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L'Illusion des 'sosies' dans un délire systématisé chronique

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We present here a paranoid megalomaniac who appears to be interesting due to the existence of a delusion or rather a strange interpretation, a sort of agnosia of individual identification: for about 10 years she has been transforming everyone in her entourage, even those closest to her, such as her husband and daughter, into various and numerous doubles. Before analysing this illusion and its pathogenesis, we will describe the psychosis as a whole, as otherwise it is not possible to give the true stages of the evolution of this delusion which can be masked by later delusions.

On 3 June 1918 Mme M. goes to inform the local police commissioner of the illegal confinement of a large number of people, particularly children, in the basement of her house and throughout Paris: she requests that two policemen accompany her to verify what she is saying and to free the prisoners. She is taken to the Infirmary and two days later is admitted to Sainte-Anne where Professor Dupré certifies her as suffering from chronic psychosis which is hallucinatory, interpretive and imaginative with themes of the fantastic, delusions of royal grandeur, of substituting people around her and being in a state of psychic excitement. On 7 April 1919 Mme M. is transferred to Maison-Blanche.

Mme M. is now 53 years old with no family history of psychiatric disorder. She had typhoid at the age of 12, received a primary education until the age of 14, then learnt and practised the trade of couturier. Married in 1898 at the age of 29, one year later she had a son who died (she believes he was substituted), then she had twin girls, one of whom died (abducted according to her), the other is in good health and now 20 years of age, and in 1906 twin boys were born, both of whom died at a young age (according to her one was abducted, the other poisoned). She lived comfortably, her husband owning a large dairy business. A restrained, sober person, the only thing she ever took to excess was coffee.

Her husband reports to us that he noticed in his wife three or four years

after their marriage, and particularly following the deaths of the two twin boys in 1906, a 'nervous' state, followed by displays of jealousy and delusions of grandeur. A few years later she declared to him that he was not her husband and already began to express the majority of her current beliefs. These seem to be systematized and developed rapidly. From 1914 on, at any rate, her ambitious ideas were set for good, her delusion did not extend beyond thoughts of persecution. She imagined a very complicated story, the details of which are so complicated that it would be impossible for her to sum it up. Moreover, she is very talkative and does not always follow the thread of her thoughts. In general, she expresses herself more precisely in her writings, which are copious, though not to excess, and are coherent. The two main themes are on the one hand, delusions of royal grandeur, and on the other hand, the theme of persecution (people disappearing and being hidden in vast cellars). We will sum up these two trains of thought through the words and writings of the patient since 1919.

Delusions of grandeur. 'I am from a very important family, writes Mme M.; I am the granddaughter of Princess Eugénie; I was born to the Legion of Honour; my father was the Duke of Broglie and my mother Mlle de Rio-Branco, the daughter of the Duke of Luynes.' Her paternal grandmother is the queen of the Indies. De Rio-Branco is the name of the children of Henri IV from whom she descends; she is a relative of the Duke of Salandra. She adds, 'M. Pierre-Paul M., who died at my house, certified that I was not his daughter, that he had acted criminally in hiding me from my parents and that I was 15 months old when the abduction was committed.' Therefore, she believed she had been substituted for the daughter of M. M. from the cradle.

She claimed her fortune to be immense, that all of Rio de Janeiro belongs to her grandmother who owns considerable mines in Buenos Aires. 'I am certain, she says, that I have been left 200 million francs by my grandfather, Louis XVIII, who lived at the Tuileries; he bequeathed me the whole of the Île St Louis; since his death the rents owed to me alone amount to 740 million [francs].' According to her, he owns 75 houses. Since her birth, her great-grandmother has left her 125 billion [francs].

Intellectual and moral qualities of the highest order are linked to this wealth. She writes . . . 'My character has never been anything other than upright . . . I am an untarnished woman... a creature beyond reproach, who not only has all her reason, but also wanted to save the proper administration... My signature has value, my personal details are those of an honest woman. My good previous history acts as a magnet to bad people who want to have it for themselves, by making use of my identity papers.

'My protests are not only just, but from someone who is of sound mind and upright, Mme. de Rio-Branco.' Moreover, after having exposed the persecutions of which she is the object, she adds '. . . all these explanations, just think of the trap in which I find myself; one must be gifted with an intelligence and an uprightness that will match up to each and every test, to

hold one's head up high to all the villainous leeches. So there is the story of a true Frenchwoman who wanted to save three quarters of the universe, having become aware of the scourge which had been rampant for some time.'

