

DOMINIQUE DELPLANCHE

## Anger

I'm going to tell you about Manu, a young neurotic of fourteen who has spent four years as an in-patient at Courtil. He presents affective troubles and a relation to desire marked by the impossible. So I have chosen these two concepts for reading the construction that he made during his stay at Courtil.

His mother addressed us on his behalf for his learning difficulties, an inhibition relating to all learning which appeared at the death of his older brother one year before his admission to Courtil. His father, after fifteen years of marriage, left his wife and children. His mother describes him as a good-for-nothing, unemployed, alcoholic and a rapist. When she undertook divorce proceedings, the father reappeared. The mother left the home with her oldest daughter. The judge would give custody to the father and visitation rights to the mother. It was thus that in February, 1988, the children could spend their vacations with their mother. Pablo, the older brother, refused and stayed with his father while the others returned to their mother's house. Upon arriving, it was discovered that Manu had forgotten his suitcase. The father returned to get it, bringing Pablo with him. And it was on the road that the accident claiming the life of Pablo took place. The father, drunk, was condemned and imprisoned. After that, he wasted away and died two years later. The mother specified during interviews that Pablo had been like a mother to Manu; that she herself couldn't care for him, and Pablo had taken care of him in her place.

On arriving at Courtil, Manu was depressed, sad and anxious at bedtime: he feared having nightmares. He addressed his fears primarily to the female intervenants who listened, comforted him, guided him, and he then slept pacified. If he met someone who didn't play along with this game, he got angry. Lacan has said of anger that it appears when the round pegs

won't go in the square holes, which is to say when the faithful Other doesn't play the game. It appeared with Manu the moment one asked him, for example, to participate in a workshop, to be where the schedule said he should be and no more than that. The request of the Other no longer was situated in a dimension of love, but confronted him with the master discourse where he might eventually be brought to the question of what does one want of him. The moment that one was no longer a sweet and loving person who attempted to understand him, who sympathized, who explained things to him and let him do what he wanted (which was nothing); the moment he was solicited on the side of desire, he threw a tantrum.

His tantrums had an excessive aspect: for a little nothing, he screamed, yelled and then cried. This always ended in a return to the depressed position. During a second period, his tantrums would change and become more verbal. He would address more particularly and almost exclusively the women. He would insult them, calling them «bitch and whore,» incompetents who knew nothing, understood nothing. Now, he pretends to throw a fit, using funny insults and smiling: «You bowl of soup, pay attention or you'll get as fat as...». These are no longer insults.

The depression and fear, which were such that at one point we thought of giving the diagnosis of melancholia, testify now to a feeling of guilt. It is thus that Michel Silvestre, in *Demain la psychanalyse*<sup>1</sup> proposes that we approach the feeling of guilt from a phenomenological point of view. From the angle of these two emotions, the subject addresses the Other to be comforted with a «No, it's not your fault.» In this way, sadness and fear, like all emotions except anxiety, are deceptive. Here, it is the Other who is fooled. To present one's suffering as needing to be appeased is, at the same time, to veil the question of one's guilt. The guilt is situated here, one might say, in forgetting his suitcase, and in not having stayed with his brother and father. Might it not be that forgetting his suitcase is the sign of his division, of his incapability to chose between his father and his mother, or even between his mother and brother-mother? His desire to stay with his father and brother can be heard in his forgetting his suitcase, a desire which he has given up on in order to choose his mother.

His avoidance of the question of guilt and desire can also be seen in the explanations he gives on the «hows» of death in general: «One dies when one passes under a bridge» or «One walks and suddenly, one dies.» These formulas make me think of other superstitious formulas that he uses: «Above all, don't talk about rain or it will rain.»

