

Book title: « **Children's drawings of gods: an interdisciplinary approach** »

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Status of publishing: open access

General argument:

The concept of god, at least in some religious traditions, is one of the most difficult concepts to grasp, and presupposes a long evolution in an individual. The interdisciplinary project "Drawings of gods: A multicultural and interdisciplinary approach to children's representations of supernatural agents" aims to demonstrate the richness of drawing as a method for studying representations of god in children and thus contribute to our understanding of this concept, its origins and its development. In this perspective, drawings from a variety of cultural and religious traditions (Switzerland, Japan, Russia, Iran, Brazil, Netherlands and so on) were collected and analysed by the project team and their partners from different countries. The purpose of this book is to bring together these researchers with the objective on one side of sharing the results of their research, and on the other side critically examining the contributions and limitations of this methodology, which deals with research conducted with children. It is also an opportunity to launch a discussion on new research avenues to study this material and especially to reflect on the new empirical and theoretical perspectives within the broader framework of the study of this concept.

## **Plan**

### **Part I: Towards an integrative model**

Authors: **Pierre-Yves Brandt** (University of Lausanne), **Zhargalma Dandarova Robert** (University of Lausanne), **Grégory Dessart** (University of Lausanne), **Hanneke Muthert** (University of Groningen, The Netherlands), **Hanneke Schaap-Jonker** (Kennisinstituut Christelijke GGZ, Amersfoort, The Netherlands)

Title: **Integrative model of children's representations of god in drawings**

Abstract: Confronted with the task to draw "god", children have to solve a problem. They are asked to produce a visual representation of an entity that they have never seen. Resources for solving this problem are available in the cultural context. Some of them concern the shaping of the figure itself, like various religious representations of gods, iconic figurations of supernatural agents in fictional artifacts (paintings, movies, cartoons, etc), advertisement, etc. Other resources concern the {valence} attributed to colors or to different parts of an image composition. The drawings produced by children depends not only on their familiarity with these resources (socialization and educational aspects), but also on their cognitive abilities to grasp the concept of god *and* the environmental resources provided for representing god. In choosing how they will represent god, and depending which are the resources with which they are familiar, children have to solve additional problems. For example, potential parental connotations of the concept of god can wake up attachment bond to parental figures; religious prohibition to represent god can be in conflict with the requested task to draw god; drawing a supernatural agent can activate skills for drawing an agent like a human being with anthropomorphic and gender features, etc. The purpose of this chapter is to integrate as far as

possible the results presented in parts II-V of this book, and to articulate the different factors in an integrated model of possible strategies to solve the problem of drawing god.

## **Part II: Focus on the main figure : anthropomorphic and gender features**

Authors: **Grégory Dessart** (University of Lausanne), **Zhargalma Dandarova Robert** (University of Lausanne), **Pierre-Yves Brandt** (University of Lausanne)

### **Title: Anthropomorphizing and de-anthropomorphizing supernatural agency: From conceptual strategies to their theological implications**

Abstract: Children very often depict supernatural agents in their drawings as a human figure and seldom as a non-human entity. By portraying a human entity, they are likely to add non-human elements or remove human features in a gesture that conveys a sense of being different a concept from the one of the human being all the while mostly fitting into the human category. Children sometimes work on the background around their drawn god to provide additional information about how they imagine that figure in interaction with the world. Appearances of the divine in a human form have a strong significance in several religious traditions and help individuals grasp some qualities associated with it. Various religious traditions have often identified such scenarios as being close to god or being assigned a special mission or receiving guidance. How children associate god with a human form and how they seem to repeat cultural patterns may be indicative of both their religious socialization and the underlying cognitive processes involved in such a task.