Her role of benefactress is the result of her high birth, of her intellectual and moral qualities, of her financial privileges. 'I would have done great things with this fortune', she says. 'I would have done some good for everyone.'

Delusions of persecution. They are varied and of unequal importance. Her enemies behave by carrying out thefts and poisonings, and by mixing up children, or by making people disappear, by transforming physically, though that is less frequent. 'I am a woman who has been stripped of everything, from whom they have embezzled funds and taken children: they wanted to poison me, then kill my husband. . . At Maison-Blanche there is a central point to which they bring the money which has been stolen from my properties.' They have stripped her family of the Grignon estate, and of several million, which she can't even put a figure to. Her enemies have committed forgeries to lay their hands on the rents, they know the numbers on her bonds, in order to give to their children; furthermore, they have had her taken away to the Quai des Orfèvres [Paris Police Headquarters] so that they could steal her receipts and documents.

On many occasions she believed someone wanted to poison her: she attributes an illness to an attempt to poison her with arsenic, someone is putting arsenic in her chocolate, in her 'spices, her food and her drink'; on several occasions the room in which she slept at Sainte-Anne had been 'sulphured', and she adds: 'the antidote they gave me was to make me out to be a liar, so that my complaints would not hold up. I believe I am convalescing (at Maison-Blanche) because of a poisoning I was subjected to at the Joffroy ward.'

The main theme is that of substitutions and the disappearance of people. We have already seen that Mme. M. has been the 'victim of an abduction'; she continually comes back to this subject, 'since my childhood I have been pursued by a gang who know about my wealth, since I was taken away from my parents and abandoned with a M. M.' Thus, substituted for the daughter of this man, she should not be called M., but Louise C., the name of her husband, or Mathilde de Rio-Branco, the name of her true family 'in spite of the simulations and errors'. And she writes, 'never having divulged my birth, many people only know the name of the person who brought me up; it's these doubles who have given me the names of their children, that's why they have changed my personal details.' At her wedding in the Town Hall, she was made to sign blank papers on two different registers; three times someone has stolen her marriage certificate, a woman makes use of all her papers, which are in order. At the hospital, she is detained as someone else, 'A condemned person, a woman who has committed crimes and sins; the captivity that I am suffering really should be suffered by someone else, who is

one of my doubles . . . I know perfectly well that someone was released instead of me, my release having been signed some time ago. Transference has made me into a person from their gang, who bears some resemblance to me, someone from the district whom I knew, who dresses like me and who takes my place in my flat during my absence.'

She believes she has two or three doubles who are known to her; therefore she has taken precautions: 'For a long time, my papers have been in order, I am armed with certificates on stamped paper, certified reports, identity certificates and doctors' certificates; it's no good taking me for someone else, that is to say a double.' To clarify her identity and complete her justification, she points out the transformations of which she has been the object. 'I was blonde, they made me chestnut, with eyes three times the size; they were rounded in front, now they are flat: they put drops in my meals to take away the features of my eyes, and the same with my hair; as for my chest, I no longer have one...and that's why no-one recognizes me anymore and why people are making use of my good previous history', and then she gives her 'personal details' with a wealth of detail, which we will come back to further on.

Her children have also been the object of substitutions; one was abducted, when he was with his nurse and replaced by someone else, who died; 'I was thus at the burial of a child who was not mine', she concludes. This child was poisoned at twenty-two months. She noticed this by looking at his nails; he would have been buried at Bagneux, but she thinks that he has been given an antidote and put with another family. The little girl was abducted and replaced by other young girls, who were led to her home one after the other. 'To replace my own abducted daughter', she says, 'they always gave me some other girl, who in turn was taken away and then immediately replaced. . . As soon as they took one child away they gave me another one who looks just the same: I have had more than two thousand in five years: they are doubles . . . Daily, young girls came to me and daily they were taken away from me: I warned the police commissioner of the district of Necker, telling him that their parents had disappeared and that the little girls had little stitch marks on their faces, which were there to remove their thoughts, and that they had been maltreated... This coming and going of children to and from my home lasted from 1914 to 1918 without a break.'

