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# The Bodily Ego, the Phantasy Body, and the Polymorphus Mimicry of Primary Narcissism

## Summary:

After reviewing the crucial place that Freud gives phantasy in his middle period, the author integrates it with his late concept of the bodily ego to introduce the *phantasy body*. It is more than an inert self-representation and is connected with the mimetic or imitative dimension of primitive sexuality. It is also a polymorphous body that is ontogenetically composed of different zones and which can change form when different images are superimposed over it. Phantasy forms or symbols that interact with this body are linked to the thing-presentations or parental imagos that comprise the Freudian unconscious and to the defensive process of identification. This is illustrated through clinical vignettes in which the patient is able to superimpose an image first in their own phantasy body and then in the image of the parent or parental-substitute that caused the ego injury that led to identification. Lastly, this mimetic aspect of phantasy is conceptualized as transcendental materialism which expands upon the Kantian framework that Freud uses in his model of mind. Phantasy is differentiated from fantasy with the idea that the latter's images do not interact with the phantasy body but instead relate to word-presentations.

Chuang Tzu famously said that he didn't know if he was a man who dreamt he was a butterfly or a butterfly who dreamt that he was a man. In the Freudian model, it is not contradictory to say that both are true. Freud (1917a) sees the mind as "a hierarchy of superordinated [superego] and subordinated [ego] agencies, a labyrinth of impulses striving independently of one another towards action" which means that there are many components of the personality from which one may be acting (p.141). A specific act or the desire for an object is often seen to originate from a *confluence* of sources or as a compromise-formation between their drives or trends. Chuang Tzu's butterfly body is an example of a phantasy elaboration of a "form taken by the ego" in identification with a parental imago or internal object (Freud, 1923, p. 28). Furthermore, dreams like Chuang Tzu's illustrate that we have a bodily sense for being of different shapes, sizes, species, and possessing fantastical abilities or powers. Unlocking this sense when we observe a patient acting from a defensive ego form can help to create associative material in order to find the "repressed affects" that caused us to identify with the parent or parental-substitute.

Freud (1911b, 1917b) himself speculates about phylogenetic causes of these phantasy forms or symbols but definitively states that "it is a methodological error to seize on a phylogenetic explanation before the ontogenetic possibilities have been exhausted" (Freud, 1918, p. 97). He recognizes that he cannot "overlook the fact that phylogenetic motives and productions themselves stand in need of elucidation" and that "in quite a number of instances this is afforded by factors in the childhood of the individual" (ibid). In the ontogenetic view, the salience of a particular phantasy form depends upon things like the id drive/bodily

zone with which it is paired, its ties to a particular developmental stage of the ego's perceptual-consciousness system, and the smallness of the child in contrast to the largeness of the parents. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to review the debates in the origins of phantasies or so-called archetypal material.

The article begins with a review of Freud's concept of phantasy in relation to the imagination, the unconscious, and psychopathology. The phantasy form or symbol is linked to what Freud terms thing-presentations, as contrasted with word-presentations, as the original expression of the unconscious. This is then placed within the larger context of the structural theory. Next, positive aspects of phantasy are explored in intellectual or artistic pursuits and Freud's binary of the narcissistic man vs. the man of action is explicated as his version of introversion and extraversion. I argue that the implicit contrast is whether someone is more at home in his mind or his body. I then go on to conceptualize that mind is initially tied to the body-image that is formed in the narcissistic stage and the mimetic dimensions of primitive sexuality are what grant the artistic introvert her special access to phantasy. Freud's concept of the bodily ego is described as a projection of a surface and suggests that projecting onto a surface different than one's own body is possible. Coupled with the mimetic function and to employ this term in the clinic, I refer to the bodily ego as the "phantasy body." Additionally, I seek to rehabilitate Freud's idea of the polymorphous body of the child beyond literal sexuality and in relation to this imitative dimension of sexuality.

The clinical vignettes that I offer illustrate the clinical application of the above concepts. I show how the phantasy body can superimpose and transform a part or all of itself into a symbol. The mimetic is seen to provide a feeling of the correctness for both a symbol transforming it as well as the image the parent or parental-substitute who caused the ego injury that led to the defense of identification. This match unlocks the affect and id drive that must be worked through in order for the identification to not return.

## I.

Freud (1911a) locates phantasy in the stage when the ego creates three dimensional, in-color presentations of the breast. The original wish fulfillment of the infant, who would hallucinate the breast for its pleasure, comes under the yoke of the reality principle. This makes the ego's original hallucinatory presentations of an object only appear when an object is in fact present.

Other than hallucinations returning in psychopathology, Freud sees two exceptions to the reality principle's rule: when we hallucinate at night in our dreams and when we daydream or fantasize. Freud uses the term phantasy to designate the latter, and I will follow him in doing so until I make a case to disambiguate it from fantasy later in the conclusion. "With the introduction of the reality principle," Freud (1911a) writes, "one species of thought-activity was split off; it was kept free from reality testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone" (p. 222). To the extent that phantasy is felt to be part of conscious volition it seems unproblematic to connect it to daydreaming about being with an attractive person, some great achievement, or otherwise pleasurable scenarios. However, patients often imagine negative scenarios in bouts of "spiraling," "catastrophizing," or, for example, imagining what their romantic partner might be doing with someone of whom he is jealous.

