

The Bodybuilding Passage to the Act of the Adolescent

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Abstract—Objective: this work focuses on bodybuilding as narcissistic inscription of the relational dynamic of the ego and the body, in this sense we **think that this symptomatic adolescent act highlights a defective image of the body, leading, by a sadistic passage exercised on the split body, to an Ego/body-ideal.**

Method: Semi structured interviews with 16 adolescents between 15 and 18 years old allowed us to highlight a lexical field related to the body and the excessiveness in sports; also, the administration of TAT to a bodybuilder (17 years old) for more than 2 years.

Results:

- Defectiveness in the structuration of the body image; the future bodybuilder will be fixated to the image of the narcissistic misrecognition.
- Unsatisfying object relation, implicating incompleteness in the process of subjectivation.
- Narcissistic and corporealized ego ideal leading the adolescent to a sadistic pathology directed toward one's own body as a compensatory defense.

Keywords—Bodybuilding, body image, narcissism, object relation.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE man is captured by the image of his body. This explains many things and at first it is the privilege that this image has for him. [...] The *Umwelt*, what he has around him, he corporealizes it, does it at the image of his body.[1]

The body worked, refined, is the expression of being, of the cultural and the symbolic. In the society of display self-image aims to be captivating. The young bodies, healthy and beautiful, compete in the permanent search for the commercialized admiration.

In order to intercept the gaze of the other and the others, some adolescents settle into a muscular escalation, becoming *bodybuilders* (excessively dependent on sports and later on anabolic steroids). What do we understand from this practice? A passage to the act on the body that becomes the object of sadistic practice turned against it? Muscle reinforcement in place of penile erection?

What image of his body does the adolescent have which leads him towards the realization, by the physical act, of a corporeal sculpture. What does he want to change, substituting

the past body that is seen as rejected, denied, hidden, by the new acquired corporeality? Who is this adolescent?

We form the hypothesis that *an archaic body image, defective, that is substituted with a new image, which is no less defective, acts through a mutilative motivation, uses the body as an object, is at the origin of the dependence on sports and anabolic steroids among adolescent bodybuilders.* Through his addiction to sports, the adolescent searches into the mirror of self, a new image overinvested of an Ego/body-ideal.

In order to implement this work, a population of 16 adolescent bodybuilders from 15 to 18 years old was selected according to specific criteria defining bodybuilding (everyday practice of exercising, dependence to anabolic steroid and hyper-proteins alimentation). Semi-structured clinical interviews with these adolescents allowed us to support our data, and the TAT of Tareck (17 years old), a bodybuilder of 2 years and 7 months, serves as an illustration.

II. THE SEEN BODY V/S THE HIDDEN BODY

"Henceforth the image of the seen-body takes over the images of the lived-body. It is after three years and throughout our existence that the image of the seen-body imposes itself [...]" [2]

The imaginary impression of the body begins with the corporeal sensations of the baby (maternal breast, environment, etc.), until the discovery of the image of his own body. This image of the body based on the body schema, - neurological substrate - is charged with the affectivity and the relational. It is built from memories, emotions, and the involvement of parents and of the significant Other.

The meaning that the bodybuilder gives to his body, the gaze that he draws, and the way he speaks are fundamental articulation for the comprehension of the subject.

The lexical fields of interviews of adolescent bodybuilders first take hold of the body. "*I like living with my muscles bare. [...]*" (Sami, 18 years old). This exhibited nudity the bodybuilder carries it with him and apprehends himself by it. It seems that, to the contrary, the body gathers the gaze on itself. The body is what ensures the gaze.

The bodybuilder, in effect, appears to be vigilant to the gaze of others - (to gaze, to see, to be seen, vision) or its opposite (invisible, hidden) are used 12 times on average per interview - His identity and the feeling of existing pass through the gaze that the other poses on his body, "*My body sees itself.*" (Gilles, 16 years old).

By default of being able to unify the image of the body in the psyche of his childhood, the bodybuilder attempts to unify the admiring approbation of gazes that are posed on him. It is the seen body that he wants for body. "*I see myself seen*" (Alex, 18 years old).

