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LAUGHING AT CASTRATION: BATAILLE'S LAUGHTER IN LACAN'S "RETURN TO FREUD"

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Laughing at Castration: Bataille's Laughter in Lacan's "Return to Freud"

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Vray est qu'icy peu de perfection
Vous apprendrez, si non en cas de rire:
Autlre argument ne peut mon cueur elire.
Voyant de dueil, qui vous mine et consomme,
Mieulx est de ris que de larme escripre.
Pource que rir est le propre de l'homme
François Rabelais

I started a joke which started the whole world crying
But I didn't see that the joke was on me, oh no
I started to cry which started the whole world laughing
Oh If I'd only seen that the joke was on me
The Bee Gees

A free person thinks about death less than anything, and his wisdom is a meditation not on death but on life.
Spinoza

ABSTRACT

At the end of his theoretical and clinical journey, Sigmund Freud concluded that, despite all the efforts of analytical treatment, the analysand's castration anxiety appears as an insurmountable limit to which the analysand and the psychoanalyst must resign themselves. By delimiting castration anxiety as the insurmountable limit of human existence, Freudian psychoanalysis is operating with a sad and serious concept of anxiety. In his famous “return to Freud”, Jacques Lacan places psychoanalysis in the tradition of François Rabelais, who recognized the therapeutic potential of laughter in the face of the melancholic seriousness of the human being. In addition, Lacan also proposes during his teaching a concept of a lacerating anxiety which, because it is not reduced to the symbolic register of expectations regarding the desire of the Other, is thought of within the register of the real. This lacerating anxiety is triggered by a double lack that occurs at the moment when the lack inherent in the symbolic negativity of the phallus lacks and the object *a* appears. The real dimension of this object that causes anxiety is responsible for throwing the subject into the experience of an indeterminate and excessive negativity that consumes them: jouissance. The Lacanian concept of jouissance comes from Georges Bataille's reflections on the experience of a sovereign and joyful anxiety, laughter, the expression of a desire that lacks nothing, because it is pure excess. Faced with the heavy and servile atmosphere of anxiety at the possibility of death, as it appears in the dialectical tradition of Hegel and Kojève, Bataille finds in laughter a sovereign way of overcoming this sad anxiety at death. Taking into account Bataille's influence on Lacan, we wonder about the possibility of approaching the Lacanian concept of anxiety not as an affection that produces resignation and melancholy, but as an affection that results in the joyful experience of laughter. Thus, this dissertation aims to show that Lacanian psychoanalysis uses the Bataillean concept of sovereign anxiety, laughter, to overcome the Freudian concept of castration anxiety, thus continuing the Rabelaisian tradition of the therapeutic potential of laughter.

Keywords: Anxiety, Castration, Laughter, Jouissance

RINDO DA CASTRAÇÃO: O RISO DE BATAILLE NO “RETORNO A FREUD” DE LACAN

RESUMO

Ao término de seu percurso teórico e clínico, Sigmund Freud conclui que, apesar de todos os esforços do tratamento analítico, a angústia de castração do analisando aparece como um limite insuperável diante do qual o analisando e o psicanalista devem resignar-se. A psicanálise freudiana, ao circunscrever a existência humana no interior do limite intransponível da angústia de castração, estaria, assim, operando com um conceito triste e sério de angústia. Em seu “retorno a Freud”, Jacques Lacan, além de inserir a psicanálise na esteira da tradição de François Rabelais, a qual reconhece o potencial terapêutico do riso frente a seriedade melancólica do ser humano, também propõe durante seu ensino um novo conceito angústia que, por não se reduzir ao registro simbólico das expectativas quanto ao desejo do Outro, está para além da tensão e seriedade da castração. Esse novo conceito consiste na apreensão da angústia em seu aspecto real e dilacerante, sendo desencadeada pelo aparecimento do objeto *a* no instante em que a falta inerente à negatividade simbólica do falo vem a faltar. A dimensão real do objeto *a*, causador dessa angústia dilacerante, é responsável por lançar o sujeito à experiência de uma negatividade indeterminada e excessiva que o consome: o gozo. O conceito lacaniano de gozo é oriundo das reflexões de Georges Bataille sobre a experiência de uma angústia soberana e alegre, o riso, expressão de um desejo ao qual nada falta, pois é excesso. Frente a atmosfera pesada e servil da angústia de morte, tal como ela aparece na tradição dialética de Hegel e Kojève, Bataille encontra no riso uma maneira soberana de superar essa angústia triste. Considerando a influência de Bataille sobre Lacan, nos questionamos acerca da possibilidade de abordar o conceito lacaniano de angústia não como um afeto produtor de resignação e melancolia, mas como um afeto que resultaria na experiência alegre do riso. Assim, a presente dissertação tem como objetivo mostrar que a psicanálise lacaniana recorre ao conceito batailleano de angústia soberana, o riso, para superar o conceito freudiano de angústia de castração, dando, assim, continuidade à tradição rabelaisiana do potencial terapêutico do riso.