Imagining negative scenarios problematizes this simple view of phantasy, but Freud acknowledges that more occurs in it than just the volitional process of daydreaming. He sees that there is an unconscious side and that content from this side of phantasy informs both symptoms and dreams. Freud (1917b) writes:

We have already become familiar with the idea that even a day-dream is not necessarily conscious—that there are unconscious day-dreams, as well. Such unconscious day-dreams are thus the source not only of night-dreams but also of neurotic symptoms. (p. 373)

When Freud (1911b) approaches unconscious phantasy he finds an overlap between it and symbolism. In his essay on Schreber he writes:

The sun, therefore, is nothing but another sublimated symbol for the father; and in pointing this out I must disclaim all responsibility for the monotony of the solutions provided by psycho-analysis. In this instance symbolism overrides grammatical gender—at least so far as German goes, for in most other languages the sun is masculine. Its counterpart in this picture of the two parents is ‘Mother Earth’ as she is generally called. *We frequently come upon confirmations of this assertion in resolving the pathogenic phantasies of neurotics* by psychoanalysis. I can make no more than the barest allusion to the relation of all this to cosmic myths. One of my patients, who had lost his father at a very early age, was always seeking to rediscover him in what was grand and sublime in Nature. (Freud, 1917b, p. 54, emphasis mine)

When a real object is lost, or its cathexis is given up after an ego injury, it can be replaced by a “sublimated symbol” which is part of the pathogenic phantasies of neurotics. As Freud indicates, the symbol is not just an esoteric derivative of the unconscious but corresponds to a drive relation to a parental-substitute or, as we will see later, a superego figure. In his example here, a patient sought a connection to nature following the loss of his father. Freud acknowledges, with fear of monotony, that psychoanalysis will follow the coding system of ancient myth in such divisions of father sky and mother earth and that this trumps what might be given in an individual’s native tongue.

The priority of symbol over language leads us to one of Freud’s most important statements on the unconscious. For Freud (1915c, 1917c) it is categorical that the unconscious is comprised of “the presentation of the thing alone” (p. 201) and that the unconscious is “the region of the memory-traces of *things* (as contrasted with *word-cathexes*) (p. 256). The ability to perceive things in three dimensions and in color comes prior to the baby’s ability to form words and allows for “the first and true object-cathexes” (Freud, 1915c, p. 201; Pederson, 2018, 2023).

Thing-presentations have a tripartite structure in Freud’s account. I would like to start with a simple statement that he makes in the metapsychological essay ‘Repression’ (1915c): “the libido that is withdrawn from the real object reverts first to a phantasied object and then to one that had been repressed (introversion)” (p. 196). On the front end, Freud (1914) holds that:

We have recognized our mental apparatus as being first and foremost a device designed for mastering excitations which would otherwise be felt as distressing or would have pathogenic effects. Working them over in the mind helps remarkably towards an internal draining away of excitations which are incapable of direct discharge outwards... however, *it is a matter of indifference whether this internal process of working-over is carried out upon real or imaginary objects...* (pp. 85-86, emphasis mine)

When we receive an ego injury from an object that has abandoned us, attacked us, disrespected us, etc. it is very common that it “rents space in one’s head.” We leave the situation but can picture it over and over—thinking about what we could/should have said, imagining doing things that we wouldn’t normally let ourselves do, (etc.). Freud also mentions that a real object can be part of this process, and this goes with clichés like someone taking home the anger that he has with his boss and displacing it onto his partner, kids, or the dog.

The path to the second, unconscious form of phantasy begins with the id drive. Freud (1911b) holds that frustration in current work (ego drive) or love (object drive) can cause libido at an earlier stage to be activated:

Anything that causes the libido to flow backwards...whether, on the one hand, the libido becomes collaterally reinforced owing to some disappointment over a woman, or is directly dammed up owing to a mishap in social relations with other men—both of these being instances of ‘frustration...’ so that

it becomes too powerful to find an outlet along the channels which are already open to it, and consequently bursts through its banks at the weakest spot... (p. 62)

Frustration with an object we love or situations where our reputation is attacked are later conceptualized as trauma in Freud's idea of narcissistic or ego injury (Pederson, 2015, 2018, 2021). While using examples such as these, he simplifies the cause of trauma to "an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way" (1917b, p. 275). If the emotions from one of these ego injuries can't be worked over in phantasy, it will cause an id drive from an earlier stage of development to "burst through." Later, in analogy to the history of a city, Freud (1930, 1933) revises this idea of the libido being forced into archaic areas of the mind and instead holds that these areas remain in operation "dovetailed" to subsequent developments. Regardless, the libido that bursts through "bring[s] into play the dispositional factors which have hitherto been inoperative" that lead to a certain type of symptom or character neurosis in the form of id drives (Freud, 1912c, p. 232). These initially inoperative id drives are linked to the concept of primal repression in which "[o]ne instinct or instinctual component fails to accompany the rest along the anticipated normal path of development" (Freud, 1911b, p. 67; Pederson, 2018)<sup>[1]</sup>. Just as the dammed-up libido rouses the id drive from its primal slumber, Freud (1912c) observe that "owing to the obstinate frustration, [it] has lost its value for the subject, and turns towards the life of phantasy." (p. 232).

A finer distinction can also be made between an imago and unconscious phantasy. Once the "libido (whether wholly or in part) has entered on a regressive course" Freud (1912a) writes, it "revive[s] the subject's infantile imagos" in the process of "introversion" (p. 103). Once revived, these imagos, or the presentation of the parents set up in the ego through primary identification to create the superego, are what "feed the subject's phantasies" and manifest "the attraction of his unconscious complexes" (ibid). Freud (1915b) also sets up a post-repression derivation for phantasy in his concept of the substitutive formation. Before continuing on, It might be of value to bring in the rest of Freud's structural model into play and use a concrete example.

In the later dual drive language, the real object from which the libido "reverts" is one that we interact with through the ego and object drives under Eros or under the death drive's repetition compulsion (Freud, 1920). In contrast to the latter, which seeks an object with whom we can repeat the same traumatizing feelings and id drives, Eros seeks new objects or deepening connection with known objects in work, love, and friendship (Pederson, 2021). When Freud references introversion in the withdrawal of libido from the real object, this needs to be contrasted with regression. Freud (1914) uses the term introversion to denote the return to more primitive functioning but that can be reversed or extraverted back to higher levels (p. 84). For example, we all introvert back to absolute narcissism where we lose constant conscious attention in sleep and the vast majority of us then return or extravert to full consciousness the next day when we wake up. In regression there is no return to higher levels of functioning and libido is "dammed up" (ibid, p. 86). Thus, a man, under the banner of Eros, can spend significant time with his girlfriend, continue to get to know her better and make future goals with her. Then he can find out that she's cheating on him and this ego injury could lead to him regressing from seeking romantic love. He may swear off of all women and choose to focus on his career or friends instead of romantic love. The repetition-compulsion, in contrast, introverts because his previous level of functioning is not lost. However, instead of an open-ended relationship under Eros, he is now unconsciously attracted to women who are selected because they will cheat on him again, or betray him in some way, so that he will re-live the same feelings he had "repressed" with the first woman.

