

TOXICOMANIA IN CONTEXT

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Introduction

I would like to discuss five points that arise when working with patients that 'consume' drugs or alcohol. In the Lacanian School we talk about 'toxicomania', which implies that we have, or pretend to develop, a psychoanalytic theory of toxicity. Whereas other discourses talk about 'substance misuse'. Consequently one could say that they have or pretend to develop a theory about the good use or mis-use of substances. It is very interesting to notice that the term 'use', like the term 'consume', invokes the discourse we are immersed in our modern world of consumer culture.

What theory then do we have when we speak of toxicomania and alcoholism? I will start with Lacan's famous quotation from the Meeting of Closure of the cartel working day in the year 1975: "There is no other definition for drugs than this one: it is what allows for the breaking of the marriage between *jouissance* and the little willy".¹

What is Lacan trying to say? He wants to say that the drug disconnects *jouissance* from the phallus, from the masculine way of limiting *jouissance*, which implies a break away from phallic signification and therefore from the Name of the Father. Lacan indicates that there is a link between 'a-diction' and the question of a *jouissance* that is not framed by the phallic function of signifiers.

1. Drugs and alcohol

First of all I would like to discuss briefly the difference between alcohol use and drug use. In my daily work in the institution I find that therapists do not consider alcohol addiction and drug addiction as different, given that in both cases there is a misuse of a substance. In contrast, we find that people working in the Lacanian Orientation consider the ethics of the toxicomaniac different from the ethic of the alcoholic, as can be seen in a paper by Dario Salomone and Claudio Godoy called *An Ethical Debate on Alcoholism* published in *Subject, Jouissance and Modernity*.²

It is true that in the clinic we often see that people can use both alcohol and drugs or give up using both at the same time. But when we try to understand it from the point of view of a psychoanalytic theory we realise that alcoholism and toxicology belong to different logic. In which way do they differ? The main difference is that in alcoholism the S involves the Other. A sign of this is that alcoholic patients are subject to embarrassment. They feel ashamed of their behaviour and often avoid sessions or refuse home visits simply because they do not want to be seen in a state. Very often alcohol is used to deal with the other sex. I would like to briefly discuss with you a short clinical vignette.

This 34 year-old man has been very anxious since he gave up drugs and reduced his alcohol intake. When he drinks his anxiety diminishes, although he feels guilty afterwards. In the preliminary interview he said: "I lost the woman I loved for alcohol". He feels very sad and depressed. He now feels that he really loved her and he cannot think of any other woman. He desperately wants her back and fantasises about having a family and children with her.

He says that he feels very lonely and guilty. Under the effect of alcohol he had beaten her up. He added: "I knew nothing about love and for that I blame drugs". While he refers to alcohol in relation to his girl friend, he relates drug use (even if he uses the word love) to his own feelings. This brings up for him the question of semblance, that is to say, the question of *jouissance*. "There are so many feelings that I am not sure which ones are apparent and which not." "I did not feel anything before. I just wanted to perform."

We could say to sum up that the use of alcohol in this case has to be referred to love whereas drug use has to be referred to *jouissance*. While it is a fact that people substitute drugs for alcohol, it is also important not to become immune to those changes and to continue to question them since they might indicate a real movement in someone's subjective position.

2. The Other which does not exist and his ethical committees

To unveil the problem of addiction in our contemporary culture we have to understand what has changed in our modern world. We can say that the use of drugs nowadays is very different from what the intellectuals used to do with them at the beginning of the century. We are not going to claim that the modern world is responsible for this phenomenon because we know, with Freud, that the discontent of civilisation

is at the core of the drive itself. However, it is important to consider how the changes in our culture have given birth to new ways of doing with this discontent.

In Jacques-Alain Miller's course entitled *The Other which does not exist and its ethical commitments*.³ Miller says that in our modern world the *plus-de-jouir* gains a very important status. With the decline of the father function we can talk of a primacy of the object *a* over the Ideal. He writes it like this: $a > I$ (session of 11/12/1996). In doing so, he proposes a way for us to understand the discontent of civilisation which is, as we have said, not caused by the outside world but which is written in the centre of the living being, at the core of the drive.

