

Part II

The father embodied

INTRODUCTION

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The theme of Part II is the “body” set in the larger context of this volume’s exploration of Freud’s notion of the symbolic or Dead Father. The concept of the imaginary body is a difficult one to grasp. However, this part of the book, “The Father Embodied,” brings that idea to life. Most people relate to the body as though it were brute fact, something that hurts, hungers, or requires medical attention. This is particularly true these days given that neurochemistry increasingly dominates the field of psychiatry. Patients often enough report that they are suffering from a “chemical imbalance” or that they need more serotonin rather than describing themselves as suffering from a conflict over one matter or another. Nonetheless certain psychiatric disorders actually make the case for a body that exists outside of the laboratory and in the imagination, in the self-image, of the individual. Take, for example, “body dysmorphic disorder,” anorexia nervosa, and conversion hysterias where psychogenic symptoms can impair physical functions such as sight, hearing, and ambulation. Of course, having an image of “an imbalanced brain” is in and of itself imaginary, regardless of what the biochemistry might be.

Bear in mind that even the “self,” the “me,” is a rather recent concept in mankind’s history (Taylor, 1989). Fourth-century Bishop Augustine of Hippo is generally given credit as the earliest philosopher to have embraced the standpoint of the first person, the “I,” in his turn from the outer world to the inner one in his quest for truth. Going beyond the perspective of consciousness embedded in that standpoint to thinking of mind in the complex terms of the unconscious and psychic structure was, for the most part, left to the last century or so. And although “imagining” things about the body was certainly a rather common idea, the notion of the body as constituted by an imaginary axis was not.

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan put flesh to the bones of the idea of the imaginary body with his landmark (1938) paper “The Mirror Stage,” in

which he describes the moment of jubilation when the infant recognizes his own image in the mirror. Through an external reflection, through what Lacan called the signifier of the Other, the baby has the illusion of completeness. No longer a jumble of unintegrated physical sensations and faceless body parts over which he has little motor control, he sees a unified entity. This, says Lacan, is the basis for narcissism. That entity is “me,” the “*moi*,” that is to be my “ego.” For Lacan the ego has an imaginary status (which hardly means unimportant!). It is the view of one’s self in one’s own eyes, reinforced by or undermined by the gaze of the Other – the mirror, the mother, the father, and society. This also establishes the basis for the relationship to our siblings, peers, our counterparts, relationships often dominated by aggression and rivalry; it is either you or me.

According to the prominent Lacanian Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan attributes the pre-eminence of the image of the “own-body” for the human being to the subject’s intuition that he lacks something, has a hole, of something missing in Being, that the image of the body covers up or fills. Received wisdom tells us something analogous in the rather ordinary understanding that arrogance or extreme physical narcissism is usually a defense against “in-security.” In other words, they cover a lack, a *manque* as the French would put it. Chatter among teenagers, so involved in the construction of the imaginary body, certainly affirms that!

This imaginary axis is traversed by the symbolic composed by signifiers – phonemes, words, the spoken language of the (m)Other. Those signifiers create an effect in the bodies of speaking-beings, naming it, sculpting it, cutting it up, forming and transforming it according to the demand of the Other. The “Other” is understood in both the restricted and extended sense of the term. The Other, Lacan’s term for the Unconscious, includes the voices of the early objects as well as the whole of current culture and civilization. Thinking about the ideal body promoted by culture today makes this idea rather obvious. The exigencies of the perfect body are the bases of multiple contemporary symptoms, such as those listed above. Bear in mind, however, that the traversing of the imaginary by the symbolic organizes the body image. The functions of the symbolic create psychic structure. The paternal function, the function of the Dead Father, is central to the normative structuring and functioning of the mind.

