“PER VIA DI PORRE”, “PER VIA DI LEVARE”, “PER VIA DI TAGLI”¹

Contemporary Symptoms and the Art of Interpretation

Rik Loose

In *Du Discours Psychanalytique* Lacan seems to argue that the discourse of the master produces the discourse of the capitalist, or at least, he implies that the discourse of the capitalist is produced by a warping of the discourse of the master (Lacan, 1978 [1972]). In the discourse of capitalism the terms of the left antipode of the discourse of the master are reversed. That produces the following:

The discourse of the master demonstrates that the constitution of the Subject (S) in the field of the Other (S1 ➔ S2) results in the production of a remainder (a) which the subject can never reach (∥).

When the terms of the left antipode are reversed in the discourse of the master, the disjunction (∥) between (S∥a) is undone and a closed circuit is formed. Now we have a circular trajectory where the positions merge which implies that castration is dismissed. In the discourse of capitalism the *apparent* agent is the subject, but the real driving force is the object as *plus-de-jouir* (surplus-value of

In the discourse of the master, the master is only the apparent agent, whilst the truth as driving force is the castrated subject of the master (S), which turns him or her into a master by the very denial of his or her castration. The plus-de-jouir is a product here and it implies the installation of a lack in – or limit on – jouissance.

In the discourse of capitalism, the logic of the plus-de-jouir has become an unlimited right to jouissance: “Here it is, now take it.” Modern advertising is grounded by this idea: “You are a complete loser if you don’t want to be part of all this jouissance.” The S1 in modernity does not anchor the subject (S) anymore. Now the object of jouissance determines the subject (S). This results in a movement in which jouissance overrides the chain of signifiers (S1 ➞ S2). The chain of signifiers has become a function of the determining power of jouissance. In this loop-kind-of-movement the chain of signifiers is at the mercy of the demands of a constantly changing object of jouissance. What supports the subject here is not the reference to a symbolic ideal but the reference to an object. The discourse of capitalism leads to individualisation because it condenses the object and the subject in such a way that the other structural and differentiating aspects (S1 ➞ S2) have been superimposed by this condensation: “it is me and my object.” This jouissance is idiotic. In other words, the Other as structure and desire have been dismissed by jouissance. We will see that the discourse of addiction, as the paradigmatic discourse of contemporary symptoms, is happily married to the discourse of capitalism. Contemporary symptoms are the triumph of object(al) jouissance over phallic jouissance. Here we find a closure of the disjunction between (S) and (a).

Is it possible to develop a discourse of contemporary symptoms or Addiction (it can be argued, as we will see, that they are the same)? In such a discourse the object of jouissance (a) must be the apparent commanding agent. Therefore being in the place of agent it commands the subject (S), but, and this is important, it appeals to an ideal (we will see the difference shortly). This ideal pretends to be an ideal, external
solution for the subject. Hence, this can be written as follows: \( a \rightarrow S_1 \). It produces a subject \( (S) \) who suffers in the real, especially when the external solution is temporarily, or indeed permanently, not available for some reason or another. That leaves only one more place and term. Therefore in the place of truth we find general knowledge \( (S_2) \) which is indeed avidly, but impotently, pursued by addicts \( (S_2//S) \) who epitomise modern subjectivity. This gives us the following discourse:

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\text{Contemporary Symptoms/Addiction}
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\begin{array}{c}
a \rightarrow S_1 \\
\uparrow \quad \downarrow \\
S_2 \quad // \quad S
\end{array}
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However, there is another way of reading this discourse. We can do the same as Lacan regarding the discourse of capitalism: he inverted the left antipode of the discourse of the master to produce it. He did that to show that the master signifier \( S_1 \) is no longer in command to structure things. This results in the subject \( (S) \) having the freedom to choose and thus to overrule the master signifier and its function within the chain of signifiers, but on condition that he or she conforms to objectal \textit{jouissance}.

So what can we say about the discourse of contemporary symptoms in this context? First of all we should notice that it is not produced from the discourse of the master as happened with the discourse of capitalism. Production in capitalism eventually produced the continuous loop of \textit{jouissance} which means that desire and its satisfaction have been short-circuited. Freud likened that to masturbation.