Without that gaze, the feared fragmentation would appear. In the other's gaze and in his own, the bodybuilder opposes

TABLE I
 LEXICAL FIELDS RELATED TO THE BODY IDENTIFIED FROM INTERVIEWS

Body and Gaze	Bad and Good Image	Space and Location	Reparation	Father mother others
Muscle	Underestimate	Movement	Training 6/10 h	Person
Thorax	Lack of	Agitation	Products (AS)	Mother
Biceps	(Trust, Love ...)	Space	Proteins	Father
Weight	Ugly	Club	Pill	Brother
Nudity	Stunned	Running	Amphetamine	Sister
Cloths	Fatigue	Summer	Ephedrine	Friends
Pain in the body	Pain		Etc.	
Chest	Depressive			
Eyes	Illness			
Gaze	Esteem			
Vision	Satisfaction			
See	Beauty			
Be Seen	Attraction			
Invisibility	(attractive)			
Mirror	Seduction			
Form	(seductive)			
Presence	Insurance			
	Confidence			
804	421	91	107	77

the acquired unity of the body to the multiplicity of the parts that composes it. In all the interviews, parts of the body are cited (*chest, muscle, biceps, etc.*), it is when *he sees himself seen*, that he speaks of his body as an entity. His ego identifies with his image, his body, “*There is me now in the big mirror [...]*” (Julien, 17 years old). Corporeal narcissism is identifiable since it is different from the image of other bodies: the body is therefore a unique model, irreplaceable original. “*I live when I look at myself.*” (Sami, 18 years old); This image (becoming the referrer of the Ego) and its characteristics comfort the narcissism.

While, previously he spontaneously identified the other with him, by the process of introjection, and himself with the other, by that of projection, at the end of the Lacanian [3 & 4] jubilatory experience, the child will recognize his Ego. The identification with the specular image provides the child with a sense of unity substituting the fragmentary feeling until then. For Julien and other bodybuilders, the feeling of jubilation appears only belatedly. This identification (*There is me*, said Julien) is not recognition but misrecognition: the subject confuses himself with the image in the mirror. The identification is then narcissistic [3]; surely the mirror stage is a structuring of the personality, but it is especially the definitive inscription, finiteness, of the subject in his biological body. Far from jubilating, the child suffers from this symbolic castration, attempting to subjectify the unconscious image of himself in the reflected image [4]. If at a later stage, the child recognizes the image of otherness, in an intersubjective dimension, the bodybuilder on his own behalf is fixated on the image of narcissistic misrecognition: the Ego will become an image and not the image, image of the me. “*I was nothing before my sport.*” (Adel, 16 years old).

The salience of this bodybuilding lure allows an understanding of the rationalized reinterpretation by the Ego of the constituent details of the body image. The designation of the body captures the subject in a chain of significant. Everything happens as if the perceived body creates the ego and actualizes it through the gaze.

The child proves his unity, more in the parents’ gaze and sayings, an other, than in his own image. Thus, the look is fundamental because it allows the identification with oneself by the specular image and the identification of the self through the image in the Other’s gaze. Therefore, the specular image and the image in the gaze of the Other serve as a model for the constitution of the subject. “*I had no mirror*” (Gilles); “*I looked at myself, I did not recognize myself, I thought: this is not me.*” (Amin, 17 years old).

The muscles that the bodybuilder so proudly exhibits are in fact a response to this feeling of not being seen or not having been, the same as not to be seen, not to be recognized by himself and not to be distinct. “*I do not think my father sees me.*” (Bassam, 18 years); “*I run into my mom at times down the stairs, she took time to recognize me, I said: it’s me[...]*” (Sami, 18 years old).

This is precisely the object relationship that led Dolto [5] to define the unconscious image of the body as a relational structure. But the young child, realizing that others cannot access him other than by what he gives them to see, “privileges the appearances and neglects his internal sensations. Henceforth, he forgets the inside to handle only the outside. The bitterness of disillusionment gives place to the unconscious craftiness of a child who recuperates the specular image at the expense of his narcissism.” [2]

At the narcissistic stage, the child, being his own ideal, invests of the libido in the image, in an ideal that he projects and that as such, is substituted to the lost narcissism of childhood. The unity of the *I* is no longer based exclusively on the narcissistic ideal [6]. The adolescent bodybuilder, precisely, is subtracted in an idealized corporealized narcissism; the unity of *I* continues to be based for him on the narcissistic ideal.