If the depression and anxiety pass, the feeling of guilt persists. He feels guilty all the time and in a massive way. One day, I became angry at a group of children, saying, «Who could have broken this. It's incredible

that nothing here stays in one piece. Who is it?» *Manu* rose and left the room in such a way that I was convinced he had done it. Later in the day, I learned that it wasn't him. Another example: one night, on the telephone with his mother, he began crying. To his mother, asking him if he hadn't done something wrong, he responded, «Yes, but I don't know what.» Is he once again soliciting from the Other an «It's not your fault» by pleading guilty when he isn't? On the other hand, he renders himself guilty by breaking things, pushing the Other to punish him by constituting a debt that he will have to pay. In this way on another occasion after he had ostensibly broke a lot of things, I explained to him that he put himself in this mess, that he hurt not us but himself because he knows that at Courtil one pays for what one breaks. To which he clearly answered, «Yeh! But this way you busy yourself with making out the list of broken things to make me pay for, I busy myself with paying for them, and we don't worry about other things.»

The other thing that mustn't be worried about relates to what set-off the breaking spree: something he said concerning a bandage on his finger. «I have a band,» he said, making two intervenants laugh.<sup>2</sup> Confronted with this enigmatic laughter, *Manu* was overcome with anxiety and in the half-hour that followed, he broke things. Then an «It's your fault» appeared. The Other is guilty of hindering him from doing what he wants. At this moment, *Manu* might say what he wants in the form of «what I want to do is this, but you won't let me.» Thus he could accede to a painting workshop after having installed an «I'll come if I want to, and you won't stop me.» In the first period, he refused to come to this workshop, then he came but made a big mess all the same. I punished him, depriving him of the painting workshop the next week. He was surprised. But the following week he came decidedly: «You won't stop me.» He came but painted like a house painter, playing on the ambiguity of our request. The following workshop he didn't sketch; he scribbled a little. My colleague worried that he didn't draw anything. She usually got from him very pretty drawings about which he spoke and she took notes. This time he presented her a big, black square, the white border of the paper making a frame: «Go ahead! Tell me what that might represent.» We hung up his picture, and I congratulated him for being such a great artist that he could represent the «nothing.»<sup>3</sup>

In other respects, he had a way of not authorizing himself to take pleasure in anything; he did not engage himself in doing what he wants. He stayed at a distance and watched the others have fun. He really wanted to, but he wouldn't let himself go. He often wanted to go home to his mother's in the middle of the week, but it was always with great distress that he announced this to us. Friday, he watched his friends play soccer. He didn't participate because he has to go home. This choice of displeasure, suffering is perhaps another facet of self-punishment, linked to guilt.

An impossible concerning desire clearly surfaced. He could only indicate his desire under the auspices of the hinderance or in denying it. For example, angrily he told me, «Don't think I come to your workshop because I like you.» And more recently, he said, «Ha!Ha!Ha! I can still come to your workshop. Too bad for you.» The impossible desire is also his way of constructing a version of the accident that happened to his brother. If Pablo died, it's his fault. He could have made the same choice as all the others. His brother had clearly put forward a desire to remain with his father, and it follows that he died. Might Manu one day desire without death following? The accident confronted him with a forced choice of his mother: give me mother or give me death. Above all, he mustn't indicate his desire for other things than mother, he has to go home to mother.

A workshop «handyman» which I conducted with another intervenant gave me the occasion to follow Manu in his question on the mother and women. Manu came for several months, but whatever I said or did, he insulted me. Two things relate to these insulting scenes. It was soon clear that I, as a woman, knew more about the craft than my male colleague, and we played on this battle of the sexes. Was man then confronted with a woman opposite of the one he advanced in his insults: an incompetent? Another important point was that, regularly but very discretely, he asked me about my son. He never forgot that I'm a mother.

Manu had always idealized his mother, which I called the «All for mother.» He wanted to go home to mommy all the time because she needed him to help with the other children. Alone, she couldn't manage it herself. His project for his future was to live with his mother, above all not with a woman he might choose. He went so far as to steal things for her, because she didn't have them. He wanted to fulfill this woman who was alone without a man; he never spoke of her boyfriend. His mother, remember, called his father a good-for-nothing rapist. Thus there was no man as cause-of-desire for her. There wasn't a masculine ideal for Manu. The ideal was situated in his brother-mother. If Manu then fulfilled this mother, it was in taking the place of the dead brother who was a true mother for him, who cared for the children. In caring for the children, he also took the place of the father: a thief. The mother, during an interview, testified to the resemblance between Manu and his father, saying, «Manu, he's my ex-husband,» meaning «he's just like my ex-husband.»