Surprisingly what we should notice is that the discourse of contemporary symptoms is produced from the discourse of analysis.
When we look at the discourse of contemporary symptoms we can see that it is produced by inverting the right antipode of the discourse of the analysis (and this time the change includes the direction of the vectors in the discourse as was proposed by Lacan for the discourse of the capitalist):

Can we say that the discourse of analysis was the necessary condition for the discourse of contemporary symptoms? It is certainly worth considering as psychoanalysis was produced in Victorian times: Freud provided patients with the freedom to say anything about the most intimate details of their lives in a time of repression and prohibition of jouissance, especially sexual jouissance. Of course what happened with and since Freud is that knowledge has been produced about this repressed jouissance. Through the production of this knowledge and especially its general acceptance (i.e., it became part of the way we began to think and experience things, like sex) it became dislodged from the jouissance it protected us from. Unconscious knowledge protects against jouissance; it regulates it. When knowledge became dislodged from jouissance, jouissance was given free reign. This is, it seems to me, the very point that Miller made when he said in A Fantasy that, the “discourse of hypermodern civilization has
the structure of the discourse of the analyst” (Miller, 2005, p.7); it “is interpretation that has dislodged knowledge from jouissance in a general kind of way, which implies that now, surplus-jouissance commands” (ibid. p. 8). Miller claims that Freudian practice produced a liberation of jouissance, but also, that it anticipated the rise of the object a, to the social zenith (a reference to a comment that Lacan made in Radiophonie, 2001, p.414) which makes it, not a star, but a Sputnik, i.e., an artificial product (ibid. p.11).

Although psychoanalysis itself developed into a completely different ethical direction, it can nevertheless be argued that, it paved the way for the development of a market of happiness that does nothing more than accommodate jouissance in various ways. CBT, humanistic counselling and most forms of psychotherapy accommodate jouissance by giving in to it, whilst psychoanalysis began to realise that it needed to intervene in it. Psychoanalysis began to say “NO!” to jouissance, or at least it began to recognise that only in certain circumstances, such as, for example, psychosis, that jouissance should be supported in such a way that it would prevent the subject from being perplexed by a more injurious unlimited jouissance. Psychoanalysis was forced to reinvent itself because it had created a by-product, namely the proliferation and liberation of jouissance, and as such had to become a clinic of jouissance, that is to say, a clinic that operates on jouissance via the psychoanalytic act.

The point here is that the pressure of jouissance produced by the disconnection or dislodgment of knowledge from jouissance had a part to play in the warping of the discourse of analysis, such that it became a discourse of the accommodation of jouissance. By inverting the right antipode of the discourse of analysis, the discourse of contemporary symptoms is produced. The object no longer appeals to the subject to produce a language (lalangue) that is radically particular to him or her:
Now the object appeals to the subject to produce a language, i.e., an experience that is like the discourse of capitalism; homogenising, universal and short-circuiting via a closed loop. In other words, the object of jouissance is in command and it determines that everything that happens in this discourse accommodates precisely what sets it in motion, namely, jouissance. It is important to mention here that this homogenising effect does not necessarily imply that the clinical structures have disappeared or become less important. The implication is rather that they have been submerged and thus need to be provoked in our clinical work with patients.

Should we be surprised that the discourse of contemporary symptoms or Addiction is the precise mirror-image of the discourse of capitalism? No, because in both there is no disjunction or lack which would anchor the subject regarding the master-signifier and in both, it is the objects of jouissance that dictate the subject. These two discourses are the precise inverse of each other and they are thus totally complementary. They are a harmonious marriage and we know how sickening that is. What happens increasingly is that the modern subject is forced to administrate the jouissance in his or her body with things/gadgets. In a culture where the law of jouissance dominates over the law of the signifier or desire, we will encounter increasing turmoil in the body with the result that there will be an overreliance on gadgets of jouissance. Pleasure can become jouissance, Miller says, when it ceases to obey the knowledge of the body, which is what seems to have happened here (Miller, 2001, p. 20). This can happen, for instance, by pleasure being connected to an object or signifier of that object, which promises more. In that movement knowledge of
the body is overridden by the real of the body, that is to say, by the *jouissance* of the body\(^2\).

This kind of body requires regulation, but it is also possible that the administration of *jouissance* to a body, just of itself, will lead to the necessity of regulation beyond the signifier, precisely because it contributes to the diminishing effect of the signifier (when *jouissance* proliferates the signifier loses its traction). It is possible to say that this is what Lacan was aiming at in *Les Nons Dupes Errent*, namely, when he says that between birth and death we find structure and *jouissance* for the speaking-being and that when structure loses its hold, the subject will be increasingly confronted with the *jouissance* of the body (Lacan, lecture of 13/11/1973).