Authors: **Grégory Dessart** (University of Lausanne), **Zhargalma Dandarova Robert** (University of Lausanne), **Pierre-Yves Brandt** (University of Lausanne)

### **Title: Gender-typing god representations: Socio-normative constraints and ontological significance**

When drawing a human (or personified) figure children are likely to make a statement about its gender(s), be it intentionally or not. When they attend to gender-typing god children are likely to stand at the crossroads of different sorts of normative pressure guiding their visual compositions. The main predictable sources of influence may pertain to: same-gender preference, cultural androcentrism of god concepts (e.g., in an environment marked by Christianity) and hegemonic masculinities.

The present chapter will adopt an interdisciplinary perspective and propose theoretical perspectives to apprehend different types of normative pressures. Empirical evidence will be provided by comparing four samples of participants from different cultural contexts (i.e., Saint-Petersburg, French-speaking Switzerland, Buryatia and Japan).

Another section will address the possible visual impact of gender. Besides being the receptacle of normative influence god representations might sometimes be gendered to convey specific properties, such as a beard might evoke wisdom or mixed genders might refer to the notion of duality. This part will be supported empirically by data collected in French-speaking Switzerland.

The gender-typing of god by children will therefore be addressed in the present chapter through sources and influence, on the one hand, and possible wider effects that are not exclusive to gender, on the other hand.

Authors: **Zhargalma Dandarova-Robert** (University of Lausanne), **Christelle Cocco** (University of Lausanne), **Grégory Dessart** (University of Lausanne), **Pierre -Yves Brandt** (University of Lausanne)

Title: **Where gods dwell? Spatial imagery in children's drawings of gods**

Abstract: Spatial metaphors, used to describe the divine in some ancient and existing religious traditions, are often associated with higher levels in space. The major deities of ancient Greek religion were believed to reside on Mount Olympus. In Christianity God is consistently associated with heaven and Jesus ascended into it after his resurrection. According to the Hindu and Buddhist cosmology devas (divine beings) dwell in various heavenly realms. Thus it is not surprising that gods are often pictured above the earth or within the upper section of an image (e.g. paintings) in religious art.

Accordingly, can we expect to find the same spatial pattern in children's drawings of gods? Noting that they vary greatly in their composition, especially concerning the presence or absence of a background. This chapter presents results from a comparative analysis of drawings collected in Japan (n = 92), Russia (n = 519), Switzerland (n = 532) and annotated with Gauntlet, an image annotation tool (<http://d2d.vital-it.ch>). The embodiment theory will be used as a conceptual framework to explain the findings. Individual variables such as religiousness (e.g. being Buddhist or Christian), gender and age will be considered in order to control for their possible influence on the spatial characteristics of children's pictorial representations of the divine.

### **Part III: Focus on material features**

Authors: **Christelle Cocco** (University of Lausanne), **Christine Mohr** (University of Lausanne), **Domicela Jonauskaitė** (University of Lausanne), **Pierre-Yves Brandt** (University of Lausanne)

Title: **The colour of god(s): Early processing mechanisms of an all-powerful entity as depicted through colour choices in drawings of gods**

Abstract: Our cultural upbringing likely shapes the way we envisage powerful, guiding entities such as god or deities. Such powerful entities might touch upon common psychological processing mechanisms that become expressed comparably across cultures. For instance, a powerful god might bring us a guiding light, the bright yellow colour of the sun, overseeing our activities and wellbeing from a spatial position overseeing all our activities (the sky). This power might also be represented as a halo around a depicted figure's head. We are investigating to what extent, at which location and in which context (religious or public) children of various ages and of different cultures (Switzerland, Japan, Russia, Iran) use "powerful" colours (yellow, orange, red) to depict god(s). Within the larger cross-cultural project "Drawings of gods", children's drawings were digitized. A specially developed computer program enables us to extract colours from these drawings and compute the proportion at which each colour appears in the drawings. These proportions were compared as a function of variables of interest (e.g. country, age, etc.). Results show, for instance, that drawings collected in religious contexts contain more yellow than the ones in public context. These results are discussed in light of colour choices in previous studies regarding the link between colours and emotions or concerning children colour preferences, to assess the specificity of colour choices for god versus other context situations. Thus, we learn to what extent intrinsic properties of colour convey psychological meanings.

