

From the loss of the object: the encounter over the abyss

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Abstract: This paper contains theories regarding the relationship between the loss of the object of full satisfaction and the possible experiences of jouissance. In order to undertake this discussion, central concepts will be used such as those from *das Ding* in Freud, and the object “a” in Lacan, based on the concepts of anguish, joy and eroticism, the latter being a concept found in Georges Bataille’s works. It will also recover the notion of sublimation, the path to satisfaction by which the subject borders the emptiness left by the loss of the object, making a social bond. The symbolic register is thus responsible for making this bond, because by using words the subject could possibly make an encounter over the abyss created by sexual detachment. Language would therefore have the function of filling the emptiness left by the loss of the object, a soothing promise, but impossible to be fulfilled, since nothing is said about this emptiness.

Keywords: object, subject, jouissance, language, *das Ding*.

Between one being and another, there is an abyss,
there is a discontinuity.
Bataille

The subject for psychoanalysis is fractured by a division between systems governed by different principles: the unconscious, the pleasure principle, and the conscious, the reality principle. This division on psychic topology refers to the origin of the word *sex* and carries with it the notion of separating the continents. A continent is recognized by its borders, its limit, a mark for the psyche as well, which has in the separation of experience and reality the inscription of the sexual in human experience. This division is a scar that later, when trying to recover a time prior to the border, will be lived as a trauma.

Not far from this psychoanalytical division, Bataille thinks the being in its discontinuous essence and in its reproduction discontinuity would be at stake. From that primary moment onwards we have been separated by an abyss, i.e., the dissolution of continuous forms creates an abyss between one being and another, and we are only able to share the vertigo of that abyss.

Starting from the concept of traumatic division and discontinuity of being, we arrive at a common core of experience that is incompleteness, a traumatic mark on the subject, who believes in the possibility of one day experiencing maximum pleasure and, relieved, saying that *everything is complete*. Nevertheless, when the subject does not properly achieve satisfaction – for it never will be complete because of the division in its origin – the subject lives the inconsistency of the elected object and the absence keeps him bound to a movement that insists

upon an encounter with the continuousness of complete satisfaction. This object, however, does not come and will never come, there is an unbridgeable abyss between them – an abyss today considered by psychoanalysis between the subject of desire and the desired object.

The permanent inadequacy of the object is what distinguishes humans from other animals. One can say that animals completely satisfy their needs and humans partially satisfy their desires. The idea developed by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* from 1930, which he named on a long footnote an organic repression, considers it a forgetfulness of the species in the transition from a mythical time, prior to inscription of language in human development. In the Freudian text, the acquisition of bipedia and the sense of smell distant from sex organs would have procedurally established the primacy of vision and changed instinctive functioning into drive, as revises Marco Antonio Coutinho Jorge (2013), a Brazilian psychoanalyst who revisits this passage, emphasizes the importance of their effects on a new reading of Freud:

When the sense of smell was not the predominant element anymore, all bodily orifices seem to have been triggered to produce sexual arousal and the body, ruled once by the unambiguous sense of smell, seems to have started to explore the complex diversity inherent to it. (p. 145, our translation)

Speculation on these differences would reveal an instinctive knowledge in the animal, which would direct it to the object that properly brings satisfaction to its organs and, thus, is appropriate for reproduction. It does not present itself as an existential issue, or a continuity issue, as its finitude is not in question. In other words, the dissolution of continuous forms would be given for man,

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a language-using animal. Language comes to substitute what has been lost in the species, namely, the organ's object of satisfaction. It is left for man to make some kind of deal with the satisfaction that language consents to the body. Or, on the other hand, a little more satisfaction, no longer called pleasure, but rather *jouissance*, which keeps saying that language has a place that is not fully represented because of its substitution character.

Even more clearly than pleasure, *jouissance* deliberately gives notice of drive as this energy that, if not for the loss of the total object, could be named instinct, but instead, when it introduces an animal species in language, it points to the impossibility for the subject to see himself as an alien to the abyss that separates humans from other animals. Therefore, drive makes for a questionable subject, because from that moment on not-knowing about his own body and even less what to do with it will have consequences on human sexuality and it will be translated in words, the watchword.