Narcissus in the waters of his gaze is in love with himself. It is to be said that the ultimate search of the bodybuilder is the perpetual search of an ego, externalized has become an object rather than a subject. Of this object, the thing-body becomes the subject: “*My biceps, this is my brandname, it’s me.*” (Amer, 18 years). The subjugation of the Ego to the body image permits the observation in the bodybuilder of a narcissistic closure, an exclusive dependency on his muscular envelope invested in itself.

Always, the bodybuilder splits his body; there is in effect the invisible body, unknown, suffering, denied, that of childhood, and there is the body/ego ideal that wants to be distinguished, particularized, the object of gaze; by turning, body-subject to which the ego identifies. “*This body makes me forget the body that I have never been.*” (Bernard, 16 years old); “*My phantom body [...]*” (Tareck, 17 years old). The Ideal Ego searched for because the body has suffered from being nobody’s body.

In this gap, the past body, the body hidden by the newness of the muscles, is the object of the sufferable repetition, on which the overwhelmed ego exercises his sadistic aggression turned against oneself. The pain inflicted by others has become the pain inflicted by oneself. It is this pain that leads to destroying oneself with anabolic steroids, to be flogged. “*These minor discomforts of amphetamines are nothing, they*

are only benefits (in French *bienfaits* or *bien-fait* – well made)." (Tareck). As such, the body of the bodybuilding sports is the narcissistic body, the ego ideal. The bodybuilder with two bodies has no body. One is denied, it is the child whose body was forgotten, the other, proclaimed, is that of the dethroned ego, because it is corporealized.

The body/ego is invested in its capacity to produce, to manufacture even more muscle to relegate into forgetfulness the slender and infantile body. Production that relates back to a reified ego (*object, sculpture*), to the permanent lure that is established between the production and the quality of the body/ego that can be exhibited, like a factory that would calculate its production on the quality of materials (*AS, training, hours of musculature, pills, etc.*). The ultimate irony, in building his body/ego, the bodybuilder destroys the I/subject through auto-mutilating castration.

So, all comes down to the made body (well made); exalted body/ego, but sacrificed body. Split body.

III. PARENTAL DEFECTIVENESS AND BODYBUILDING OR SURVIVAL

"To be systematically losing does not stop him, but rather bases him, in his individual myth to want to be magnificent. [...] He is the royal waste of the Other. Triumphant victim returns to him the palm of martyrdom. [...] And he becomes a heroic witness of the Passion of castration." [7]

The recreating gaze held on the body is primarily that of the mother. Winnicott [8] speaks of a house for the psyche in the body through the structuring illusion of the good enough mother. The indifferent mother, by contrast, prevents the differentiation from occurring and will create in her child a precocious narcissistic disinvestment. "When I was little, I did not like myself. [...] Mom was afraid to touch me, the maid gave me the bath." (Sami, 18 years old)

Anzieu [9] considers that the skin-ego shores-up on the various functions of the skin: a function of containment, of limits, of inscription of traces, of communication. The mother, by correctly interpreting and ensuring the needs of her baby, constructs an envelope of well-being, and supports the secure illusion of double narcissism - omnipotence and omniscience. Without this magical illusion, the child does not inscribe: "I was like a bag with something in it" (Amin, 17 years).

The narcissistic disinvestment of the Ego, as an object of the id, leads to the loss of its objectal quality. The Ego that is prematurely solicited will develop alarming conducts, representatives of the death instinct, in their neutralization function, even mortification of excitement. A Winnicottian false self is constructed. "I asked for nothing. I did not cry." (Bernard, 16 years old). Later, a false body appears, mortifying the ego.

