

Delusion of inanimate doubles

SIR: The report by Anderson (*Journal*, November 1988, 153, 694–699) presents convincing evidence from the literature that the Capgras symptom includes the duplication of objects, as well as persons, and does not depend on psychodynamic mechanisms. However, he undercuts his argument by emphasising how the patient was emotionally invested in his tools, thereby giving some specificity to the content of the delusion. A good critique of psychodynamic formulations is provided by Sinkman (1983); he also includes the replication of personal items under the Capgras symptom. In fact, Capgras & Reboul-Lachaux (1923, p. 10) note the substitution of a building: "... mais le Préfet de police, le commissaire eux-mêmes ont disparu et ont été remplacés par des sosies; 'la préfecture de police a été renouvelée au moins dix fois en totalité dans ces dernières années; comme ça, personne ne saura l'hitoire (sic) des substitutions'."

In addition to the Capgras symptom, the patient had the Frégoli (believing that a persecutor was masquerading as another) and possibly the intermetamorphosis symptoms. The first part of the discussion shows some confusion in determining the former's presence because of the author's insistence on whether the patient actually saw a particular person; since these are delusional beliefs, the perceptual element is largely irrelevant.

Unfortunately, prosopagnosia rears its head as an explanatory mechanism. Prosopagnosia can be considered to be an inability to recognise a particular example within a single class of objects (not limited to faces) or the "defective contextual evocation for stimuli belonging to a visually ambiguous category"; bilateral symmetrical inferior mesial (fusiform, lingual gyri) occipitotemporal cortical lesions are responsible for this entity (Damasio *et al.*, 1982). Psychotic phenomena do not arise from this condition, primarily because the occipital lobe is the least likely area to be the source for delusions.

Although many patients have mentioned minor changes in the appearance of the object of their delusion only a few, of more than 300 cases (Signer, 1987) have shown prosopagnosia or autoprosoagnosia. Of some cases recently with senile dementia of the Alzheimer type, one seemed to have had prosopagnosia (Kumar, 1987), but this may have been part of the disease's more general visual-spatial disturbances. I have examined a patient with the Capgras symptom who could not see the persons believed to be substituted (Signer & Benson, 1987), and one who was blind.

The syndrome of prosopagnosia is not what was intended by the term *agnosie d'identification*; it is

clearly a delusion ("cette croyance aux sosies, encore que peu fréquente, s'observe, à titre de symptôme accessoire, dans les Délires de persécution, sous la forme d'une fausse reconnaissance associée à une interprétation erronée . . . L'illusion des sosies, chez elle, n'est donc pas, à vrai dire, une illusion sensorielle, mais la conclusion d'un jugement affectif" (Capgras & Reboul-Lachaux, 1923, pp. 12–14). Perceptual phenomena (feature recognition) play a minor or insignificant role in the delusion of substitution; it is much closer to reduplicative paramnesia in cognitive pathology and neuroanatomic origin, with injury to frontal and temporal structures (Signer, 1987).

S. F. SIGNER

Royal Ottawa Hospital
1145 Carling
Ottawa
Ontario
Canada K1Z 7K4

References

- CAPGRAS, J. & REBOUL-LACHAUX, J. (1923) L'illusion des "sosies" dans un délire systématisé chronique. *Bulletin de la Société Clinique de Médecine Mentale*, 11, 6–16.
- DAMASIO, A. R., DAMASIO, H. & VAN HOESEN, G. W. (1982) Prosopagnosia: anatomic basis and behavioral mechanisms. *Neurology*, 32, 331–341.
- KUMAR, V. (1987) Capgras syndrome in a patient with dementia. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 150, 251.
- SIGNER, S. F. (1987) Capgras' syndrome: the delusion of substitution. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 48, 147–150.
- & BENSON, D. F. (1987) Two cases of Capgras symptom with dysmorphic (somatic) delusions. *Psychosomatics*, 28, 327–328.
- SINKMAN, A. M. (1983) The Capgras delusion: a critique of its psychodynamic theories. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 37, 428–438.

Delusional Depression in 19th Century Scotland

SIR: May I be allowed to reply to the letter from Morton (*Journal*, November 1988, 153, 710–711), although I fear the issues he raises go beyond criticism of a single paper to methodological issues affecting all historical phenomenological research.

There is a tradition of such research which examines clinical data, for example the work by Loudon (1984) on chlorosis. The criticism that such work represents a "category fallacy" is based on two assumptions: firstly that a particular nosological category for one cultural group lacks coherence in another, and secondly, the comorbidity from physical illness may invalidate 'caseness'.

During the 1880s, many of the concepts of melancholia and depression were well advanced in terms of our understanding, with replacement of botanical schemata by empirical principles (Berrios, 1988).