

The subject of jouissance: *Spun*, a Lacanian film?

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We'd like to say how *Spun*, the film directed by Jonas Akerlund and written by Creighton Vero and Will de los Santos, is a profoundly Lacanian film from start to finish. Underneath a seemingly nonsensical jumble of rhythms, every trait of the addict is presented with astounding clinical precision.

We'll proceed as follows. We'll set out purely clinical points, somewhat abstract, but which we'll make as crystal-clear as possible, precisely with the help of examples from the very lives of the film's characters. Let's start by saying that there are four main characters. Three plus one, to be precise. There are three men, and on the other side, the women. Ross, the slightly lost drug addict, will be, existentially speaking, the central character. Spider Mike, the drug dealer, the mediator, the one through whom everything must pass, the one who keeps things flowing - representing the equivalent of a certain empty square. Finally, the cook symbolizes the drug itself. But also - the plus-one we were talking about - a whole series of women who will never actually do anything together. Indeed, one of our hypotheses is that the film *Spun* shows us that when it comes to drug addiction, there are no longer "men or women". In fact, the drug addict is Pauline without realizing it: he couldn't care less about the color of the skin, the religious denomination, the nationality and, above all, the sex of the people he meets. "Neither men nor women, neither Jews nor Greeks", because they're all drug addicts. In this, the drug addict is a relentless universalist.

Whatever the case may be, what strikes you first and foremost is that the director ensures that the nonsensical, the senseless, is presentified in the very manner of filming. Reality, presented here in the guise of compulsive pleasure, is made present through the very rhythm of the film. It's a very difficult film to watch. Right from the start, you feel a strange vertigo, a kind of dizziness, a slight nausea: a most trying feeling. The discomfort, it should be noted, is physical from the outset: we are indeed confronted with a kind of unbearability - a sure sign of the presence of a certain reality. Things are in turmoil, everything is moving too fast. This deprives us of landmarks,

of stable points of support: everything is constantly far too noisy, whirling, dizzying. And so, throughout the film, we are forbidden to think. We can't, as usual, take the time to reflect on reality, to name it, to symbolize it, to encircle it with signifiers, to comfortably appropriate it: we're plunged into it in all its violence, as if beyond signifiers, and this despite ourselves. Hence, once again, the profound physiological unease aroused by this strange and surprising film.

But let's proceed in order, step by step, as this is the only way we can escape the tight set-up the director has put in place to immerse us in a whirlwind that makes us feel as close as possible to the environment in which the drug addict evolves.



Let's begin by defining what we'll call here, with Lacan, “drug addiction”. Lacan has an interesting vision of drug addiction, very close to what the film highlights, and which he condenses into a laconic phrase: “to be a drug addict is to break the marriage with the little peepee”. To understand why Lacan sums up being a drug addict as a divorce, we need to understand the word “marriage” in the Freudian sense. Being married to the phallus is no small thing. You have to be able to live with it. Playing the role of man, whether in your relationship, in front of your children, at work or on the world stage, is not without anguish.

Let's make one thing clear, before we get to the heart of our demonstration: if the drug addict embarks on such a hard, difficult life, it's not for nothing. Drug addicts are tireless workers. His life is one of hard labor: from morning to night, he has to find the means to obtain his product, and let's face it, it never stops. Under no circumstances is it a hedonistic search for pleasure. Nor does the addict aim for happiness. None of this makes sense to him. So what does the addict want? For

Lacan, what the addict wants is to avoid encountering a certain anguish. He wants to set up a device that will enable him to avoid having to confront castration anxiety, no more, no less. To avoid having to play the man, to constantly deal with the role of the bearer of the phallus: this, according to Lacan, is his one and only true aim. The addict makes a choice. He or she enters drug addiction as one enters holy orders. They are responsible beings. This is the meaning of Francisco-Hugo Freda's subtle phrase: "it's not the drug that makes the addict, but the addict who makes the drug". To be understood in the sense of: "society has nothing to do with it". The drug addict is in no way a victim. He makes the drugs, sometimes literally, extracting and cooking them himself. And here, in the film, to the letter, the addict makes the drug: the cook is relentlessly making meta-amphetamine.



In other words, the addict is never forced to take the drug, but always consents to do so.

For the drug addict, the initial encounter is always a little contingent and haphazard. One fine day, he has a happy encounter with a partner of enjoyment, who immediately proves to be the perfect partner. A partner who makes it possible to break, purely and simply, the marriage with the phallus, and thus with all the anguish that goes with it. The bottle, for example, is always there, at hand, faithful, but above all - and this is such a sublime quality - it's silent. That's what everyone wants, a silent partner for pleasure, who doesn't need to be asked, who can never refuse. A partner who always says yes, and with whom there can be no misunderstanding. All that's needed is for the thing to happen with a specific partner, outside language, outside the inescapable tricks and cheating induced by language and speech. The drug is either there or it isn't, and that's all there is to it.

