

# What Is Psycho-Organic Analysis? A description of the therapeutic space between body and psyche.

MARC TOCQUET

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## Abstract:

In this article, I present Psycho-Organic Analysis, a psychotherapeutic method created by Paul Boyesen in 1975. I articulate this presentation around the work with the "Organic Connection", a therapeutic space between body and psyche, which is at the heart of our therapeutic practice. I specify the contents of Organic Connection, the ways of accessing it and the therapeutic utility of working from these contents.

**Keywords:** Psycho-Organic Analysis, organic connection, body sensation, emotion, feeling, image, somatization, voice, positive regression, expression, symbolization.

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In 1925, on the high plateau of New Mexico 2,300 meters above sea level, Jung was on the fifth-floor terrace of a dried brick building. In this highest house of the village, he was wrapped up in a wool blanket, speaking with Ochwiay Biano ("Lake of the Mountains"), the chief of the Taos Pueblos Indians. In the evening coolness, taking his pipe out of his mouth and looking into Jung's eyes, Ochwiay Biano says:

- *Whites always desire something. They are always worried and are never at rest. We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We believe they are mad!*
- *Why do you think they are mad?* Jung asks.
- *They say they think with their heads.*
- *But of course! With what then, do you think?* retorts Jung, surprised.
- *We think here, says Lake of Mountains, showing him his heart.*" (Jung C.G., 1961, p. 392)

This holistic approach is also at the heart of Psycho-Organic Analysis: we position our therapeutic work at the level of the unity of the human being in which body, heart and thought are united and move in the same direction. The specific concepts and therapeutic approach of Psycho-Organic Analysis, created in 1975 by Paul Boyesen, were constituted in a combination of psychoanalysis, psycho-corporal therapies, and humanistic psychotherapies (Blamauer, 2003).

Much of the theoretical structure of psychoanalysis is at the heart of our practice. We work with the unconscious, pre-conscious and conscious, as well as with the notions of defence mechanisms and psychic resistance. We recognize the importance of early childhood experiences,

the structuring function of the Oedipus complex, and the transformational value of transference in therapeutic work.

However, following in line with the work of Wilhelm Reich, Gerda Boyesen and Alexander Lowen, we consider the body as a place and a means of expression and, unlike psychoanalysis, as a possible vector for the therapeutic transformation.

We know that the human organism functions as a single unit with two different systems: psychic life and organic life. These two systems are conditioned by one another and influence each other reciprocally. Therefore, it can be said that the unity of a person, their psycho-organic unity, results from the fact that all issues are part of both the somatic and the psychic framework.

The general approach of the many psycho-corporal therapies, especially following the work of Alexander Lowen, has been to give pre-eminence to the body, and to “body language”, by proposing emotional and bodily catharsis as a privileged therapeutic vehicle<sup>1</sup>. Paul Boyesen found, early on, that catharsis alone does not create any lasting therapeutic change. For such a change to take place, catharsis must be accompanied by an awareness, which only comes through giving a sense of meaning and significance with words.

Conversely for us, symbolizing is not simply a process of putting memories or associations into words, in which the corporeal experience would be secondary. In Psycho-Organic Analysis, the body is an indispensable vector of therapeutic transformation. We know, in fact, that it is the mutual connection between the body and the mind: the combination of internally-experienced feelings and the ability to express these externally, in words, that supports the efficiency of the therapeutic process.

Furthermore, Psycho-Organic Analysis is also infused with the existential humanist approach, which considers the person in the originality of his or her subjective experience and postulates the existence of a healthy core at the heart of every individual. The way of ‘being’ for each person depends on the specificity of his or her individuality, and only has meaning when expressed through their specific and unique identity. This may seem self-evident, but this ‘position’ has remarkable effects on the quality of the relationship that we establish with our clients.

Within Psycho-Organic Analysis, specific therapeutic tools have been developed from the roots that I have presented above.

