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## The Admission of Children in a Specialized Institution

When things aren't going right, it sometimes happens that one goes to see someone. The choice of who one consults depends on the knowledge of the illness from which one suffers that one attributes to this person: the doctor or someone else, sometimes the psychoanalyst. It also happens sometimes that one addresses oneself to an institution which dispenses care or an education. This is the case for the children that one addresses to specialized establishments.

In effect, the thing gets complicated when the complaint is fixed on the Other; it's this Other that one addresses when one addresses an Institution. This will be a question of accounting for a moment in my reflection on my function. I am the director of an institution for children presenting mental troubles. When parents come to consult me, a discourse is installed between us that comes out of the master discourse because it is addressed to me as director.

Their child isn't doing well. This is translated as: «He doesn't learn at school. He is difficult at home. He does weird things. He does everything backwards.» When it isn't that, it's translated as: «He's willful.» or «He's bad, evil.» If they come to see me, it is because they, themselves have broken down, they've run out of knowledge.

When they no longer know, someone else must know. In their opinion, there certainly must be solutions, remedies, a technique, a pedagogy, a psychology or a medicine that will have the power to fill-in this gap. Where they have failed, others will know what to do. This appeal to a «yet again more knowledge,» which is addressed to me on their initiative, inaugurates a social bond inscribed in the register of the master discourse. All the more so in that they address themselves to an institution which, in

the name of its administrative recognition, supposes a medical, psychological or pedagogical knowledge about the illness with which they have rigged-out their child. It is all the more a master discourse since, in this institution, they address themselves to the one in whom they have faith insofar as he bears the insignia: the Director. You will see, moreover, that it isn't a question of evading this discourse. It's clear that whatever is on the order of a decision, comes back to the director. I would formulate my question thus: What manoeuvre can I make, in the master discourse which comes back to the director, to promote the elaboration of a signifier, from the starting point of a request which is addressed to me?

This question, moreover, is inscribed in a larger context: What is the place of psychoanalysis in an institution? Is an articulation with the discourse of the analyst possible? This defines the framework in which I hope to advance.

Before coming to the question, I would like to pause an instant on the transitive request, on that appeal to a «yet again more knowledge» which is addressed to me so that I can uncover its characteristics.

First of all, it must be stated that it is the parents who address themselves to the institution, and not the child himself. The child, in this situation, is put in the position of not being able to formulate a complaint. As will be seen in the fragments of clinical cases that I will bring in, the child occupies the place that Jacques Lacan defined in his note to Jenny Aubry, and which consists in proposing his symptom as representing the truth of the familial couple. This is, obviously, a problematic situation. When a subject comes to complain about the object of his affections, one doesn't see immediately why one should concern oneself with the one being complained about. In this first moment of the admission, there is a manoeuvre to be made which attempts to displace the complaint, thus installing the minimal conditions so that the child can formulate his own request.

Next, it is important to highlight that the parents' request already implies its response. The parents don't consult just anyone: an analyst, for example. If they address the institution, it's because they expect a precise response that they think they will be able to find with us, for example, in the form of an admission as in-patient for specialized care, the framework of which is composed of technicians who know how to correct the distortion their child manifests. Indeed, this parental request is an appeal to knowledge, certainly, but what sort of knowledge?

More will be said on this, but first I will articulate my project with fragments from two clinical cases.

Damien was sixteen when he was brought by his parents to consult me. He said nothing and was visibly embarrassed. They had been sent to us by a center who said our school might be able to help them. The tone was reproachful. They spoke loudly and had a great deal to say. They'd had more than enough. Their problem: Damien is coprophagic. He had stopped for a few years, but now he'd started once again to dirty his pants, at school as well. And on the scholastic level, he didn't do any better. He no longer learned anything at school, except to play hooky, and he bothered his classmates. All said, the thing had become so unbearable that he could no longer stay in his school. That was the reason for their visit.

Damien never opened his mouth. But he was there. He listened. The request his parents then formulated very precisely: they expected us to teach him to be clean. In front of Damien, I responded as quickly that if it's a question of putting us in charge of teaching their son cleanliness, they were sadly mistaken about our institution. I added that if this was truly what they were looking for, perhaps it would be better to look into another institution. Damien raised his eyes to look at me. His parents shut up. They were embarrassed and looked at each other hesitantly. One said to the other that perhaps they were wrong about coming here. Maybe they better find somewhere else. The other intervened, «Wait.» Again, a hesitation. Then the father turned to me and asked, «What should we do?» I answered that I, myself, didn't know, but that perhaps it would be worth the effort to try to understand more about it. More hesitation. In the end they stayed.