Palavras-chave: Angústia, Castração, Riso, Gozo

SUMMARY

1. Psychoanalysis: a laughing cure?

In the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, as well as finding a series of fundamental treatises for Western medicine, we also find a set of letters from a pseudo-Hippocrates, in which the story of the supposed encounter between Hippocrates and Democritus is told. This encounter supposedly took place when pseudo-Hippocrates was called by the citizens of Abdera, the city of Democritus, to check on the health of the philosopher who, because he laughed at everything, was considered mad by his fellow citizens. In letter 15, sent before arriving in the city, the doctor tells Philopoemen about a dream in which the god of medicine himself, Asclepius, appeared and revealed the truth about Democritus and what could be expected from his trip to Abdera:

> I woke and analyzed my dream. It meant that Democritus does not need a physician, since the healing god stayed away because he had no grounds for giving treatment. But the Truth of his being healthy stays with Democritus and the Opinion that he is sick has truly made her home among Abderites. (*Hip 342-25*)

In letter 16, addressed to Cratevas, pseudo-Hippocrates asks his correspondent to collect the plants and roots needed to make hellebore, the effective remedy for treating madness: “Dans nos *Lettres*, l’ellébore est considéré comme le médicament de la manie, ou de la mélancolie” (PIGEAUD, 1981, p. 475).

Letter 17 recounts the supposed meeting between the two men. On arriving in Abdera, the doctor finds Democritus surrounded by writings and dead animals. He asks him what he is doing, to which the philosopher replies that he is investigating the cause of man's madness, which would be caused by the excess of the humors. Faced with this answer, pseudo-Hippocrates, amazed at Democritus' wisdom, agrees with the philosopher, saying that he is a happy man, possessing a tranquility that is not shared by all human beings. The philosopher then asks why the doctor doesn't share this happy tranquility. The doctor replies: “Because, traveling, children, debts, disease, death, servants, marriages: such things whittle away my leisure” (*Hip 357-10*). As soon as Democritus hears the doctor, he is startled by his intense laughter. Baffled by the situation, pseudo-Hippocrates asks the philosopher the reason for his pathological laughter, so that he can cure him of the illness that afflicts him. Ironically, Democritus says that if the doctor manages to cure him of something, he will have achieved

something unimaginable until then, because he would be curing a therapist. In this sense, it is already implicit in this statement that Democritus sees in his laughter a therapeutic potential, which not even the pseudo-Hippocrates knew about until then. The doctor says that he is certainly ill, because he laughs not only at what is bad, but also at what is good:

> Don't you think you are outlandish to laugh at a man's death or illness, or delusion, or madness or melancholy, murder, or something still worse, or again at marriages, feasts, births, initiations, offices and honors, or anything else wholly good? Things that demand grief you laugh at, and when things should bring happiness you laugh at them. There is no distinction between good and bad with you. (*Hip 358-25*)

In response, Democritus says that the doctor doesn't know the true cause of his laughter, because the philosopher doesn't laugh at good or bad things. He adds that when the doctor discovers the true cause of his laughter, he will have a more useful medicine than the one he has now: “And when you learn it, I am certain that you will take on a better cargo than you brought on your embassy, my laughter, and carry it back as therapy for your country and yourself, and you will be able to instruct all others in virtue” (*Hip 360-5*).

The ultimate reason for Democritus' laughter corresponds to the unreasonableness of human actions, which go beyond the natural limits proper to humans. He laughs at the emptiness that exists in all human attempts to remain firm and complete in their endeavors:

> But I laugh at one thing, humanity, brimming with ignorance, void of right action, childish in all aspirations, agonizing through useless woes for no benefit, traveling to the ends of the earth and her boundless depths with unmeasured desire, melting gold and silver never stopping this acquisitiveness of theirs, ever in an uproar for more, so that they themselves can be less. (*Hip 360-5*)

In other words, Democritus is saying that the citizens of Abdera who are mad are suffering from an excess, an inordinacy of human desire, which is so present in melancholy. Once this inordinacy of human desire has been verified, Democritus would be proposing a more measured way of desiring, one in which human beings would desire while taking into account the limits and specificities of their nature. Human nature is made up of an instability that is part of the very dynamic movement of the

atoms that make up the microcosm and macrocosm. According to Democritus, all of nature is made up of the combination of atoms that collide and fit mechanically into the void. The human being, like the rest of nature, is made up of this variety of atoms that relate to each other in the void, making it impossible for them to possess any kind of ultimate or predetermined essence. Taking this into account, Democritus understands that if human beings understood that there is no fixed foundation for their actions, they could then cease this inordinate search for some ultimate foundation of life:

> If they managed these things with thoughtful calculation they would easily escape and get relief from my laughter, but as things are, assuming that matters in life are fixed, they are driven crazy by them, deluded by irrational calculation about change that is irregular. They are unteachable. There is inherent instruction in the alteration of all things which falls on them with sharp swerves, which makes us aware of every kind of unanticipated revolution. (*Hip* 367-10)

By calculating measurements, human beings would be able to establish a balance in the soul and thus achieve what Democritus means by *euthymia*: “L'euthymie est la joie dans la vie quotidienne, pour l'immédiat dans la routine de tous les jours. Elle comporte des décisions d'ordre matériel immédiates.” (PIGEAUD, 1981, p. 450). In the fiction of our pseudo-Hippocrates, we see that Democritus laughs so overwhelmingly precisely because he has achieved this balance. It is precisely because he has achieved *euthymia* that Democritus can laugh: “Car le rire est le signe de l'euthymie” (PIGEAUD, 1981, p. 464). Thus, if pseudo-Hippocrates wanted to cure Democritus' so-called madness with hellebore, he showed him not only that the citizens of Abdera were in fact mad, but also that “face à ce médicament à la fois spécifique et quasi-universel, Démocrite propose un nouveau remède: le rire” (PIGEAUD, 1981, p. 475). This is the medicine that should be administered in the presence of the madness of the citizens of Abdera. Laughter is therapeutic. Democritus' euthymia is a wisdom that lies in his own laughter, a sign of unconcern for the future and the virtue of living in the present: “L'euthymie c'est la sagesse empirique, qui sait que nous avons un corps et que nous vivons avec lui. Moyennant quoi, l'on pourra rire sans chagrin, sans terreur, sans souci, sans abattement.” (PIGEAUD, 1981, p. 451).