In order to present the modality of Psycho-Organic Analysis, I propose to base the following explanations on its ‘structural’ model. As with Freud’s tripartite topographical models of the mind, the topographical model used in Psycho-Organic Analysis is not a physiological topography, nor

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<sup>1</sup> We are familiar with Lowen’s famous phrase: “The body does not lie”.

cartography. It is a model of the organic functioning of a human being, as shown in this first diagram:

### Topographic Model in Psycho-Organic Analysis

<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">LEVELS</div>	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">MANIFESTATIONS</div>
<b>CONCEPTUAL</b>	Reflexive Thought Language Conceptualization Reasoning Image
<b>ORGANIC CONNECTION</b>	Body Sensation Emotion Feeling Imagery Movement Dreams
<b>DEEP ORGANIC</b>	Visceral Manifestation Vegetative Reaction Emotion Psycho-peristalsis

The **Deep Organic** level is the level of visceral manifestations, vegetative reactions, psycho-peristalsis. This is the biological pulsatory life of our body, regulated by the Autonomic Nervous System: the beating of the heart, breathing, digestion, the hormonal and endocrine systems, etc. – all the wonderful biological life that enables our body to function every moment of the day and night.

The level of ‘**Organic Connection**’ is the space of connection between organic life and reflexive thought. It is the level of emotions, bodily sensations, images, dreams, behaviour, voice, as well as many other bodily symptoms. This is the intermediary space between the conscious and the unconscious, where manifestations occur that either seek to unconsciously express our

unfulfilled needs and inhibited desires. As I will demonstrate, this is for us the ‘privileged’ space that gives us access to deep therapeutic work.

The **Conceptual** level is more the territory of reflexive thought, language, conceptualization and reasoning. Depending on the needs of each person in therapy, and the stages of their therapeutic process, we can work within each of these levels:

- We can work at the conceptual level and proceed in a way that is somewhat similar to psychoanalysis – except that we pay more attention to the client’s and our own body;
- We can work – as many other body-orientated (and other) psychotherapists do – at the level of ‘Organic Connection’ with the client’s bodily sensations, emotions, feelings, imagery, movement, and dreams (as these all relate to the body);
- We can also position ourselves much more at the deep organic level and propose work that mobilizes the body burdens. We have developed specific ways of doing this.

The originality of Psycho-Organic Analysis lies (above all) primarily at the level of ‘Organic Connection’, in this space between body and psyche.

It is in this connection – between the organic experience and the dimension of meaning – that a symbolization of what the person has experienced becomes possible. It is this symbolization, associating the organic experience and the spoken word, which enables a lasting transformation to occur.

Here is an example of part of a session with a young woman, ‘Amandine’, who came to see me as she was suffering from anorexia and bulimia:

- *My mother tells me that she will call me back, but she doesn’t call me back. She is lost. She has difficulty with herself. She doesn’t know what she wants. I have never been able to count on her.*

At this moment, Amandine is also telling me that she feels a weight in her throat. I invite her to explore this sensation.

- *Before my attacks, I often have this sensation. In the past I often had a tingling feeling in my mouth, now it is my throat that is tightening.*

I propose that Amandine should try to let her throat ‘speak’ and I ask her: *What would your throat say if it could speak?*

- *It would say: "Release me. Give me oxygen." This weight in my throat is related to the fear of not doing things right. I am trapped in the fear of not doing well enough, not succeeding.*

*Me: “Stay in touch with this sensation in your body, what happens?”*

- *I am seeing myself as a child when my mother used to drive me to school in the morning. We were always late. She was always rushing me. It’s as if she was waiting to be late. I felt that it bored her to take care of me; that it was an obligation for her. She would have preferred not to have to do it. She was not interested in me. Still, she could have taken advantage of these moments to be in contact with me. Then too, my throat was very tight. She never asked me a single question, neither in the morning, nor in the evening when I came home from school. She didn’t care at all. She was absent, always preoccupied by my father. And me, I*

