can be *incorporated* and thus become a *new mental reality*.

Excitement, which in children’s groups rises and spreads quickly, and runs the risk of doing away with thinking, is thus also the “transmitter” of an affectivity that breaks down the already known defensive patterns of meaning and action and produces changes in “feeling”, which the mind can then give shape to.

That is why the group experience is most beneficial to inhibited children and children with little self-control, who can find in the collective container a new way of experiencing excitement and of giving shape to the “excited” imagination.

Incontinence, breaking the mirror, and self image

Erica (aged 7), who joins the group of Davide and Angelo a few months later, has come to the service on account of her behaviour problems at school, although she is very bright and gets good grades. There she is described as uncontainable: she plays tricks, steals, swears, masturbates compulsively, damages things, breaks down into desperate sobs because she feels rejected.

On her first day in the group she expresses her fear of being “bad” and with her putty she produces the head of a “newborn pirate” surrounded by tiny objects: a leaf, a lemon drop, a flower, a little bird. She says these are the things that the baby sees when it opens its eyes for the first time. To all children, entering into a group evokes a return to the origin. To Erica, who is particularly intuitive and creative from the outset, the representation of the origin is rendered through the encounter of the senses with reality, presenting herself significantly as a “pirate” child. Her great intelligence unfortunately does not help her to deal effectively with her emotional problems and her incontinence bursts forth in thousands of ways, in her coarse and sexualized language, in how she challenges the group and its setting: she wants to set the floor on fire with alcohol, pee on the floor, she makes the radiator leak by loosening a screw, plays nasty tricks. She suddenly turns into a wicked imp, relishing in the evil she does, and then becomes disheartened because she feels “bad” and rejected.

The recognition of her creativity calms her down for a while, but at the least frustration her destructiveness is unleashed again. She taps into her rich imagination not just to surprise others with her inventions but also to tell blatant lies, which reveal her fears and the way in which she tries to “beat them”.

The group is both fascinated and repelled by such disruptiveness: they admire her volcanic imagination and inventiveness, laugh at the stories she tells, shut down before her excessive enactments, but are willing to talk about her ways, because she expresses negative and excessive behaviours on everyone’s behalf. They can compare themselves to her with relief, because their lies are not as sensational, their tricks are not as mean. Erica too compares herself with the others and sees their difficulties (“he can’t write”, “she never talks”), she can assess her skills, reconsider her worst sides, beyond the moral judgement and vicious cycle involving the fear of being inadequate – the destructive action – the fear of being punished – excitement –another wicked action.

In a group it is useful to have someone who tends to personify negativity, provided that roles do not become fossilized, singling out a “scapegoat”. That is why it is necessary for the leader to help the group see the negative hero as someone who has the strength to reveal what is monstrous, so that it may be confronted together, for indeed the individual alone would be crushed by it. The epic power of storytelling, which resonates so much with children’s sensitivity, provides the means for this. So, when the group plays together acting out imaginary characters, Erica impersonates “Cat Woman”, a character that is aggressive and violent with the bad guys and turns into a good avenger, like Batman for the boys.

Erica’s emotional and motor uncontainability subsides but explodes again unexpectedly, when she feels fragile in the group, as well as at home and at school, until one day an incident occurs that affects her deeply. While she is playing with the other kids, she pushes with too much force a large mirror on wheels that is part of the furnishings of the group’s room; the mirror topples over and shatters into a thousand pieces, producing a crashing noise and frightening everyone. We are flabbergasted: nobody got hurt, but it could have happened. What is more, the mirror had a very important function and symbolic value for the group: it stood close to the wall and served to reflect oneself and confirm the image of one’s character, but most importantly it marked an area where those who wanted to be “found” by the others could hide. It had soon become the entrance to the “haunted house”, a place they made up, which was to remain off bounds to me: like in the story of Alice in Wonderland, it was the space of imagination, where the normal rules governing reality did not apply. Beyond mirroring, where to encounter the monstrous and the possible.

Since then, at every session, everyone looks to the spot where the mirror once stood, wondering how it broke, as if they did not remember, and whether it can ever be fixed. Erica repeats over and over again that she did not do it on purpose, but since then she has constantly tried to revise and adjust her self image, which has been so tarnished since the incident, and, on top of it, in the group, where she had learned to

appreciate herself. She begins to draw various girl models: one with square hair and body (she wants to be “square”), then a “happy” one, much too cheerful and tidy (an overadaptive ideal), several others with black or red braids sticking straight up in the air (she feels like her hair is standing on end), others as mermaids (in the process of transforming), others still with huge tufts of hair pointing to the sky, vertical, flaming, dreamy shapes, like evolutions of her sense of how she looks and is perceived by others.