Her husband M. C. also disappeared: a double took his place; she wanted to get divorced from this double; she drew up a petition and made a request for a separation to the courts. Her husband had been murdered and the 'men' who came to see her are 'doubles' of her husband; she counted at least eighty. Moreover, she gets worked up when someone speaks to her about this: 'If at any rate', she continues, 'if this person is my husband, he is more than unrecognizable, he is a completely transformed person. I can assure you that the imposter [sic] husband that they are trying to insinuate is my own husband, who has not existed for ten years, is not the person who is keeping me here.'

But the disappearances extend largely beyond the family circle of Mme de Rio-Branco, to her household, to the whole world and particularly to Paris. There are 'doubles' of the concierge, who introduces her to workers in disguise. All the other tenants are replaced by doubles. Talking of the domestic servants she had, she cites all their names, and adds, 'If I cite these names, it's because of the doubles, several families with the same staff have used blackmail.' In rue Mathurin-Régnier there are dungeons, an artesian well and vaults where about 28,000 people have been shut up since 1911, a group of individuals strip the people of everything they have and shut them up in the cellars: they were in correspondence with a tenant in her house, the 'double' of a Madame P. Beneath the Military School, l'avenue Suffren, le boulevard Dupleix, rue Dutot, about twenty children are asking her to get them out. Under her own house she can hear the voices of children calling out: 'Mother, I beg you, come and get us out.' Beneath it's a complete system of 'amphitheatres', of 'underground passages'; the people have gone underground as if by means of a service or goods lift, by stages, and someone is doing away with them. Living people are being buried in catacombs. Near Pasteur thousands of individuals have been shut up and mummified. The cellars of Paris are full of children. During the war, because of the planes which were flying above the house, many people including children went down into the cellars and did not come back up; they found that they were trapped. Underground operating theatres were set up to disfigure people and it was said that they were people returning from the war. The shelters are not very safe, because of those people who go down, very few come back up; she forbade people from going down. 'The German fighter planes are firing blanks: there are no bombs, people are wrong to seek refuge in the cellars: many young girls are unable to get back out, as the opening is blocked up. The Métro is fatal for us, because the French and English armies have been put down there: the crisis of strength in the military arises particularly because of the disappearance of regiments underground, in the Métro. . . More people have disappeared like that' – she writes – 'than have been taken prisoner.' The military uniforms loaded on to the trucks belong to soldiers undressed underground.

Similar interpretations occur on various occasions. Mme M. interprets the damages of the war in the same egocentric way; if some houses are demolished, it is to disorientate people. She understood that her husband had been murdered, because people seemed to run away when they saw her coming. She springs phrases into the conversation such as 'we will have them all' which fuel her delusion and strengthen her conviction in the deed of disappearances and substitutions. She finds that the dietary regime prescribed is not given to her and she concludes: 'the only thing that this observation clearly proves is that there are people in the shadows who are trying to burden my life in order to pass me off as being sick,' etc.

Mme M. is deeply moved by all these disappearances and substitutions.

'We must take steps as quickly as possible to save all these human lives which are in danger. My arrest is illegal', she continues; 'it is only natural for me to warn these men of the scourge which has made so many people disappear, particularly children; it is stupid therefore to immobilize Mme C. who has had the goodness to put herself out, after having herself been poisoned and stripped of everything she had.' She addresses numerous complaints to the police, complaints which are more like urgent warnings; but the Prefect of the police, the commissariat themselves have disappeared and been replaced by doubles: 'The Paris police headquarters has been restaffed at least ten times over the last few years; that way no-one will know the history of the substitutions.' Then she writes to the State Prosecutor, the House, to Senate, and to the War Minister. She goes to the Auvergne to find her children and there too she notices that many people have been held prisoner.

Moreover, she requests that her personal details are rectified so that she does not have to suffer someone else's punishment; but where on the one hand she is by birth and her wealth a victim of the substitutions, her complaints are on the other hand a bother to the gang of forgers, flashy foreigners and swindlers who have succeeded in having her interned by passing her off as someone else, as a double, and who, by similar means, do what they can to stop her getting out. Furthermore, at the hospitals of Sainte-Anne, and Maison-Blanche, they carry on with their universal work of substitution and disappearance. Beneath Sainte-Anne is a hell where numerous doctors are trapped. During the transfer to Maison-Blanche, Mme M. heard: 'Is it possible that we are soldiers trapped underground and they have illegally confined the person who wrote on our behalf?' They repeated, 'Madame we have been underground for three years and they have been dragging us around like carts and have been chasing us with whips.' It is worth noting that on several occasions Mme M. denies the existence of personal enemies: 'Nobody has got it in for me', she says again on 21 November 1922, and moreover 'underground' she hears voices protecting her: 'She is too good this woman, she must not be touched.'

