

the drug: what object for psychoanalysis?

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Jean-Louis Chassaing has submitted this paper in anticipation of the release this year of his book entitled *Drogue et langage – ducorps et de lalangue* (The drug and language – thebody and *lalangue*). It will be published by Érès in the collection ‘*Humus, subjectivité et lien social*’, directed by Jean-Pierre Lebrun. In regard to the translating of this paper, Jean-Louis Chassaing was insistent regarding the retention of ‘the drug’ in the singular, as, beyond the concept of ‘drugs’, it is the drug as singular object that he endeavours to investigate in this paper.

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Toxikon

When in 1945 Otto Fenichel, of whom Lacan does not generally speak well, wrote a chapter on “Drugless Addictions” [*Toxicomanies*], it is clear that for the analyst the notion of the drug as common object does not necessarily coincide with the notion in drug addiction [*toxicomanie*], the *mania of the toxic*, the mania of the toxikon. This toxikon – whose etymology goes back to *toxon*, ‘arrow’, *toxikon*: poison that was smeared onto arrow tips – this toxikon was the word chosen in the 19th century by the medical profession to designate (or perhaps to stigmatize as one says these days) the users – drug addicts – who do not restrict themselves to their use, but in fact abuse these products. These products, all things considered, come from medical practice but are deviated from that use. Effectively, the side effects have become the main effects that are sought after: pleasure and enjoyment [*jouissance*], without being able to distinguish one from the other, but which in any case are situated on the side of excess, and of prohibition or its transgression.

The word *toxicomanie* in French belongs to the medicine of the 19th century, in its moralizing version of the era, indeed in the same stream as the degeneration theory of Benedict-Augustin Morel (1809-1873). But the term was taken up by psychiatry, still in the 19th century, and we discovered that in the text *Précis of Psychiatrie* by Régis – who was an excellent clinician and one of the first promoters of Freud in psychiatric studies – that he used the term *toxicomanie*, a use whose origin he attributed to Charles Férey, a psychiatrist who was for a time Charcot’s secretary.

The history is interesting, since in psychiatry the word *toxicomanie* replaced that of dipsomania. Régis speaks of morphine dipsomania, cocaine dipsomania, opium dipsomania and so on, in the fashion of the first dipsomania in France: alcoholic dipsomania, different from *potomanie* which is the fact of drinking water in an excessive fashion. Thus the multiplication of products, combined with the introduction of ‘foreign’products, products from other cultures and then industrialized products, brought forth the need for new words in clinical practice – or according to a well known play on words in French – new evils [*maux*] to be defined by new words [*mots*]. The task of classification, however, created some problems for nosology, the description and classification of illnesses. In most psychiatry

textbooks, drug addictions as a category were situated, and are situated in the older and fundamental works in the chapter devoted to personality disorders and therefore on the level of symptom or syndrome (and/or in regard to nosology) next to or amongst obsessions-compulsions whether they are enacted or not – and thus impulses – along with perversions, fetishism in particular, etc.

English or American terminology speaks instead of addiction or drug addiction which does not really change the problem evoked above, indeed it even removes it from the possibility of locating it etymologically and historically. It was not until the beginning of the 1970s that a French-English psychoanalyst Joyce MacDougall¹ was able to bring back into the French language, with its origins in Roman law, the old term *addiction* ‘he who has not paid his debts is physically forced’. She introduced this, essentially in regard to two ‘pathologies’: perverse (excessive) sexuality and psychosomatics.

Here I am only giving a brief overview. Today the word addiction is fashionable and is used at the least opportunity to the extent that it no longer signifies anything much. There are even university departments of Addictology. This has become a discipline with a great future... for university appointments!

Drugless addictions

Thus in 1945 Otto Fenichel² spoke of drugless addictions in his foundational work *The psychoanalytic theory of neurosis* in which he devoted a chapter to “Neuroses related to Perversion”. Bringing drug addiction and impulsive madness together is interesting and very apt in regard to the history of classification. Impulsive madness is a psychiatric term derived from Esquirol’s much contested notion of monomanias. The part of the chapter entitled “addictions without drugs” refers to other authors, as well as to clinical practice with eating behaviours and to gambling [*jeu*], but this is not the object of our discussion here: that would take us too far back into history.³