In Seminar X Lacan says that “the symptom is the result of a question regarding the cause as *object a* and desire as the effect of it.” (Lacan, lecture of 12/06/1963). However, when *jouissance* is in command as object or agent - which is what happens in the discourse of capitalism because there castration is dismissed - *jouissance* becomes the effect of the cause, rather than desire. Recent times demonstrate a shift from the administration of desire, lack, (ordinary) pleasure and so on, towards an unmediated and individualized administration of *jouissance*. In modern society administration is increasingly divorced from the law that regulates (which includes the social bond) and consequently, we become individual units of an administration of *jouissance*. A more unmediated and bodily way of suffering is a consequence of this shift in balance. The *jouissance* that is correlative to castration/separation can return to the subject in the form of a *jouissance* of the Other after finding recourse in external *jouissance* solutions. The modern subject is a subject who has fallen asleep and needs to be woken up. So what do we do?

Increasingly, the modern subject is not prepared to take

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2 The body becomes a location of *jouissance* rather than pleasure. Knowledge of the body, that is one overwritten by signifiers which have a limiting effect on jouissance, is overridden. The body is then pushed in the direction of *jouissance* via “gadgets” and away from the limiting knowledge of *jouissance* and the signifier.
responsibility for his or her unconscious. This means that the subject avoids the “know-how” of knowledge with jouissance. In Seminar XXIV, Lacan says that we are all glued to sense and he expresses the hope for a “new signifier” that has no sense and which, as such, is able to open up to the real (Lacan, lecture of 17/05/1977). When we intervene with contemporary subjects we must ensure that our words open up to the real in order to curtail or stabilise the jouissance of the Other. Neither sense nor ideals are up to the task. Lacan says in the same seminar “All discourse has a hypnotic effect. All discourse has effects of suggestion. Discourse always induces sleep, unless one does not understand; then it wakes one up.” (ibid, lecture of 19/04/1977).

Discourse and modern symptoms have something in common: they put the subject to sleep. It seems that this theoretical development in Lacan’s work implies the possibility of considering the existence of different ways of administrating jouissance in an era when the law and desire have been rendered more or less impotent, that is to say, in an era in which the subject is encouraged to cheat on his or her desire.

It is an ethical imperative that we find a way of awakening the subject of contemporary symptoms at the very beginning of their treatment. The way to do this is by intervening in relation to a particular limit or anxiety within them. This limit or conflict may be an indication of the object a (Brousse, 2005, p 25).

The very first interpretations should be those that aim at anxiety as the relay between jouissance and desire. Only anxiety can establish a relationship to desire, the desire of the Other, as that which is lacking in the Other and which can install the love of the transference. It is like Alcibiades in Plato’s Banquet: He loved Socrates because of Socrates’ relationship to knowledge: his desire to know. Alcibiades loved Socrates because of the latter’s lack (of knowledge) which caused his desire to know. These interpretations are the kind that open, or perhaps even create the unconscious, by establishing a relationship between the subject and the lack in the Other. This is
the establishment of the subject of love for whom the analyst as Other functions as an agalmic object of transference. The sequence is not unimportant here: it is not necessarily supposed knowledge in the analyst that makes the subject love him or her; it is rather the establishment of love in the transference that creates the interest in the unconscious and its knowledge via the analyst. With the love of transference, an administrative kind of relationship to jouissance has been created that is mediated by the social bond with the Other. In this sense you could say that now the love of the transference can do its work. That is when analysis has a chance. So what do we need to do to make the odds come out in our favour?

In 1966 Lacan remarks that the legislators of medical practice moved medicine into the direction of jouissance. He argues that addiction is following the path of medical science and is becoming increasingly dependent on effects we have on the body. Medical legislators, he continues, impose two duties: firstly the controlled use of drugs; and secondly the medical use of jouissance (Lacan, 1966, p. 767). With these remarks he anticipates precisely the point he would make two years later in seminar XVI, namely, that increasingly, modern culture disconnects love, i.e., desire and the social bond, from both knowledge and jouissance (Billiet, 2008, p. 120). When drugs do their work a relationship to the supposed knowledge of the Other becomes obsolete and the administration of jouissance does not require the social bond with the Other anymore.

So far an intervention has been outlined that may only create the conditions for a possible administrative relationship to jouissance via the transference or the (knowledge) of the Other, although we have to immediately add that there is absolutely no guarantee that these conditions will be created, especially in the modern subject. The question that now arises is the following: How can we intervene within the transference (once indeed it has been established) in order to have an effect on a body that is wrecked with jouissance such that the subject’s relationship to jouissance becomes supportable without the aid of external objects? Transference here concerns
more directly the question of “know-how” with one’s jouissance than a relationship to love and knowledge. So where do we stand in relation to interpretation? What can interpretation do? How should we interpret?