These letters from pseudo-Hippocrates ended up inaugurating a medical tradition that insists on the therapeutic potential of the wisdom that lies in laughter. This is the case of the Renaissance physician and writer François Rabelais, who, in his pentalogy

Gargantua and Pantagruel, “reprendra la thérapeutique du rire” (PIGEAUD, 1981, p. 476). In his book *Rabelais et la médecine*, Roland Antonioli notes that the 16th century author “continue cette tradition du rire médical, qu'il recueille… aux sources mêlées de la rhétorique, de la physiologie, de la philosophie antique et de la religion” (ANTONIOLI, 1976, p. 156, APUD PIGEAUD, 1981, p. 576). Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and his world*, also notes the importance of the fictional meeting between Hippocrates and Democritus for the Renaissance writer's theorizing about laughter:

> Rabelais himself developed it [a theory of laughter] in the old and new prologue of the fourth book of his novel, based mostly on Hippocrates, whose role as the theorist of laughter was at that time important. [...] The teaching concerning the therapeutic power of laughter in the “Hippocratic novel” received special recognition and notoriety at the Montpellier Medical School where Rabelais studied and later taught. (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 67-68)

The five volumes that narrate the adventures of the giants Gargantua and Pantagruel deal with a variety of topics, such as philosophy, religion, medicine, politics and art. According to Bahktin, the pentalogy accomplished the revolutionary feat of introducing popular laughter, which in the Middle Ages was extremely repudiated, into the humanist wisdom of the Renaissance, which in turn ended up blurring the boundaries between popular and vulgar wisdom and cultured and intellectual wisdom. If earlier laughter within the literary genre was considered low and vulgar, with Rabelais laughter found a home in what was considered high literature:

> A millenium of folk humor broke into Renaissance literature. This thousand-year-old laughter not only fertilized literature but was itself fertilized by humanist knowledge and advanced literary techniques. In Rabelais we see the speech and mask of the medieval clown, folk and carnival gaiety, the defiance of the democratic cleric, the talk and gestures of the mountebank-all combined with humanist scholarship, with the physician’s science and practice, and with political experience. [...] In other words, medieval laughter became at the Renaissance stage of its development the expression of a new free and critical historical consciousness. (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 72)

Unlike Democritus, for whom the gay knowledge of laughter lay in the measure and symmetry of the soul, Rabelais understood that the subversive wisdom of this popular laughter was to be found mainly in carnivalesque laughter, that laughter which took place at parties and banquets, moments of excess and lust. It's no wonder that

Rabelais illustrates in his books banquets filled with alcohol and food, an abundance that is always accompanied by obscenity and laughter. At these banquets, there are a number of elements that convey a gay truth:

> The banquet with its variations was the most favorable milieu for this absolutely fearless and gay truth. Bread and wine (the world defeated through work and struggle) disperse fear and liberate the word. The merry triumphant encounter with the world in the act of eating and drinking, in which man partakes of the world instead of being devoured by it, was profoundly congenial to Rabelais' outlook. (BAHKTIN, 1984, p. 285)

The powerful comicality inherent in the elements involved in the banquets that Rabelais narrates in his works, in Rabelais' view, would bring with it the therapeutic potential to cure his readers of melancholy through the wisdom of laughter. Its disruptive and liberating character made Rabelais consider it to be “as a universal philosophical principle that heals and regenerates” (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 70). That said, Rabelais, as a doctor, understood that his comic stories had the therapeutic power to cure his readers' melancholy through the wisdom present in popular and carnivalesque laughter. In the two prologues to the Fourth Book, Rabelais “develops his doctrine of the gay physician and of the healing virtue of laughter founded on Hippocrates and on other medical authorities.” (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 179). Following the teachings of Democritus, the wisdom of laughter is therapeutic.

In his *Discourse of Rome*, of 1953, as soon as Jacques Lacan began his famous return to Freud, he turned to Rabelais and placed him at the beginning of the tradition of psychoanalysis:

> La psychanalyse, si elle est source de vérité, l'est aussi de sagesse. Et cette sagesse a un aspect qui n'a jamais trompé depuis que l'homme s'affronte à son destin. Toute sagesse est un gay savoir. Elle s'ouvre, elle subvertit, elle chante, elle instruit, elle rit. Elle est tout langage. Nourrissez-vous de sa tradition, de Rabelais à Hegel. Ouvrez aussi vos oreilles aux chansons populaires, aux merveilleux dialogues de la rue… (LACAN, 2001, p. 146)

Psychoanalysis, as well as being a source of truth[1], is also a source of wisdom, of a kind of knowledge that never deceives[2]. This gay knowledge provided by psychoanalysis lies in the laughter that opens up to human beings in their relationship with language. In this sense, we can say that Lacan is supporting the idea that psychoanalysis, like Democritus and Rabelais, is betting on the therapeutic potential of laughter, of this gay knowledge that permeates the whole field of language and is capable of "curing" the melancholy and seriousness of life. However, while it is true that for Lacan psychoanalysis is part of this Rabelaisian tradition, this does not seem to be the case for Freud, for whom there is a sad and serious dimension to life that is insurmountable, namely castration anxiety.