In the film, such a partner is omnipresent. The prostitute, for example, is literally bound and gagged, mute as she is, always under his thumb, unable to refuse anything, and therefore never saying "no". The drug addict doesn't need her assent; there's nothing to do with language or speech. For the drug addict, this prostitute is strictly equivalent to his drug - which, by the way, also has to be paid for. Let's be clear: there's a profound equivalence between onanism, autistic sexuality with a silent, gagged woman, and drug use.



The film is full of available partners for pleasure, with whom it's not necessary to talk. The phone call to a phone-sex hostess, when the girlfriend isn't up for it; prostitutes, when there are no women within reach - "do you have any women in stock?"; porn at any price, where you choose your object from a catalog according to your fantasy. And then, of course, the omnipresent meta-amphetamine!

But we have to distinguish between young Ross, Spider Mike and Cook. It goes without saying that they are not caught up in the same desire for pleasure. Cook, who is none other than the imaginary phallus, cowboy-playboy to these ladies. He doesn't necessarily have the phallus, but he is it: just look at his body, his gait, his image in the mirror. Spider Mike idolizes Cook, but he's just a little phallus himself; he rules his household, but outside, on the world stage, Cook is the phallic star, shining brightly. Ross, on the other hand, may want something more than to escape all responsibility, to divorce himself from the phallus. He's not completely caught up in a perverse desire for pleasure. He's in love, let's not forget. This is present throughout the film, like a sort of red thread. Ross wants a real life, and seeks passion as such. He uses drugs to live - admittedly illusorily - in the Nietzschean Grand Midi. He has in him, let's say, a little more than the will to break off the marriage with the little pee-pee.

The drug addict, in any case, does everything to dispense with the subtleties of demand when it comes to maintaining a relationship with the other sex. He will use exclusively non-language *jouissance*. The true drug addict is totally unaware of the unconscious. Quite simply because, for them, there is simply no longer any subject - in the sense of "subject of the signifier", subject of language. To be in touch with the unconscious, with its laws, which are the laws of speech and language, you need to be hooked at the very least on the world of signifiers. Language has to be more than just a tool of communication - more than just monkey money fraudulently passed from hand to hand. "No more unconsciousness for the drug addict", we might say. In this sense, there is no drug-addicted subject, but simply an anti-subject who has become an addict. If there's an ounce of subject left, it's a subject of *jouissance*, no more, no less. The term "subject of *jouissance*" is a strange oxymoron. Because *jouissance*, beyond meaning as such, has no a priori connection with any subject whatsoever. With the *jouissance* of the drug addict, we're in the animal world, not the world of language.

Be that as it may, if we find few drug addicts on the couch, it's precisely because they are, no more and no less, cut off from the unconscious, and by this very fact, far too far below any possibility of full speech for work on the signifier to take place. In analysis with a drug addict, only the place can take place, which renders interpretation inoperative, perhaps even impossible as such. Perhaps, then, we need to know how to skew, to surprise, to try to do everything we can to stupefy the addict, the aim being to get him to deign to leave his elitist caste, the caste he holds so dear: that of drug addicts. The aim is to simply return to the world of speaking beings. This requires an

art that is not available to everyone, and few analysts take drug addicts under their care.

“Subject of jouissance”, we announced in our title. We need to say something about this, even if it's an extremely complex issue. For if jouissance concerns the body, and the subject derives from the division inherent in our access to language, then how can these two terms - subject and jouissance - coexist? Is it jouissance that has a subject, or the subject that enjoys? There's an ambiguity here.

Let's remember that, somewhere along the line, it's jouissance that has found itself a subject. The drug addict is a shining example of this. In the case of the drug addict, the drive is in fact autonomous, running on empty inside him, in spite of himself. In fact, the drive appears in the form of a certain compulsion to repeat. In the drug addict, it has found a host to parasitize relentlessly. Enjoyment parasitizes him, always to his own detriment. For the speaker, language inexorably stands in the way, distorting him in spite of himself. For the speaking being, there is a loss of jouissance: no more instincts to hold on to. And this is accompanied by an undeniable loss of a certain vitality, the vitality of passions not mediated by language. The signifier bites into the body, mortifying it forever. It diminishes our sensations, dulling them irreparably.

So it's perfectly possible to conceive of jouissance as being aimed at finding a subject, rather than thinking of a subject seeking jouissance. At least, this seems to be what the drug addict is showing us. Doesn't *Spun*, that strange film, show us bodies caught up in a jouissance of which they become the subjects? Enjoyment overrides all willpower, making them its playthings. What does it do other than subjugate them, this mad, unbridled jouissance? There is no longer a subject who enjoys, but rather a jouissance that has found itself a subject.