I received Damien alone then. He said nothing about his coprophagy, but he spoke about his current school. He liked the school, and he didn't really want to leave it. He was learning a trade there which interested him: masonry. I then told him that I wouldn't admit him into our establishment unless he expressly wanted it. But was it possible for him to stay in his present school? Silence. Then he asked me if he could learn the trade of masonry if he were admitted into our institution? I responded that, insofar as director, I would personally see to it that this was made possible for him. It was at Damien's request that he would be admitted.

That was four years ago. He is still at the institution, while he also goes to a school where he currently learns the trade of laying tile. We have never confronted the problem of his coprophagy at the institute. However, during the first interviews with the parents following his admission, by way of opening the discussion, Damien's father brought a sack containing a box of cocoa mix, a rusty tool or some other object/scrap of waste that Damien had, he said, stolen from the institution and offered as gift to him. He came then to render us our object which, afterwards, began to circulate in diverse forms.

On one occasion, however, Damien confided to me this object in the form of a little mechanical box for rolling cigarettes with a space for keeping the tobacco. This was about a year ago, and at the time I had had to send him home for a few days because he was slipping up at the institution. I called him in to inform him of the sanction. After a long silence, he slide his hand into his pocket and pulled out the object that he confided to me, saying, «Keep it until I come back. If my father learns that I smoke, he'll kill me!»

In this sort of absolute knowledge, coprophagy had been the only means Damien had found to hollow out the object little a in the Other. He interrogated the desire of his parents by decompleting them of a little bit of knowledge. From the moment that, in the institution, he was sure that his parents wouldn't accede to this little bit of knowledge for which they came looking, he authorized himself to release a little of the jouissance that held in his symptom.

What is this appeal to knowledge that the parents address to the institution during the first interview about? The familial couple is confronted by a difficulty with their son on which they don't have the upperhand. The void that forms in their knowledge doesn't in any way shake their certitude. In coming to see me, they expect to finally find the master less faulty than they, themselves. In their opinion, the void that they cannot refill themselves can be filled by others. There's no place here for questions; simply a hole in the knowledge that must, quite simply, be filled up.

What they came looking for was an Ideal to which, for once and for all, their son could be identified, an  $S_1$  from which their son could no longer subtract himself. This parental appeal to knowledge, thus, doesn't install a subject-supposed-to-know. There is no place here for the analytic transference. The hole in knowledge that confronts them doesn't call for an  $S_2$ . It doesn't call for any signifying elaboration. This hole excites a simple request for an  $S_1$  to which their son would identify. This is in the dimension of the Ideal.

Awaiting a response to their request, what comes back -- «We won't teach him cleanliness» -- has the effect of leaving this hole empty. This intervention surprises them. It shakes their truth for an instant. Contrary to what they'd always believed, this was not a problem of education. Here, the dimension of the enigma surges up. Up to now, Damien's symptom allowed them to remain unconcerned. What happened here was different.

Certainly, the thing wouldn't necessarily rock their foundations. The response, however, had the merit of producing a breach in the Other's knowledge to which Damien was entirely sensitive. For him, we really outstripped the dimension of the Ideal and went straight to the cause. The follow-up of listening to him alone reinforced the bar placed on the Other. He seized the occasion to ask me to be signed-up to learn the trade of masonry. He didn't ask for more. And we didn't ask for anything from him. Alfredo Zenoni said that, «If in the place of the response there is no ideal, the response of the Other then has the value of a question.»<sup>1</sup>

Juliette is an adolescent of seventeen. She came to the institute accompanied by her social-worker. She is a child of the state and had been placed in a foster family about six or seven years ago. Before her placement, she had lived with her older sister in an orphanage. Now, life has become unbearable in her foster home. She throws temper tantrums; she is, they say, jealous of Eve, another foster child recently placed with the same family. Juliette is violent. Sometimes, she is even dangerous. She must be separated from Eve. This is the description they give of her, even if it's presented with kid gloves.

Then I see Juliette alone, who quickly explains in a declamatory tone that it is out of the question that she be placed with us. She feels quite well where she is. What's more, she likes her school. There aren't any problems as far as she's concerned. It's clear, she isn't coming. She is determined on this point. Before her determination, I respond that in this case, she won't come. No child is here against his will. All the children in our establishment are there because they decided to come. I even insist, adding that, in my position as director, I never cede on this point under any sort of pressure. I am in a position to guarantee it.

In effect, that's exactly what happened. I explained it all to the social-worker, and I left without forgetting to say to Juliette that if she wanted to see me again, I would be willing to meet with her.

