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Gilles, or the Question of Birth

«Was I in your belly? Why did you make me come out? I was fine in your belly; I didn't want to come out.» For Gilles this question about his origin is central, a running interrogation for a child whose particularities it will be a question here of experiencing.

An installation¹ in the field of alienation

«I didn't want to come out.» Gilles seems to take this sentence as his own, but it is really drawn from his mother's discourse about the birth: «He didn't want to come out,» she said, adding that «they forced him into the world.» His birthday is one day after his mother's, being «one more day.» One may take the mother's «he didn't want to come out» as a master signifier, S1, where «it speaks of him,» where he emerges as subject effect of language, when before «there was absolutely nothing.»² Yet Gilles makes it his own saying, «I was fine in your belly.» What status can be given to his affirmation? It draws manifestly on an evocation of jouissance that, in using the simple past, he postulates, rightly, as originally lost, referred to a radically unattainable time, thus mythic. In effect, there is no primary jouissance. One then has grounds for producing this affirmation of chronology in order to attribute it a logical status, that which elaborates the operation of alienation in which the incidence of language on the living organism is formalized. The first moment of alienation allows the conceptualization of the inaugural encounter of the subject with the jouissance of the Other.³ The master signifier, S1--he didn't want to come out-

-gives him his being, «his being of jouissance, to be considered as the native form of the subject.»⁴ But the structure of language is such that it produces an «appeal made in the Other at the second signifier.»⁵ This is necessary in order for the first to have the status of signifier. According to Pierre Bruno, this appeal «is only made in the Other, but through a levying of one part of the «being of the organism» insofar as this being goes «beyond the limits of the body.»⁶ If the mother's breast is the most frequently cited example of what passes beyond the frontier of the body, the placenta is another: «the section of umbilical cord, what the newborn loses, is not, as the analysts think, his mother, but his anatomical complement.»⁷ On this subject, Lacan forms the myth of a phantom who flies away, to which he gives his name for the libido.

For Gilles, it is exactly that the sectioning of the umbilical cord has not been without consequence. In effect, he had an umbilical hernia necessitating an hospitalization, on which occasion the mother said that she had a presentiment of his death: «I went to the hospital with the basket and Gilles, and I came back with the empty basket, with the clothes and nothing inside it.» We won't emphasize the empty basket with nothing in it, which could indeed say something about herself after the birth of the child. We would rather question the fact of knowing how this benign medical intervention was inscribed for the child. In effect, in numerous drawings, Gilles doesn't fail to represent strongly the umbilicus with a doubled circle. On this point of his body, in the double line, I propose to read the mark of a non-separation of the object, inscribed by an operation having taken on for him the status of a mutilation in the real, of a realization of the loss substituting for the *se parere* of the operation, the loss such as it is operated in separation. Yet, separation supposes that the subject encounters the desire of the Other. In this regard, Gilles is, on the contrary, caught in the maternal phantasm such as is demonstrated in the relation that she entertains with her child's body as an object of jouissance.

Gilles and the mother's phantasm

According to her, Gilles' infancy was marked by serious health problems, while the medical dossier doesn't allow us to consider that it was a matter of anything but incidents and infantile illnesses without long-term effects. She gives the tone: «The smallest benign mishap is terrible for Gilles.»⁸ The redundancy of terms in this enunciation is remarkable: a mishap cannot be a big deal, but if it is «the smallest» and also benign, the qualification «terrible» justifies that it become the object of intensive care,

practiced outside of the influence of her husband, whose place is not promoted, and covered by its quality as auxiliary to child care.

During a second hospitalization, at one and a half, for a purulent otitis with pulmonary complications, the mother once again saw her child dead: «He was like a corpse, a rag without life. I decided on the hospital. ‘One more day,’ the doctor said, ‘and he would have been dead.’ He was no longer there.» The medical reports say more soberly that «at his admission into the service, Gilles was in a good enough general state of health.» The expression «one more day,» the exact gap between the mother’s birthday and that of her son, is, in terms of the discourse in which the child is caught, the gap between life and death, life in which this son tries to stand on his own two feet, child who took a long time to learn to walk and still would walk strangely at first, «on tippy toes.»

From then on, Gilles would be submitted to the gaze of his mother who inspected him from head to toe: «I watch out for everything, the moment there’s a pimple or something.» Note the anonymous form that her discourse can take about her child, then represented as «nothing», «everything» or well assimilated at other moments to an object.

Clinical bearings

Some of Gilles’ centers of interest allow for the orientation of a clinical reflection concerning him. Everything that touches on agriculture mobilizes his attention and his future plans. What he says on the one hand, and his familial reality on the other, have contributed in our establishing that it is the paternal question that is evoked for Gilles in his efforts to assure himself of a support in relation to the particularity of maternal desire.