At Maison-Blanche, everybody, or nearly everybody, has doubles. 'The theatre that is played out by these doubles is unbelievable. Many nurses are underground; there are too few left to look after the patients. . . I noticed that one person or a number of people suffering from a persecution illness have made many visitors disappear; three days ago M. de Rio-Branco came, the same trap was set for him; he came in through a door and disappeared into a laboratory in the basement; since this attack, I have heard M. de Rio-Branco talking, asking why he has been confined illegally.' All the people in daily contact with Mme de Rio-Branco at the asylum have their doubles, doctors, interns, nurses, patients. The section head has been replaced by doubles, and when she is asked if she is really certain about this she stops, then exclaims with conviction: 'The doctors that come here wearing capes, don't tell me there is only one of them, I know at least fifteen!' The doctor

and the intern are not always the same people and she warns them: 'You have a double who retracts all your orders in order to compromise you'.

Staff changes are continual: 'the Sister is sometimes kind, sometimes annoyed: these are doubles. For each sister there are fifty, they give their orders through doubles. The young daughter of this Sister also has doubles. The number of sisters who have disappeared is unbelievable.'

Many of the patients in the ward have doubles that she can pick out every day. Doubles of herself succeed in receiving visits which should have been for her and receive packages that she ordered long ago (because of this she doesn't order anything now, since nothing is delivered to her), everything is given over to women who usurp her true name and profit from their resemblance to her. There is the same doubt with her letters: 'I don't know if you have received them, because of the doubles.' The succession does not stop. The doubles are replaced by doubles. 'The only aim of the forgers, the thieves of heraldry, of the armed gangs and robbers is to run off leaving men and women to be accused in their place: when they have accomplished their misdeeds and lies, they run away and someone else comes to take their place, and that's the play that's been going on for four years. Three quarters are using false names. Their acting is good enough to prove convincing... The embarrassed witnesses of this illusory environment are illegally confined and stripped of everything... there are families who have got together amongst themselves and brought up their children with my money. I fear the people who give themselves names that are not theirs. But that's not the case with me.' And to stress it further she adds 'I am from the other type of group, not in any gang and not frequenting any'.

Such is this rich delusion, a fantastic yet systematized delusion, peppered with constantly repeated neologisms: she is completely destroyed, . . . her life is burdened with debt . . . her child having been poisoned is given an antidote . . . she is subjected to persecutory ordeals, etc.

In the ward Mme M. is usually calm, polite, even kind, when one is not talking to her about her delusion; she does not make any friends, remains completely idle, and refuses all work. She gets annoyed at the name M.; sometimes she writes long letters, sometimes also she indulges in soliloquies accompanied by gesticulations which bear witness to her intellectual excitement. This is noticeable when the patient exhibits her delusion, which she does in a rather complex manner, talkatively, verbosely and with an extreme flow of ideas which require precise, close cross-examination to stem her natural tendency of continually diverging from the point.

Mme M. has never been aggressive, but has made two attempts to escape, and has escaped once.

No intellectual weakening has been noted.

The physical and in particular neurological examination does not reveal anything other than a slight bilateral patellar hyper-reflectivity.

It emerges from the preceding account that this chronic, systematized

delusion is simultaneously imaginative, interpretative and hallucinatory. Imagination played the preponderant role, but numerous interpretations and episodic hallucinations have contributed to the elaboration of this 'fantastic' story which, as is usual in such cases, developed in particular as a result of psychic excitation. It is in fact emotional hypertension, intellectual exaltation which determines the exuberant proliferation of errors of judgement, of imaginary accounts and illusions, and at the same time talkativeness and verbosity, generating long and useless discourse which obscures the main idea. Stripped of all this wordiness, this phantasmagoria is reduced, in effect, as with all people who have the faculty for such wild imaginings, to a small number of fabrications, the main ones of which can be seen in our observation: the notion of royal origin and its consequences, substitution at the cradle and confessions of the criminal on the death bed, and finally the old myth of the vast underground, a small hell from which the cries and pleas of the tortured rise up towards those people who hallucinate.