This is to say that mass production hits something which is already present. What is new is the way that mass production, through its imperative 'Consume!', proposes *jouissance* as a semblance for everybody. This phenomenon, named by Jacques-Alain Miller as 'the haunting of the *plus the jouir*', creates the illusion that through the good use of the object *plus-de-jouir* we could obtain a complete satisfaction of desire. Mauricio Tarrab adds a very clear elaboration of the same theme in a text published in Spanish entitled *Beyond Drugs*.⁴ In this circuit the contemporary subject gets the impression that *jouissance* is allowed rather than forbidden by the Ideal.

We live in a world regulated by the mass market. A world, as we say, of globalisation. And in it, the *plus-de-jouir*, no longer framed by the Ideal, is available everywhere on the market. We are prescribed where to find our *plus-de-jouir* and we are compelled to buy and enjoy.

But it is also a world of sameness, of standardisation and boredom! But why can one say this? Because the universalisation promoted by mass production and mass consumption tends to standardise desire by manipulating the demand. This manipulation is an attempt to control the cause of desire.

In *Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire*, Lacan wrote that demand is a structural part of the drive. However, one knows that what makes one subject different from another is the absolute particularity of the cause of his desire. And the real always comes back. The more it is denied, the more violent is its return. The attempt to standardise desire by reducing the *a* to an S_1 , introduces what can be called with Lacan a civilisation of boredom.

From this point of view, one can say that to be a drug addict is coherent with the new way of life. The drug addict is a mass consumer like ordinary people, he or she buys products. From this point of view it is interesting to note that the treatments that are proposed to individuals who mis-use drugs are homogeneous with the drug use itself. The question at stake is only ever one of finding a substitute drug, e.g. Methadone for Heroin.

In these treatments, as in globalisation, subjective division is refused. Consequently, these treatments are grounded in the desire not to know anything about what is unique for every one. Subsequently, if we apply treatments that are homogeneous with the consumer culture there is nothing to be known. What we have is a manualised practise, which is the epitome of such a discourse. What we intend with the analytic discourse, on the contrary, is to introduce the subject to the Other of the unconscious by creating a demand for knowledge.

3. The discourse of the capitalist

In a lecture given in Milan on the 12th of May 1972,⁵ Lacan made clear the specificity of the discourse which characterises the world we are speaking of. He calls it the discourse of the capitalist. In this discourse, the subject, $\$$, comes into the place of the agent and one arrow links the subject with his product *a* and the other arrow links the S_1 with knowledge.

There are two structural consequences of this. The first is that, contrary to the discourse of the master, in the capitalist discourse the subject appears to be dis-identified. This failure of identification explains quite well the confusion in which people find themselves in our modern world. Consequently it explains the need for someone to attach themselves to anything that could give them an identity, e.g. the phenomenon of sects.

The second is that the subject of the unconscious is completed by his product, thus engendering a vicious circle. In *La Troisième*⁶, Lacan named the subject of the capitalist discourse, or the individual, 'the proletarian'. That is to say, the subject who goes with his or her *plus-de-jouir*.

This is a really a consequence of the progress of science and technology, which have eroded the previous limits of the Ideal by increasing the possibilities of having either goods or, in a not too far away future, perfects bodies through artificial insemination. In a way one can say that our modern world now puts clearly on the scene the difference between the Ideal and the Superego. The object is now clearly

on the scene. Whereas before the object *a* was veiled by the Ideal, we can now say that the object *a* has been dispossessed of its clothing and appears before us in its nakedness.

4. The not-all

To go further and to understand more about this new world of which we are speaking, we have to introduce with Jacques Lacan and Jacques-Alain Miller a 'new system' for reading it. With the concept of the 'not-all' we can go perhaps beyond, or at least make clearer, the question of the discourse of the capitalist which is in a way referred to the master discourse.

In one of his most recent courses, 22/05/2002, Jacques-Alain Miller noted that we have entered the era of the 'not-all', as Lacan said in his paper of 1972 entitled '*l'Etourdit*'.⁸ The rules of the father, of identification, are declining. The 'not all', he said is not an 'absolute' which would be decompleted. It is not something 'complete' at all, but it is rather a series without any limit.