Freud’s drive theory, postulating both Eros (libido, life instinct) and Thanatos (death instinct), has created generations of disagreement among psychoanalysts worldwide. Mainstream American psychoanalysts by and large reject the death instinct while accepting most other aspects of Freudian theory. The Europeans, particularly the French, take the concept very seriously. Lacan found a way to unify libido and the death instinct through his understanding of *jouissance* (Miller, 2006), which knots together pleasurable satisfaction as well as pain, suffering and discontent in multiple forms. Lacan’s formulation of *jouissance* distributes the experience over two forms:

(1) the *jouissance* obtained through the body of the other, the other's parts, for satisfaction; and (2) the *jouissance* of the organ of the "own-body." The latter is called "phallic *jouissance*." In contrast to *jouissance*, which can be of the body, desire requires an encounter with another, an Other, through the path of love. For Freud, the object is lost; for Lacan it is total satisfaction by the object that is lost. This "castration" keeps desire alive (Miller, 2006).

The chapters that follow in Part II examine the effect of the representation of the Father on the body from several perspectives. Marilia Aisenstein, coming out of the psychosomatic school of thought in Paris, looks at how the absence of the father and his symbolization affects the real body, the actual soma. Eric Laurent, Parisian Lacanian psychoanalyst, looks at how recent changes in cultural norms and advances in contemporary knowledge have impacted the representation of the father and his symbolization. And noted historian Thomas Laqueur writes a personal memoir that painfully demonstrates the impact of culture, the Dead Father writ large, on his own father's experience of his life and his body as he confronted his rejection by his beloved Germany during the time of the Third Reich.

Aisenstein finds that the failure of the paternal function creates devastating clinical manifestations in both the lives and the bodies of the patients that she describes. Both have serious physical illnesses that bring them for psychoanalytic treatment. Starting with a review of the Oedipus myth and focusing on the father-son relationship, she goes on to pose an interesting question about the connections among the search for identity, for fantasmatic filiations and popular voluntary body alterations such as tattoos. She demonstrates the interface between the imaginary body and the real one, separable only conceptually.

In the case of Xavier, who presented with severe idiopathic hypertension, the failure of the paternal function leaves him unprotected and at the mercy of a terrifying mother, whom he described through memories of his distressed childhood replete with humiliating punishment. Because of his arrest record, he would under ordinary circumstances be considered a "sociopath." Apparently paradoxically, in his quest for the father, he represents the policeman who arrests him for a minor crime as a "good man." In Aisenstein's chapter the reader will see her working to give Xavier's actions the status of psychic events through the shared narrative of their work together. Her goal is to make it possible for Xavier to inscribe himself "at least into a fantasy of a filiation bearing mourning."

Aisenstein's second case is clearly one of a more neurotic structure. Monsieur Z, suffering from a rivalry with his rejecting father, came to treatment because of kidney disease so serious that it required dialysis. Her third is that of a young man who tattoos almost all of his body. He attempts to re-create himself "by means of corporeal transformation" in an effort to spare himself the need to seek psychological treatment. Laurent picks up this point later in his chapter when he demonstrates how the modern subject,

confronted with the collapse of cultural ideals and the decline of the paternal function must find unique ways, personal solutions by which to reinvent the self. Aisenstein's tattoo artist finds his solution through finding a way to write what would otherwise be impossible to say or to inscribe.

Laqueur has written extensively on the body and the history of sexuality and masturbation. He is currently working on the culture of death and its history, how society deals with the dead, the changing rituals and customs surrounding death and burial. He is therefore no stranger to the concept of the body as imagined. Taking as his starting point a photograph of his father found after his father's death amid boxes of memorabilia in the garage, what he wryly calls an "auto haunting," he traces the trajectory of the imaginary through several preceding generations, searching for and finding the ultimate symbolic inscriptions on ancestral tombstones. His narrative follows changing paternal images over his family's remarkable history, documenting changes in the family name, the Name of the Father (*le Nom du Père*) as well.

Laqueur compares the "physically successful," proud young German student in his father's dueling club photo to the frail and dying abject body of the father that the son remembers. These memories evoke those of Freud of his own humiliated and ill father. He contrasts this father to the father of psychoanalytic theory – the Oedipal father, the father of the primal horde in *Totem and Taboo*, to the father of fatherhood, *Vaterschaft*, in *Moses and Monotheism*. Laqueur's moving account illuminates just how flesh of the living, unlike the remains of the dead, is a creation of *Geist*, of Spirit, of culture.