Freud, however, had not previously distinguished between alcoholic behaviour and gambling, or rather placed them together. In the letter to Wilhelm Fliess of the 11th January 1897, he compares the alcoholism of someone close to a patient of his to the gambling of a (male or female depending on the translation!) patient. His account is worth recounting here:

The dipsomania arose by reinforcement (or rather by substitution) of a drive that replaced the associated sexual drive (the same phenomenon had probably occurred to the old F.) [...] regarding his gambling passion.⁴

The latest version, that described as the *Complete Edition*, that of that rascal Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson⁵, revised and augmented for the German edition⁶ by Michael Schröter, modified and translated by Françoise Khan and François Robert for the French edition⁷ gives the following sentence:

The dipsomania arose by reinforcement, or better, by *substitution*, of this impulse for the associated sexual impulse. (The same thing probably goes for the gambling mania of the old F.)⁸

It would be interesting to read the sentence in German, but the tone is already there. Substitution of the sexual drive by an impulse that is tied to it... There is an idea, but one perceives a hesitation: reinforcement substitution, a link between the two... There are two of them: a sexual one and an impulsive one that reinforces the first, is substituted for it or is

associated with it in being substituted for it... Which one would the latter be? Which one would it be if it were distinguished from a sexual drive? Following Lacan, can we not speak of a jouissance of excess that *thanks* to the drug would come to produce a forcing of the barrier of the pleasure principle, the principle of least tension? We could in fact speak of a beyond of the pleasure principle, of the death drive of the Other jouissance, etc. But would this not be a bit too quick, to precipitously ‘tack’ the theory onto practice, in a manner that is not well argued? I am seeking with you. Before leaving this important question in suspense, I will add this pertinent and very apt remark made by Charles Melman in 1989 during a colloquium of the *Association Freudienne Internationale* on drug addiction: the jouissance of the drug addict is not in the moment of the taking of the product, but rather in the moment of tension of the pain of a beyond of the pleasure principle which is the moment, the terrible moment, of the lack. The jouissance of the drug addict, in the Freudo-Lacanian sense, is the jouissance of the lack! And the pleasure is in the detumescence, in the taking of the product. And I will add that *thanks* to the drug *object – in the usual sense* of the term and not in the Lacanian sense of the object *a* which would be going too fast – as *object-at-hand* the drug addict reproduces in an artificial way, and the term is appropriate here, this particular pleasure/jouissance alternance but with the drug as partner, and as pleasure/jouissance it is a set – almost in the mathematical sense – close to hand, in other words the drug addict believes he is the Master of the game [*jeu*]. I will provisionally call this object *a*, a ‘connecting object’ which thus allows this passage of pleasure-jouissance at will, I would say to the point of satiation... But this satiation, the ‘that’s enough!’ of this ‘little game’ is at risk of only being realized with the death of the body...

Let us take up what Melman says so admirably in the postface of the book indicated above:

The remarkable efficacy of drugs is in short-circuiting the complex and random progression of discourse in order, through a chemical hit, to realise an excitation or a more successful orgasm that is reproducible at will. These products guarantee the triumph over an instance – a phallic one – whose programmed capriciousness and evasiveness render the subject reliant upon a failure.⁹

Ursucht?

Let us leave aside these very theoretical questions in order to take up Freud’s well known comment regarding addictions. It is again in a letter to Fliess, later than the last one cited. The letter of 22nd December 1897 states:

It has dawned on me that masturbation is the one major habit, the ‘primal addiction’ (Ursucht), and that the other appetites, such as the need for alcohol, morphine, tobacco, etc., are only the substitutes and replacements for it.¹⁰

The insight has dawned on me that masturbation is the one major habit, the “original addiction”, and it is only as a substitute and replacement for this that the other addictions arise — those to alcohol, morphine, tobacco, etc.¹¹

At this point, in this latter translation of the *Complete Edition*, there is a reference to a footnote¹²:

On the question of the “addiction” supplementing “the missing sexual jouissance”, cf. also “Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses” (1898b, GW, I, 506; OCF.P, III, 231.).¹³

It is curious that it is precisely upon this point that the reference evokes a supplement for the “missing sexual enjoyment” as it is not here that this is said by Freud! But in our book we had already noted this occurrence in 1998! Here it is in part:

A more precise investigation demonstrates that as a general rule these narcotics are destined to play the role – directly or indirectly – of the missing sexual jouissance, and, when a normal sexuality can no longer be established, the relapse of the treated addict can certainly be expected.¹⁴

Thus once again there is this question of jouissance, of substitution, or of a supplement, of a reinforcement which is missing from sexual jouissance.

