

The ravages of the will to enjoy

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Psychoanalysts seem to agree on one thing: the imperative of enjoyment that is the hallmark of our nihilistic society, where more and more subjects seem to be slaves to satisfaction and the objects of satisfaction. It's the zenith of the objet a already mentioned by Lacan. Today's drug addiction, and the ever-increasing number of addicts in all walks of life, has nothing to do with the use of toxic substances by a minority of people in the 60s - suffering artists or bored middle-class people, not without a desire to marginalize themselves, to subvert the norms of the cumbersome society in which they were stuck.

One constant remains, however, like an eternal mini-truth about drug use: the jouissance it procures is always beyond phallic jouissance (without even being the Other jouissance referred to by Lacan in his seminar *Encore*). Just listen to these addicts, who often vindictively claim to be addicts - as if they were or not. They, and the women in particular, speak of an enjoyment that renders orgasm comparatively ridiculous (for them, the non-phallic enjoyment of the "shoot" exceeds the simple orgasm by leaps and bounds, at least in terms of intensity, and this is a constant theme among users, mainly of heroin, but not only). We're dealing here with an jouissance that breaks the "marriage with the little peepee", as Lacan puts it, in reference to little Hans - or "little Angst" as he often calls him, and which must be taken into account. Desire is completely short-circuited here, and is nothing more than the desire for an object of satisfaction, immediate and cheap satisfaction - so to speak. Let's just say that it sidesteps phallic jouissance, the jouissance of the organ, which simplifies things quite a bit - at least initially. In fact, it's often said that drug addiction, before being a problem, is a solution to a problem - an ephemeral solution for most of us, but one that can hold out for a while in the face of the impasses of love (non-sexual intercourse), and the refusal of castration anxiety (and psychoanalytic castration in general) that characterizes our times.

Psychoanalysis has given us this discrimination: there is no single jouissance, but a plurality of jouissance. Phallic jouissance is the most accessible to us, but not everyone is willing to go through it, which implies setting the fantasy in motion, and accepting, as Lacan reminded us, "the marriage with the pee-pee", which is not

without its failures - for men and women alike. Let's just say that this assumed marriage requires knowing how to deal with anguish, which isn't something you can just hand out, and not to everyone.

This marriage is one with a “foreign” jouissance (that of the organ; we don't in fact enjoy the woman, at least on the man's side, as Lacan trumpeted, but the simple organ, in this case the phallus, but a real one), a source of anguish, and an alternative may be compulsive drug use. We can already say that drugs can be interpreted as a singular outcome, arising from an encounter with jouissance at a precise moment, when what is supposed to represent it in the subject's field (the phallus, even if the latter is the signifier par excellence of desire), is conceived as embarrassing. The subject will thus find a way out other than the compromise between jouissance and semblance authorized by the phallus.

To break this marriage is to sever the body from phallic jouissance. And so, we can say that drug addiction is not a symptom, which means that it is not a formation of the unconscious, which as such would have to do with the truth of the subject, and would carry an jouissance, a substitutive satisfaction, of a sexual nature, marked by castration. It is neither a substitutive formation, nor a formation of compromise, but rather, let us repeat, a formation of rupture. A break with phallic jouissance, thus a rejection of castration, of the phallus, and hence a rejection of the paternal metaphor. But despite the analogy, this position should not be confused with the foreclosure of the Nom-du-Père found in psychosis. Drugs lead to a kind of break with the Noms-du-Père, which we should call hors-psychosis, and whose consequence is a clean break with the particularities of fantasy.

Drug addiction is a use of jouissance outside fantasy - fantasy being, as we've seen, what enables the subject to deal with a certain relationship to jouissance. The drug addict thus tends to prove that it is possible to enjoy without the phantasm, that addiction can replace phallic jouissance. Drug addiction would then be a subjective position based on the choice of jouissance over desire, i.e., the preference given to whole-body jouissance over phallic jouissance, which is sexual jouissance - but also, of course, jouissance of meaning (jouit-sens); phallic jouissance has the father, the signifier and the phallus at its core. Against this division into forbidden jouissance and impossible jouissance, the drug addict appeals to jouissance One (which, however, soon deludes him, hence the disenchantment that soon follows).

Phallic jouissance is because sexual jouissance is marked by the impossibility of establishing the One of the sexual relation in the enunciable, precisely because there is no signifier of sexual jouissance (but only of desire: namely, the phallus). A jouissance of what comes instead, a jouissance of the word, outside the body. The sexual partner, representing the body of the Other, will be the object cause of desire, which is also plus-de-jouir, the impossibility of going beyond a limit in jouissance. This organic limit, supported by the pleasure principle, is a barrier, a failure, and the

need to start again.... This is what we mean when we say that the drug-addicted subject, unable as everyone else to eternalize jouissance, comes to repeat it more than anyone else, and outside phallic jouissance, to the point of toppling over, and coming to enjoy repetition - the ravages of repetition under its mortifying masochistic aspect, the death drive visible in the open air...

Refusing to “marry the little guy” is also an attempt to posit drug addiction as a solution to the impossibility of sexual intercourse. The drug addict subtracts himself from the imperative of (phallic) jouissance so as never to encounter the mark of castration in the Other (perversion, in other words, which is where we tend to “classify” drug addiction). The drug addict's choice, then, is to annihilate the strike of the drive, in an attempt to bring about “a” world in which reproduction would be sexless. Drugs are thus a means - to put it briefly - of avoiding the question of sex (in its teleological finality of reproduction of the species), and thus again of castration. In other words, the drug addict wants to institute a sexual relationship beyond the phallus.

To be bearable, the “marriage with the pee-pee” nevertheless implies its investiture by the phallic, in order to justify the “foreign” jouissance that manifests itself. It's a “d'hommedication” of this jouissance; in other words, it becomes nothing more than semblant jouissance, jouissance of parade. Parade to the desire of the Other.