Jacques-Alain Miller argues in the book The Later Lacan that, in order to bring “the subject back to his truly elementary signifiers”, it is crucial that in interpretation a signifier (S1) is produced that stands apart from other signifiers (S2) that would provide it with sense (Miller, 2007, p. 7). Returning the subject to his elementary signifiers is to have an effect on lalangue, which means having an effect in the subject where the unconscious, language, trauma and jouissance meet in a radically singular way. These interpretations may be perplexing, sometimes even shocking, but never predictable.

In the second lecture from seminar XXIII on Joyce and the Sinthome, Lacan mentions he had just come back from the US where he met Chomsky. Chomsky considered language to be a genetic fact. Lacan says that, according to Chomsky language is an organ. This causes Lacan to say, that as an organ language makes a hole in the real, and that through the hole it makes, it can put into operation a hold on the real. He even recognises this hole in primal repression (Lacan, lecture of 09/12/1975). In other words it is very fundamental in relation to the operation of language and the establishment of the unconscious. A hole is not a lack. A lack is on the side of the Other and it causes desire. For example, what is at stake in a painting is the gaze as object of desire which can satisfy the desire of the viewer. In seminar XI Lacan says:

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\text{it is a question of a sort of desire on the part of the Other, at the end of which is the showing. How could this showing satisfy something, if there is not some appetite of the eye on the part of the person looking? This appetite of the eye that must be fed produces the hypnotic value of painting. (Lacan, 1979, p. 115)}
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So the crucial thing is this: according to Lacan there is a hypnotic value to painting, as indeed he thought there is also for discourse.
This is precisely what Freud said about hypnosis and suggestive techniques when he likened it to what Leonardo Da Vinci said about painting: it works via *per via di porre*, which means that it is a matter of adding bits and pieces to the canvas (Freud, 1905, p. 260). Freud then likened interpretation in analysis to what Leonardo called *per via di levare* which is the movement of sculpture, namely, the taking away of bits and pieces from the block (ibid.). Interpretation should never be suggestive, but it should also not be discourse in which S1 brings in S2 and thus sense with *jouissance* creating *jouir-sens* (enjoyment in meaning). For the modern subject who suffers from a body wrecked with *jouissance*, or indeed who suffers from the neurotic burden of too much *jouir-sens* (i.e. the *jouissance* that is contained in meaning or the signifier), the signifier of interpretation has to make a hole in the real of *jouissance* or in the imaginary of sense.

To return to the metaphor of art, the Argentinean/Italian painter Lucio Fontana considers he is a sculptor. In 1959, when he was in a rage (he could not get the paint on canvas in the way he wanted), he stabbed his painting, thereby making holes in it. In that moment he had discovered his art: his incisions, which he called *Tagli* (Hess, 2006, p. 41-42). From then on he began to make various kinds of incisions in his paintings. Some of these canvasses are expanses of colour in which the incisions and holes provide relief and orientation. It is important to mention that his discovery was made in a state of overwhelming *jouissance* and that the gesture itself may have an affinity to the contemporary symptom of self-harm.

The idea of an interpretation with an S1 without it being allowed to absorb the S2, as it was developed by Miller in *Interpretation in Reverse* (Miller, 2007), is like an incision made by the signifier. This could be considered to be Lacan’s aforementioned hoped-for “new signifier”, a signifier that should be able to create a hole in the real (of *jouissance*) or indeed a hole in *jouir-sens* (in order to unburden the subject of the weight of the imaginary of sense).

In concluding I would like to propose that the sculptures (he called his perforated paintings sculptures) of Lucio Fontana are apt
as a metaphor for the function of interpretation of contemporary symptoms in the same way as the “per via di levare” of sculpture was for Victorian times. The difference between classic sculpture and Fontana’s Buchi, Brochi and Tagli is the hole, the incision. As Freud implied, classic sculpture refers to the intervention in desire. So perhaps it is possible to say that the sculptures of the Buchi, Brochi and Tagli refer to the intervention in the drive and libido; they create a hole or limit in the jouissance of the drive and the imaginarisation of jouissance. Can we call this gesture surgery with the unitary signifier?

One way or another, the psychoanalytic act of creating a limit is crucial, especially in a world where everything is possible and where the “can-do” and “I do because I can” mentality reigns supreme.

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