These are features common to a great number of cases. Our case is original due to the presence of a particular symptom of which we do not know of any other example in this form and to this degree. We want to talk of 'doubles' using the same expression as the patient. Mme de Rio-Branco herself chose this term, very pertinently and not as a figurative expression. 'Doubles', she says, 'are people who resemble each other' and this definition translates exactly what she feels, and what she observes. For a number of years, the doubles have taken first place in her delusion; she counts them by the thousand or rather they are countless; this succession of doubles causes her continual torment, because besides those she can see, there are also those who are hidden from her. She is therefore persecuted by these numbers who multiply day by day; she talks of the gang, of the society of doubles as others talk of policemen and freemasons.

This belief in doubles, frequent as it is, can be seen as an accessory symptom in the delusions of persecution, in the form of misrecognition associated with a mistaken interpretation. Take the example of a young man in love. In the street he comes across some young girls who seem to be making fun of him but at the same time he notices certain similarities between their features, and their clothes and those of his fiancée; he thus concludes that an agency is putting doubles of his fiancée in his path to make him think that he is not loved.

In our observation the phenomenon is different, we notice above all that Mme de Rio-Branco makes some banal false recognitions, that she does not mistake for doubles. One day she attends the funeral of a neighbour; though sometime later, victim of a delusion, she notices this neighbour in the street, and even though her mind is haunted by doubles, on this occasion she doesn't hesitate in trying to resuscitate the dead woman, adding that the death and the burial have been a pretence.

With her the delusion of doubles is different from ordinary misidenti-

fication. Mme de Rio-Branco hardly ever notices doubles of passers-by that she comes across, and it is rare that she discovers suggestive resemblances amongst strangers; more often than not it is one and the same person who changes successively into the first double, the second, the third, etc., at intervals of a few hours, a few days or a few weeks. This phenomenon, which we believe to be exceptional, has occurred entirely during a crisis point of turmoil in 1914. One day obsessed by this notion of the abduction of children, following the death of four of her own, Mme de Rio-Branco no longer recognizes her daughter; someone has abducted this child and replaced her with another child who bears a resemblance to her; the next day another little girl similar to the one before appears; two days later, there is a new substitution of a double. From 1914 to 1918 she writes, more than two thousand doubles of her daughter have passed before her eyes; every day, indeed a number of times a day, a little girl appears

et qui n'est chaque fois ni tout à fait la même
ni tout à fait une autre.¹

From then on this delusion spreads to the rest of the people in her circle. Convinced that her husband has been murdered, she rejects him, believing him to be a double. Doubles of her late husband come to visit her at the hospital. Being there has not destroyed the phenomenon but it is less frequent, however, than it was previously. Periodically, doctors, nurses and patients are transformed into doubles. In short, everywhere Mme de Rio-Branco perceives resemblances and everywhere she fails to recognize true identities of the people.

Strictly speaking, this is not therefore false recognition; it could be said that there is an agnosia of identification.

How could such a delusion have been generated and developed? We believe that the mechanism of it is quite simple; it does not differ from that which controls the increase in the number of mental delusions or delusional interpretations; an emotional state first of all, a habit, then a cast of mind.

In order to explain the triggering of the phenomenon, we will recall certain psychological conditions of recognition. In any recognition, there exists, more or less, a struggle between two emotional elements of sensory, or memory images: the feeling of both familiarity and strangeness. This struggle is easily noticed when, for example, it is a matter of identifying a person who hasn't been seen for a long time. When it's a matter of faces that are seen everyday, such as those of people closest to someone with whom they continually live, no hesitation is possible, unless it's following a mental disturbance. This

¹ Lines are from a poem by Paul Verlaine, 'Mon rêve familial', *Poèmes Saturniens*, which might be translated as 'and each time it is not altogether the same person, not altogether a different person'.

disturbance is focused more often than not on perception or memory: misidentifications arising out of dementia or confusion enter into this category. Those which arise from depression are a little more complex; sometimes linked to the difficulty in evoking mental images, they are provoked particularly by anxiety, which is almost always accompanied by a very painful feeling of strangeness, of which metabolic delusion is the extreme degree. In this case the more familiar faces appear to be transformed, patients confuse their relatives with strangers.

There is no doubt that this period of anxiety and turmoil existed for Mme de Rio-Branco; it was during the time that she was suffering from delusions and hallucinations that she heard children moaning wherever she goes.