*was making myself as small as possible in the car, to try not to bother her more, to disappear, to apologize for existing.*

*Me: "Describe the situation in detail, and what you felt at that moment."*

*A: We're in the car, I curl up, my stomach hurts, I feel alone, my throat is tight, I cannot talk to anyone, I don't want to go to school, I don't want to see anyone.*

*Me: "What is happening for you, in this car, with your mother?"*

*A: I feel completely non-existent. Being next to her like this is even worse, because I see how she doesn't care, how I do not concern her. It has always been like that, everywhere. I feel the anxiety which is here.*

*Me: "Stay in touch with yourself in this situation. What would you like to say to your mother?"*

*A: Look at me! Don't you see that I'm here? Don't you see that I need to be in contact with you? I need you to notice me. I exist. Get out of your world, open your eyes. I'm dying of this isolation. You're not here and Daddy only thinks about himself.*

*Me: "How is it in your body, here, right now?"*

*A: I'm completely irritated. At least, it's directed outwards. It's disgusting to have children to hook a man and then to just ignore them. Not to really get involved with them. To create a family and then to act as if it didn't exist. This way of making herself inaccessible, of being inaccessible in fact. My hands want to grasp, to grab, to scratch.*

*Me: "What is it that you want to scratch?"*

*A: My mother of course! So, she can see that she has a daughter named Amandine. I have the impression that she's never really noticed. She wants to lead her mundane life, to be the wife of her husband, not to lose her position, not to disappear.*

Some time passes: Amandine seems to calm down.

*Me: "How do you think it should be between you both?"*

*A: How should it be? She should at least look at me, see me, understand that I exist, communicate with me, and give me a bit of attention. I don't ask for much, just a little bit of attention. For her to be interested a minimum in me.*

*Me: "How would this manifest itself?"*

*A: She would ask me questions. She would ask me how my day went. When I bring back my school report card; she could at least look at it, say something. She could take me in her arms, give me her warmth, integrate me into her life. We would have a life together, we would talk to each other, she would listen to me, she would help me to find myself, she would support me, affectionately.*

Some more time passes.

*Me: "How is it in your body now?"*

*A: It's less tense, it's less on edge.*

*Me: "What do you still feel about how it should have been with your mother?"*

*A: Between a mother and a daughter, there should be complicity, sharing. That's what I was waiting for, and it never happened, ever. She cares so little that you would feel like you're attacking her if you expected something.*

*Me: "What could she have done?"*

*A: It's easy to be with a child. You sit next to them and talk to them, you listen to them. She could have put her arms around me and tried to understand what I was going through. She*

*could have encouraged me to speak by being really attentive to me, trying to get in touch with me.*

*Me: "When would that have been?"*

*A: Anytime. In the evening when I came back from school, in my room in the morning, at any time. There would have been a good atmosphere between us, where I would have felt confident and recognized.*

*Me: "How is it in your body, here, right now?"*

*A: It's more relaxed. I feel a lot of heat. It's fluid inside; it's soft.*

*Me: "I invite you to enjoy these good sensations. Open yourself up to this relaxation, to this heat. Let your body really enjoy it and nourish itself."*

Some more time passes.

*A: I see myself at the seaside in Brittany; the wind is blowing gently. I feel how pleasant it is to have my throat free; the lightness of the air on my face; the air on my living body.*

I propose to Amandine that she allows herself to feel the sensation of the air on her face and her living body, to be attentive to what this sensation produces in her.

*A: I feel alive and free. Free to be myself, free to create what I know I am capable of creating.*

I propose again that she takes the time to feel what is here now.