She tells that she is much better now at school, at play she chooses roles like the “headmistress” or the police woman. She can play more and better with the other kids. In the end, she writes her secret on a sealed note, which holds her fear and shame: “I don’t want to have the scab”, thus admitting her wish to no longer be infected, nor to infect others.

In children’s groups an incident often marks a developmental passage, brings to maturity a process that is under way, as if an event that is feared needs to happen in order to test the limits, to consider how it can be remedied, and introduces a new phase of awareness.

There are more and more children who, like Erica, have trouble controlling their behaviour, display an “uncontainable” excitement, that spills into the outside world, overwhelming themselves and others. The most frequent response consists in having more and more people to control them, means to curb or coerce them, often with scarce results.

External attempts to create barriers merely amplify the sense of internal ungovernability, because they end up vicariating the control skills that children must learn to develop for themselves. The great internal fragility, which becomes persecutory and generates the disruptive behaviour, must meet with consistent limits, but most importantly it needs to be heard, recognized and sustained in order to be taken on by the child and gradually transformed into desire, rather than remain a protest against the sense of void and absence.

When Erica’s excessive and vulnerable physicality begins to find mirroring in the group, she puts the others to the test through her destructiveness in order to “measure” the effects and consequently learn to modulate the impact of her impulses on reality, concretely, empathically, first, rather than symbolically.

Erica succeeds in regaining control over her impulsiveness only by reconstructing the self experience in the group, giving herself more inner strength, that is not just destructive but mostly creative, seeing herself as someone who can be liked and do good things: quoting P. Gutton (2008), «creation reorganizes conflicts». And every creation is a transformation of the self, which never ends.

Words and gestures, from withdrawal to exchange

The body, gestures, words and thoughts in children are still fields of experience and expressive ways which are so contiguous, interwoven and polymorphous that they communicate through a wide range of expressive registries, from verbal to gestural, motor and sensory, play and graphical – pictorial and representative – dramatic,

with quick shifts from one registry to the next or the simultaneous use of multiple expressive channels, in a hypercondensed way, as quoted by Baruzzi (1990).

There are fewer splits, deviations and misunderstandings between physical and mental, so much so that both the tendency of the character towards the continuous motor and sensory discharge and that of defense and withdrawal, involve every part of oneself, and the person as a whole must become involved towards possible change.

Stella, who is also 7 years old, joined the group for problems entirely different from Erica's: she is very shy, doesn't play or talk much while at school, only to her school friends, teachers are unable to give her an oral test (only her mother is aware she can read), even though she is extremely diligent at her homework. Her mother says she behaves quite differently at home, talking a lot and making herself heard.

She begins to talk immediately in the group, but quietly and only with me, possibly because I do not put her to the test. She is very pretty, precise and tidy, she is a perfectionist and is always very reserved. She observes others playing, staying apart sitting beside me, her drawings are accurate and she builds colourful high walls and rectangular people with lego.

Erica is jealous and competitive; one day she says: "I joined the group because I'm naughty, but you're good so why are you here?" Stella ignores her, watches everything with apparent detachment, interested only in my expression. Her drawings are perfect but slightly studied and repetitive: giraffes, horses, landscapes. She hardly reacts when provoked.

Polarization with Erica is maximum. Stella avoids her, but when they do play together it is an important experience for them both: it is the encounter with what causes fear and is rejected, but attracts her because it is missing.

Stella's change within the group comes by degrees and in unexpected ways. Whereas during the first year she remains polite, well-mannered and formal, during the second year she changes her attitude almost subtly but decidedly. She distances herself from me, hardly speaking to me, but from time to time enters into the group's play surprising us all, interpreting mischievous, provocative, bossy and angry roles and characters. She plays the part of a lonely and naughty "ferret" that with no warning or reason steals people's telephones, upsetting their games, and repeatedly throwing dolls into the wastepaper basket. To help insert her "blitzes" into the games of the others, I suggest some narrative elements, like being a reporter trying to reconstruct clues and motives, putting disconnected facts back together again into a collective story.

Without a word she interprets the role of provoker and disturber: her pain for being on the outside emerges, self-excluded from the games of others; without asking she grabs hold of other communication instruments which she generally refuses, despises and throws away dolls representing small and dependant parts. From then onwards she will never be the same again. She will become more restless, contradictory, but more interested in other people and more creative. All this has its price: she becomes untidy (her mother says), especially at home, vulnerable with

outbursts of rage and night fears. We discuss this in the group: Stella and the others talk about their nightmares, draw them, mask them as monsters which they later wear themselves, taking on the roles to tame them.