The feeling of strangeness develops in her, therefore, as it does in the majority of disturbed people, and it jostles with the feeling of familiarity that is inherent in all recognition. But it does not totally invade her consciousness; it does not distort either her perceptions or her memory images. Consequently, some faces that she sees with their normal features, the memory of which is not altered in any way, are nevertheless no longer accompanied by this feeling of exclusive familiarity which determines direct perception, immediate recognition. The feeling of strangeness is associated with recognition which conflicts with it. The patient, whilst picking up on a very narrow resemblance between two images, ceases to identify them because of the different emotions they elicit. Quite naturally she attributes to these similar beings, or rather to this unique, unknown personality, the name of doubles. With her, the delusion of doubles is not therefore really a sensory delusion, but rather the conclusion of an emotional judgement.

This delusionary conception of the double, created by the logic of feelings, took an unusual development, rising to the level of an overwhelming belief, because she firmly believed in the fundamental theme of abductions or of people being substituted. Convinced from then on that the use of doubles is the usual ploy of her enemies, she will not hesitate in unmasking them at the slightest emotional stimulus. She will succeed all the better in this, because, on this subject, she has a very pronounced paranoid disposition, a very marked tendency towards mistrust, and towards attention to the minutest details.

This characteristic can often be found in patients: they take account of the minutest of facts, which are too insignificant to be focused upon by any normal attention, and they attribute to them a decisive value. We currently have under observation a paranoid woman who is very interesting from this point of view; her systematic mind focuses on a very small number of interpretations and claims, but, on the other hand, she is so to speak, under the delusion of verbal precision. When talking to her of her past declarations, the slightest change of words brings about incalculable consequences for and raises vehement protests from her. In another way Mme de Rio-Branco is just as fussy.

The reading of her letters is very revealing on this point. By giving her particulars, describing the way she gets ready, clarifying the spelling of her name, giving information about her address in town, and about the ward in which she is now staying, registering the day and time of her changes of area, mentioning the date at the beginning of her letters, she voluntarily amasses a series of details which relate perfectly. Transcribed in full below is one of the many passages from her letters in which she describes her physical appearance with a very unusual wealth of detail:

'So that there is no longer any mistake about it, here are my personal details, for which there is an urgent need because of the change which has taken place in me during the last twenty-five years that I have been in these two places. I have been transformed in order to completely change my person. Being unrecognizable, apart from a few identifying marks, it would be possible for them to pass me off as an insane person. My particulars: I was blonde, brown-eyed with some black areas in the brown, scars near my right eye and various others, a scar on my right hand and a turquoise ring, which was confiscated from me, and I had two small freckles on my neck. Over the last few years dressed every day in a black and dark blue suit, a black amazon hat with violet on it or a dark blue hat. Accompanied by a little blonde girl, in an embroidered linen dress, with her hair in a French plait, a white Brandenburg coat with ivory buttons and lined with 'duchess' satin, a straw cloche-hat with a fancy white feather, yellow knee-length boots. In winter: dressed in a fluffy coat, a velvet cloche-hat with white or beaver fur. This person, who is me and whose true particulars I am relating, is honest beyond doubt... no mistake can possibly be made, I am the only person with these distinguishing features.' She cites also her surname, all her christian names, her full date of birth, and the full address of the person that 'she replaced following her substitution'. Her Paris address includes the *arrondissement*, the *quartier*, the street, the number, floor and even the side on which the flat is situated. In short, she is concerned not to be taken for a double of herself and because she notices the signs of age, or rather the signs of persecution, which have changed her face, she carefully notes her distinguishing features and with a touch of coquetry describes the pretty costumes of her younger days so that no-one can confuse her with doubles of her youth.

Her deeply detailed examination, when applied to strangers, leads her to disregard the characteristic features of their facial appearance and leads her to concentrate upon imperceptible changes which she exaggerates and which are sufficient to prove to her that doubles exist. Moreover, that is the argument that she herself gives. When she is asked why she believes that people in her circle on certain days are replaced by doubles, she replies 'that can be seen by certain details. . . a little mark on the ear. . . a thinner face. . . a longer moustache. . . different colour eyes. . . the way of speaking. . . the way of walking'. Before approaching an interlocutor, sometimes she looks at him for a second and asks, 'Are you Mr so-and-so', the obsessive fear of the

double casts doubt on the most positive of her perceptions. In this way, by an unusual manner, she reaches a state of, if not metabolic delusion, then at least a delusionary state of metamorphosis: the excess of attention, the worry for precision. While these delusions of transformation normally imply loss of a sense of reality, with her, on the contrary, they are witness between the environment and the absence of psychological weakening.