*'I can clearly see the person that I could be' – She tells me at the end of this session.*

How could I define – more precisely – this symbolization which is at the heart of the therapeutic process? For me, 'therapeutic symbolization' is the action of making connections, based on a situation, between visual, auditory, tactile, emotion, feeling, and the putting into words and giving meaning in a "communicating ray"<sup>2</sup> with the other person or people involved. I would like to emphasize two points here:

- As in the example above, where Amandine is in the car with her mother, the work of symbolization takes place when it originates from reliving a specific situation from the past.
- This communicating 'ray' that I mention is a subjective action of expression and is particularly powerful and active in the therapeutic framework, because of transference and the therapist's warm and sensitive welcome. It is the instinctual involvement in the transference situation that provides the energy necessary for transformation.

Symbolizing is using the 'Organic Connection' to bring the person in therapy to connect what is happening now in body experience, feelings and emotions, to the person's psychic representations of situations in his or her past. These can be situations where the person has experienced and also those that he or she has not actually experienced, but was hoping to, or is still hoping to experience. 'Organic Connection' is the level that allows access to the symbolization of a situation and therefore constitutes the fundamental therapeutic tool.

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<sup>2</sup> Expression borrowed from F. Dolto, in Dolto F. & Winter J.-P. (2002), p. 71.

During symbolization, the client is present – with his or her desires, in contact with his or her own sensations and emotions, and an active part of this communicating ray with the other person involved. This enables a different integration of the client's experience to take place. As we have seen, it is a question here of what I have experienced, and also of what I have not experienced, but was expecting or hoping for. In Psycho-Organic Analysis, the mechanisms of transformation also include the taking into consideration of and repairing the unrealized.

For us, the 'Organic Connection' is indeed the space of subjectivity. It is the place where the person's subjective truth expresses itself fully, as it is part of the two aspects (psychic and organic) of unconscious issues. This is what we experience as Psycho-Organic Analysts, but we are considering 'Organic Connection' as the place of subjectivity that is also, ultimately, at the origin of psychoanalysis.

The discovery of psychoanalysis was indeed made at the interface of the body and the psyche. What Freud studied closely, that is to say using the methods of his first career as a researcher in neurobiology, was the paralysis of hysterical patients presented to him, he discovers that hysterical paralysis is not really within the corporeal register, it is not anatomical: the patient whose hand is paralyzed is paralyzed by the hand, the word "hand", the "concept" of the hand, this is called paralysis "in a glove". It is not anatomical and the paralysis is incoherent with regard to the nervous structure. This paralysis is located at the connection between the word and the body. It is, in fact, at the level of 'Organic Connection'.

Here too, the hysterical patient's fullest subjective expression is to manifest the unconscious conflict that preoccupies them is situated at the level of the physical expression of a psychic problem.

It is important to note that, for psychoanalysis, the expression of the body is secondary compared to the concept: the concept of the hand is first and only secondly, the problem around what the paralyzed hand wants to manifest appears in the body. This is the phenomenon of "hysterical conversion" in which some part of a psychic problem manifests itself in the body, as a corporeal or somatic symptom. The body is thus considered by Freud as the place of 'expression', only secondary to the psychic conflict. The body aims to draw attention to this conflict by expressing repressed representations.

Different forms of psycho-corporal organization exist, of course, other than hysteria; such as psychosomatic disorders, for example, which inhabit the physiological body differently. The physiological body presents itself here as autonomous, with respect to the instinctual body, and, therefore, psychoanalysis has much more difficulty in treating such pathologies.

For us, and as Wilhelm Reich and Gerda Boyesen have demonstrated, the body is capable of recording conflicts within its very physiology, that is to say without the bodily symptoms being the

translation of a psychological conflict. For the Psycho-Organic Analyst, the body and the psyche constitute the same functional unit, each co-acting directly on the other. Both operate at different speeds, with distinct – but (of course) – complementary nervous formations. Consequently, the action at each level of our topographic model directly affects the other two.

This synergy between soma and psyche, as well as a pre-eminence of the body in the perception of information, is also demonstrated by neuro-science, notably by the work of Antonio Damasio (1994, 2010).

