

## being me – being him

Terry Perk



*An insect that mimics a leaf does so not to meld with the vegetable state of its surrounding milieu, but to re-enter the realm of predatory animal warfare on a new footing*<sup>1</sup>

When I was twenty-five I trained to be a secondary school teacher. A few months in, and with my first teaching placement imminent, an impending sense of responsibility and several drams of Dutch courage found me press-ganging myself to the barbers to give up my then long hair to what I thought at the time might be a more respectable length. Half-cut, in terms of hair and intoxication, I watched in the mirror as my locks were shortened, slowly observing the image of myself disappearing in the glass. In a kind of reverse mirror-stage however, I began to see my twin brother emerge in front of me, reflected, his image as equally shocked as I was. Momentarily caught in a discordant sense of self, I sat disoriented, feeling myself present whilst seeing him as me in the mirror – where he shouldn't have been. He was in the wrong place and I was no longer in place as I should be. I was simultaneously both of us, mimicking without intent (if that's even possible), an exhilarated and delusional imitation.

Jacques Lacan argued that, “whenever we are dealing with imitation, we should be very careful not to think too quickly of the other who is being imitated,”<sup>2</sup> suggesting that imitation points past the thing being imitated. At primary school I remember being sent to see the headteacher, on account of some petty misdemeanour, and Mike, my twin, standing in for me, taking the rap on my behalf. In my mid-teens I shamefully recall returning the favour, standing in for him over the phone to break up with his then girlfriend, my pubescent voice mimicking his in its equivalence. More than simulation and its reproduction of functions, my mimicry created an appearance to serve completely different functions, including the displacement of guilt.

Mike recently told me how he has regaled stories of my minor childhood sporting achievements to his friends, passing them off as if they were his own, appropriating my history for himself. I've done the same on occasion, without any internal sense of lying; appropriating his history in a seemingly natural extension of our shared appearance – a duo of untalented Mr Ripleys, gaining miniscule social and cultural advantages.

When imitating him I'm both me and not-me, neither him nor me. My being him and his being me is less a question of resemblance than it is a strategic deception or camouflage, what Brian Massumi has called “a power inherent in the false;”<sup>3</sup> no longer me and not quite him, but someone else altogether.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Massumi, *Realer Than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari* (Copyright, no. 1, 1987), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. (New York: Norton paperback, 1981), p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Massumi op cit., p.2.