Authors: **Christelle Cocco** (University of Lausanne), **Raphaël Ceré** (University of Lausanne)

**Title: Numerical analyses of children's drawings of god(s): an approach based on computer vision and mathematical methods**

Abstract: Contrary to mainstream research methods in psychology, the project "Drawings of gods" encompasses computer vision and mathematical methods to analyse the drawings. The first part of this chapter describes a set of these methods permitting to extract measures, namely features, from characteristics and annotations of the image. In the second part, the dissimilarities between the drawings are computed on these features (such as the gravity centre of the smallest image unit, namely pixel, or the annotated position of god) and combined in order to numerically measure the difference between the drawings. An exploratory data analysis based on these dissimilarities, including multidimensional scaling and clustering, is conducted to understand whether the chosen features permit us to discriminate the children's strategies to draw god.

**Part IV: Focus on emotional features and attachment style**

Authors: **Richard P. Jolley** (Staffordshire University), **Grégory Dessart** (University of Lausanne)

**Title: Emotional expression in children's drawings of God according to age, gender and religiosity**

Abstract: Experimental research on the expressive aspects of children's drawings conducted in the last 40 years has reported consistently that children use the same expressive techniques as artists, despite varying opinions on how expressive drawing develops in childhood (e.g. U-shaped curve or age incremental). This growing body of research has been largely derived from drawing tasks that explicitly ask children to draw an emotion/mood (e.g. happy, sad, angry). Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of expression in children's drawings is such that we might expect children to spontaneously/naturally communicate expressively in drawing tasks that do not specifically request mood. 'Drawing God' is such an example due to the potential emotive aspects of the picture, both in terms of the 'God Figure' and the potential representation of other subject matter in the drawing. With this in mind an analysis is presented in this chapter of over 500 children's drawings from Switzerland, obtained from a sample of 6- to 16-year-olds. In particular, we will comment on the intensity (strength) and valence (positive, negative, ambivalent, neutral) of the emotional expression in the drawings, and how this varies according to age, gender and religiosity.

Authors: **Hanneke Muthert** ( University of Groningen, The Netherlands), **Hanneke Schaap-Jonker** (Kennisinstituut Christelijke GGZ, Amersfoort, The Netherlands)

**Title: Different attachment styles in relation to children's drawings of God: a qualitative and quantitative exploration**

Abstract: Different attachment styles (secure, insecure) - being defined along the dimensions of degree of anxiety and degree of avoidance in a Western context - imply different types of relationships between self and other, and thus different ways of being receptive for and connecting to the external social and cultural world, including religion. We assume that a secure attachment style will be related to being more open and responsive to (religious) culture seen as 'not-me'. Someone who is securely attached is able to integrate external ideas, thoughts,

stories, images, rituals, symbols regarding God in her/ his own thinking, speaking and experiencing of God, being connected at the very same time to personal experiences, needs and longings as well. Exactly in integrating these internal and external worlds- which means containing ambivalences as well- one can use symbols as referring to otherness in a way that is personally meaningful. This reflects a developed capacity for mentalizing or thinking about thinking and understanding mental states, which is part of social cognition.

In this chapter, we will explore children's drawings of God and their accompanying narratives in relation to their attachment styles. After describing our theoretical framework, we will present the results of a qualitative analysis of 15 drawings of insecurely attached children in comparison to 15 drawings of securely attached children, with a focus on qualitative aspects of children's drawings of God and their use of religious symbols. In this context, children's drawings of their families are investigated too. Our hypothesis is that those who are securely attached will use more religious symbols, and that these symbols have a referring and self-transcending character, in contrast to those who are insecurely attached. Furthermore, we will examine the spatial characteristics of drawings of God, as a preliminary quantitative analysis, with a focus on the size of the drawings of God, and 'god's' position of the paper in relation to attachment styles. Our hypotheses are that, compared to securely attached children, the size of the drawn Gods of insecurely attached ones will be smaller, and position their drawing more often in a corner or at the lowest part of the page.

