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«Superman, that's Me» or «Danton is in the Guillotine»

What founds his psychosis according to George

George was six years old at his arrival in the institution. He invested himself in neither places nor people and neither addressed anyone nor made any request. For him, the Other is a persecutor; he is submitted to its jouissance. The unity of his ego is not assured; it only occurs in relation to others, when he imitates the other children for example, or else his ego is not constituted except under the gaze of the Other. In music workshop, trying to presentify his image in a movement while playing an instrument, he said to the adult who accompanied him: «Watch me play.» If the adult turned away, he used the mirror as replacement. George doesn't exist without the support of the image.

Comic books fascinate him, and he is often seized by a trait in the image. Thus, in a «Tintin and Milou» book, he covered with red marker the bandage placed on Milou's wound; or again, confronting the image of a Smurf who had fallen into a hole, George doesn't grasp that the Smurf is underground and continues to look for it in the following images.

George represents himself by the sentences that designate him, that resemble him, sentences which come to him from the Other. Thus, it is customary to hear him announce himself with, «I'm late,» or «I'm all red.» His language is incoherent, and his relation to the signifier is particular; the signification doesn't always seem very well attached, words being real for him. He says, for example, «the dog turn» for the doctor, «the baby lovewich» for the beloved witch, «Rob the hoods» for Robinhood, «faucet» for jets of water.¹

One day, he arrived very angry, exclaiming, «I don't like. Mock. They're mocking us.» I tried to get him to explain what he meant by the term mock. He paused, «I don't know. Ah! Yes. To mock is: he mocks, she mocks, we mock, you mock, they mock.» The signification did not hark back to anything; it was perfectly irreducible, which made me think of a neologism.²

George supports himself with a few signifiers which are petrified, and imaginary identifications to a few characters such as Zorro, Bioman or Superman.

The traits levied on the Other are massive and George uses them according to his own logic:

«I'm twelve. I'm a boy. Before, I was one. I was a baby. My brother is fifteen. That's a teenager. When I'm big, I'll be an adult, a dad. Dad is a man, he's adult because he's big. A woman is a lady. My mother, she works with the ladies, a lady is to be a woman.»

His language is metonymic without any dialectization, a succession of S1s (master signifiers) that he has levied on the Other.

Sketch of work undertaken with George

George participates in a marionette workshop in which I recount a story that he reformulates on my invitation. Facing the incoherence of his language, I was lost and started writing down what he said. The sheet of paper acted as stop sign, marking the frame, and George abandoned the marionettes to begin drawing and writing. In a mirror relation, he inscribes my first name on the paper. I myself inscribe his on my paper. At first, this work allowed him to humanize himself. Now, he is inscribed part-time at the school. He begins by writing his first name, then his last name.

He names himself George the 5th, insisting on this nomination. The identification to his name, through his writing, will mark for George a detachment from the image, a separation which cannot take place. George will write more and more words, notably 'I,' 'me,' 'not all,' and 'no,' words he then addresses to his mother in diverse letters. It is in beginning to speak of his girlfriend that the word 'you' will appear and with it the writing.

In the imaginary register

George is identified to diverse television characters: Zorro, then Bioman. He no longer signs himself George the 5th, but George Bioman, even adding, «Bioman, that's me, it's a giant that attacks the other guys, it's a robot, he has lots of friends.» Bioman, is a cartoon character of the ego force, robot with articulated, detachable parts, each of which recovers a new force after disarticulation. From the fragmented, George will make a unity: «I am Bioman.» This becomes the signifying trait which will sustain him.

It's in the mirror that George will meet his imaginary double; «imaginary dissociation, topical regression to the mirror stage» as Lacan said, is caused by the absence of the phallus, by the lack of a signifier for the Name-of-the-father. «Look at Superman, he's there,» George told me, pointing his finger at the mirror. «Superman, that's me. I'm the strongest. Super G is stronger, he flies through the air, in the sky.» The name of Superman comes to his support, facing the enigma of his image. This identification allows him, by stabilizing him, to avoid falling into a panic, the total disarray of facing persecution, of facing the jouissance of the Other. The schizophrenic, Jacques-Alain Miller said, becomes machine as substitution for a symbolic default, the foreclosure of the Name-of-the-father. A schized subject with organs that have no function, he has to make them signify to himself.³ The foreclosure and the checkmate of the paternal metaphor constitute the «defect which gives psychosis its essential condition».⁴ In psychosis, the Name-of-the-father doesn't work; it's foreclosed. From this fact, the appeal to the Name-of-the-father has no other response than a hole.⁵ However, the psychotic can find other means to make a dam against the Other's jouissance. He attempts to find imaginary solutions, a minimum symbolic, a substitute for this phallic lack.

I authorized myself this theoretical detour to show that to make up for the foreclosure, George will find, invent significations or identifications on both the imaginary and symbolic planes at the same time.

In the symbolic register

We uncover two axes of relations: one which touches his world and one which touches his body.

He can't pin any signification on the natural elements that surround him such as the sun, the clouds or storms. They can at any time unleash themselves on him, persecute him without his understanding the

cause. To find a little soothing, he will personify them, give them familiar faces:

«The big cloud is Dad. He's angry. He doesn't have any teeth or any eyes anymore. The little cloud is happy. It's Mom. The sun is sad. He's crying because he lost a tooth...George, that's the sun. He's happy. He smiles. The tooth fell out.»