The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, although not based on Rabelas' contributions on the therapeutic potential of laughter, ended up sharing with the Renaissance writer and doctor the idea that laughter is an excess that ends up relieving the tension of the serious life of the adult, who is subjected to a strictly logical and rational use of language. In *The joke and its relation to the unconscious*, Freud tells us about the process of the child's submission to a serious and logical use of language, which is why they try to resist this submission by making jokes:

> He now uses games in order to withdraw from the pressure of critical reason. But there is far more potency in the restrictions which must establish themselves in the course of a child's education in logical thinking and in distinguishing between what is true and false in reality; and for this reason the rebellion against the compulsion of logic and reality is deep-going and long-lasting. Even the phenomena of imaginative activity must be included in this [rebellious] category. The power of criticism has increased so greatly in the later part of childhood and in the period of learning which extends over puberty that the pleasure in 'liberated nonsense' only seldom dares to show itself directly. (FREUD, 1960, p. 126)

To deal with this serious use of language, the subject needs to have a rational psychic expenditure, investing in the same psychic paths. The libidinal economy must respect every linguistic rule, constantly taking care not to make mistakes and thus not be punished by society. In his famous work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, when Freud

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[1] In the course of our work, it will become clearer what this "truth" mentioned by Lacan is. For now, it's worth noting that he is appropriating the Heideggerian concept of truth as *aletheia*, that is, the unveiling of being. By this, he means that it is only within language, within the symbolic register, that full speech can occur, that is, the unveiling of the desire of the subject of the unconscious.

[2] In Seminar X, Lacan will say something very similar about anxiety, since it is the affection that does not deceive.

tells us about the tension present in states of anxiety, he explains that this tension is due to the psychic hypercathexis present in the subject's anxiety at the possibility of danger. He tries to protect himself from it by preparing himself psychically for the possibility of its appearance: “preparedness for anxiety and the hypercathexis of the receptive systems constitute the last line of defence of the shield against stimuli.” (FREUD, 1955c, p. 31). The tension of anxiety is closely linked to the serious and rational use of language, since the moral coercion involved in the rational use of language is based on the castration anxiety present in every adult who has gone through the Oedipus complex. Fearful of possible punishments for the careless use of linguistic rules, the anxiety and seriousness of adult life are linked by the need to maintain a constant libidinal hypercathexis. That's when laughter, alongside jokes, emerges as an expression of the sudden relief of this energy that until then had been over-invested in anxiety and its expression in the rational use of language. The psychoanalyst tells us that laughter “rises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge” (FREUD, 1960, p. 147). Both jokes and laughter, therefore, result in the release of the tension of this over-invested energy during states of anxiety. For Freud, analysis brings the subject up against the insurmountable limit of castration anxiety, so that jokes and laughter can appear as a palliative remedy that relieves some of this anxious tension. However, for him, the limit of castration anxiety remains firm, appearing as the human condition before which human beings must resign themselves.

Freud's conception of anxiety seems to continue another tradition that formed the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis, namely the Hegelian-Kojèvian tradition. As in Freud, anxiety in these authors presents an insurmountable limit that inserts the human being into a sad and servile existence. We know that Lacan's contact with the German philosopher was mediated by Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is why Lacan says that he considers the Russian philosopher to be his master: “Kojève que je tiens pour mon maître, de m'avoir initié à Hegel” (LACAN, 2001, p. 453). The Kojèvian reading of the dialectic of master and slave marked an epoch on the French intellectual scene. The slave is the one who works in the face of the anxiety of death, of the Absolute Master, which makes him work until the end of history, absolute knowledge. Absolute knowledge is the moment when he is finally able to satisfy his desire for recognition, finally recognizing his value as a revealed void, that is, as death

living a human life: “Hegel's absolute Knowledge or Wisdom and the conscious acceptance of death understood as complete and definitive annihilation are one and the same” (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 124). In other words, in absolute knowledge the human being assumes his own finitude in an authentic way, he is faced with his ultimate and insurmountable limit, death: “It is death that engenders Man in Nature, and it is death that makes him progress to his final destiny, which is that of the Wise Man fully conscious of himself and therefore fully conscious of his own finitude” (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 133). However, when the human being finally deals with his anxiety as such, when he becomes aware of his nothingness, his death, no happiness or joy comes over him; on the contrary, this anxiety brings with it the serious and heavy awareness of death: “In mortal terror man becomes aware of his reality, of the value that the simple fact of living has for him; only thus does he take account of the "seriousness” of existence” (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 24-28). Faced with this implicit alliance between Freudian psychoanalysis and the Kojèvian tradition of anxiety, Lacan allies himself with the Rabelaisian tradition, emphasizing laughter, the gay knowledge, by proposing a new concept of anxiety. It is only in *Seminar X*, in 1960, that Lacan proposes a new concept of anxiety that goes beyond the concept of sad, insurmountable anxiety present in both Freud and Hegel-Kojève: “It is in the re-reading of Freud that Lacan shows the new way of approaching castration” (BOGDAN, 2019, p. 55). However, we realize that before this, Lacan is already anticipating this movement. This is evident in the reference Lacan makes in *Seminar V* to the Rabelaisian image of the banquet to talk about jouissance and its relationship with language: “Ultimately, the entire process of the elaboration of desire in language comes back to and comes together in consumption at a banquet. The whole detour is only taken so as to come back to jouissance, and the most elementary at that.” (LACAN, 2017, p. 121). Using the Rabelaisian image of the banquet, jouissance is excess itself, a gay knowledge of laughter. Jouissance is what stops the work of signifiers and the anxiety of castration inherent in it. We know that jouissance is “a notion that translates Bataille’s concepts of waste, expenditure, erotic excess, and transgression” (RABATÉ, 2003, p. 18). Bearing in mind that the concept of jouissance comes above all from the thinker and writer Georges Bataille, our working hypothesis is that it is the French philosopher who allows us to formulate a concept of anxiety in psychoanalysis that goes beyond the sad and serious anxiety of Freud and Hegel/Kojève.