I will continue with this example of a repetition-compulsion to elucidate the first, conscious form of the thing-presentation and phantasy in a more nuanced way that includes the superego. The man who is cheated on and feels betrayed could become very angry at his partner and this anger, as we saw, is paired with a fixation point from earlier in development that makes a certain aggressive id impulse salient. For example, the man could desire to "beat her to a bloody pulp with a sledgehammer" but have several aspects of his personality that don't want this aggressive reaction to be expressed. Some of these can be linked to the superego. For example, a part of him could still love his girlfriend and not want to hurt her. In structural

theory, “the ‘devotion’ of the ego to the object” in love “can be completely summarized in a formula: *The object has been put in the place of the ego ideal*” (Freud, 1921, p. 113). Moreover, this love for his girlfriend can go along with longing to see her but an ego ideal of pride might cause him to hold himself back and this can further increase psychic tensions. Additionally, the man could feel that a good person wouldn’t be physically aggressive like this and therefore when he feels the anger towards her it will conflict with this ego ideal and will cause more tension to form. He could also worry about criminal charges and how others might see him for acting violently. These different ideals and fears about being seen as bad, or the ego ideal of a good reputation, can also go with simple ego concerns. For example, the man could fear her physically larger brothers and that they would hurt him back if he got physical with her. Thus, the first conscious phase of phantasy is the interplay of the emotional reaction/id impulse and the ideals or exigencies that oppose its expression and raise psychic tensions.

After the id impulse has broken through and mental tensions get too high, then repression proper can happen. Freud (1915b) also refers to it as an *after-pressure*, that “affects mental derivatives of the repressed representative, or such trains of thought as, originating elsewhere, have come into associative connection with it” (p.148, emphasis mine). The latter aspect concerns the word-presentations that deal with the ego injury as an *event*. The parent or parental-substitute who caused the ego injury, some part of the environment or something that the object said, (etc.) can also play a part in dreams, slips, or repeating words that can be used to associate back to the event. The former aspect, the mental derivatives, concerns the creation of a *substitutive formation* that is supposed to directly reference the id drive. However, in Freud’s first example, the case of a phobia, the animal is symbolic of the father (ibid, 155). Similarly, in the example of the overly conscientious obsessional, the reference point can also be the thing-presentation since “the super-ego... has been determined by the earliest parental imagos” (Freud, 1933, p. 64). Lastly, in the somatic innervation of the conversion symptom, Freud (1915b) references the bodily zone that draws “the whole cathexis on to itself” (p.156). However, such a symptom can be associated to as something that distracts or obstructs one’s focus from other things, as consuming all of one’s attention, and in such a way as to also set it up in the parental position as well (Pederson, 2018, 2023). Thus, while the phantasy form is only manifest in the phobic symptom, these other examples also reference the object even though its phantasy image remains latent.

To return to our example, following repression proper the id impulse in combination with the thing-presentation or imago of the parents will now create a mental derivative in the form of an *unconscious phantasy* image. Again, this is primary over the word-presentations that are in “associative connection” to the event of the ego injury. At the unconscious level the girlfriend can have the phantasy form of a “big bodybuilder” which must be derived from the relevant id impulse of wanting to beat the parental imago to a bloody pulp since it does not resemble the thing-presentation of the parent that formed the imago. As Freud (1917b) writes:

Whence comes the need for these phantasies and the material for them? There can be no doubt that their sources lie in the instincts; but it has still to be explained why the same phantasies with the same content are created on every occasion. (p. 370)

I won’t offer any taxonomy about specific phantasy forms here, but what matters is that Freud understands them to be reflections of the id drive(s) that are called up with the ego injury. This is important because it allows the feeling for the real object, the *quota of affect*, to be conserved on the unconscious level with the phantasy form. Freud (1915b) acknowledges that “the object-cathexis in general is retained with great energy, and...persists in the system *Ucs.* in spite of—or rather in consequence of—repression” (p. 196). The powerful reactions that people can often have to certain phantasy forms when they recount their dreams or a piece of art that moves them illustrates the significance that they take on.

Lastly, in repression, the unconscious phantasy can be extraverted to the repetition-compulsion so that the man returns to real objects. To be clear, this is only one part of his personality, and it is possible that he can still connect with a real object through other drives that remain under Eros. However, when there has been

too much repression, and too many parts of him are under the banner of Thanatos, then the relationship with an object will ultimately result in more pain than any deepening of connection.

## II.

Along with the psychopathological expressions of phantasy, Freud also acknowledges positive dimensions in sublimation. This content gets into the material, sensuous quality of phantasy. For example, Freud (1917b) uses introversion to talk about the figure of the artist and how his childhood development gives him a special relation to phantasy:

An artist is once more in rudiments an introvert, not far removed from neurosis. He is oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs. He desires to win honour, power, wealth, fame, and the love of women; but he lacks the means for achieving these satisfactions. Consequently, like any other unsatisfied man, he turns away from reality and transfers all his [ego] interest, and his [object] libido too, to the wishful constructions of his life of phantasy... Access to the half-way region of phantasy is permitted by the universal assent of mankind, and everyone suffering from privation expects to derive alleviation and consolation from it. But for those who are not artists the yield of pleasure to be derived from the sources of phantasy is very limited. The ruthlessness of their repressions force them to be content with such meagre day-dreams as are allowed to become conscious. A man who is a true artist has more at his disposal... he possesses the mysterious power of shaping some particular material until it has become a faithful image of his phantasy; and he knows, moreover, how to link so large a yield of pleasure to this representation of his unconscious phantasy... (pp. 375-376)