#### **Part V: Focus on specific cultural context**

Authors : **Mohammad Khodayarifard** (University of Tehran), **Reza Pourhosein** (University of Tehran), **Shahla Pakdaman** (University of Shahid Beheshti), **Saeid Zandi** (University of Allameh Tabatabaie)

#### **Title: Iranian Children's Drawings of God: Demographic and Contextual Considerations**

Abstract: Recently, more than 3'000 drawings of God have been collected in Iran. This chapter presents the conditions for this collect and some results derived from it. These findings are interpreted in terms of possible social, cultural, and contextual factors (media, formal and informal education) and also reviewed from developmental psychology perspective. Furthermore, a brief comparison between Iranian findings and those of the Western cultures is taken into account, considering the concept of god with regard to Iranian-Islamic culture and non-Islamic cultures. Finally, limitations of the study and future research directions are critically discussed.

Keywords: god image, drawings, Iran, culture, spirituality.

Authors: **Alberto Domeniconi Küntgen-Nery** (University of São Paulo), **Camila Mendonça Torres** (University of São Paulo)

#### **Title: The first discoveries and the challenges of researching representations of gods in a continental country such as Brazil**

Abstract: The collection of drawings held in Brazil, faced the difficulties of a country as large as a continent. Fortunately, we were able to gather a group of researchers, all of them psychology undergraduate students, from different parts of the country. After translation and adaptation of the procedure to the Brazilian Portuguese and background, they were trained to apply the procedure and collect drawings. Our sample includes 150 drawings ranging from Sao

Paulo, one of the largest urban centres in the world, to native communities in the Amazon. Different range of age groups and religious traditions are represented. The results reflect Brazil's multicultural environment, strongly influenced by the Christian religious tradition, largely Catholic, but that in recent decades has seen an outstanding growth of Pentecostalism. At the same time, some drawings present animist representations of gods.

## **Part VI: Focus on non-representability and prohibition**

Authors: **Thomas Römer** (University of Lausanne)

### **Title: Representing the gods of ancient Israel and Judah**

Abstract: The article will try to demonstrate that the concept of aniconism is a very late development linked to the rise of Judaism in the Persian period. During the first half of the second millennium there are clear indications that Yhwh and a female goddess, Asherah, or the "Queen of Heavens" were represented in various ways. Iconographic and textual sources provide indications for this fact. The chapter will first discuss the available sources. After that it will be shown that Yhwh in the North was represented as a young bull and in the South in an anthropomorphic way as an enthroned god. Special attention will be given to artefacts that are thought to depict Yhwh and a female deity. The article will finally try to answer the question why Judaism prohibited pictural and other representations of the god of Israel.

Author: **Zahra Astaneh** (University of Lausanne)

### **Title: The representation of God in Islam and its prohibition: Children's strategies used by Iranian children in drawings of God**

Abstract: Traditionally, the act of drawing and specifically drawing God and the prophets is considered forbidden in Islam. In fact, Quran as the sacred book of Muslims doesn't say any verse about the prohibition of drawings in general. But the Muslim scholars interpret some verses of Quran and prophetic words as prohibiting the representation of God. By the aid of researchers from University of Tehran, we were able to test what consciousness children have of this law when asked to draw God. A little over 3,000 drawings of children between 7 and 14 years old from six cities in Iran have been collected. After presenting the religiosity context of contemporary Iran, this chapter illustrates the strategies used by Iranian children to draw God. The first findings are that only 9 children used the words "sin" or "to be allowed" in their descriptions. By increase of age, more children have said that they "can't" draw God because to their opinion God is greatest and is beyond their imagination, or they say that the God is not drawable. Our findings show that religious teachings are acquired mostly after age of 10.