Four months would pass before I would receive a new telephone call on her account. This time she presented herself very differently. Then, she had been explosive, revolted, hyper-charged; this time she manifestly wasn't feeling good. She had difficulty speaking. Her voice was feeble. She was uneasy, embarrassed, troubled. She explained to me that she didn't feel good. It was in her head that everything went wrong. She had «once again» failed her apprenticeship as baker. But what bothered her even more was that Eve already knew how to read better than she does. After a long silence, she continued. She isn't sleeping well lately. She's gotten in the

habit of waking in the middle of the night with the following dream: her mother comes to take her away by force. She is literally torn away from her godmother (this is what she calls her foster mother). She then explains to me that since she was little, when she had lived with the Sisters, a nun had explained to her that if she had been placed by the judge, it was because her mother, even though she loved her, couldn't take care of her. It is in this context that the same nun had presented her one day to a lady whom she let believe was the mother. «I really truly believed it,» she told me, «Until the day I had to leave the home to go to the foster family. I didn't want to go away because of my mother. To convince me to go, this nun had to tell me that the woman wasn't my mother.»

Finally, she had left the orphanage for the foster family; her sister stayed there. Her sister was currently to receive her high school diploma and even go on to college. She states painfully that she herself wouldn't be capable. She is truly upset about it. «It's in my head that everything goes wrong,» she repeats. She no longer wants to stay with her godmother. She absolutely must be admitted to the institution. I ask her, then, if she has already had a chance to speak to someone about the difficulties she's just related to me. Her response is negative. I again ask her if, in her opinion, this work of elaboration doesn't prevail on her admission to the institute, if we might not equally consider the question. She would acquiesce.

I began my exposition with the question: How does one arrange a margin in the master discourse so that the subject can represent himself in the place of the Other by his own question? As we have seen, to pose the question in this way supposes that one has, beforehand, accepted the idea to lend oneself to the master discourse. This discourse is inherent in the very status of institution. To work there presupposes lending oneself to the master discourse. De facto, the appeal that the parents address to the institution inaugurates a social bond inscribed in the register of this discourse. And this in the same measure that what is requested comes out of the field of an identification to an ideal that the institution is susceptible to satisfying: a «yet again more mastery» so that the child finally lines up under an  $S_1$  without posing anymore questions. However, I bring some nuances to my question. Master discourse, certainly, but which master? What bothers the parents or their substitutes is that the Other of the signifier is not complete. They come with the request to complete it. The response that they get back doesn't cover this request. They are presented a decompleted master, castrated of knowledge, a not-all master.

The intervention which is first addressed to the child, aims at putting a hole in the Other. This manoeuvre, not calculated, moreover, modifies, upsets the status of knowledge in the request of the familial couple. Where there was a «someone must know,» a void, an enigma suddenly appears in such a way that, from the «knowing subject»<sup>2</sup> to whom the appeal is made ( $S_1$ ), with a rocking motion, one passes to the erection of a subject-supposed-to-know which promotes signifying elaboration ( $S_1$ -> $S_2$ ). Where they expect the production of meaning, it's non-sense that surfaces, halting them, questioning them, and introducing them (parents, but also their substitutes), but above all the children (Damien, Juliette) to the dimension of the cause.

This manoeuvre invites them to formulate a request that goes beyond the transitive request to a superior stage in the graph of desire, which is that of the dimension of the cause. This concerns the necessary conditions, even though they are insufficient, so that a question can come up for a subject. The invitation is first extended to the child to release a bit of the jouissance that houses the symptom he has staged in a signifying chain. I would add that it is precisely because one expects me there where one hopes to find me -- in the master discourse -- that it becomes possible, and easier, for me not to show up there and consequently break into the meaning. It's exactly because one expects the master discourse, a singular discourse having the property of blocking any question on the topic of knowledge, that it becomes possible for me to introduce a gap, to provoke the question in not responding, so that the non-sense which surges up has a chance of making the symptom emerge.

Finally, I would like to propose the following: this manoeuvre consists of producing in the master discourse a rocking movement, a pirouette which forces it to make a demi-turn. It puts into play the object insofar as agent inaugurating another discourse: that of the analyst. However, if it concerns the transference in this installation of the subject-supposed-to-know, I wish to underline that insofar as director, I never authorize myself to make of myself the support of the transference. Others in the institution will take over where I've left off. It is obviously not in the mechanism of the analytic cure that one is positioned here, but indeed in an institutional practice which aims at a clinic of the particular with reference to the ethic of psychoanalysis.

<sup>1</sup> Alfredo Zenoni. «Objet du transfert et r{ponse de l'analyste.» *Quarto* #44/45: Oct. 1991; 59-64.

<sup>2</sup> Dominique Haarscher, «From Beforehand to Preliminary.» *Courtill Papers*. See above / below;