Thus, due to not having an object corresponding to the previous forms of satisfaction ruled by reproduction, which object would fit the forms of satisfaction? One cannot thusly direct copulation and decide which object will be chosen to satisfy these organs. Herein, there is a paradoxical movement between freedom and restraint, given that at the same time that humans lose the object and have a diversity of options, they will no longer enjoy their choice of the object as the animal does, and therefore "To that extent one can say that humans are as free as they are determined" (Mello, p. 116, 2001, our translation). Thus, the absence of a specific object characterizes the human experience as a march that expects a reunion with the object of utmost satisfaction – mythical – once obtained. A march with disagreements, but also surely full of moments of joy, as Lacan states (1994/1995):

It is through the search for a past and surpassed satisfaction that the new object is sought and it is found and embraced elsewhere, not where it was sought. There is a fundamental distance introduced by the essentially conflicting element included in every search for the object. (p. 13, our translation)

If the object is not there where one expected to find it, but rather in another and still unknown point, so it is the never finding it that the drive moves freely, being plastic. Thus, ". . . *das Ding* would be the referent, the basis of all object relationships, in the sense of what is sought and never found" (França, 1997, p. 86, our translation), i.e., *das Ding* is the Thing that precedes the appearance of the lost object of drive and, therefore, it would be in its constitution as a driving force of desirous reverie. According to Garcia-Roza (2004), the objects present themselves as candidates to take the place of the lost Thing, since it has never been obtained.

This former satisfaction alluding initially to the phylogenetic past recurs in the first moments of the subject's

life. It is an experience of excessive invasion of the Other in which the baby's senses, still *crude*, are bombarded with stimuli from all sides and with varied intensities. This Other assails the infant with language, marking his body and thrusting his desire to use the word in his flesh – that in which it preserves from sensory experiences: tactile, olfactory, gustatory, visual and auditory. The baby's body is then clipped by the inscription of signifiers from the one who first serves as caretaker and at the price of his survival, surrenders to the whims of the Other.

There is a condition of absolute dependence and, thus, of alienation to the Other's desire. He offers the infant the world of language, through which the structuring of the subject is possible. Hence, the word that is initially borrowed will later be taken as his own, an effect of the alterity of the Other. We can thusly affirm that the radical effect of the word is the assumption of the subject, as states Garcia-Roza (1990):

We call man the being through which the word emerged and that was made by it. The word did not emerge in humans; humans are an effect of this emergency. The word, having made its emergency, re-signified or simply signified the body with its flaws, as well as the objects in the world. The immediate effect was the denaturalization of the body, of its needs and the world's objects, as well as the appearing of a new order: the symbolic order. (p.16, our translation)

The symbolic order is therefore understood as the set of signifiers always addressed to a third element, language. The symbolic register is responsible for social bonding, i.e., there would be the possibility of an encounter over the abyss created by sexual division in words. Language would therefore have the function of filling the emptiness left by the loss of the object, a soothing promise, but impossible to be fulfilled, since nothing is said about this rift, it is of the order of nonsense, of the real devoid of language.

The real as a rift does not exist for the subject directly and can only be seen in its entanglement with the imaginary and symbolic. Its presence through absence, as one can observe in word cadence, in which the fluidity of sound is the effect of the cutting space between two words, a space in which there is nothing but silence, containing the rhythm and sense to be created. In this way, for the word to gain meaning it must remain somewhat unrepresented, alien to signifiers. This that would be the "irreducible hiatus in the symbolic, what can be confirmed by the fact that any language allows to say the whole truth, can only be half-said" (Miranda & Albertini, 2012, p. 378, our translation). In regards to the real and the language the psychoanalysts add:

The Real as unspeakable makes a point of absence that is determinative of all speech. But at the same time and paradoxically, the logic of the unconscious

ascribed to language, to the point of absence around which it organizes itself, is what let us to find an orientation in speech and in its attempts to provide meaning, to signify what will never have only one meaning. The Real is what commands all functions of significance; for this reason, it is not possible for the signifier to tell everything or represent a subject. (p. 442, our translation)

The subject is repeatedly taken by moments of excessive drive, in which no word can give a significant definition. Then a trauma is created at a later time, which in the moment lived was not represented, what will leave marks and inscriptions will give notice of this excessive drive. If in many occasions the subject is assaulted by moments like these, they are remembrances of a mythical moment that echoes the irrepresentable primordial helplessness, a time of absolute dependency upon the other.

As an effect of this helplessness the newborn is overtaken by the primordial anguish, a pure affection that gives notice of the excessive energy pulsating in the still broken body of the baby. Thus, referring to this irrepresentable time, a hiatus between the pure drive and the symbolic universe (França, 1997) that subsequent traumatic experiences will also urge anguish as a defense. This affection that signals an approximation to the real may paralyze and mute the subject.