Modern neurophysiology shows how our perception of the world feeds itself primarily on our bodily sensations, and how our bodies can perceive situations before the brain can to process them. The first perception – of what is happening to us – is not cerebral and does not happen through thought. The perception arises through an infinite number of sensors scattered throughout the body, which – first and foremost – perceive information, and then sends the information to the brain, by means of what Damasio calls the “neural cards”. Damasio thus shows that we feel an emotion of sadness, before experiencing the feeling of sadness.

Spinoza (1677, Part 2, XIII) already understood this, since (for him) the body and the mind are attributes of the same substance. Did he not write: "The object of our mind is the existing body, and nothing else?"

Let us also note finally that these reflections are in accordance with Dolto's (1984) proposals about the "unconscious image of the body". Dolto shows us that the human subject is indeed constructed from three components of this unconscious image of the body, which are in fact, a set of bodily sensations.<sup>3</sup>

The ‘Organic Connection’ therefore happens in both directions: it is just as much the psyche that connects with the body (the corporeal emotion is first, as shown by Damasio and then the psyche connects with the body), as the inverse, bodily inscriptions are dependent on the psyche, as in the case of hysterical conversions. The body is therefore a place of psychic expression, and the psyche is a place of bodily expression.

In Psycho-Organic Analysis, our ways of working with the level of Organic Connection are specific. One of the characteristics of the Psycho-Organic Analyst is his or her ability to accompany the client in welcoming, listening to and exploring this Organic Connection. This can happen when the person in psychotherapy is open to these bodily sensations, as well as to their emotions and feelings. The therapist supports this openness and exploration by an absolute and supportive presence. So, what is this Organic Connection made up of? What do we work with?

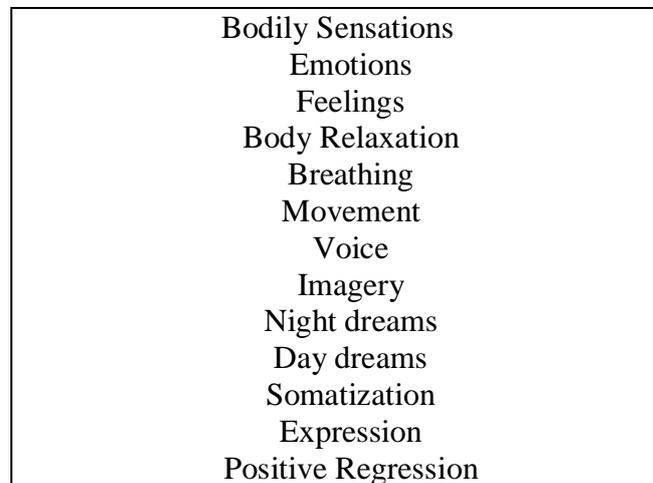
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<sup>3</sup> The three components are :

- the Basic Image which is the sensation of a dense and stable body,
- the Functional Image which is the sensation of a body which is agitated by organic tensions,
- the Erogenous Image which is the sensation of an erogenous body palpitating with pleasure.

Here is a second diagram, in which I present some of the contents of the Organic Connection and some of the ways of accessing these contents. The list of these particular methods of access is, of course, not exhaustive.

### **Examples of Some Ways of Accessing the ‘Organic Connection’**



#### **Bodily Sensations**

Since the body and body sensations are where one's relationship to oneself happens, the most beautiful thing that we can propose to the client is to take time to listen to the sensations inside themselves, as simply as possible, in a position of openness to what emerges, and to let the images and situations come up – which we can eventually pursue in the therapeutic work.

#### **Emotions**

Along with bodily sensations and feelings, emotion is also part of the content of the Organic Connection. From my perspective, it is also a part of the Deep Organic. Emotions are found in both of these levels. The body experiences an emotion, but we also have, secondarily, a perception of this emotion. This perception is part of the Organic Connection.