The artist, like the scientist, or saint who can derive substantial pleasure from art, science, or religion, has a different psychical constitution or economics of libido than the normal individual (Freud, 1930). When these types encounter frustration in work, friendship, or love they do not regress from their desire but return to phantasy in the service of the ego and object drives of the higher stages. The artist still wants to win honor, power, wealth, fame, and the love of women with his art and maintains an ambitious ego ideal. However, it's important to recognize that many artists, as with other intellectuals, might possess technical proficiency and ambition without much of a relationship to their own phantasy. Although "the ego ideal demands such sublimation," Freud (1914) writes, "it cannot enforce it; sublimation remains a special process which may be prompted by the ideal but the execution of which is entirely independent of any such prompting" (pp. 93-94). The sublimation that gives the true artist a "mysterious power of shaping some particular material until it has become a faithful image of his phantasy," comes from sexuality. In contrast, the merely ambitious person is forced to imitate or react against what is fashionable in the work he produces.<sup>[2]</sup>

Freud (1930) further takes up this idea of introversion in *Civilizations and its Discontents*. He now renames the introvert *the narcissistic man*, and contrasts him with *the man of action*. The former "inclines to be self-sufficient, [and] will seek his main satisfactions in his internal mental processes" (pp. 83-84). This stands in stark contrast to the description of "readiness for activity... impress[ing] others as being 'personalities'; ...[and] tak[ing] on the role of leaders" as Freud (1931) describes the narcissistic libidinal type (p. 218). I take the latter description to cover a fixation or the narcissistic defense (in which one becomes his own ideal or identifies with the parental imago) in later stages of development (Freud, 1914, 1923; Pederson, 2020). While the narcissistic or introverted man may have a narcissistic defense, or just a fixation, in the stages of primary narcissism.<sup>[3]</sup> Other theorists use the term "schizoid" to cover the intellectual or autistic side of the introvert or what would be described in high school as "nerdy" (Fairbairn, 1952). These are individuals who find it easier to connect with their studies than with other people or who have intellectual or artistic interests for which they show intense enthusiasm or focus.

In contrast to "the nerd," most of their classmates don't take much pleasure in reading books, the memorization of disembodied facts, or in making art. Some of these extraverts can still have good study

habits and do well in school, but there are many people who don't do any reading for pleasure after they get done with high school. Of course, these extraverts can be religious, have a philosophy, or affirm a type of art, but this will mainly come from identification with, or reacting to, what she finds in her social milieu or family. For example, most people simply adopt the religious beliefs of their parents and do not do an extensive study of religion or the philosophy of religion. Some of them might also rebel against their parents' religion, but this is often as unthinking as the adoption of it. In contrast, the introvert will show an interest in one of these intellectual areas beyond simply identifying or reacting to her social milieu.<sup>[4]</sup>

The person of action or extravert feels more at home in his body while the nerdy introvert can be characterized as awkward in his body. The extravert, simply, is more given to working with his hands, playing and enjoying sports, and being practical (i.e. knowing how to fix things around the home). Additionally, the extravert can be more attuned to social interaction with real others, and the stories of real life people will be more important to them than the characters in a book, for example. Many introverted intellectuals show a deficiency in these areas and are criticized by the extravert for not having "common sense" in regard to being curious about practical things which would lead to knowing how to maintain the household, their car, as well as having bodily coordination or finding social rhythms with others. In short, introverts are more capable of shifting their dependence on real objects to unreal objects culturally mediated through art, science, and religion. This valorization of the intellectual sphere appears to have a parallel in the introvert shifting dependence on his real body to some aspect of the body-image that is in touch with phantasy forms. Although, of course, the introvert's family or social milieu may influence him to have or cultivate more athleticism or embodiedness.

My reader may struggle with the idea of how intellectualism could be conceptualized to be so early in development, but this is a direct consequence of Freud's Kantian commitments (Pederson, 2015, 2018, 2023). If the ego must form its own presentations of things in the external world, which culminates with the infant forming a presentation of a three-dimensional, in-color object in external Space, then intellectualism follows a simple binary. One is either giving attention to things in the external world or is giving attention to things in one's internal world of phantasy. The drive to contemplate an object after it is no longer in front of one can focus on its sensuous and idealized (sexual) form, as with the artist, or in relation to the self-preservative drive that would judge its threat or power. From this simple relation of contemplating the object (including the environment as object) in phantasy, the later cognitive developments of the perceptual consciousness system can also be brought to bear upon it. For example, Einstein performed his famous thought experiments to figure out his theory of relativity but in essence he simply imagined a force acting upon an object several times over and then ran through the mathematical calculations for them. Similarly, an artist can try to accurately represent a landscape, still life, or individual in a painting but this can expand to experimenting with the form of the objects in several different ways.

### III.

As we saw in the first section, the formation of three-dimensional, in-color presentations of the external world begins with the hallucination of the breast and then, under the reality-principle, we only form presentations of objects that really exist in the external world. This view, that our experience of reality is a controlled hallucination, is "an extension of the corrections undertaken by Kant of our views on external perception" (Freud, 1915c, p. 171). While Freud (1911a) sees "the activities of consciousness" that allow us to form these presentations as allied with self-preservation or ego drives, he pairs "the sexual instinct and phantasy" (p. 222). In other words, the object drives lean on the presentations created by the ego drives and use them to populate our internal world. As we saw, Freud sees phantasy of having escaped the reality principle so that we can continue to hallucinate according to our desires in the lesser form of our daydreams. However, he also conceptualizes an unconscious aspect of phantasy that is not in our conscious control.

Escaping notice by commentators, the body-image of the narcissistic stage is also dependent upon the presentations formed by the ego drives. While Freud (1914) argues for the body-image through psychopathology, he also generalizes from it to give an origin to the self-love, self-regard, or the self-esteem function in all people. If a person loves or esteems herself, she must be able to take herself as an object and this body-image provides such an object for narcissistic libido. As we will see, it straddles both the conscious or volitional side, as well as the unconscious side of phantasy and constitutes what could be termed a phantasy body.