What does he know about farming? He talks a lot about farm machinery that works the earth, the sounds of which he recognizes when he goes outside. He is also knowledgeable about crop species and knows all sorts of seeds. «My dad grows colza seeds,» he says. The dad, isn’t he the one who gives the seed? The question of procreation has been recently a current event since Gilles’ mother has given birth to a little girl. As Freud says:

...in an unexpectedly large number of life-histories, normal as well as pathological, we find ourselves obliged to take as our starting point an

outburst of sexual pleasure and sexual curiosity connected, like this one, with the birth of the next child.⁹

This question is reworked in a different form around fishing, which is a fundamental activity for him, around which, today, he finds an anchoring point which upholds him. The purchase of a fishing rod, in this perspective, was an important moment, and he was able to save up for several weeks in order to do it. In his difficulty to learn to walk, Gilles had appeared «like a disjointed puppet» as his parents put it. His body didn't hold up. More recently, drawing men, he didn't put any arms on them: «I always forget the arms.» On the other hand, he sometimes gives them arms when they are carrying umbrellas. We know that it is the symbolic body that makes the body of the organism, and its unification depends on signifying articulation. In this respect, we propose to consider that the fishing rod substitutes for the signifying articulation and constitutes a symbolic support for this child who is situated outside discourse as a schizophrenic subject.

In other respects, this child, who has difficulty holding his place, can remain immobile for long periods of time, plunged in fascinated contemplation of fishermen. During a walk in the park, he rushed to the pond where he remained alone, at the edge of the water, to gaze.¹⁰ Then a disturbing question surged up about what might be hidden beneath the surface, the existence of which was not assured for him: «Fish, they exist, don't they?» he asked, as if the absence of what he can't see was unbearable for him.

One day, he happened to dissimulate a drawing that he had torn from a book and kept preciously. It represented the surface of the sea with a boat bristling with fishing rods, and, separated by the horizon line, the depths underwater with all its population. One question revealed that not the least little detail had escaped him, indicating his strong interest, but one of the explanations was strange: «it's a French boat because there is a man who calls the fishermen.» A little later in the conversation, he evoked the fact that the boat had a French flag, but without coming back to his first statement. The symbolic value of a flag in maritime matters evidently is not without relation to a paternal evocation, but in default of being caught up in discourse, the flag floats, leaving the statement pregnant with its enigma, failing a signification that might be constituted there. Who is the man who calls? It might be him, as suggests another drawing representing a strange being in a boat furnished with a flag. The person, whose body is constituted of an unformed mass of circles, has very long ears and a belly button marked with a double circle. These double circles, as we've seen, are the place on the body where the mother/son relation is inscribed. Did his mother transform the cry of the infants, permitting the nomination of her

absence? One can hypothesize no. Gilles was presented, in other respects, as having been a very difficult baby because of his crying. Today, one finds Gilles working with his voice; he seems to be experimenting with it. This voice is not inscribed as a lack in the Other which remains absolute, the object not having been subtracted. The non-separation is marked in a game Gilles sometimes plays. He hangs an object by a string, but, unlike Freud's grandson, who plays at making disappear and reappear his spool.¹¹ Gilles' game consists of watching the object at the end of the string to reassure himself and, failing that, assures himself that an adult also sees it. It's as if he were petrified in contemplation of the object hanging by a thread, unable to renounce the vision which assures him, one might hypothesize, so at not to be let down, which could indeed be the status birth has taken for him. Where a child comes to symbolize the absence of the mother and operate his own disappearance, Gilles falls into an abysmal contemplation of the object that he can see, and he falls under the gaze by which he maintains himself.

Relation to language

A question relative to the fact of «being pregnant» brings out evidence of Gilles' relation to language. Speaking of Choupette, his mare, he says: «She is pregnant [enceinte] with me; when one is in the saddle, it's like she is pregnant with me.» This can be taken two ways which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Either «I am in her belly,» or she is encircled in the sense that the child's legs wrap around her, forming an enclosure [enceinte]. If this usage of the signifier is at work in Gilles' language, the farm then becomes an enclosure. One can under these conditions put the three signifiers -- maternal belly, farm, and enclosure -- in a series and consider, in the mode indicated by Freud in his 1915 article on the unconscious that if «a hole is a hole,»¹² here «an enclosure is an enclosure.» The same metonymic relation exists between them as that which made Freud, in his writing about schizophrenia, say that «What has dictated the substitution is not the resemblance between the things denoted but the sameness of the words used to express them.» This is how one can account for the phrase Gilles proffered -- «I'm pregnant [enceinte being also enclosed]» -- in attempting to strangle himself with a plastic sack.