Stella by now is part of the group and using various stratagems she draws the boys into a fight for the possession of a foam-rubber cushion, in particular Federico, in whom she has a special interest which is reciprocated. She often enlivens the common actions always with expressive non verbal instruments, and one day she suggests putting all the putty together to make strings, joining them together and creating a trail encircling the group's entire room.

Her drawings become more original. She frequently represents a snail, happy in its shell, a shell which becomes more and more colourful; then the snail loses its shell and grows frightened; in the end two snails, a big one with a shell and a little one without that is unhappy.

Stella feels vulnerable and exposed, without her defensive shield, but she is building up her experience on how to enjoy herself with others and how she can protect herself, by being less hardened and obliging, but more aggressive.

Her teachers say she socializes more at school now, she talks to her teachers, answers questions when properly guided and encouraged.

Words still don't come to her easily in the group, and it is through her body, gestures and expressiveness that she has come to understand how her safe shell was a tight fit. Her mimic "interpretations" have released her repressed feelings, allowing her to contact the restless and neglected parts of herself, her fears and wishes; she had been unable to come to terms with them and could not be completely authentic and creative.

Words, proper and orderly language, for Stella as for many other children, represent a foreign land, an adult territory that risks drawing them into an extraneous and limited significance which they become passively subjected to or avoid, seeking refuge in stubborn silence, where the frowning "snort" of the ferret means more than any other words.

They must arrive at words helping them to translate, interpret and master reality and the adult world, often enigmatic, but along this ridge between finding one's own distinctive sense and being alienated in the other way they play out the chance of becoming rooted in their own individuality.

In this search for a subjective and original meaning, sensoriality and gestures play a key role, taking us back to the source of our feelings without separating the meaning from the deepest and intimate emotional sense.

Sexuality: from provocation to desire for another person

During the early phases in the life of children's groups, sexuality erupts on the scene in a privileged expressive form of excitement, as a prototype of transgression and provocation against the bounds and rules of "good manners" set by adults. Swear words, coarseness, obscene gestures and drawings, that even the shier children dare to produce, make them feel partners and grown up, able to show off the forbidden

and escape social conventions, which they believe would consider them ignorant and inhibited.

This is the territory chosen by many boys (or girls who are considered tomboys) to seek their role within the gang, helping them to overcome their lack of self-confidence and competition, strengthening their bossiness when a sense of weakness or passivity risks prevailing. Child sexuality, as quoted by Gutton (2008), sees one sex only, male, with its intrusive and aggressive characteristics and modalities and need to possess.

Seduction is refused because it exposes the lack of self-sufficiency, the risk of precipitating when feeling small and easily seduced. "Girls are disgusting", boys often repeat in a group, and girls generally don't know how to answer back, caught up in a stereotype where they don't know how to react, and limit themselves to answering that boys are unbearable and irritating. Passivity, so unavoidable especially at that age, is the worst enemy and nightmare for everybody, most difficult to recognize, tolerate and come to terms with without embarrassment.

Emancipation therefore goes through a masculinization of subjectivity, by asserting oneself through impositions, and often an urgent search for dominating relations and physical tests to escape from the suggestion exercised by the individual and by the community. The inhibited emerge from their barriers and fears through tantrums and teasing surprising all those who knew them as submissive.

Sexuality is to be sneered at, leaving the child's body, so tender and passive, behind, delivered into the hands of maternal care and paternal rules. Evoking parts of the body and excrements considered dirty and shameful is an exciting collective ritual because it is forbidden, claiming autonomy and independence from the body and its productions, still partial and uncertain at other levels.

After these first moments or idealized phases of autarky on behalf of the group, experienced equally in the group who can do without adults, rules and dependence bonds (like in the group illusion described by Neri), everybody returns to their own problems, envy, lack of self-confidence, jealousy, competitiveness and unsolved needs. Defense of derision is not all-powerful.

Effective actions on the subjects of sexuality and provocation are difficult: the words of adults are heard as moralistic, with the implicit intention of holding them in a state of inferiority. Mobilizing sex stereotypes today is just a little easier, but before the stumbling-block of challenging one's own dependence and passivity, as in confronting the awesome gaze of the Medusa, children become paralyzed and erect barricades, or flee from them. This is the knot which child sexuality seems to wish to evade from, as they have yet to encounter complementarity of the genders and their own personal way of being, such as active-passive or autonomous-dependant. The problem arises when mutually exclusive polarities remain.