#### **Feelings**

A feeling is the psychic transcription of an emotion that is made through a series of images. Feeling is therefore – from the very start – part of an associative chain in which there are several situations. So, there is a kind of continuum from the most organic to the most psychic, between an emotion (understood by Damasio as “a stimulus, a complete collection of automatic chemical and neural responses forming a distinctive structure” (Damasio, 2003, p. 69)) and a feeling, which is the psychic transcription of emotion. Feelings are secondary to emotion (by a few milliseconds!): one feels an emotion of joy, before experiencing the feeling of joy. Various brain accidents and experimental protocols allow researchers to clearly differentiate these two phenomena. Feelings then continue their way through psychic inscription, where it can then become what the person subjectively experiences about the situation, in relation to his or her experience and history.

#### **Body Relaxation**

By ‘stimulating’ the parasympathetic half of the Autonomic Nervous System through various ways of bodily relaxation, this allows the person to open up to perceptions of their bodily sensations, emotions and feelings. It creates a certain fluidity of ‘being’ which allows images to emerge which can then be linked to situations or memories.

## **Breathing**

When breathing is conscious, it allows memories and images to come up, ensuring the feeling of permanence of self, of “sameness”, as Dolto (1984) would say. It is a method of support to get through difficult moments, anxiety, and apprehension. Conscious breathing encourages the appearance of the new, the unknown, the unfamiliar. As a medium for the feeling of one’s existence, breathing generally promotes well-being.

## **Movement**

The body acts; it manifests fairly continuously in movement; the spirit participates or seeks to guide. We can propose, for example, as Paul Boyesen teaches us, that the client accentuates, repeats, or exaggerates a movement that is currently happening and this movement often lets images, situations and words come. What is appearing? What is happening?

## **Voice**

Work on the voice, with its modulation, its tone and clarity, work with "humming" and all other sounds that can come out of our throats and that are always experienced with the greatest sensitivity. The voice is a very sensitive element between emotion, sensation and expression. With what quality of voice do we express our words? An example of work that can be proposed: “Feel your breath and let a sound emerge”. Sound and voice can constitute magnificent openings to the emergence of feelings and situations. The voice can be a joyful support of one’s consciousness of participating in the world.

## **Imagery**

Like emotion, imagery is an important expression of the Organic Connection, and also a way of accessing other elements of the Organic Connection. In fact, an image is a sensitive, living formation. I truly feel it is the delicate, fluid and moving formation of choices and imagery that gives us access to the Organic Connection and which also probably organizes most of our psychic life. It is images, not words, which are the privileged means of expression for nearly all our memories and our learning.

This importance of imagery is not surprising as the sense of sight is fundamental for Homo Sapiens. Vision has been by far our predominant sense ever since we stood upright. For anatomists, the retina is a part of the brain which is located outside of it. Image thus constitutes the main vector of access to the Organic Connection. It is a kind of ‘transitional object’ between soma and psyche.

By linking bodily experience and psychic representation, imagery fundamentally leads us into situations. We often solicit images from our clients in order to open up to situations, which can then be revisited or elaborated on; difficult situations or those awaiting resolution<sup>4</sup>.

The sensitive nature of an image means that it alone can evoke and condense the entirety of a vaster issue, which may have appeared in different forms at different stages of a person's life, and that a current situation may activate or re-activate.

Images can condense disparate elements that are connected by a dimension of meaning, something Freud had already established by studying the imagery of dreams. An image can therefore, very often, provide the path that enables us to trace the origin and meaning of a difficulty

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<sup>4</sup> It is striking, when we pay attention, to see the extent to which expression is based on images. Here are some examples gathered in a few sessions:

- I'm like a whale stranded on a beach.
- I have no memories, they must be buried deep down somewhere.
- I have tension in my neck on the left, like a ball that wants to get out.

or a symptom. Moreover, there is great fluidity in passing from one image to another. An image very easily leads to another with which it is associated. Our attention – as a therapist – is naturally drawn to these modalities of passage, because the associations thus created often put a larger theme that is an issue for the person into a different perspective. Imagery is an intermediate formation between unconscious needs and desires on the one hand and symbolizing (in the "concept") on the other.