The fact of speaking, as we have already seen, was problematic for Gilles. For the schizophrenic, the wager is not slight since this means aiming at the possible disappearance of the Other.¹³ Thus the moment Gilles chose to begin speaking was not just any old moment, but that of the

birth of his younger brother, as if this birth had torn his relation to his mother. The two children are separated by four years, and Gilles, who until then had not yet pronounced a single comprehensible word, truly set to speaking. The style of this speaking however presented the particularity of a discharge so intense that he sometimes ran out of breath.

«I'm going to celebrate Clementine's birthday. She's my fiancée.» Clementine, and not Ludivine. Gilles has trouble with first names. Only the end of the name is correct, as one attests often. He plays a lot on the phonemic proximity likely to be heard between closely related signifiers. In this way, his family name rhymes with fiancée. He makes other rhymes on names according to the same principle: «Athena is a papa, Gilles is a peel.» It is also a way to attempt to give a signification to a name by which is indicated the identity of a subject, a name being exactly that which has no signification. In schizophrenia, it is unbearable that a signifier have no signification.

As for knowledge, on the contrary, anything concerning the order of generations is not inscribed: «My mother has a little sister.» When one asks him, «But who is Ludivine for you?», he is as likely to answer «My sister,» as to respond, «My mother has a little sister.»

Diagnostic

We conclude with a few remarks on the diagnosis. If the lack of metaphor in Gilles' language testifies -- as we have seen -- to schizophrenia, this diagnosis is supported by other elements. Firstly, the difficulties he has in constituting a body, as well as the illnesses in which he «looks like a corpse» -- which might be considered as a catatonic state -- attest to a jouissance that never left the body to be identified in the place of the Other.

Secondly, the sort of relation the mother entertains with Gilles indicates the anonymity of the mother's desire. The way she presents Gilles' history evokes what Lacan said of the relation of the mother of the schizophrenic with what had been her child at the moment when he was in her stomach: «nothing other than a body diversely convenient or burdensome.»¹⁴ As Freud said, «...in their play children repeat everything that has made a great impression on them in real life...»¹⁵ If the relation to the signifier is not what the Fort-Da stages, it must also be considered that this game includes the question of the object (the spool) in regards to which the mother's position is equally different,¹⁶ where nothing names the

desire from which the child has issued. This also opens on the strongly impersonal manner with which Gilles' speaks of his mother, thus responding to her position as regards him: «I know my mother. She's called Myriam.»

- ¹ Colette Soler. «Hors Discours: Autisme et paranoïa.» **Les Feuilletts du Courtil #2: 1990; pp. 9 - 24.**
- ² Jacques Lacan. «Position de l'inconscient» (1960). *Ecrits*. Seuil: Paris, 1966; p. 835.
- ³ Pierre Bruno. «Alienation et separation dans la schizophrénie.» *Recueil #8*: juillet, 1990.
- ⁴ Pierre Bruno. «Le dit--Sur la schizophrénie--.» *La Cause freudienne #22*, 1992; p. 152.
- ⁵ Lacan. *Op.cit.*
- ⁶ P. Bruno. «Alienation et separation dans la schizophrénie.» *Op. cit.*
- ⁷ Lacan. «Position de l'inconscient.» *Op. cit.*
- ⁸ In the same way, when he had chicken pox, she said: «Chicken pox are spots. For Gilles, it becomes tragic.»
- ⁹ Sigmund Freud. «Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-old Boy.» *SE: X*. Hogarth: London, 1961; p. 113.
- ¹⁰ He told me that he really liked ponds a lot. Ponds are part of those watery places associated in childrens' stories with interrogations on birth: cf. Freud, «The Sexual Enlightenment of Children» (1907). *SE: IX*. Hogarth: London, 1961; p. 136, where Freud cites a letter from a little girl of eleven asking her aunt about this: «Trudel thought the stork brings them in a shirt. Then we want to know as well if the stork gets them out of the pond and why one never sees babies in ponds.»
- ¹¹ Sigmund Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. *SE: XVIII*. Hogarth: London, 1961; pp. 1 - 64.
- ¹² Sigmund Freud. «The Unconscious (1915).» *SE: XIV* Hogarth: London, 1961; pp. 159 - 215.
- ¹³ Pierre Bruno. «Le dit--Sur la schizophrénie.» *Op. cit.*
- ¹⁴ Jacques Lacan. «L'angoisse» *Seminar of 1962-62*. Unpublished; lesson of January 23, 1963.
- ¹⁵ Sigmund Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. *Op. cit.*
- ¹⁶ Cf. the mother's statement evoking the empty basket with «nothing in it» as cited above.