DISCUSSION

THE PATIENT (entering vivaciously): I am not a woman, I am a young girl. I am a child who was taken from her family when she was a little girl... I have been declared under a different name, but I was born a Rio-Branco; my grandmother has 80 thousand million [francs]; my personal details were changed; someone abducted my children and put others in their place. These are people who make substitutions for doubles. At my wedding they wanted to deceive me on the papers declaring my civil status. It's something which is pursuing me for no reason etc....

M. DE CLÉRAMBAULT – Did the patient follow up any of these claims?

M. CAPGRAS – She went to the police commissariat to lodge a complaint and she wrote numerous letters to the authorities.

M. DE CLÉRAMBAULT – Along with M. Halberstadt, I wonder if auditory psycho-sensory phenomena are not playing a certain role.

THE PATIENT – The sounds are not from auditory phenomena, but from bandits hiding in the cellars.

M. CAPGRAS – The patient has shown fleeting auditory hallucinations; they do not now play any role in the delusion of doubles.

M. DUPAIN – I had a patient in my care who was in a state of psychological excitement, suffering from hallucinations, a chronic systematized delusion, and who was affected by the same delusion of doubles: sometimes the substitutions revolved around her husband, sometimes around the doctor or the staff; she maintained that other patients bearing resemblance to her were released in her place.

The Capgras Delusion: commentary

The 'illusion de sosies' soon became known as Capgras's Syndrome or the Capgras Delusion. Unfortunately, the immediate theoretical ideas offered by Capgras to explain Mme M.'s complex symptoms were quickly forgotten: instead, his subsequent views emphasizing psychogenic origins of the syndrome, particularly Oedipal feelings, began to dominate ideas, first in

France and then elsewhere. But it is clear from his first paper on the subject that, originally, he conceptualized the disorder in a quasi-neurological way. He used the word 'agnosia', for example, and, without mentioning him by name, invoked Bergson's (1911) dichotomy between a feeling of familiarity and full identification to explain the patient's responses to recognizing others yet being unable to believe that they were truly who they seemed. This approach to the Capgras Delusion was periodically dusted off and reasserted (Derombies 1935) but was not fully explored until the recent theoretical paper by Ellis and Young (1990) in which it was suggested that the Capgras Delusion is the mirror image of prosopagnosia (i.e. the neurological condition resulting in profound inability to recognize faces (Meadows 1974, Ellis 1975)). Some prosopagnosics reveal covert face recognition (Bauer 1984, Bruyer *et al.*, 1983, Young and de Haar 1992). When shown previously familiar faces whom they cannot consciously recognize they may, nonetheless, reveal increased autonomic activity compared with that elicited by faces never encountered before; or they may display an inhibition in learning incorrect face-name pairs compared with correct pairs. It is not entirely certain why or how such covert activity occurs, but one explanation offered by Bauer (1984) has certain attractions. He argued that there are two routes to recognition: a ventral route connecting visual cortex to temporal lobe and limbic structures that produces overt face recognition; and a dorsal route between the same centres that passes closer to parietal structures and which may convey affective information or signal some sort of significance in the stimulus. Some prosopagnosics while clearly having damage to or disconnection along the ventral route, nonetheless may receive some information, albeit unconsciously, via the dorsal route. Ellis and Young (1990) suggested that in the Capgras Delusion the reverse may be true: an intact ventral route coupled with an impaired or disconnected dorsal route. This explanation as yet lacks firm empirical support but it does take further the speculations of Capgras and Reboul-Lachaux. As Ellis and de Pauw (in press) have pointed out, the so-called dorsal route may be described as signalling affective significance but, equally, it could transmit what Bergson (1911) inferred to be a necessary sense of familiarity. More recently, Mandler (1980) independently argued that, normally, recognition may involve the convergence of two independent processes, familiarity and identification. If someone receives only the latter type of information, then it is conceivable that he or she may conclude that something is wrong with the person – the appearance may not have changed but some indefinable quality is missing, *ergo* it's a double, robot or whatever (Ellis and Shepherd 1992).