I think it is the way the therapist presents him or herself and reacts, his or her trust in their development, the patience and waiting which even more than words, is the instrument to positively show that passivity does not necessarily mean being dominated, feeling weak and frightened, but can become full of receptivity, care and

attention, that dependence is not only limiting but can lead to new bonds and possibilities.

When Erica approaches boys in a way that is too sexualized, the boys keep her away and avoid her; when Matteo, from under the table grabs the girls' legs as if they were "chicken drumsticks", they get away from him annoyed. Both protagonists think they have no other instruments to meet the other and "touch" desire. I frequently point out that in other cases, in different ways, we succeeded in winning the favor of the opposite sex without transgressing or falling into excess.

Erica invents the role of "Cat Woman" also in order to enter successfully into Davide's stories, which are filled with Superheroes and so far involved only the boys.

As for Matteo, after many egocentric failed tries, he manages to win everyone over by bringing along a book of jokes and games, thus opening the doors to relations.

Finally Stella, who during the last period has succeeded in taking part in physical games with Federico, on one of the last days, as Erica did, hands him a sealed letter with a secret wish. Her secret is a love letter to an unknown boy: with difficulty she has learnt to establish a relationship with her own desires.

Sexuality therefore is not only a way to state and claim the autonomy of the body, unshakeable from social dictates, the individual's power and resourcefulness, freeing itself from maternal embrace, but it is also a way of facing desire, no longer as an avid and overbearing need, but as tending towards the other and recognition of his or her decisive importance for self-fulfillment.

Conclusions

The body is what is most immediately and directly facing others, an image made of forms, gestures, manners, a whole that escapes us and that we see mirrored in the eyes of others. Our body speaks of us without us knowing and leads us to our encounter with reality, internal and external, through which all is revealed. According to Levinas, our face reveals us, our vulnerable nakedness as individuals, and it is in the face that we make our encounter with the other person.

Through the body, touched, "moved" or invaded by sensations, we discover emotions, the most intimate and primary affects, the most pressing and undefinable experiences that words will never explain. Our body discloses our original identity and retains experiences and memories, which will remain the basis of every future representation and creation, and the style that will distinguish us.

If the body constrains and possesses us, before psyche can try to shape it according to ideal models and aspirations, "it cannot be a true object amongst others," quotes A. Ferrari (1992), "but the source of all possible objects, because it is from this object that all representations and chances of determination of all physical and non physical objects are born."

With pubertal development, the body, which becomes foreign on account of the changes and the emerging of genital sensuality, is questioned for the first time, so

that it may become the site for new experience and awareness. Adolescence will work on this research and identity building, to create a more subjective image of oneself, less constrained by immediacy of sensoriality, as quoted by Gutton, but childhood is the time of that original relationship between physical and psychic, which will remain the deepest and most mysterious source of that intimate and authentic sensation which each one of us knows and may attribute to experience.

This primary body-mind relationship is anything but simple and devoid of conflict: it intertwines with a state of undifferentiation of the self, where the borderline between internal and external, what belongs to us and is foreign to us is ambiguous, and where the condition of passivity and dependence prevails. The assessments and certainties that the child absorbs from adults and culture remain the foundations of childhood knowledge, which extend and correct social confrontation, but which are truly questioned during adolescence. The child feels he is not the author of his own judgments and builds his own world on this impossibility of self-determination.

If the child's mind is necessarily dominated by adult thoughts, the body instead is the place for emancipation of initial passivity (except in some cases of severe family disorders where it is handed to intrusion and perception of other people's needs), it remains the shelter of oneself, which turns it into a research instrument of secret feeling and original recreation of experience.

For psyche to really become creative without being limited to reality, the child needs to experiment through his body the mesh between sensory and imagination, shape and symbol, playing imaginary roles allowing him to embed the quality of objects, turning them into his own, reinventing his inside world.

In groups where syncretic sociality, as described by J. Bleger (1972), represents a common sensory basis and constitutes a symbiotic-merging level, portions of sensitivity and coenaesthesia of each person, characters, scenes, narratives, overdramatization of conflicts interweave permitting experimentation and unexpected transformations, which individually would never have been discovered. The image of oneself and the interior images meet those of others and the welcoming gaze of the therapist, so as to learn and discover narrative forms and identities, nourished also by conflict and error, without isolating oneself in roles and rigid stereotyped defenses, so that the mind may integrate its individual emotional sense through sharing truth in order to learn freedom without avoiding bonds.

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