If this ‘jouissance’ does not directly correspond from the outset to the beyond of the pleasure principle, whilst engendering it in the form of intolerable lack, and if it comes as an add-on, as a supplement (without at the same time being an Other jouissance?), as excess, is it not in the between-the-two, a specific jouissance of the object, a jouissance that ‘constitutes’ the passage between pleasure and its Beyond?

But – and this is important – this occurs by doing without language, by substituting it for phallic jouissance or by adding on to it. This is congruent with clinical practice today in which language with its equivocations and its ‘inadequacy’ is ‘unsuitable’ for any exchanges...!¹⁵

This is also what Melman stated in the postface cited above: “short-circuiting the complex and random progression of discourse”.

What object?

As we have just mentioned, the terms pleasure and jouissance, according to whether they are employed by Freud or by Lacan, needed to be specified in order to justify their use in a manner that is suitable in this clinical practice. The clinical practice with drug addiction is in fact a caricature of our modernity.

The question of the object is no less problematic for all of this. We can only just begin to tackle it.

Fenichel’s ‘catalogue’ pertains to a botanical classification, although he offers a psychopathology for each chapter, however succinct it may be. Its interest lies in disconnecting the common object from the psychical object. If drugs are effectively prehensile objects to have at hand, what then for instance is the prehensile object of the gambler, an example of *drugless addiction*? What is the object of the anorexic? For the bulimic? Is it the food bowl? For the gambler, is it the roulette ball or the baccarat cards?

For Lacan the anorexic eats the nothing; the nothing is his or her object of predilection. For Freud the gambler is dealt ‘a good hand’ or not but it is a question of hand.

To speak of the object for psychoanalysts, particularly Lacanians, requires the definition to be circumscribed in the very language of their theory. The same goes for the question of repetition: it has a Freudian specificity. The considerable salience of the drug object testifies to the importance given to objects, whilst they are discarded almost straightaway... in anticipation of the next one. Freud had already brought our attention to the fact that, in contrast to past civilisations, our civilisations prize the object over and above the object

relation. Lacan took a minimal precaution: he ‘naturally’ distinguished between common objects – he was wary of speaking of real objects – and ‘his’ object *a*, psychical object, lost object, object of lack, object of castration.

This is a first point.

To be continued?

Translated from French by Michael Plastow

References

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- ⁴ Freud, Sigmund. *La naissance de la psychanalyse* (edition established and translation by Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, Ernst Kris). Paris: PUF, 1956/1973. Translator’s Note: I have translated literally from the French here due to the emphasis given in the paper to the particular wording of the translations into French.
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- ⁶ Freud, Sigmund: *Briefe an Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904* (Ed. Michael Schröter; Transcription Gerhard Fichtner). Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1986.
- ⁷ Freud, Sigmund. *Lettres à Wilhelm Fließ 1887-1904*. Paris: PUF, 2006/2007.
- ⁸ T.N.: Again I have translated literally from the French version. The English version taken from: Masson reads as follows: “His dipsomania arises through the reinforcement, or better, *substitution* of the one impulse for the associated sexual one. (the same is probably true of the gambling mania of old F.)” Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff. *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*. Cambridge, Mass. & London: Belknap, 1985. 222.
- ⁹ Melman, Charles. “Les sexolytiques”. Postface to *Écrits psychanalytiques classiques sur les toxicomanies*, coordinated by Chassaing, Jean-Louis, with the help of Balbure, B, Dufour, A & Petit, P; postface by Melman, C. Paris: Éditions de l’Association freudienne (today the ALI), 1998.
- ¹⁰ Freud, Sigmund. *La naissance de la psychanalyse* (edition established and translation by Marie Bonaparte, Anna Freud, Ernst Kris). Paris: PUF, 1956/1973.
- ¹¹ Freud, Sigmund. *Lettres à Wilhelm Fließ 1887-1904*. Paris: PUF, 2006/2007. 365 .T.N.: Again these citations are translated from the French versions cited here.
- ¹² T.N.: This reference is in the French edition of the letters but not in Masson’s English version.
- ¹³ Freud, Sigmund. *Lettres à Wilhelm Fließ 1887-1904*. Paris: PUF, 2006/2007. 365.
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