From then on, in the choice of drug addiction, it is no longer the subject who is offered up to the grasp of the Other, but rather the drug.

The drug addict is thus the one who has chosen jouissance Une by refusing phallic signification, by rejecting the paternal metaphor. By rejecting the Nom-du-Père, drug use is no longer part of a relationship with the Law. From a psychoanalytical point of view, this renders obsolete any discussion of the legalization or non-legalization of a particular product. For the drug addict, legal and illegal mean nothing, for the jouissance of transgression is always ultimately a phallic jouissance.

Moreover, to situate the position of the drug addict within the social bond, in Lacan's category of discourses, is to refer to the discourse of the capitalist: a particular and exploited social bond, making the desiring subject believe that the missing object, the plus-de-jouir, exists, manufactured by science, and made available as such on the market. This is a concept that creates a strange kind of individual: a subject completed by his or her jouissance. The drug addict becomes the paradigm of this conception of the social bond: so connected to his jouissance that his sexual desire is abandoned. He achieves what a certain civilization wants: to transform all phallic jouissance into a productive force. He thus embodies the ideal of the consumer society, transforming all phallic jouissance into a force of production, and realizing the dream of modern civilization to erase, in the name of an Une jouissance, the fundamental dissatisfaction that arises in all speaking beings when they attempt to rediscover the

foundations of their being. This is because the roots of our being are to be found in original repression, to which the subject will never have access.

Returning to the subject of drug use in the 1960s, we'd like to take a look at Louis Malle's beautiful film *Le feu follet*. As you'll recall, the main protagonist, Alain, has just come out of rehab in a Versailles clinic, having left his wife in the States. This is an adaptation of Drieu La Rochelle's 1931 book of the same name, in which Alain is "addicted" to drugs, not alcohol as in the film. But this amounts to the same thing, since the only distinction between drug addiction and alcoholism is the fact that alcohol is not prohibited; alcohol can therefore be considered here as a drug - and even one of the most devastating, along with heroin.

As soon as he comes out of treatment, Alain returns to his band of debauched friends, where he soon finds he no longer fits in. What's more, it seems to us that he realizes that, deep down, he's only ever belonged there illusorily - with the help of alcohol and the blindness it procures.

He also met up with an old friend from the same gang, but who has "settled down" and now lives peacefully with his wife, children, car and dog, writing about Egypt at his own pace and in his spare time, not without pleasure, a "hobby" that fully supports him, he confides, in an attempt to appease him by showing him that another path is possible - that of sublimation. But Alain can't listen to his friend, married and weaned on all his years of binge drinking. He's still looking for intensity, and life seems very dull without alcohol. So he drinks again for a few days (his last), quickly realizing that death is the only way out. He then organizes his suicide, taking care to write an unequivocal letter beforehand, which reads: "I kill myself because you didn't love me, because I didn't love you. I'm killing myself because our relations have been cowardly, to strengthen our relations. I will leave an indelible stain on you". Suicide because we couldn't fulfill ourselves, because the only fulfillment we have left, without failure, is the assumed death we give ourselves - even if looking it in the face remains an impossibility, it is indeed one of man's only freedoms, dixit Lacan.

To bridge the gap with what we said about drug addiction at the start of our text - different today, more widespread, and secreted by the "discourse of the capitalist" itself, but not without retaining an eternal "constant" with the addictions of the past - we can say that Alain's choice of alcohol is a way of doing without desire and fantasy, to enjoy without phallic jouissance. It's even made explicit in the film that Alain is impotent, something his wife reproaches him for in hushed tones, attacking his lack of virility - which evokes for us here what Mehdi Belhaj Kacem says about virility, which for him is the attribute of one who knows how to defer his male jouissance, not giving in to it immediately, but knowing more than any other how to deal with desire and its own temporality, an jouissance that is anything but immediate. Alain has become impotent - we assume, at least here - through his mortifying alcoholism, and through his unwillingness to endure any of the phallic jouissance in

which the man has to face up to his anguish (not “coming too quickly”, since his desire is annihilated as soon as it is enjoyed, but also being able to assume detumescence as such, without too much anguish, until the next desire...). The result is that a life without alcohol seems extremely dull to him, his old debauched friends no longer suit him (even when re-alcoholized), his wife leaves him begging for his lack of virility (his impotence here); not even his “settled” friend can convince him that maturity exists and can be good: a new period in life when adolescence has to go, to make way for something different and just as intense, even if in a completely different, more subdued way...

This is a truth that is exposed in Louis Malle's film, because drug use always leads sooner or later to a depression that is most difficult to overcome - even if many agree that it's an underlying depression that makes a subject a drug addict, which we reject here. Here, at the extreme, the character, Alain, commits suicide, an altruistic suicide as we call it, i.e. not an act (stronger than oneself), but a cold calculation, with the sole intention of leaving a message to others, to loved ones, that they are finally paying for not having been able to understand him - bottomless re-proaches designed to induce endless guilt.

What has been democratized, and is increasingly present in our nihilistic societies characterized by a veritable imperative of jouissance (a “volonjouissance” as Castel subtly puts it), is the use of toxins to break the marriage with phallic jouissance; but the constant, here too, is that of its after-effects: outright depression and endless suicides.

To the contemporary imperative of hedonistic enjoyment, the push-to-enjoy that is indicated as the only way out by “current discourse”, we can thus oppose the asceticism of “unhindered lack” (Mehdi Belhaj Kacem). There's a long way to go before this discourse takes hold and has any real political repercussions, but a film like *Le Feu follet* (The Will-o'-the-Wisp) put us on the right track as early as the 60s, pointing out the impasses of “volonjouissance”, which will only continue to grow.