The lack of penis anguishes the child. "Dad said, you are beast and muscular. Yet when the body is beautiful one is afraid of nothing." (Gilles). The adolescent revolts: his father can be found on the path of his fantasies, of his desires, of his power, of his muscular erection. Not being able to face the castration, the bodybuilder calls for compensatory mechanisms; his muscles in erection want to make him believe

in his erectile power. The false semblance of this second lure, leads to the addictive repetition. "If I feel a little soft, I go to the club" (Bassam); "I am a sportsman, of what am I afraid" (Tareck, 17 years old). From the body-building, to alimentation, to the multiplicity of hours of training, to strong and stronger steroids; the chain of dependency is installed, enclosing the adolescent in a circle of illusions. He believes he will no longer fear his anguish, but in fact flees it; the avoidance and denial of the castrating apprehension take place.

Powerless in facing castration, the "act of cutting between the mother and the child, which slivers the imaginary of its narcissistic link" [10], the bodybuilder substitutes it with a modeling of the body. In effect, rejected, humiliated, unrecognized by one's own, stranger to himself and others, the child, by reparation and compensation mechanisms, tries to give himself an identity: sports becomes a sign, a mark of recognition, replacing the deficient father. "I needed my father, but he was not there." (Sami); "My father gave me nothing, taught me nothing" (Gilles); "If he could put me up for adoption, he would have been happy." (Bassam, 17 years), "[...] neither father nor mother, now I do sports" (Mario, 16 years old).

The father, in fact, "agent of the humanizing symbolic cutting" [11], allows the passage to the significant world. By contrast, the eventual default that severs mother/child can be translated through the foreclosure of the signifier. But the importance that the mother gives to the father's word will condition the anchor of the paternal function in each subject.

The mother of the bodybuilder is a mediocre mediator, the father in her eyes is "An incapable person" (Ghaleb); "nosy" (Gilles), "an unsatisfied" (Mario), "a monster" (Sami); "a coward" (Hosni 17 years), "a violent alcoholic abuser" (Bernard), etc."

How then the bodybuilder can, with a defective or frightening father, and having been the object of a weakened maternal mediation, pretend the symbolic castration? The bodybuilder has not, in fact, accomplished, only approximately one and another of the conditions of the *humanization*. The bodybuilder with a questionable mother attempts to rediscover a significant Other; he seeks to move away from an identificatory image of the mother without a penis (clitoris equivalent to being without muscles), but the father is defective. Identificatory processes could not be accomplished; he finds in the body that becomes Ego-ideal, a repetitive mechanism, compensatory to castration.

"I had no choice, I should have died, or wanted to live, I chose sports to live, and I have started." (Sami). The bodybuilding passage to the act, which is characterized by a triple addiction, is, in fact, an adolescent aggressive act turned against the self.

These are relations to the object that will allow an awareness of the experiences of puberty, at this age, a narcissistic reorganization is inscribed that must allow the internalization of body modifications and the access to the changes in the object relations. The bad is projected otherwise

it is a splitter: Green [12] insists on the splitting of the ego of the subject, in order to maintain its cohesion that refuses to be recognized as bad. The object is *ex-corporated*. In this greenian vision, castration would be related to the disinvestment of a partial object, invested with narcissistic libido. But this process would allow the total investment of objects that provide a narcissistic safeguard. The object is then used for narcissistic means. Eros becomes a source of survival and unbinding, the destruction of the object. Survival is the death of the other. Thus the aggressive adolescent [13: 481-502] conserves the link with the libido by making use of a violence that is an assertion of individual ego integration in an attempt to safeguard his ego by an illusory omnipotence. This violence of the safeguard of power through the body, the bodybuilder turns it against himself.

The relation of strangeness with his body puts into question even the identity of the future bodybuilder. The child is devalued, and in reaction to his anguishes of loss will recourse to splitting in order to avoid confrontation with the depressive position [14]. The unintegrated body modifications, the bodybuilders will accomplish them; he becomes actant and actor of his modifications, but excessively dependent on sports and AS. The adolescence takes for him a value of engulfment in which individuation is confronted with the risk of destruction threatening both the subject and the object. The unresolved preoedipal violence together with libidinal aggressiveness lead the adolescent to a bodybuilding passage to the act, that has become a survival mechanism, but a mortifying survival.

"Now with my body, I can turn the girls' head"(Gilles). *"It shocks you if I say I'm gay since I started my sport."* (Sami); *"I do not care who my sexual partner at the moment is, I have my sport!"* (Hosni). *"Without sports no sexuality"*, they all proclaim, though *"the sex is secondary, sport comes first"* as Alex, 18 years old, said it.