What both the anguish-signal, a second period of the experienced anguish at the post-repression, and the primordial anguish exhibit is the hopeless position of the subject for whom something is missing. The absence of the object that will satiate man, as water satiates the thirsty animal, is what identifies the subject as incomplete in its radicalism. In other words, the anguish witnesses the failure of drive to be satisfied with the chosen object, because it is the impression of anguish such as the unspeakable and indeterminate affection, that carries the truth of an absent structure and that echoes in the structure and the network of signifiers the dynamics of finitude in face of the insistence of drive (France, 1997).

The word would come thus to try to give anguish a limit and therefore it is an act (Lacan, 1963/2005), it works upon the Other and is a significant effect that creates the unconscious and, therefore, the subject. If at first there is the alienation between the child and this Other, offering/invading with names, it is in the hiatus between a signifier and another that children start to suspect that they cannot succeed in the enigma of the desire of the Other and in their own desire. Thus, facing the castration in the Other the subject that until then neglected his own directions, he starts writing about his desire and not only about the desire of the Other. According to Mello (2001):

... it is towards this beyond of the Other that the subject's inquiry is directed. The desire of the subject is built upon the black spot, the enigma, the

obscurity of the Other's desire, of the desire running through the Other, seeking to find its expression through the demands and significant articulation that are never completely grasped. Hence, the structural impossibility of overcoming the inquiry about the desire of the Other takes shape. (p. 89, our translation)

If it is not possible to obtain answers to the desire of the Other, it is possible to trace it in the significant marks left on the body of the one elected as the object of desire, here through at the first moments of the subject's life, the baby. When language falls on the flesh still *crude* of representations, it makes mortal inscriptions of pure intensity on the body; they are bursts of pain and pleasure, of life and death, of excesses that create borders. Something, however, survives and resists signification, a part of the body flows off and is not imprisoned in the signifier, it is what gives notice of another time when one could completely enjoy the object. Lacan (1975/2008) talks about the relationship between the signifier and jouissance:

The signifier is the cause of jouissance. Without the signifier, how can we even approach that part of the body? How, without the signifier, can we center this something which is the material cause of jouissance? However blurred, however confused it may be, it is a part of the body that is signified in this depository. (p. 30, our translation)

But, what would this jouissance be after all? Instead of delimiting this concept in direct propositions, it will be opened and imploded by the concept of *Eroticism* proposed by Bataille (2013). This writer, called a libertine by the critics, both due to his habits and his coarse language and description of unscrupulous acts, shocked the readers of his time and today calls for the attention of people interested in his amoral literature. In his writings he gives a glimpse of the excess of body intensities and the cracks within language, what would drive his production forward would be the hope that through subversion of language itself, he could successively transgress limits. Limits of body or mind, whatever they are, he demands that everything shall be overcome, without ever reaching a state of rest, the subject always being open (Nunes, 2012).

What the philosopher points out without hesitating is that chastity, taboos, moralizing patterns are themselves hindrances to possibilities for the subject to obtain pleasure, and that they must be questioned and overcome. Thus, the law exists so that it can be tested to its limits, ever advancing slightly more beyond what has been determined. There would be the experience of maximum pleasure on the other side of the border of what is allowed, which would lead the body to absolute ecstasy. But, if such jouissance is unreachable, what is the point of so many moral barriers? For Bataille, the jurisdiction would

disguise the impossibility of such *jouissance*, i.e., society creates laws to appease the subject, telling him that the expected satisfaction has not yet been reached because it is prohibited, not because it is impossible, as in fact it is.

The possibility of breaking the law, however, is always there, as Bataille (2013) said, the subject retains the taboo to enjoy it:

As we are about to take the final step, we are beside ourselves with desire, impotent, in the clutch of a force that demands our disintegration. But the object of our urgent desire is there in front of us and it binds us to the very life that our desire will not be contained by. How sweet it is to gaze long upon the object of our desire, to live on in our desire, instead of dying by going the whole way, by yielding to the excessive violence of desire! We know that possession of the object we are after is out of the question. (p. 141-142)

Bataille's thought is transgressive not for using "disrespectful" words, but primarily for keeping within itself the idea that the subject must allow the overflow of excess in his body, for "Flesh is the extravagance within us set up against the law of decency" (Bataille, 1986, p. 92). The law must be scratched by the experiences of ecstasy with which men should propose themselves to live by. His speech, therefore ". . . constantly evokes the opening to a life experience outside the field of moral injunctions, an experience consecrated to convulsion and vertigo" (Nunes, 2012, p. 95, our translation).