While taking the ego as an object is the definitional function of the superego, Freud initially posits that the “infantile ego, finds itself possessed of every perfection” (ibid, p. 94). Later, he corrects this and consistently maintains that perfection first appears in the parental object, which at this stage, necessitates a narcissistic object. “To the ego, therefore, living means the same as being loved—being loved by the super-ego,” Freud (1923) writes, “[t]he super-ego fulfils the same function of protecting and saving that was fulfilled in earlier days by the father and later by Providence or Destiny” (p. 58). In our Western culture we would call it God, but in Freud’s appreciation of different cultures and religions he refers to it as the being or force upon whom we “transfer the guidance of the world” (1924, p. 168). This is not to say that Freud believes in or postulates a metaphysical entity, but that he theorizes an early superego level that could be elaborated along such cultural lines for people with religious belief. I have argued that it represents a primitive form of authority that is equivalent to the injunction that ‘what is must be so’ and a figure who is responsible for the badness or goodness in the world (Pederson, 2022, 2023). Even atheists can feel a sense of rebellion against the way that the world is, have phantasies that our world is not the real one, or can feel that there’s no point in having any hopes or dreams without consciously blaming God for this (Pederson, 2015, 2022).

The foundational self-esteem relation that Freud (1923) had conceptualized as primary narcissism, ends up being reconceptualized as secondary narcissism (Freud, 1923, p. 46). As a consequence of this, the concept of secondary narcissism, or idealizing oneself as one had idealized a parent, parental-substitute, or superego figure, was subsumed under the defense of identification (Freud, 1914). Freud (1923) writes:

We succeeded in explaining the painful disorder of melancholia by supposing that [in those suffering from it] an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that is, that an object-cathexis has been replaced by an identification. At that time, however, we did not appreciate the full significance of this process and did not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its ‘character’ (p. 28)

This takes us back to Freud’s formulation of frustration and trauma from the first section. Whether an object is lost because it dies or abandons us or because it mistreats us or shows itself unworthy of respect, the emotional reaction we have to it can cause an ego injury that necessitates repression. Freud here observes that in some cases that repression goes along with identification. For example, instead of fully feeling the grief for a loved one who died we can identify with the dead loved one and get around our grief.<sup>[5]</sup>

What makes Freud’s formulation of the superego preferable to (object) relational accounts is that it is Janus faced. On one hand, Freud’s concept of the superego includes an intersubjective component that allows us to put our ego ideal onto someone in the state of love or onto an authority figure; this idealization gives the object the power to hurt our self-love (Pederson, 2015, 2018, 2021). On the other hand, we can equally idealize and give authority to conscience and can experience a loss of love from the parental imago that forms this aspect of the superego. The intrapsychic moral and non-moral conscience can equally create feelings that lead to repression and have a phantasy form with which we can identify in order to defend against the feelings (or the anxiety of them when the tensions get too high) (Pederson, 2015, 2018). By non-moral conscience I mean that people can judge themselves for mistakes they made, the promises they broke, or have regrets or shame for acting in ways in which they disrespected themselves. Similarly, people can have loyalty to others who do, and want them to do, immoral things and therefore loyalty should be seen as a non-moral ideal that can come into conflict with the moral conscience. Moreover, one can judge oneself for



being disloyal to others but also to oneself— many of my patients have associated back to an ego injury in which they view themselves as having abandoned themselves.

Whether the cause is inter or intrapsychic, Freud sees the process of identification as a return to the narcissistic stage in which the body-image is formed. “The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis,” Freud (1917c) writes, “the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up” (p. 249). Although this was first conceived of as the superego treating the ego as the individual had judged or wished to treat the object, as we saw, Freud comes to appreciate “the full significance of this process” as subsuming the defense of secondary narcissism. Thus, the view of the parent, parental-substitute, or superego figure as perfect or superior, dead, or secluded, castrated, obstructive, good, etc. returns us to the phantasy forms or symbols of phantasy. The return to the narcissistic stage suggests that this identification with the thing-presentation’s or the parental imago’s symbolic form is enacted *via* one’s body-image.

Ferenczi (1952) first inspired me to observe the imitative or mimetic connection between the symbols of phantasy and the body. He writes:

Those intimate connections, which remain throughout life, between the human body and the objective world that we call *symbolic*. On the one hand the child in this stage sees in the world nothing but images of his corporeality, on the other he learns to represent by means of his body the whole multifariousness of the outer world. (p. 228)

The idea of ‘learning to represent by means of his body’ can only have a meaning in imitation.

Both Ferenczi and Freud connect primary narcissism to animistic religion and though there are interesting practices of imitating both spirits, animals, and aspects of the environment to be found in the anthropological scholarship, I will later ground this connection in clinical examples.

Eugenio Gaddini (1969) gives the most formal connection between phantasy and identification *via* imitation. “The primitive imitative perception seems to lead to the hallucinatory image,” he writes, “to the phantasies of fusion through modification of one’s own body, and to imitations, in the direction of the wish *to be* the object” (ibid, p. 477). For Gaddini, the wish to be the object in identification goes all the way back to the image of the object and is powered by imitation. I would like to build upon this to show the link of sexuality to both imitation and phantasy in Freud’s work.

Above, we already saw Freud’s explicit connection of phantasy and the object/sexual drive, but he is more ambivalent about its connection with identification. While the ego/self-preservative drives are responsible for the formation of three-dimensional, in-color presentations in the external world, the object/sexual drives, in essence, imitate and play with them to populate the internal world in phantasy. In some places, Freud (1923) maintains that the sexual/object drives and identification are the same: “[a]t the very beginning...object-cathexis and identification are no doubt indistinguishable from each other” (ibid., p. 29). Where he is cautious about this explicit connection it is because he observes that there are examples of identification coming from hate (Freud, 1921). However, on one hand, it is not problematic to hold that the parental imago could be set up through Eros but later be used by hateful or aggressive feeling for identification. Moreover, one only hates where one has loved or wants to love, otherwise the object would be regarded with indifference. Whether one hates or loves someone, one is thinking about them a lot, which makes indifference the primal opposite of love (Freud, 1915a).

Even a cursory reading of Freud’s work shows that identification does not just refer to a process in a single stage. So far, we have only been considering narcissistic identification in which one usurps the structural role of the parental imago. For example, a defensive narcissistic trend in the personality develops after an ego injury with an object or superego figure that is viewed as perfect or superior and the injury is defended against by the individual now regarding himself as perfect or superior. This should be contrasted with

primary identification, or what some have proposed to call internalization, that forms the parental imagos as the supraordinate aspect of the ego: “the nucleus of the super-ego... corresponds to the introjected parental agency” (1926, p. 139; 1923, p. 31). Narcissistic identification, and the other forms of identification that follow it, are secondary defensive identifications that “regularly make important contributions to the formation of character,” Freud (1933) writes, “but in that case they only affect the ego, they no longer influence the superego, which has been determined by the earliest parental imagos” (p. 64).