Therefore, the bodybuilding passage to the act is a form of language, a substitute for the lack, a mean of identity defense, an illusory recognition of self of the ego throughout the body.

IV. TARECK, BODYBUILDER. SYNTHETIC READING OF THE TEST OF TAT AND THE INTERVIEW

"Before my sport, I was no one, today, I am Tareck. [...] I lacked everything, care, caresses, attention, and I have only got beaten. [...] I am proud of my body, I never get tired of looking at it." (Tareck, 17 years, bodybuilder)

Tareck is the only child of a dysfunctional couple, he is 17 years old. He began sports to an extreme at the age of 14, and locked himself in addictive repetition. The father is a handsome man of 42 years, a wealthy merchant in town, never present at home, always about to insult and complain. The mother of Tareck comes from a family of notables, more prominent than the paternal family; she judges being badly married. She did not wish to have children and Tareck was born by error. The only person who looked after the child of error was the nanny, who was unfortunately returned to her

country (Sri Lanka), when Tareck was only 3 years old. Since then the child has grown up as he could. Puny and *"mal made"* as his mother said, the child often took refuge in neighbors to get a little pampering, *"By seeing them I have learnt that one could love children."* This love was seen but not lived, the boy locked alone in a melancholic bubble. At school, the only place where he felt somehow at ease, a teacher encouraged him to do judo. It was only at 14 years, that desperate, he enrolled in a sports club.

The narcissistic defectiveness always appears strongly in the projective test of the young man (c. 1, 2, 3BM, 4, 13B, 19, 16). It is in the interview related to a humiliating, victimized, and eroticizing maternal imago: *"She complained constantly, and then made me pay for what I have not done, insulting me, I hid under the table and made myself invisible."* Invisibility that provoked emotional destitution in childhood, except the fear that never left him. *"I was quiet under the table, I did nothing, thought nothing. I was only afraid that my parents would remember me."*

This anguish of humiliation is accompanied by an eroticizing, and henceforth guilt-inducing, image of the mother by the sight of her nude and touched body (naked, she would be massaged by Tareck) that harasses the child and inhibits him. Inhibition that appears on the card's level, by the general tendency to restriction found in almost the entire story (long latency, intra-story silence, short story, position of refusal), acted through mechanisms of denial, annulations and repressions.

The inhibition and avoidance of personal implication appear in the anonymity of the characters (TAT p. 3BM, 4, 8BM, 13B); this procedure is used where it is about family relationships, dysfunctional and lacking. *"I do not know if we are a family."* In addition, breaking off of the story due to the presence of an anxiogenic element (p. 13B and 5) refers to an anxiety relative to the mother, for whom the doubled imagos is felt. As well for the framing (c. 6BM & 19) that shows the drive frozen by an archaic castration. *"To punish me, my mom locked me in the room without light"*; an obscure room, but rather black castrator of a jailer matrix, who scares. The significant posture of affect (c. 10) is a measure of protection to the emotional impact of maternal imagos. The affect is recognized but it is found to be pushed to the outer envelope, and the bodybuilding seems to become a refuge against the fears associated with the archaic mother and the eroticizing mother. *"I hate heels, my mom hit me with them [...]"* Fetishism can lead to homosexuality; the heels on the skin have, for Tareck, a penile value: *"[...] they entered into my flesh."*

The representation of an object with idealization (+ valence), (TAT c. 1 & 10), is a narcissistic detail used for self-worth when threatened. Tareck feels threatened in his ego, by a paradoxically defective and aggressive father; *"Dad was dominated by his mother [...]; he is a jerk, like Mom said [...]; he swore at me [...]; I was never protected by him."* Tareck feels lonely and powerless (TAT- p. 3BM, 4). Powerless that he tries to compensate for by emphasizing the beauty of his muscles (when, during the interview, not talking about his

muscles, he looked at or performed movements to highlight them). The personal references (TAT p.1 and 4) show his need for self-investment. While the insistence on the limits and shapes and on sensorial qualities signal the investment of a corporeal envelope.