Later, thanks to the weather report, George begins to order these elements with a minimum of the symbolic order coming in to frame the jouissance which is dropped on him. He says:

«You know the weatherman, the guy who makes France. The storm comes, it's zero degrees and also rain at ten degrees. The cloud is wise because he's calm. He doesn't make a big mess if not the storms. A sun, twenty-four degrees because it's hot.»

After that, George found peace for himself. This hooking up of symbolic significations is already a response, an attempt to put order into the unleashed aspect of the elements. As George would say, «The storm, that frightens children.»

The foreclosure of the Name-of-the-father also has an effect on the body. Phenomena having to do with the fragmentation of George's corporal image testify to it. One day George arrived, saying and showing me at the same time, «Look, Colette, I lost my tooth.» This tooth would finally disappear for real that evening when he lost it in the taxi. A second loss, coming to symbolize the first one, which made a hole in his body and let the real of his fragmented body appear.

Another time, he asked me what time it was. When I told him, he added, «Look at your watch. There's a mark.» He displaced my watch and saw the mark it left on my wrist. «You see,» he continued. «I was right. Afterwards there's blood. Later it's going to bleed.» Since then, each time he sees me, he worries, scratching this trace on my wrist with his fingernail, asking me about his future.

George has a very peculiar relation to his body. He would say, for example, «I live me» for «I live at...» or «I me think» for «I'm thinking.» Or again, he called the Camp Walk in which he participated «corpse walk». The slightest injury to his body makes him panic in the extreme. He flees, leaving to the other the view of his disarticulated body. This fragmentation of the corporal image is also observed in another phenomenon; when he

loses his coat, it's a real tragedy for him. As Jacques-Alain Miller explains, the body of the schizophrenic is the consequence of the failure of the paternal metaphor. The phallic function puts the *jouissance* outside the body; its absence is correlative to a return, in the body, of this *jouissance*⁶.

Thanks to the themes of the French Revolution and the decapitation of Danton, George will attempt to secure a signification, construct a knowledge outside of the paternal metaphor. Through a delirious metaphor he tries to constitute a body for himself, to order the fragments of his body in imagining a sense and, at the same time, finding a little soothing. The hero of the story, Danton -- an historical personage who actually existed -- is by this fact closer to the symbolic than the diverse television characters. «What's the Revolution? You put a phrygian cap on Danton's head. He is in the bathroom. He's taking a shower. He shaves. He smells bad. He puts on some women's perfume.» For George, smelling bad and being bad are hopelessly confused thereafter. George has a somewhat original interpretation, «They put the heads on the balcony.» If, in the course of his recitation, George stops to pose questions -- «Say, Colette, the Revolution, it's not for kids, is it? It's a phrygian guy that cuts off people's heads and for the kids...» -- he finds his own answers -- «Me, I wouldn't have had my head cut. I would've been a phrygian. The guillotine, cut up people and not kids. It's a guillotine. It's cut. It's out of order. You can't pull the lever anymore. It doesn't work anymore. The end for the revolution.»

The effects of a work

Lately, George writes his page of letters, one at a time, letters that I must read by hooking them up to each other, which obliges me to decipher what he's written. For him, this writing is an attempt to pass a bit of *jouissance* into the symbolic order. The trace is symbolized in the letters which read themselves, marking henceforth their difference from the trace left by my watch on my arm, which is purely real.

George pursues his elaboration and, thanks to this, is more soothed. The theme of the Revolution, in giving a sense to the fragmentation, allows him to a minima organize his relation to the world. Since the beginning of this work, George has made a bit of *jouissance* pass into the symbolic and his relation to his body is less fragmented.

- ¹ I have tried to remain as faithful as possible to the structural mechanisms underlying these deformations in rendering them into English. In French, «le mec sain» pour le medecin, «la sorciere a meme» pour la sorciere bien aimee, «rend des Bois» pour Robin des bois, «la chasse d'eau pour le jet d'eau, often have resonances that it was impossible to capture in English. For example, «le mec sain» translated literally means the health guy or the healthy guy, which isn't a bad substitute for the word for doctor. What to me seems important is the phonemic displacements characteristic to psychotic discourse, rather than the strange shades of meaning that may or may not be attached to these deformations, particularly as relates to their definition in the mind of the psychotic speaker, shades of meaning which one cannot ascertain. But a good example of this sort of deformation drawn from the clinic with an anglophone would be the patient who said, «self-steam» in place of 'self-esteem.' [trans. note].
- ² What the child repeats as the meaning of «to mock» is the declension of the verb, which is much more important in French than in English, because in English the regular verbs only change form in the third person singular. In French, the regular verbs change form for each of the pronominal cases: je me moque, tu te moques, il/elle se moque, nous nous moquons, vous vous moquez, ils/elles se moquent = I mock, you mock, he/she mocks, we mock, thou mockest (obsolete), they mock. The declension of verbs is something a French child regularly repeats as part of his schoolwork. [trans. note].
- ³ Jacques-Alain Miller. «Schizophr{nie et paranoa.» Quarto X, 1983; 18 - 38.
- ⁴ Jacques Lacan. «On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis.» *Ecrits: a Selection*. trans. Alan Sheridan, Norton: NY, 1977; 215.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Jacques- Alain Miller. *Op. cit.*