The sexual-mimetic dimension of identification can be seen across all of Freud’s later examples of identification, which makes it the best candidate to explain narcissistic identification. Freud (1921) gives examples in the cases of a child crawling on all fours and imitating his deceased kitten, in cases of a “masculine woman” in which she imitates the comportment and movements of her father, and in a hysterical cough that is traced back to identifying with the hated rival mother (p. 107). In these examples, imitation ranges over of the entire bodily sensibility of movement (comportment) to just a single trait of how the body moves (in the cough). Freud (1923) also observes individuals whose history of romantic love is observable in their current interests, hobbies, or tastes as imitated from these love objects (p. 29). In parallel, we can note cases in which imitation of desires and interests is more global and contrast it with identification that makes one a “copycat” of a specific interest.

If we follow this progression of secondary identifications, then the imitative or mimetic aspect of sexuality must go deeper than desires or interest, deeper than the movements of the object’s body, and into the very image, or presentation, of their body. While Freud observes the shaping of the material in art to match phantasy as a “mysterious power,” he explicitly aligns it with “mimicry” in a letter to Ferenczi (Freud, 1916, p. 102). The various forms that the artist represents through painting, music, or a novel must be paired with some sense of both correctly approximating objects of the external world but also shaping them to represent the symbols of the internal world. Interestingly, in his concept of the bodily ego, Freud (1923) provides us with the apparatus for this praxis. He observes that it is the first form of the ego and defines it in a way that is separable from an individual’s own body: “it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface” (ibid, p. 26). In other words, this projection of a surface could be upon one’s own body surface but could also be applied to other surfaces. Since its object is a surface, and not the movement of a surface, the bodily ego seems to reference the mimicry involved in the forms (surfaces) that the artist produces, describes with his words, or expresses through a melody. If this mimetic sense governs the production and appreciation of art, then it can also govern the production of the phantasy image and its utilization in the defense of identification. This makes the bodily ego— *via* the mimetic aspect of sexuality— the functional and conscious aspect of the body-image of primary narcissism. However, staying closer to common language when I reference it in clinical work, and its origins discussed above, I use the term *phantasy body*.

In the vignette below I will show that identification with the parental imago is underpinned with a phantasy image and that there is a mimetic sense that allows for that image to map onto one’s phantasy body. When, in imagination, a patient pictures or superimposes a phantasy form over his body he is able to say whether it resonates with it and, if it does, how he can feel his body-image change in size, shape, color, etc. in a way that feels right. The fact that an image belongs to a parent, parental-substitute, or superego figure can first be approached by soliciting *ego and object statements* in which the patient guesses how others see him if they were to see him in the phantasy form (Pederson, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2022). The patient then associates to the time he viewed someone else in the light himself which gets him to the superego figure with which he identified. This connection is then corroborated by superimposing the phantasy form into the parent or parental-substitute:

Client begins the session with a lot of flirtatious smiles, laughing, and movement. I decide to draw attention to it and let her know how easy it would be to banter with her and avoid getting into the work. I ask her if she has the effect on all men? Client admits that it’s easy for her to flirt like this but then adds that “the guy always sends the first message.” She goes on to tell me how it typically goes from there: how she “control[s] the narrative once it starts,” and that it’s about her “seeking and getting attention.” I ask Client to think of one of her recent conquests, to close her eyes and focus on

how much he wanted her, and to see where in her body she feels the power of this. After focusing, Client tells me that she feels it in her “hips and butt” and that there’s a certain way she’d like to stand when she feels the power— “like a performer on stage.” I ask Client for her first association to a performer that embodies this, and she quickly tells me Beyonce. I then ask her to picture Beyonce’s body and then see if it maps on when she superimposes it over hers. After focusing, Client tells me that it feels right and she pictured her hips and butt grow and becoming taller overall. I then ask her to visualize herself up on stage as Beyonce and then to guess at what the men there might be thinking about her. Client gives me several statements: “you’re sexy, I want to touch you,” “I want your attention,” “I want others to know that I get attention from you, and you boost my ego.” Client pauses at this point and tells me that it feels like she’s “their object” but without any negativity. Rather, she refines this to say that “[she] know[s] what [she is]” when they want her.

Knowing that Client is in identification with a parental imago, I read back her statements about how the men might view her and ask her if she’s ever seen someone from her past in this light? Client tells me about “a boy” in high school who she “put on a pedestal” and wanted. Client says that at that time he had a girlfriend and she wasn’t with him. She then goes on to tell me that she ended up giving his cousin “a blowjob” while in high school and did sleep with him later in college. Client adds that her best friend had slept with him too and began to emphasize that he wanted to sleep with her more than with her best friend. Client took this as a “win” and talked about “the ego boost” she got from this. She emphasized that her best friend “had always been more popular with the guys ‘til that moment.” I ask Client to talk about how it was for her when her friend was considered more attractive? Client goes on about how her best friend had always been “more mature, prettier, and skinnier” and that it bothered her a lot. Client admits that she lost her virginity before her friend “just to lose it before her.” Client goes on about how her friend got better grades, was a better athlete, and “was more liked” by others. I then ask Client to close her eyes, focus again, and see if it feels right to superimpose the Beyonce body onto her friend. After, Client tells me it does and I ask her to see what her body reaction is to this and whether there’s a specific time that comes up for when she most saw her friend this way. After focusing, Client tells me that it feels like her “butt and hips” are shrinking and that she’s getting shorter. I ask her to close her eyes again and let this come in fully. After she tells me that she feels back to her normal size and then tells me that she pictures her friend in the outfield of a baseball diamond. I ask her to stay with this and to see if it comes more into focus. After, she tells me that it was in middle school and that she, her best friend, and several other girls used to gather out there. Client talks about how she felt like “a person there to be there” and that she “wasn’t adding anything with [her] presence in the group.” I ask her how much it felt like she was riding her best friend’s coattails and being included because of her? Client answers that “it was a lot” and then gets into how sometimes their friends would hang out and wouldn’t invite her. Tears begin to fall at this point and, even though her face doesn’t appear very emotional to me, I wait for her to restart the dialogue. She then shares the insight that she “feel[s] like [she] can’t contribute [in an interaction] unless [she’s] flirting” and she “do[es]n’t know how to be [herself] without [flirting].” After a short pause she adds that she’s never been in a relationship in which she hasn’t cheated...