Lacan's relationship with Bataille, which began in 1934, is marked by the convergence of the same objects of criticism, since both authors were part of the same movement of criticism of Hegelian philosophy presented by the master Kojève. According to Roudinesco, in her biographical work on Lacan, the psychoanalyst was strongly influenced by the thought of Bataille, before whom

> he remained present as a distant but curious and fascinated spectator. The earliest meetings of the Contre-Attaque group were held in his apartment in the boulevard Malesherbes, as were the gatherings that gave rise to the College of Sociology. His silent presence at the secret activities of Acéphale is attested by al the contemporary witnesses. (ROUDINESCO, 1994, p. 136)

The biographer, however, observes that Lacan doesn't seem to have influenced Bataille, and even wonders if Bataille ever came into contact with what the psychoanalyst produced at the time. According to her, there would have been a one-way intellectual exchange between the two authors. This one-way exchange mainly covers Bataillean ideas that revolve around the concept of jouissance, such as the ideas of the impossible and heterology:

> Not only did Bataille's reading of Nietzsche supply Lacan with a new interpretation of the philosophy that had influenced him throughout his adolescence, but Bataille also initiated him into a new understanding of Sade, whose writings would later lead him to a formulate a non-Freudian theory of pleasure. Moreover, Lacan borrowed Bataille's ideas on the impossible and heterology, deriving from them a concept of the “real” seen first as “residue” and then as “impossible.” (ROUDINESCO, 1994, p. 136)

Well, the jouissance present at the banquet, mentioned by Lacan in the quote above, has a close connection with the Bataillean concept of the impossible, which, in turn, evokes the dimension of gay knowledge, that is, laughter. For Bataille, laughter, as the limit between the possible and the impossible, is a gay knowledge that corresponds to non-knowledge: “La transparence de Hegel envisagée comme un repos n'est que le jour gris d'un savoir absolu. Mais comme le mouvement du rire elle est le non-savoir, la nuit qui l'emporte en éclat sur la lumière” (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 572). The non-knowledge of laughter opposes the transparency of Hegel/Kojève's absolute knowledge. If the negativity of Hegelian anxiety is a productive and formative negativity, Bataille will oppose it to an unemployed negativity that is felt as an excess.

Laughter, this unemployed negativity, is the moment when the work of dialectical negativity is corrupted, relieving the human being of worries about the future: “Il est vrai : le rire est une réussite si bizarre. L'action, le souci, répondent aux données naturelles : dans le rire est levé le souci : l'armature éclate qu'avait mise en ordre l'action” (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 340). Thus, laughter, non-knowledge, is what relieves the tension of anxiety in the face of death, which makes human beings busy seeking to appease this anxiety in absolute knowledge. This is Bataille’s goal: to transform anxiety into delight: “‘I teach the art of turning anguish to delight’, ‘to glorify’ [...] But anguish which turns to delight is still anguish: it is not delight, not hope – it is anguish, which is painful and perhaps decomposes” (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 35). Unlike the productive and industrial negativity of servile and sad anxiety, the negativity of joyful anxiety, laughter, frees human beings from their serious and melancholic lives. The gay knowledge that Bataille wants to convey is that knowledge that transforms itself into non-knowledge, the possible that ends in the impossible, laughter.

If Bataille is the one who creates a joyful concept of anxiety in order to overcome the Hegelian-Kojèvian anxiety, Lacan is the one who, using Bataille's theoretical contribution, proposes a joyful concept of anxiety in order to overcome Freud's castration anxiety. It is not Kierkegaard who is the main philosophical reference for re-reading the Freudian concept of anxiety, but Bataille. That said, this paper aims to show that Lacanian psychoanalysis uses the Bataillean concept of sovereign anxiety, laughter, to overcome the Freudian concept of castration anxiety, thus continuing the Rabelaisian tradition.

In order to achieve this objective, the work is divided into two sections, each subdivided into two subsections. The first section presents the theoretical movements that Bataille makes to create the concept of laughter as a joyful and sovereign anxiety capable of confronting the sad and servile anxiety of the dialectical tradition of Hegel and Kojeve. In this section, we will start from the heavy and sad atmosphere of the German and Russian philosophers' reflections on desire as lack and its relationship to anxiety in the face of death, trying to show how laughter finds no place in this theoretical horizon. Next, we will propose a definition of the Bataillean concept of laughter as the wasteful repetition of the lost immanence experienced at the moment when the object without objective truth appears. To do so, we will look at the interlocution that Bataille establishes with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to forge this new

concept of sovereign anxiety that goes beyond the sad concept of the dialectical tradition. The second section, in a way mirroring the first, shows how Lacan uses a series of Bataillean expedients to formulate a concept of anxiety that goes beyond the Freudian concept of castration anxiety. To accomplish this, we will go through the Freudian contributions on castration anxiety, the joke and laughter, in order to reveal the theoretical elements that Lacan will later use critically in his "return to Freud". Finally, we will focus on Lacan's journey up to his eleventh seminar, discussing the nuances and developments of the concepts of anxiety and laughter in his teaching. Along the way, we will explain Lacan's use of Bataille and how the latter supports him in creating a concept of joyful anxiety that goes beyond the Freudian concept of castration anxiety.