## **Part VII: Focus on comparison with other supernatural agents**

Author: **Ramiro Tau** (National University of La Plata)

### **Title: Natural and supernatural agents: children's representations of gods and dead entities**

Abstract: When a child faces the task of having to draw something "related with human death", within an interview, he draws from imaginary, figurative and schematic resources offered by culture and the peer-group's social representations, in the process of generating an original

image, modulated by the subject's own knowledge. In turn, a graphic representation such as this one, usually exposes the child's resolution of two fundamental problems regarding the comprehension of death: a) Which type of entity —a body, a person, a soul, among many others— dies with death? b) What are the characteristics of the place or space of the dead? We can say that, for the child, both, what dies with death as well as the place of the dead, are regulated by a specific legality, different from the one the child recognizes as prevailing in his daily life. In particular, the physical, biological and psychological principles that children accept and recognize as necessary in their everyday experience, are cancelled, inverted or alternated when death occurs. This subversion of the order of the real, where the child accounts for the dead and their corresponding space, becomes evident in their drawings and is analogous to the one found in children's representations of deities, supernatural agents and divine spaces. This cognitive and figurative correspondence between the attributes the children confer to the dead, the gods and the spaces they inhabit will be analyzed and discussed building on the results obtained in a study on the development of the comprehension of death, conducted in Argentina, with 60 children from 5 to 10 years old, belonging to atheist, agnostic and Christian families.

### **Part VIII: Focus on the research process**

Authors : **Dominique Vinck** (University of Lausanne), **Pierre-Nicolas Oberhauser** (University of Lausanne)

#### **Title : Shaping digital tools, equipping children drawings**

Abstract : As data sharing and preservation become a major concern in the humanities and social sciences, more and more scholars are lead to produce, organize and/or manage digital infrastructures. What we suggest to call data equipment is a major aspect of such work. Our study draws on the ethnographic follow-up of the “Children's drawings of gods” project, focusing on the production and organization of the database. We describe how the drawings are equipped, i.e. how entities are added to the original material and transformed in order to make the data usable and sharable at different scales. We document the constitution of the data (production and recollection of drawings and metadata, production of further metadata, digitization), the transformation of the drawings during this process, and the design and realization of a database and several digital analytical tools. This careful tracking and analysis allows us to describe how the data, the infrastructure and the (actual and potential) research collective are co-constructed. Our main argument is that the incapacity to define accurately the abilities of the database's would-be users partly prevent the blackboxing of various choices into data, IT tools, research protocols, organization and skills.

Author: **Frédéric Darbellay** (University of Geneva)

#### **Title: Children's Drawings of Gods: The Dynamics and Challenges of Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

Abstract: Based on an analysis of the research project “Drawings of gods: A multicultural and interdisciplinary approach to children's representations of supernatural agents”, this chapter aims to study the epistemological and methodological issues that arise when several disciplinary approaches are convened for the processing, analysis and interpretation of a corpus of digitized children's drawings. Based on a participant observation, the documentation and the self-reflexivity of the researchers involved in the dynamics of the project, we show how the interdisciplinary process is set up, with its points of convergence, its potentialities but also its difficulties with regard to the various epistemic and cultural horizons involved.

**Part IX: Conclusive remarks on this interdisciplinary project**

Authors: **Pierre-Yves Brandt** (University of Lausanne), **Zhargalma Dandarova Robert** (University of Lausanne), **Dominique Vinck** (University of Lausanne), **Frédéric Darbellay** (University of Geneva)

Title: **Contributions and limitations of the methodology of drawings for studying children's representations of god**

Abstract: The use of drawings to study children's representations is not a classic in child psychology. Analysing images is challenging on different levels: content analyse, material features of the drawings, development of technical tools. This chapter will discuss the benefits and the limitations of this methodology.