One day at the supermarket, he complained about the women working there as usual. In a discussion that followed, I retorted, «But your mother, she's also a woman.» It was as if I had insulted his mother. «A mother is not a woman,» he said. He's right; a woman can't be reduced to or completely explained by «being a mother.» The maternal function is situated in reference to the father and the phallus, in the phallic field, the

field of castration. This is also how I took Manu's discourse; the father is no longer there, nor the older brother, so he must be the one at her side to care for the children. To indicate the woman there would be to raise the question of sexual desire between man and woman. Here it would confront him with incest. He would be the man beside his mother who is also a woman. He was cornered between the ideal, forbidden mother and a «whore,» «bitch,» woman of pleasure.

To come back to the «handyman» workshop, at a given moment the insults ceased. Just before, he had asked me to list the things he'd broken, so we wouldn't busy ourselves with other things. I went to work, but seeing that this didn't really interest him I told him I didn't want to make this list. I had other things to do, and I turned away from him to build something. For the first time, he set to work building and became completely calm. Just at the end of the workshop, he came to tell me that he was angry because the two intervenants laughed at him. I explained that if they laughed it wasn't to make fun of him, but because he had said something ambiguous. He didn't ask what. That's where it ended. There were no more insulting tantrums.

The next week, I proposed to build a totem. Manu was one of the most interested. He asked questions and wanted to know everything. He made careful plans for his totem: the «no nos» it represented and the rituals for punishment for those who broke them. During the construction of the totem, he left the room quietly to cut the electrical wires. Later, he would say in his most persuasive tone, «It wasn't me.» Thus, he now presented himself as not guilty when he was guilty.

During a bicycle outing in which he participated so enthusiastically as to find himself a bike, we rested in a ditch. Cows came to look at us. They were heifers. Manu interrogated me on their gender since it wasn't clearly visible. A discussion followed on the calves which are the babies, the heifers which are girls and who must pass by the bull to get pregnant and become cows, etc. We continued our route, and Manu asked me, «Is that a skirt or shorts you're wearing?» A little bit later, Manu told me in a completely neutral tone about his brother's accident. But he wasn't long in speaking to me and afterwards spoke about what went on between his mother and father. He then reproached his mother for not having defended him to his father, for not having kept him from seeing his father on his death bed and for having sent him to Courtil for learning difficulties.

From then on, Manu changed a great deal: he set to work in the workshops with pleasure, he was late returning home to his mother, preferring to mow the lawn with the gardener than go home. Through

friendship with the intervenants, he restored something of a paternal ideal. He solicited them to know more about fishing, boats, fish: a series of signifiers which date from before the death of his brother and which came down to him from his father. Women know nothing about these things, these are mens' business, and he is a gallant gentleman who is going to explain to the women the difference between a trout and a carp.

<sup>1</sup> Michel Silvestre. «Le sentiment de culpabilité.» *Demain la psychanalyse*. Navarin, 1987; p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> Bander in french means to have an erection. [trans. note].

<sup>3</sup> The «nothing» is an object Lacan developed in his earlier writings. It is the privileged object of the hysteric, and the object of the oral drive of the anorexic, who eats literally the nothing. See Lacan's readings of Kris's case of the «man who ate fresh brains» and Freud's analysis of the «butcher's wife's dream» in «The direction of the treatment and the principles of its power,» and more particularly page 265 of this article in *Écrit: A Selection*. trans. A. Sheridan, Norton: 1977. In the same edition, see «The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious» where on page 315, Lacan lists the objects described by analytic theory. [trans. note].