The description with attachment to details and justification of the interpretation, the temporal, spatial and numerical precision, same as intellectualization (c. 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 13MF, 16) emphasize the control of affect and the drive that emerge, specifically when the libidinal and aggressive instincts are directed against the father and the parental couple. The forth and back between instinctual expression and defense (c. 7BM) shows the bodybuilder's struggle against the omnipotence of desire. But ambiguous desire that sometimes holds on to masculine image and othertimes feminine, imago of the archaic mother.

In effect, the emphasis on interpersonal relationships in a libidinal register reflects the relationship supported by narcissism. Our bodybuilder with fragile narcissism introduces characters not mentioned on the image in order to make a withdrawal in regard to external reality. "*When I was young, the outside scared me. But the worst is that I did not know if the house made me even more scared.*"

Putting forward the affect at the disposal of the repressed is a hindrance and a blockage in face of representations loaded with strong libidinal investment and stricken by the interdiction of a superegoic instance. Tareck has an ambiguous relation to the father and conflicting with the mother, in which rebellion and submission are combined. Hatred and sexual attraction share the field. Contrasting representations of affect (in most pictures) express conflicting desires: they reflect the affective and emotional liability on the one hand, and the pleasure and displeasure on the other hand. The liability of identifications, (undetermined gender of the character seen from behind c.10, and cross-dressing c.8BM), is indicative of a sexual (homosexuality?) and identity problematic, appearing also in sexual denials, the unrecognized Oedipus (c. 2), and the narcissistic overcompensation through phallic overinvestment of the body. The body erected, muscled by the sports, becomes for Tareck, to say it again, a penile substitute: "*without the sports, I'm not a man.*"

The scotoma of a manifest object (c. 4 revolver), but also that of a character (3BM), reflects in fact a repression of aggression against the parental instances and a denial of the sexual drive. The extreme castration of this bodybuilder is obvious, and is accompanied by an archaic narcissistic injury through the use of the perception of a rare detail with arbitrary justification that is simply an expression of sexual impotence (*hand crushed*, c. 13MF).

The perception of deteriorated objects, the evocation of bad object and the instability of objects reveal the existence of underlying representation of the self affected in its identity foundations. "*I liked picking up the broken things; Dad brought me specific glue for each object, but mom threw away everything I had repaired*" (interview).

The scotomization and deterioration in Tareck all the way to the terror of disincarnation, "*One of the fears I had as a child*

is of losing my body", fear of falling into psychosis. It is this fear to fall into psychosis, that bodybuilding acting as a defense, tried to overcome through the idealization of the body.

The analysis of the interview and that of TAT strongly suggest that the family dynamics is organized around the defectiveness and lacks that make the process of individuation and adaptation difficult. In summary, Tareck suffers from an unstable father/son relationship and of an archaic mother, both castrating and eroticizing. The feelings of impotence of the adolescent appear related to the ambiguity of desire. The "*broken*" child has tried to "*put himself back together*". The narcissistic response appears as bodybuilding, in other words corporeal facing the threat that hinders subjectivation. In order to make himself invisible, the child disappeared under the table, the adolescent, for him, disappears under the muscles.

V. CONCLUSION

Synthesis. The interviews and analysis of TAT of Tareck allow us to identify certain constants.

Succinct table of the adolescent bodybuilder

- Relation to the primary object- defective
- Object a-gaze- lacking
- Symbolic castration (poor maternal mediation and mediocre paternal presence) insufficiently accomplished; reorganized by means of another libidinalized and aggressive language
- Unaccomplished identificatory process
- Return of aggression against oneself
- Passage to the act: sports dependence and addiction to AS and to hyperprotein foods
- Body/ideal ego as reparation for the affected narcissism.

Conclusion. To fill the humiliated body image, the bodybuilder develops strategies around the representativeness of his body; an ongoing struggle against the empty gazes is then settled. The acquisition, at the cost of the addiction, of the self/body-ideal becomes the ultimate goal, resulting in the splitting of the body. Bodybuilding is a pathology inscribed in the chiasm of narcissism.

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qui vient de l'Autre, Lacan a distingué *le moi idéal*, - ou idéal narcissique -, de *l'idéal du moi*, - ou idéal symbolique.

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