My patient’s sense of power over men was identified with certain bodily zones and she was able to project out an image of a power figure, in this case Beyonce, from her bodily sensations. She was then able to superimpose that image over her body and her phantasy body felt the image was correct and grew to match its form. Additionally, we see here that the image of the object, is equally a locus of the mimetic sense and something which the patient can report on as being able to house an image.<sup>[6]</sup> The phantasy form, once returned to the object will allow for the patient to access the repressed affect/id reactions that had been dissociated from the memory, or a further defense against them as seen in my patient swinging from her narcissistic superiority to her echoistic seclusion or loss of self (Pederson, 2020, 2021, 2022).

The patient’s sense of her phantasy body wanting to transform into a wholly different form also makes it a *polymorphus body*. It doesn’t instantly become a different image but grows and pulsates into it at both the level of the whole body-image as well as certain zones and areas. When Freud (1905) writes of the

polymorphous perversity of the child he draws attention to how the body can be made up of erotogenic zones so that the skin, the anus, the mouth, etc. can all be capable of forepleasure that is of an explicitly sexual nature. However, Freud (1912b) also observes that it is only later that this “sensual current” of sexuality comes into join what was first an affectionate current—with the latter being “the older of the two” (p. 180). While we can observe that kissing, caressing, massaging, etc. and affectionate expressions of the body’s erotogenic zones often occurs between people, my clinical work shows that the imitative or mimetic aspect of *Eros* comes into play too. Phantasy forms or symbols can interact with erotogenic zones or bodily areas that are less than the entire body-image. Additionally, in giving attention to these zones, the patient himself can often notice sensations and images developing there when he is reacting to transference or the feelings related to the memory of an ego injury.

I would like to give an example of the polymorphous body in which a patient’s whole digestive tract goes through phantasy. Once again, the symbol that at first resonates with the phantasy body of the patient is ultimately part of an identification and is able to be superimposed into the image of an object.

Client was 25 minutes late to session and I catch her in a lie about why she was late. I share my reaction of feeling very annoyed with her but let her know that I don’t normally feel this way in our work together. I ask her to focus on where in her body that she feels her visible defensiveness. After opening her eyes, she tells me that it’s in her throat and it feels like “competitiveness and some sneakiness.” I repeat the last word and she tells me that it feels like “I’ll show you.” I ask her to focus on the feeling in her throat and this feeling of me and see when she’s felt like this before. Client brings up a past boyfriend and his mother. They had been the focus of a session a couple of months ago and there was a competition between Client and the mother for control over the boyfriend which client incidentally lost. I ask her to focus on the memory and see if the throat sensations want to develop. After, she tells me that it feels like there is metal in her throat that it’s beginning to melt and “sink down.” I ask her what the metal is like and she tells me that it’s “a molten metal... a gold medal.” I ask her to see if her body has any reactions to it or if metal image wants to develop in some way. After focusing, she tells me that the metal has melted all the way through her digestive tract, “coats all of it,” and then became “solid.” To clarify, I ask her if it went through her esophagus and into her stomach and intestines before it hardened. She affirms and then I return her to the mother and ask her to if anything else wants to develop with a more formal focus on her. After, Client tells me that there is “no reaction,” “no feeling,” and compares it to just meditating.

I know that this metal is symbolic with some identification with the parental imago and instead of soliciting ego and object statements about how the mother might view her (with the metal in her digestive tract), I simply ask her to see if it feels right to superimpose the metal into her. After focusing, Client tells me that it feels right, and I ask her to let it fully embed and then pay attention to the mother’s reaction and how Client’s own digestive tract feels since the metal is now in the mother’s. After focusing, Client tells me that the sister “seems more even keeled.” In regards to her own bodily reaction, Client adds that she pictures “milk... or probably white paint” that goes down her throat and into the digestive tract in the same way as the molten metal did. I ask her to follow this process, without trying to rush it or control it, and let me know when it feels like the white liquid has gone through it fully. After doing this, she muses that the white paint is beginning to harden just like metal but it has “a light appearance... [and] is pure” but really heavy. She says the gold was heavy too but she didn’t feel it because she didn’t feel anything. I ask her to let herself follow the heaviness and see how her body wants to react to it. Client tells me that pictures herself moving and walking slower and slower until she wants to sit down. I ask her to let herself do this and see if this is enough or if she wants to lay on the floor or more. After focusing, she tells me that she laid on her back and that her midsection is heavy, but her arms and legs are fine. She compares it to doing ‘happy baby’ in yoga. I ask her to picture herself this way and see how right it feels and if there’s any more development. After she tells me that she’s “grown into the ground” and with some delight tells me that not even a forklift can move her...

For some patients there is a quick attunement to the work, and they very easily think in images without having to be prompted to do so. For this patient, superimposing the image of the metal coating her digestive tract onto her antagonist left her in a state of “purity” and feeling heavier in a positive way of being grounded. Although later, as with the former patient, this became experienced as another defensive state. Interestingly, this patient even suggested that the liquid that replaced the melted metal was milk, before deciding to describe it as white paint. This illustrates that the importance of how the phantasy body can itself introvert to the earlier stages of primary narcissism and that ego injuries can regress to the point of being played out between a bodily zone and an object associated with the zone (ex. urine, saliva, feces, etc.).