For this final erroneous conclusion to occur, however, another system malfunction must be posited. Not everyone who receives such a faulty or anomalous experience will conclude that someone has been substituted by a double. Following the work of Benson and Stuss (1990) on the role of the prefrontal cortex in reduplicative paramnesia, Ellis and Young (in press)

suggest that delusional misidentification, too, may require the conjunction of a perceptual/cognitive disorder and a malfunctioning attribution or decision-making system. Either alone will not produce a delusion of misidentification, but the combination of both may be necessary.

Some authorities have emphasized the selective nature of the Capgras Delusion. Berson (1983), for example, argued that no organic lesion could damage recognition only for specific individuals. Ellis and Young (1990) counter this criticism by arguing that, perhaps, only faces with emotional significance (i.e. family, friends, etc.) normally elicit both recognition routes. It is also clear from the case of Mme M. that virtually anyone could appear to be a double. Moreover, for her the doubles themselves could spawn countless doubles. Todd, Dewhurst and Wallis (1981) also reported a case of multiple doubles and Silva, Leong, Weinstock and Ferrari (1991) reported cases of Capgras Delusion where politicians and other famous people rather than just intimates seemed to have been substituted.

It would be remiss of us not to include at least some discussion of Capgras's later theoretical position on his syndrome. As we indicated earlier, there is every reason to believe that he assumed the ideas of his colleagues and soon allowed Freud to supplant Bergson (Luauté 1986). Freud (1911/1958), in fact, believed delusions sprang from repressed homosexual impulses – which is somewhat different, of course, from Capgras's (1924) notion of Oedipal conflict. Nonetheless, for a considerable period, psychodynamic interpretations of the Capgras Delusion were in the ascendent (Coleman 1933, Murray 1936, Brochado 1936). There has been little or no diminution in the volume of work predicated on the psychodynamic approach (Berson 1983, Enoch and Trethowan 1991). These largely revolve around the idea that such patients develop ambivalent feeling towards certain individuals and subsequently resolve the conflict by 'splitting' them into positive (i.e. the true individual) and negative (i.e. double, robot etc.) personae. It is difficult to see how this explanation can be considered universal: it fails to explain how the delusion can apply to individuals for whom patients have no ambivalent feelings; nor can it account for the increasingly large number of cases where the Capgras Delusion is transient and clearly attributable to one of a number of toxic or metabolic states (Ellis and de Pauw, in press).

Indeed, it would take some effort to apply such psychodynamic concepts as those currently in circulation to the original case described by Capgras and Reboul-Lachaux. Mme M. or Mme de Rio-Branco duplicated not only her immediate family but hospital staff and patients as well. Moreover, she insisted that there were doubles of the doubles, running sometimes into thousands. Are we to believe that she had ambivalent feelings to all of these, including the doubles themselves? What makes the delusion described by Capgras and his colleagues so important in the history of psychiatry is that it is the most common of all the delusions of misidentification. Its incidence

has proved difficult to quantify in any definitive way, with estimates varying from 1% to 5.3% in psychiatric settings.

A recent suggestion by Malloy, Cimino and Westlake (1992) that one should distinguish primary from secondary Capgras Delusions may help resolve some of the theoretical and clinical difficulties thrown up in the 70 years since the delusion was first detailed. Indeed, further work by Fleminger and Burns (1992) implies that there may be an inverse relationship between the presence of persecutory beliefs preceding delusional misidentification and the degree of organic involvement. Such fine grain meta-analyses will provide useful future insights into resolving many diagnostic, therapeutic and theoretical issues stimulated by Joseph Capgras's original observations.

Paul Courbon (1879–1958)

Like Capgras before him, Courbon eventually became head of psychiatry at the Ste Anne Hospital in Paris, where he also helped found the department of neurosurgery. For many years he was the secretary general to the Société Médico-Psychologique. Doubtless he was influenced somewhat by his father-in-law, Paul Sollier (1861-1933), who was a professor of psychology in Brussels from 1897 until his death. Sollier wrote two books on memory and one entitled *Les Phénomènes d'autoscopie* (1903). Courbon worked with him on a later edition of another book concerning the semiology of mental illness in which Capgras's work on the 'illusion de sosies' is acknowledged.

The following two papers on delusional misidentification for which Courbon is first author introduced to the scientific community the Frégoli delusion (Courbon and Fail 1927) and Intermetamorphosis (Courbon and Tusques 1932). They have been less influential, perhaps, than Capgras's works because the two phenomena are not as common. They are also somewhat confusable – the reason for which we shall discuss later.