In these terms, *jouissance*, according to Bataille (2013), is the experience marked by a useless waste of energy, life taken to an ultimate intensity and, for this reason, it would not be distant from death. The uselessness of *jouissance* is also proposed by Lacan (1975/2008), when the author says in his seminar entitled *Encore* that it serves for nothing but a trembling of the flesh.

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, this absolute *jouissance* is prohibited to men, its promise is kept behind the prohibition, but its realization would lead to death, ". . . which means that at its peak of intensification, satisfaction of desire seeks the total cessation of tension, as if it had reached death" (França, 1997, p. 149, our translation). The demand for meeting absolute *jouissance* is covered by Bataille in his book *Story of the Eye* (2003), in which the characters push the boundaries which divide life from death during each sexual intercourse.

. . . Simone escapes temptation. She dies as someone making love, but in the purity (chaste) and imbecility of death: fever and agony transform her. The torturer assaults her, she remains indifferent to the blows, indifferent to the words of the devotee, lost in the labor of agony. It is by no means an erotic joy, it is far more than that. But with no way out. Nor is it masochism and, deeply, this exaltation

is beyond anything imagination may represent, it surpasses everything. However, it is based on solitude and on absence of meaning. (p. 93, our translation)

Simone, as the French writer said, went too far in erotic *jouissance*, she went beyond, where there was only death, a culminating point when she remains silent and becomes indifferent to life. There the death drive detached from Eros determines the character's encounter with lost continuity. It is a condition to remain alive that the continuity is just a glimpse interdicted by law, and Bataille thus defined eroticism as ". . . the dance, properly human, happening between these two poles: of the prohibited and of the transgression" (2013, p. 16, our translation). For him eroticism is the assertion of life even in death, i. e., this out of pace dance of discontinuous existences makes men have limit-experiences of rupture with laid down standards, and the body's energy charges this transition. According to Bataille (2013, p. 63):

If we view the primary taboos as the refusal laid down by the individual to co-operate with nature regarded as a squandering of living energy and an orgy of annihilation we can no longer differentiate between death and sexuality. Sexuality and death are simply the culminating points of the holiday, nature celebrates, with the inexhaustible multitude of living beings, both of them signifying the boundless wastage of nature's resources as opposed to the urge to live on characteristic of every living creature.

One should not think, however, that this writer expects the subject to destroy himself in mortal violence experiences, he proposes a life made of moments of suppression of fixed identities, stagnant pleasures and of everything that is dull. The subject must always overcome and renew his encounters with the discontinuous and, as such, lead the body to the convulsions of little joys. Therefore, in eroticism, *life* and *death* are in conflict, they are heterogeneous, but they coexist. So there is only death in life and life in death, and they both put desire into motion.

The promise of satisfying this desire is what drives the subject in the movement to *das Ding*. The drive circles the everlasting emptiness of the absence of object. Through phantom creations the subject chooses objects that are actually small objects, always put at the same insurmountable distance from *das Ding*. These are representations of the object *a*, fundamentally a non-object, an empty space, but ready for constant replacement and hence "The lost object of every subject's history, object *a*, may be found again in the successive substitutes that the subject organizes for himself in his symbolic displacements and imaginary libidinal investments" (Jorge, 2000, p. 142, our translation).

This infinite possibility of objects, however, is felt by the subject as the thing that exposes the finitude of his being. Thus, the fall of the object imagined as complete brings about the reality of incompleteness, of a constituent split. The subject seeing himself as discontinuous in such moments is the cause that affects him when he faces the real and its unnameable excess, the affection of anguish comes to his “aid”, signaling the imminent danger. The subject at last has the possibility of choosing how to react to these moments of pure conflict before him, the artistic production among them is an impression of movement and symbolic border to the real.

To be face-to-face with the real is unbearable and soon the subject uses some mechanisms that are within his grasp, unique in his path of desire and particular to his context, it is “In the failed attempt to reach *das Ding* (that) the subject finds emptiness, an encounter with the traumatic real from where differentiated symbolic responses are born in the process of repetition, eternal return of an absence”, as Maria Inês França exemplified in *Psicanálise, estética e ética do desejo* (1997, p 150, our translation). Besides the symbolic responses referred to by the author, there is also the choice of forgetfulness, of self-paralyzing melancholia, among others.

Sublimation can be one of the paths chosen by the subject not to be paralyzed in the face of the revelation of the real in horrible instants when he accepts absence, a choice that is not constant in the subject’s life, but that can be repeated, as in the story of some artists. So, when the subject yields to the creative suppression of death drive, which dissolves the imaginary units, he finds himself free to assume his desire in countless creative possibilities.

