

The Era of Lite

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We are currently in the era of 'Lite'. The products that we consume on a daily basis have been modified and sanitised are now advertised as being Lite. Hence our milk is Lite, butter is Lite, the yoghurt we eat is Lite and the Coke that we choose is Lite. After a long day at work we can sit down to a Lite beer, accompanied by some Lite potato chips. We can light up a Lite cigarette and turn on the television and watch the News which is now also Lite, with readily-digestible (sound-) bites that have short, truncated sentences whose sole purpose is to accompany the images. The Lite-ness of the News is also conveyed by the little pleasantries between the presenters.

Lite thus presents itself as a reduction of content. From the above we can see that it can be the reduction of fat, of saturated fats, of cholesterol, of sugar, of alcohol, of salt, of tar and nicotine, and intellectual content, to name but a few. It is usually written in this incorrect and commercial way, more phonetic perhaps, but at the same time at a remove from the code of everyday English. Thus Lite also pertains to a reduction in orthographical content, that is, a reduction of the weight that the object gives to the signifier.

From the above we can deduce that Lite is not a Lite-ness of any one thing in particular, Lite-ness does not pertain to any one substance. Here we can see that an object might begin to be sketched or outlined by the very act of emptying it of its content, effecting a discontent, or a discontentedness, in relation to the object. This object then becomes defined by the reduction of its content, or even by the replacement of that content by an ersatz object that is not *it* (a sweetener for sugar, for instance).

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Lite-ness also alludes to a dangerous excess, a “too much” that we seek, and are urged by the purveyors of Lite products, to eliminate at all costs. It is dangerous because without this en-Lite-ment we run the risk of harm to our bodies, the development of Coronary Artery disease, of Liver disease, of Diabetes, etc. with their attendant threat of death and morbidity.

Furthermore, without Lite television News and Lite-weight newspapers and journalism, we are also at risk of becoming too intellectual.

But, in this era of Lite, our bodies, it seems, can become not only healthy, but young once again, and slim and attractive to boot. All this by carefully choosing, and buying, the right Lite products and scrupulously avoiding what is heavy.

And by not being too intellectual we can remain focused on the image, just like the newspaper journalists who now have their photos displayed above their regular columns, smiling for the lighter columns, more serious expressions reserved for finance and other areas that must not appear to be taken too lightly.

The excess though is not just physically and mentally bad for us: it is also morally bad to succumb to the lure of the heaviness of products that are not Lite. It is for this reason that Lite products are often advertised as being “guilt-free”. Hence the guilt-content of such products is also reduced in content. Any other foods that are not Lite become forbidden fruit, temptingly out of bounds. And yet this guilt of the subject that is purportedly provoked by the consumption of what is not Lite perhaps indicates, and also obscures, the presence of something of desire.

If Lite is a modern designation, or rather outline, of the place of the object, then each subject will take it up in his or her particular way.

A 17 year old girl, who insists tenaciously on a diagnosis of Anorexia, is admitted to the medical unit for re-feeding by the paediatrician. This is something of a victory for her as she is engaged in a bitter and

deadly competition with her sister to be a “real anorexic”: the sister has just been discharged from another hospital.

At home her diet consists mainly of Diet-Coke. Even though this drink contains no sugar, it seems that the absence of sugar is not a given. Thus she does not leave her Coke in the refrigerator at home “so no-one can add sugar to it”. When she goes to a café she insists that the waiter pour the Coke in front of her “so I know that nothing has been added”.

Our patient concurs with Lacan that the anorexic eats, or drinks, the *nothing*, and plenty of it. If it is sugar that has been removed from Diet-Coke, it is the *nothing*, for her, which is added to it. But in her statements we also find intimated the traces of a fantasy of intrusion and violation. Who is this *no-one*, we might ask, who can add sugar to her Diet-Coke? A *no-one* who, moreover, can do something to her, to introduce the sugar into her drink against her will, even without her knowing.

She articulates something of this position by saying: “I want my rights to be taken away from me”, purportedly in order to prevent her cutting herself and taking laxatives. This is played out in hospital where she wants to be forced to eat. It is the week-end when she is admitted and she is told by the staff that if she does not eat then she will be obliged to have the naso-gastric tube. This threat for her is as good as being forced and so she submits and eats over the week-end.

On the Monday the paediatrician fractures this imaginary scenario by telling her that as she is a voluntary patient she cannot be made to eat or have the tube inserted. She is angry at this and insists on being made an involuntary patient. When this is denied her and she is neither forced nor any longer under the threat of being forced, or penetrated by the tube, as a protest she resumes her usual diet of *nothing* in the form of Diet-Coke.

When, as a result of this stand-off, she is told that she will be discharged since she is medically stable and because she is not eating there is no point to her being in hospital, she is angry: “All I want is

to be forced to eat. If I could choose to eat myself, then I wouldn't be anorexic”.

It would no doubt be the culmination of her narcissistic consummation if she were indeed to eat herself.

Her rivalry is played out with another girl in the ward who does have a naso-gastric tube: “Why is she able to be forced to eat and not me. It's because she's 15, isn't it? You won't force me because I'm in-between being a teenager and an adult. I'm caught in a loophole.” She thus locates her being as “in-between”, neither here nor there.

In the era of Lite, it is perhaps, then, the unbearable heaviness of being that is shunned and which thus becomes forbidden. A reduction is required to attempt to empty out this fullness.

The object of Lite-ness is, though, one that is still defined in relation to its content: even if the milk is ‘no fat’, the yoghurt is 99.9% fat-free or the Diet-Coke is 100% free of sugar, its status is nonetheless given in relation to that particular content, continuing to locate the object within this imaginary circuit, indeed giving it added emphasis through its very reduction. We can say then that the object retains its weight, or even puts on weight, through this attempted elimination of its content.

But if being, at least provisionally, is located in the speaking-being, it is only through the word that an efficient reduction, or emptying, can take place. The object comes to be connoted through the fantasm, even if as a Lite object. Now the signifier can become tied to the weight of the object by this “loophole”, a knot that also carries a hole, that is, an emptying of another sort