Globalisation means that the old limits between people are over. Trade has pushed away the borders, science has pushed away the limits of ethics, and techniques allow for more and more, beyond anything that was previously thought possible. In fact, it means there are no longer any limits and the rule has to be referred to the barred A and no longer to the masculine system.

5. Addiction and not-all

The question of addiction has to be registered in this logic. That is to say that the understanding of this question is no longer to be referred to the logic of the Name of the Father, but to the formula of feminine sexuality. In drug addiction the paternal metaphor does not operate, and drug addicts do not seem to be concerned with Oedipal reality, even when they are not psychotic.

Jacques-Alain Miller noted that the old categories fail to explain the question of addiction. The drug addict is quite alone with his *jouissance*.

In *Three Observations on the Theme of Toxicomanias*⁹, Eric Laurent put it this way: "I think that we can understand toxicomania as the spring of the *jouissance* of the One in our world. The *jouissance* of the One is non-sexual. There is a deep fracture in sexual *jouissance* and as such it is not one".

The drug addict radically disappears under the influence of drugs. He does not want to know about the unconscious, or about castration. Drug use keeps him away from the Other. There is something of a cynical action, not to need the Other in order to enjoy. We can say that this is a choice of a satisfaction that is not limited by the phallus as organ. Toxicomania puts at stake satisfaction as unlimited, a satisfaction that does not need the Other to exist.

Without the need for an Other, how are we to get the drug addict to believe in the unconscious? Is that possible? What is clear is that the techniques based on education do not suffice when the limit is already broken. So perhaps we have to trust in the contingency, because we know that sometimes people stop their addiction because of any event.

That is to say that it can stop, this jouissance which was unlimited can stop. Where the Name of the Father does not operate, the real Other sometimes does. The love of a woman, the threat of losing a job, an illness.

In that way, coming back to the vignette I spoke about earlier, I can say that the problem with alcohol is a progression because it puts the question of love at stake. And the question of love is the question for the Other.

Let's see what he said: "Sometimes I hit the floor". He felt that he was not right and that it was very difficult to cope with the up and downs of a relationship. He does not understand why he feels so anxious and does not know how to cope with it. "I used drugs to kill feelings. I would drink before meeting my girl friend. It was a way of coping with the unknown. I did not know what love was until I stopped using. Now I know and I find it hard. Before all that I wanted was sex. Now it is different. I have discovered love and I find it harder."

For him there is something different, he starts to have questions about himself and about the relationship with others and above all, the other sex.

But how to get this man to believe in the unconscious? Is that possible? Perhaps helping him to build a real question with what he says now about love and sex? What is love? Love is a way to put the object *a* in the Other. To have a question about it is to try to produce some knowledge and first of all to take the Other into account.

We can also say that the question of addiction is a trans-structural question. And, to paraphrase Jacques-Alain Miller (in the same session), that is why the theory of knots is useful because there is a congruence between the unlimited ways to arrange the knots and the unlimited of the *jouissance* in addiction.

1. J. Lacan, *Culture aux Journées d'études des Cartels* in *Lettres de L'Ecole freudienne de Paris* No. 18, April, 1976, pp.268-270.
2. D. Salmone and C. Godoy, *Debates eticos en torno del alcoholismo* in *Sujeto, Goce y Modernidad II*, 1997, Editorial Atuel, Buenos Aires.
3. J.-A. Miller and E. Laurent, *The Other that does not Exist and Its Ethical Committees*. Unpublished seminar, (1996-1997), Department of Psychoanalysis of Paris VIII.
4. M. Tarrab, *El derecho a no ser anonimo* in *Mas alla de las Drogas*. Editorial Plural, Bolivia.
5. J. Lacan, *Du discours psychoanalytique*, 1978, *Lacan en Italia*, La Salamandre.
6. J. Lacan, *La Troisième*, 1975 in *Lettres de l'EFP* No 16.
7. J.-A. Miller, Seminar of 22nd May 2002, Unpublished Seminar, Department of Psychoanalysis of Paris VIII.
8. J. Lacan, *L'Etourdit* in *Autres écrits*, Seuil, Paris 2001, p.466.
9. E. Laurent, *Tres observaciones sobre la toxicomania* in *Sujeto, Goce y Modernidad I*. Editorial Atuel, Buenos Aires.

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