But this is an acephalous “subject”, whose very nature is to be almost and paradoxically totally desubjectivized: a pure monstration of the reality of the body's jouissance, a reality that the body enjoys, and which literally haunts the drug addict.

Let's return to the film we believe perfectly illustrates our point. An admirable film, simply in that it gives a certain carnal, sensitive consistency, in that it embodies the very concept of the subject of jouissance. How can the film *Spun* help us to try and understand something of this expression “subject of jouissance”? How can it help us remove the paradoxical aspect of this strange oxymoron?

Let's understand just one thing: if Lacan can sometimes speak of the subject of jouissance, it's simply a way of saying that it's jouissance that somehow has a subject. It's the emphasis placed by the last Lacan on the real, on the drive, on the body. Well, what our film *Spun* clearly shows is that the drug addict, having reached a certain stage

in his addiction, is no longer anything but *jouissance*. He's become a mere machine, the plaything of impulse. A mere body that enjoys. So it's not that there is in the least a "drug-addicted subject" or a "subject who enjoys", but that *jouissance* has found itself a body, a body to enjoy. It's *jouissance* that enjoys, no more, no less. There is thus an eclipse of the "signifying subject", the subject divided by language. In the case of the drug addict, this is out in the open, making him or her a veritable anti-subject.

The drug addict is the anti-subject. He has desubjectivized himself as much as possible.

The film's aesthetic whirlwind shows the incessant return of the drive: an autistic *jouissance* closed in on itself. What's it all about, really, if not a film in which there's no possibility of poetry? When it comes to the expression "subject of *jouissance*", it's nothing more than a way of underlining the fact that we are solely subjugated by *jouissance*. The paradox is thus removed: this was not the "signifying subject", but a non-subject, captive to the compulsion to repeat, captive to a mortifying *jouissance*.

To put it bluntly, this means only one thing: no love for the drug addict. The story of Ross and his sweetheart, a woman he totally idealized, was nothing more than a tender illusion. It was an autistic love of being totally out of touch. His beloved was totally inaccessible to him, but allowed him to entertain a sweet dream: that a harmonious life with a woman remains possible. The young lover passionately hoped for harmony between the sexes. And Ross isn't quite a drug addict yet, for here we have proof that there's still an ounce of "signifying subject" left in him: sometimes, between two doses of meta-amphetamine, in short eclipses, he becomes one again.

Let's dispel a tenacious prejudice: love never saves an addict. On the contrary, drug addicts become capable of love, if and only if they have weaned themselves off their addiction, or at least weaned themselves off it somewhat, and reconnected at least to the laws of speech and language. Indeed, there can be no true love, no love that allows "*jouissance* to condescend to desire", without at least being a subject of the unconscious.



"Neither men nor women, neither Jews nor Greeks. All drug addicts. That's the maxim, we said. Indeed, and this is a clinical observation, drug addicts only "fuck" each other. So, when it comes to sexualization, there are no longer "men and women", only "drug addicts". Bannière at last makes them into equals. Here, we see everything that concerns the clinic of the Name. It's a question of placing ourselves under a signifier, which as such identifies us, which names our being. This enables us to do something that everyone dreams of: it cancels out our differences. Since we're "drug addicts", there's no longer any such thing as "men or women". The curse of the sexes, the wall of non-sexuality, finally comes down. At least, that's the illusion.

A woman addicted to drugs or a man addicted to drugs means nothing. There are drug addicts, nothing more. They have this very special ability to have sex with each other very easily, without any fuss, avoiding misunderstandings, having the impression of erasing sexual difference, and thus cancelling out non-sexual intercourse as such. A woman or a man who is seized by sexual desire - and this happens to them rather rarely - will take any available body, as long as it's within reach. The only thing that matters is that this body is, like his own, a drug-addicted body.



“Spun”, in the final analysis, is nothing more than a slang term for the state of extreme fatigue in which the drug addict finds himself after spending days without sleep under the influence of meta: a specific “descent” that requires days and days of deep sleep. Perhaps this is the moral of the story: the drug addict, once his marriage with the phallus has broken down, having successfully shirked his responsibilities, anesthetizing himself meticulously and methodically, well, he has no choice but to wake up. His body can't withstand the shock for long, and sooner or later the anesthetic wears off. When the addict comes to the violent realization that he'd been sleeping awake, without even knowing it, all he has to do is take the bitter path back to the product... And the circle is complete.

The tragedy of the drug addict, what he absolutely doesn't know how to deal with, what else, in the end, but not knowing how to deal with boredom? It's precisely this, and nothing else, that we should try to teach him. Because, let's not forget, if you don't know how to be bored, you don't know anything...