Laurent's chapter complements both Aisenstein's and Laqueur's as he articulates how Lacan's distinction among the three registers of the Father – the symbolic, the imaginary and the real – contribute to sorting out the contemporary cultural situation with its lifestyle choices and new reproductive technologies. He examines the place of psychoanalysis in the post-paternal era in this time of the global market, where the father of authority of tradition and patriarchy, the Father of the Law is finished. Using the Lacanian deconstruction as described above, Laurent says that the primal totemic father, the real father of the Freudian myth who becomes the agent of castration, disappears behind the imaginary father, the father who has created "this particular inadequate child who I am." Lacan states in the Seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* that it is this imaginary father who becomes the foundation for the providential image of God (1960).

Using the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, Laurent discusses the *Akedah*, illustrating that this is precisely where Lacan situates a fundamental change in humanity. The totemic father becomes the Father of the Word. Through the effectiveness of his speech, this father becomes the father that names, is transformed into the symbolic function of the Name-of-the-Father. As the Oedipal conflict diminishes, the real, "totemic" father hides behind the

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imaginary one, the particular father who made me so inadequately so. From then on the loved Father who names coexists with the hated Father.

Laurent explores the opposition between the universal of the dead father and the peculiarity of the real living father, reminding the reader of that distinction as drawn by Laqueur. He reviews the function of the father and his role in the distribution of *jouissance* and then looks at everyone's need to invent a father and his function. It was this that Aisenstein attempted to do for her patients through a shared psychoanalytic construction.

From the analytic perspective both Marilia Aisenstein and Eric Laurent agree that the paternal function is in decline in the Western world. All three chapters that follow are persuasive to that point. Furthermore, Aisenstein argues that the body has become the site of a "ferocious care" because of the disintegration of filial and community ties in the death of the communal body. Thomas Laqueur's remembrance of his family's history reveals the immense transformation in the role of cultural norms in the construction of the self. His sweet memories, including listening to Beethoven in his father's arms, poignantly show that the son cannot heal the wounds of the real father, especially when that father has been betrayed by his culture, the symbolic father.

Eric Laurent develops what Lacan calls the *père-version*, a version of the father, who makes the objects of a woman's desire his own, providing them with paternal care. He concludes that "to be father is not a social norm but an act which has consequences, sumptuous or severe."

This era therefore demands deciphering the new forms of loves for the father now found in new families, fathers themselves born of the new pro-creative possibilities.

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Fatherhood revisited

The dead father, fraternal pact and analytic filiation in the work of André Green

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The prolific work of André Green can be defined as a search for a new contemporary psychoanalytic thinking capable of overcoming the impasses and fragmentation of post-Freudian models. From “The Freudian Unconscious and Contemporary French Psychoanalysis” (1960)¹ to *Key Ideas for a Contemporary Psychoanalysis* (2002), his writings can be seen to be directed, even propelled, by the issue of the contemporary. This investigation results in the construction of a personal theoretical and clinical model that articulates a reconceptualization and renovation of both the metapsychological foundations and the method of psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalyst and historian Martin Bergman was right when he said that Freud, for better and for worse, left behind a psychoanalysis that is much less definitive and complete, and more open to new problems and developments than his early disciples believed. After Freud’s death, his depth psychology was fortunate enough to see the rise of some original post-Freudian authors who made very valuable contributions. But it also encountered the misfortune in that each of these authors created a militant “school” proclaiming itself Freud’s legitimate heir. The “three great post-Freudian dogmatisms: Ego Psychology, Kleinism and Lacanism” (Laplanche, 1987) repeated the process of setting up their own reductionistic model, converting it into a dogma, adopting a particular technique and presenting an idealized leader as the head of the School.²

André Green wrote that the crisis of post-Freudian psychoanalysis is a melancholic one, marked by the interminable mourning of Freud’s death. Symptomatically, each post-Freudian author wanted to replace him as the great figure, and each militant movement believed that it re-experienced the original situation of the pioneers and the (re)founding Father. As in a reaction formation, a paternalistic mythology (or ideology) replaced the historical sentiment of orphanhood.

Three pioneering anti-dogmatic movements struggling with post-Freudian sectarianism and reductionism arose, one in England, one in France and one in Argentina.³ In France, in the 1960s, when Jacques Lacan went from renewing thinker to Head of School, many of his major followers,