### **Night-dreams**

There has been a lot of therapeutic work based on the narration of nocturnal dreams. We can, for example, propose that the person in therapy allow his/herself to pursue a recent dream during the session.

### **Day-dreams**

Again, we often work with the deployment of images that might appear when the client is in a relaxed state and can let go of the conscious mind.

### **Somatization**

If it is indeed somatization, this happens within the Organic Connection. In my experience, working on physical pain, for example, systematically leads to the identification of current issues and situations, which crucially need to be addressed. This is what we saw with Amandine when I asked her: "What would your throat say, if it could speak?"

### **Expression**

There are various types of expression: verbal, artistic, corporal, etc. In the forms of expression, both the body and the psyche are active. In the act of expression itself, it is the Organic Connection that is called upon. Expression is very important in Psycho-Organic Analysis and especially in group work, we work a great deal with expression.

### **Positive Regression**

Regression is not a matter of going back to the origin, but rather bringing something from the person's origin towards us, as we can never go back in time. Positive regression in Psycho-Organic Analysis is a way of restoring something from the very foundations of being, of reviving the libidinal structure of the subject. For us, the great advantage of regression is not to deconstruct, but rather to plunge into a very deep and underground level, by ensuring that the person can reunite with their pleasure for life and for living at the primary narcissistic level. Methods of regressive experience exist in many types of psychotherapies, and in many different ways. In Psycho-Organic Analysis, we can propose to the person in therapy (but always with their agreement and by specifying that the experiment can be interrupted at any time), a set of what we call "experientials". These allow unsatisfactory experiences of primary narcissism to be repaired, and a reconstruction can take place when things went badly or did not happen at all. I have noticed that this often implies reconnecting with these insufficient experiences of a relationship but this time with a person (the therapist) who is benevolent, attentive and predictable. Work on the 'birth process' is an example of the sort of healing that is possible in positive regression.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This is a specific work in Psycho-Organic Analysis where you fix what went wrong during your birth process (conceived from the conception until the reception by the parents) or what did not happen when it should have happened (Tocquet, 2018).

To conclude, I would like to highlight the difficulty of staying within the Organic Connection. The person in therapy, as well as the therapist, are subject to the primacy of the psychic perception of reality, and thus to the primacy of discourse. One of the challenges of our work is being able to resist this primacy, as the concept constantly seeks to gain the upper hand within the framework of the session.

It can also clearly be difficult (due to the primacy of image and representation in our culture) to remain at the level of the Organic Connection, and to resist the predominant power of the spoken word. Concept, that is to say the conscious, evades, eludes, invents, and digresses, often to avoid opening up to the unconscious dimension proposed by the Organic Connection or the Deep Organic. Our challenge is thus to resist this tendency, this “entropy” as we could call it, and to remain, when necessary, in this unique and original space of our practice.

### **Author**

**Marc Tocquet** is a French clinical psychologist, psychotherapist and psycho-organic analyst. After teaching in many academic institutions, including Paris Diderot University, he currently trains therapists in Paris at the French School of Psycho-Organic Analysis (EFAPO). He also supervises individuals and groups. In addition to his practice as a clinical psychologist-psychotherapist in a public hospital, he receives adults, children, teenagers and couples in his private practice. He also conducts group psychotherapy and facilitates many workshops in which the psycho-organic unity of the person is of particular importance. He is the creator of the process “Being Self: Realize yourself fully”. He is the author of numerous articles on Psycho-Organic Analysis and co-author of the book “Psycho-Organic Analysis: The corporeal ways of psychoanalysis” published in 2015 at Editions l'Harmattan in Paris.

**E-mail:** marctocquet@yahoo.fr

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