2. The sadness of death: the driving negativity of desire

Considering the importance of the Hegelian/Kojèvian concept of desire for Bataille and Lacan, we will now expose the fundamental elements of this concept of desire which, in the hands of the German and Russian philosopher, is understood as lack, that is, as a productive negativity whose movement ends up buffering the anxiety in the face of death revealed by the radical negativity of human desire itself. In view of this, we hope to show that human desire, understood as lack, is closely linked to the sad and serious atmosphere of human life, since, in this distressing horizon, human beings are constantly worried about the possibility of their own death, the ultimate and insurmountable limit of their finite existence. Considering the tense and serious atmosphere that surrounds desire as lack, in this first moment of the work, laughter and its joyful atmosphere will be in the background, since laughter is either hastily and collaterally thematized by Hegel, or is simply forgotten by Kojève. A concept of joyful desire and, therefore, joyful anxiety, will only appear in the second part of this section, when we introduce Georges Bataille's thought and outline the ways in which he appropriates Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to overcome the sad limit of death that is so emphasized in the Hegelian/Kojèvian concepts of desire and anxiety.

2.1. The Phenomenology of Spirit and the anxious *Sittlichkeit*

2.1.1. The way of despair towards the absolute knowledge

Hegel, in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, defines his philosophy as follows: "The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of truth. To help bring philosophy closer to the form of science—to the goal of its being able to give up the name of love of knowledge and become actual knowledge—that is what I have set out to do" (HEGEL, 2010, p. 6). His goal involves actualizing philosophy as such; if philosophy means love of knowledge, Hegel wants to fulfill this love, making it possible for human beings to satisfy their desire for this longed-for knowledge. Hegel's position, therefore, is that philosophy is capable of satisfying the human desire for the Absolute.

However, as Hegel himself points out, this truth only finds its true form within a scientific system that shows its rational necessity and validity. By this, he means that the exposition of the necessary path to the satisfaction of this love, this desire, must be subject to rational criteria, which are present in his dialectical method. Dialectics, therefore, will be the method by which Hegel tries to circumvent the impasses and aporias found in the philosophical context of German Idealism, based on Immanuel Kant's split between phenomenon and thing-in-itself, between the for-itself and the in-itself, which ended up relegating Truth beyond the limits of human knowledge. Unlike authors such as Schelling and Jacobi, who, each in their own way, proposed an *immediate* access to Truth, to the Absolute, one through intellectual intuition and the other through faith respectively, Hegel, as he rightly noted in the quote above, thinks it is possible to reach this Truth only within a scientific and dialectical system, *mediated* by the Concept.

It is from his opposition and divergence from this pretension of an immediate knowledge of the Absolute that we can better understand the purpose enunciated by Hegel above. In writing his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel was interested in pointing out a new path towards the Absolute, a path that does not renounce access to it, much less take unjustified shortcuts through faith or immediate knowledge. In order to distance himself from authors such as Schelling and Jacobi, Hegel summarizes his philosophical projects as follows:

> This is the view that the true exists only in what, or rather as what, is variously called intuition, immediate knowledge of the absolute, religion, Being—not in the centre of divine love, but the Being of this centre itself. If this is so, it follows that what is then required for the presentation of philosophy is not the form of the concept, but rather its contrary. The absolute is supposed not to be comprehended, but felt and intuited; it is not the concept of the absolute that is to have its say and find expression, but the feeling and intuition of it. (HEGEL, 2010, p. 7)

Such authors seek to access the Absolute without any conceptual or rational mediation, since the mediations of the concepts of the understanding, as set out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, would be finite determinations of the human being that make them incapable of reaching infinitude. In this way, Kantian philosophy would prevent access to the Absolute by maintaining a philosophy that is too subjectivist, relegating the objectivity of the Absolute beyond human comprehension. If the rational path of the

concept obstructs access to the Absolute, then the procedure must be that of immediate, non-conceptual knowledge.

> Philosophy is supposed to meet this need [of substantiality and solidity of Being], not by opening up the locked fastness of substance and raising this to selfconsciousness, not by restoring its chaotic consciousness to the order of thought and the simplicity of the concept, but rather by blurring the distinctions of thought, by suppressing the differentiating concept and by establishing the feeling of the essence, providing edification rather than insight. The beautiful, the holy, the eternal, religion, and love are the bait required to arouse the desire to bite; not the concept, but ecstasy, not the cold advance of necessity in the Thing, but the ferment of enthusiasm, these are supposed to be what sustains and promotes the expansion of the wealth of substance. (HEGEL, 2010, p. 7)