Eros cuts the silence of death drive, establishing other links and significant creations, delimiting “. . . the close relationship between destruction and creation, as an erotic imperative is installed upon the introduction of disorder, associating the dialectics of the Eros drive and the *Thanatos* Drive to another symbolic imperative” (França, 1997, p. 192, our translation).

In the inextricable but necessary tension between life and death, the excess presents itself both in the movement towards creation and in the horror that would paralyze the subject when facing the abyss between signifiers. In this abyss one gets a glimpse into the real, of what continues not to be inscribed in the symbolic, i.e., it is not inscribed not because it does not exist, but because it exceeds the possibility of inscription. It keeps the desire in motion, it is a glimpse of the split caused by the division of the subject. A division that generates meanings in the body through which it is possible to be lived as its effect, namely, sexuality, which had distanced itself from copulation.

Therefore, it is through the split that excess incites the subject to create, but on the other hand it can also paralyze him. Fundamentally, one way or another the subject comes across the smoke, the sign of anguish may be installed, or can make him rise after a short fall, taking a new position in relation to his desire. From the fall into the shared abyss, one may conclude that the creative process is an erotic act, an available alternative to separate men from a mortifying and unique truth. Beyond the immediate, art leads the subject to reorient itself with the inaccessible excess that is centrally located and contained by a fictional plot, which covers the supposed emptiness as the net underneath the flying trapeze artists.

Da perda do objeto: o encontro sobre o abismo

Resumo: Este artigo teoriza sobre a relação entre a perda do objeto de satisfação plena e as possíveis experiências de gozo. A fim de empreender essa discussão serão tomados como centrais os conceitos de *das Ding* em Freud e *objeto a* em Lacan, alicerçados nos conceitos de angústia, gozo e erotismo, este último encontrado nas elaborações do filósofo Georges Bataille. Ademais, será resgatada a noção de sublimação, via de satisfação pela qual o sujeito bordejando o furo deixado pela perda do objeto fazendo um laço social. O registro simbólico é, portanto, o responsável por fazer este laço, já que estaria nas palavras a possibilidade de um encontro sobre o abismo cavado pela divisão sexual. A linguagem teria, portanto, a função de preencher o buraco deixado pela perda do objeto, uma promessa apaziguadora, mas impossível de ser bem-sucedida, uma vez que sobre essa fenda nada se fala.

Palavras-chave: objeto, sujeito, gozo, linguagem, *das Ding*.

De la perte de l'objet: le rencontre sur l'abîme

Résumé: L'article théorise sur la relation entre la perte de l'objet de satisfaction pleine et des possibles expériences de jouissance. Pour entreprendre cette discussion on prend, comme des concepts centraux, *das Ding* chez Freud et l'*objet a* chez Lacan, fondés sur les concepts de l'angoisse, de joie et d'érotisme, le dernier trouvé chez le philosophe Georges Bataille. Il sera également rattachée la notion de sublimation, par l'intermédiaire de la satisfaction par lequel le sujet borde le trou laissé par la perte de l'objet faisant lien social. Le registre symbolique est donc chargé de faire ce lien, car la possibilité d'une réunion sur la fosse

creusée par la division sexuelle serait dans les mots. Le langage aurait donc la fonction à remplir le trou laissé par la perte de l'objet, une promesse apaisante mais impossible d'être couronnée de succès, puisque rien de cette fente est parlé.

Mots-clés: objet, sujet, jouissance, langage, *das Ding*.

De la pérdida del objeto: el encuentro sobre el abismo

Resumen: El artículo teoriza sobre la relación entre la pérdida del objeto de satisfacción plena y las posibles experiencias del gozo. A fin de emprender esa discusión serán tomados como centrales los conceptos de *das Ding* en Freud y objeto *a* en Lacan, basado en los conceptos de angustia, gozo y erotismo, éste encontrado en las elaboraciones del filósofo Georges Bataille. Será también rescatada la noción de sublimación, vía de satisfacción por la cual el sujeto aborda el vacío dejado por la pérdida del objeto haciendo lazo social. El registro simbólico es por lo tanto responsable por hacer este lazo, pues estaría en las palabras la posibilidad de un encuentro sobre el abismo producido por la división sexual. El lenguaje tendría, por lo tanto, la función de tapar el vacío dejado por la pérdida del objeto, una promesa apaciguadora, pero imposible de ser exitosa, ya que una vez tapado el vacío después nada se habla.

Palabras clave: objeto, sujeto, gozo, lenguaje, *das Ding*.

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