Ontogenetically, the body begins as non-conscious id and the ego has to form consciousness of any sensations, feelings, emotions, or drives in it. “[S]ensations and feelings, too,” Freud (1923) writes, “only become conscious through reaching the system *Perceptual*” of the ego (p. 22). The primitive ego is first only aware of the body in an auto-erotic zone—the first stage of primary narcissism (Freud, 1915a, pp. 134-135). From an auto-erotic zone the ego must develop to the point of forming a sense of its whole bodily form. This is vital because while some completely overwrite the body with word-presentations, others valorize the body of the pre-verbal child as if soma is separable from psyche. Freud’s position is neither of these. In his model, phantasy must go back to the earliest ontogenetic formation of presentations of any feeling in, or sense of, the body.

## Conclusion

Freud was not a systematizer. He was an immensely productive empiricist with a modernist sensibility who covered many topics in psychopathology and culture. I have attempted to bring together several strands of this work in order to both ground my clinical praxis as well as to elevate some of his concepts past the applications through which he introduced them. After appreciating the almost central position that phantasy was given in his model of mind, I was able to see the bodily-ego—a surface that is projected—as a carefully worded introduction of the first form of the ego. Since it isn’t emitted by the surface of the body, there is no reason that this surface cannot be projected onto other surfaces. Thus, along with the self-preservative/ego drive to form new three-dimensional, in-color presentations of the external world in curiosity, the sexual/object drive can use the bodily ego, or phantasy body, to have sensuous contemplation of presentations in the internal world in creativity. In the clinic, this mimetic function of the ego that is clearly visible in other secondary identifications can be taken to the earlier level of narcissistic identification. The phantasy form of the parental imago provides this surface and shows that symbols are not just important for the creatives with an introverted economics of libido but are relevant for the identifications that all of us possess—we are all unconsciously artists.

This use of the mimetic sense of the phantasy body to assess that a symbol could transform it, or the image of the parent or parental-substitute goes beyond the framework of transcendental idealism and deserves the name of *transcendental materialism*.<sup>[7]</sup> I have written on Freud’s commitments to Kant’s transcendental idealism and, for our purposes here, it can simply be defined as conscious awareness of an object requiring that the ego produce its own presentation or mental image of it (Pederson, 2015, 2021, 2023). Although this *prima facie* makes transcendental materialism an oxymoronic statement, the mimetic sense of primitive sexuality does give a dimension of substance to a symbol beyond the condensations, displacements, and vagaries of a word-presentation.

Transcendental materialism allows for a practical differentiation of phantasy from fantasy. Not all images in a dream or daydream can interact with the phantasy body. Thus, fantasy can be used to denote imagining in general and the productions of images that are not symbolic of parental imagos. This restricts the use of phantasy to content that is directly related to the materiality of the unconscious. Along with the act of daydreaming, fantasy would include images that are salient because they are condensations, displacements, or in some associative link to the real objects or place of the memory that caused the ego injury. This

clarification follows Freud's differentiation of thing-presentation and word-presentation.

While many patients are able to do work with both phantasy and fantasy, at the margins there are some who have defended against accessing their phantasy body and who should be approached from fantasy work with word-presentations. Conversely, there are some patients who are very attuned to phantasy work and can make great strides with it while they struggle with word-presentations. I hope my reader will consider opening up their clinical praxis with consideration for both the psychoanalytic basis of this approach and the idea of meeting the patient at the associative ground in which she can most easily begin her analysis

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## Notes:

[1] Freud only considers fixation from the point of view of the child in relation to the parent and not from the place of character neurosis in which an individual has identified with the parental imago. For example, when in defensive narcissism an individual has identified with the perfection or superiority of the parental object, frustrating or distressing situations can call up narcissistic rage. Id impulses that are linked with, or had been transcribed to the parental object are now experienced by the individual.

[2] To be precise, both sides are valuable and spur the artist on to individuation or increases of self-consciousness in Hegelian terms (Pederson, 2021).

[3] Fixation, in one sense of the term, can be understood as a non-universal adaptation of the personality. I have linked it to concepts like Klein's combined parent imago, Freud's low ego ideal, and several others (Pederson, 2018).

[4] An introvert can also unthinkingly adopt his parents' religion and may focus more on the arts or science, for example. However, if religion and philosophy is his area of introverted focus, she will show an interest in the arguments for and against religion, the existence of God, and an interest in discussing these things. However, there is also the possibility that an extravert may be born into a milieu in which someone she identifies with talks about religion in this way. Whether the interest is from a person's own psychosexual development or from her milieu would have to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

[5] In phantasy form, this can be elaborated as seeing the object as empty, transparent, inanimate, etc. and in identification this means that the ego (*qua* body-image) is now viewed by the superego as being empty, transparent, inanimate, or in whatever form symbolizes this absence or derealization. Although identification with the parental imago is a defense enacted at the narcissistic stage, Freud (1917b) observes both a narcissistic defense that suppresses love for others and directs it at one's own self-image and what he calls "an altruistic transposition of egoism on to the sexual object" in which one's sense of power is directed to the object (p. 418). I have used the term "echoism" to describe the latter defense and argued that the lost object with which the echoist identifies isn't simply absent but has been moved to the 'outside of life' as a symbolic death but it is retrievable from the beyond or here-after through id restoration impulses (Pederson,

2015, 2020).

[6] As mentioned above, sometimes the ego injury that led to repression and the production of the phantasy image is intrapsychic and the association will lead to viewing himself in the way that he imagines that others view him. In this case, the phantasy form is superimposed into the image of one's younger self from the time of the memory of the ego injury (Pederson, 2018).

[7] Adrian Johnson (2008, 2014) already uses transcendental materialism to denote his blending of Marx, Hegel, and psychoanalysis. I certainly agree with him that one must go beyond Kant to Hegel and Marx and his use of the term is not incompatible with mine. However, he does not explore the concept *via* primary narcissism, the body-image, mimicry, the bodily-ego, phantasy, the polymorphous body, or any of the concepts through which I am explicating the term. Rather, his agenda, as far as I understand it, is to take the term transcendental out of the context in which it was introduced by Kant to brand the work done by Žižek and philosophers interested in Lacan. However, with Hegel as the proper starting point of his project it seems like he could have played off of Hegel's term *absolute idealism*, and called his project absolute materialism, without any loss of context.

## **Bio:**

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