This need of substantiality and solidity of being lost has to do with what Hegel understands as ethical substance, which is closely related to the Absolute. The concept of ethical substance points to the idea of a community in which its members are within a cohesive social fabric and not torn apart by isolated individuals. However, according to Jacobi and Schelling, this ethical substantiality of the Absolute is achieved through immediate knowledge, ecstasy and burning enthusiasm. Hegel, as one might expect, tries to recover this ethical substantiality of the Absolute in another way: "In my view, which must be justified only by the presentation of the system itself, everything depends on conceiving and expressing the true not as *substance*, but just as much as *subject*" (HEGEL, 2010, p. 10). With this we can understand that Hegel is providing us with another conception of the Absolute, one according to which the Absolute only becomes effective as such to the extent that the ethical substantiality of social life is conscious of itself, in which this ethical substance becomes subject of itself and self-determined. The Absolute is not only reduced to an “original unity as such, or immediate unity as such” (HEGEL, 2010, p. 11), it is much more “the becoming of itself, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, and has its end as its beginning, and is only actual through implementation and its end” (HEGEL, 2010, p. 11). This self-conscious ethical substantiality, the Absolute-in-itself, in potential, has in its germ what Hegel calls spirit, which, only through its becoming and development, becomes for-itself, actualizing its potential.

Spirit, therefore, does not refer to an abstract or spectral being, a rational entity hovering over concrete effectiveness, but is much more the very ethical substantiality of the Absolute in-itself and for-itself. As we shall see, the spirit-in-itself arises when the

first possibilities of reciprocal recognition appear on the horizon of human consciousness, namely in the figure of the dialectic of master and slave. Spirit is "his absolute substance which, in the perfect freedom and independence of its opposition, viz. of diverse self-consciousnesses that are for themselves, is the unity of these self-consciousnesses: *I* that is *We*, and *We* that is *I*" (HEGEL, 2014, p. 252). Roughly speaking, the spirit becomes effective as such when the individuals of a community recognize themselves in and through each other, when there is actual reciprocal recognition, when the *I* recognizes itself, immersed in a complex and cohesive social fabric, as *We*, and when this social fabric, *We*, immanently constitutes the *I* itself in its singularity. Spirit, this absolute substantiality, when it becomes actual and for-itself, is what Hegel calls absolute knowledge: "This last shape of spirit – the spirit which at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self and thereby realizes its concept while remaining in its concept in this realization – is absolute knowing" (HEGEL, 2010, p. 316). Absolute knowing[3], when spirit consciously self-determines and produces its own truth from within itself, is the ultimate figure of spirit, its actuality for-itself. According to Pirmin Stekeler, absolute knowledge. According to Pirmin Stekeler

> Dieses Wir ist der absolute Geist. Er ist der Geist, der wir sind. Dieser Geist bildet eine Art Hintergrundrahmen, gerade wenn wir etwas handelnd und dabei immer schon in der einen oder anderen Weise kooperativ ausführen. Der absolute Geist ist also das generisch-kollektive Subjekt aller menschlichen Praxisformen. Er ist eine Art diffus-generisches Subjekt von Vollzugsformen im kollektiven Handeln. An ihm nehmen wir im selbstbewussten Begreifen als einer Form des tätigen Anerkennens gemeinsam verfügbarer Vollzugsformen teil, so wie wir in einem einfachsten Fall an einem Paartanz oder Rollenspiel teilnehmen oder dann auch an viel größeren Projekten wie einem nationalen Aufbruch. (STEKELER, 2014, p. 57)

Absolute knowledge, therefore, has to do with a set of collectively shared practices that end up forming a reciprocal recognition between those involved in these practices. Absolute knowledge is nothing more than knowing about this spirit that we have always been, only lacking awareness of it. We understand, then, that absolute knowledge is not a universal and supra-sensible reason, as if it were hovering over the

[3] This incursion into the Hegelian concept of absolute knowledge is essential if we are to understand what we will talk about later: how the sadness and seriousness of anxiety is appeased and, in a way, accepted in a resigned way within *Sittlichkeit*.

concrete determinations of human history. It refers to that ethical substance that becomes aware of itself as the subject of its own history. This implies that absolute knowledge requires another conception of society, one in which the whole is more than the sum of the parts. This society

> sind wir selbst, aber nicht als bloße Ansammlung oder Menge von Einzelpersonen, als bloßes distributives Kollektiv, sondern als eine Gemeinschaft, in welcher die Formen der Vernunft, um es pars pro toto zu sagen, zu einer einheitlichen Menschheit verbunden sind. Diese Gemeinschaft sind wir selbst. Sie transzendiert jeden Einzelnen. Diese Gemeinschaft wird in Religion, Kunst und Philosophie nicht bloß als Gegenstand eines Wissens thematisch, sondern als expressiv zu feiernde Form gemeinsamen Lebens, die uns allererst zu denen macht, die wir sind und sein können. (STEKELER, 2014, p. 58)

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* then attempts to rationally and dialectically expose the development of the various phenomenal figures of the spirit, of this ethical substantiality as a subject, starting from its most naive and immediate figure until it reaches its absolute figure, in which the spirit is conscious of itself in its complex simplicity. In this sense, Hegel intends to expose the path that consciousness takes from its simplest, most naive and isolated knowledge to its most complex, cultured and collective one.

> It is this becoming of science in general or of knowledge that this phenomenology of spirit presents. Knowledge, as it is initially, or the immediate spirit, is the lack of spirit, the sensory consciousness. To become authentic knowledge, or to generate the element of science, which is the pure concept of science itself, it has to work its way through a long course. […] at all events it will be different from the enthusiasm which, like a shot from a pistol, begins immediately with absolute knowledge, and makes short work of other standpoints by declaring them unworthy of notice. (HEGEL, 2010, p. 14)

It is precisely from this sensitive consciousness that Hegel's work begins, the consciousness that is certain that the object of its knowledge is something external to it, as if it had no immanent involvement in its constitution. This consciousness encompasses the three initial figures of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, namely sensible certainty, perception and understanding, which offer us the flawed experiences that consciousness makes in the face of its attempt to grasp the truth of the object as if it were something indifferent to the knowing subject.

2.1.2. Self-consciousness: desire in general

Let's briefly return to these three initial figures of consciousness. Sensible certainty is the moment of the abstract universal, which carries with it the claim to apprehend its object as pure being. However, the supposedly rich and multifaceted indeterminacy of pure being becomes much more of a poverty of qualities, since pure being is pure nothingness. Sensible certainty wants to know in an immediate and isolated way that which is most singular and ephemeral, the *This*. However, it experiences that in trying to cognitively grasp the *Here* and *Now* that constitute *This* in its immediacy, it always ends up transforming it into a universal, into a complex unity of various *Heres* and various *Nows*[4]. In this way, sensible certainty fails to say what it was aiming to say about *This*, always saying much more than it was aiming to say. It only wanted to point to the immediate being of *This*, but in this movement it denied its own immediate singularity, giving rise to an object with determined qualities.

In the figure of perception we find the moment of the particular, which still presents itself as a universal, but a particular universal, that is, the thing. The thing is not a mere indeterminacy, it presents a set of universal properties that express itself. Consciousness experiences that the thing is not identical to itself, dividing itself between the multiplicity of qualities that constitute it as a *medium* and the excluding singularity that constitutes it as *one*. The challenge of perception is to make the thing maintain its self-identity. In order to do this, consciousness performs all sorts of theoretical juggling tricks, either taking responsibility for the diversity found in the thing, or blaming the thing itself for this diversity. Finally, in an attempt to save its identity, perception decides to split the thing between being-for-another and being-in-itself. The result of this experience is that consciousness apprehends this contradiction and tries to resolve it by postulating the existence of the unconditional Universal, in other words, a dimension of the thing that is beyond the various properties and qualities expressed in it insofar as it is for another: the play of forces. While it is for-itself, the thing is one, being constituted by something inaccessible, the unconditioned Universal. While it is for-other, it is made up of various qualities.

[4] Already in the first figure of consciousness, it is possible to trace the producing negativity which, as we will see with Bataille, always postpones the moment, the here and now, to the future, thus making dialectical negativity the paradigm of servitude to which human beings submit when they enter the world of language, of the universal.

However, it remains to be seen how the relationship between the unconditioned Universal and the properties occurs. This brings us to the figure of understanding.

Understanding is the moment of singularity, that is, of the concrete universal, suspending the contradictions between the two previous moments, between sensible certainty and perception, between the universal and the particular. In this figure of consciousness, the object faced by consciousness is the play of forces or the law, the unconditioned Universal. The play of forces is what would make it possible to understand the relationship between the one and the medium, between a mere excluding particular and the diversity of sensible properties of a thing. These properties, the multiplicity, would be the expression of an unconditioned Universal, the play of forces, the appearance (being-for-another) is the expression of the essence (being-in-itself). However, these forces are not individual entities, but are the very movement of the relationship between the one and the multiple. At the end of the understanding, consciousness understands that there is nothing behind the curtains but itself, that it itself is this force that expresses itself and as such recognizes its expression in an objective way. From then on, consciousness sees itself in otherness, because it then understands itself as force, as life that continually expresses itself by denying otherness, recognizing itself in the other. As well as life, consciousness perceives itself as independent (*selbstständig*), developing itself through the negation of otherness.

These three figures of consciousness constitute what can be understood as a philosophy of consciousness, since it takes as its presupposition the idea that the activity of the cognizing subject takes place without any kind of social background. According to Stekeler, this philosophy of consciousness

> geht, wie bei Descartes oder Fichte, von der Selbstgewissheit des denkenden Subjekts aus, das als Vollzugsubjekt im Denken (Descartes), Wahrnehmen (Berkeley) oder Verhalten (Hume) präsupponiert oder unterstellt wird. Dabei wird das Bewusstsein oft selbst mit diesem Vollzugssubjekt identifiziert. Und es wird, wie in der Transzendental- oder Reflexionsphilosophie von Kant bis Fichte, im Ausgang von der Tatsache des Bewusstseins das Selbstbewusstsein als Reflexion auf die Voraussetzungen des Bewusstseins entwickelt. Das heißt, es wird behauptet, dass in jedem Bewusstsein implizit das schon enthalten ist, was die transzendentale Reflexion als Selbstbewusstsein explizit macht. (STEKELER, 2014, p. 110)

We can then understand why Hegel begins his work with consciousness and its three figures. It is necessary to deal first with those implicit determinations of

consciousness and then to make them explicit, that is, to dialectically expose the conditions of possibility that determine and mediate the pretensions to knowledge of sensible certainty, perception and understanding. In this sense, Hegel would be approaching Kant's transcendental philosophy, especially his transcendental principle of apperception, the "*I think*", as it appears in the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

> Das »ich denke« ist nun eine »transzendentale« Bedingung jeder Apperzeption, weil eine Apperzeption eine begrifflich gefasste und bestimmte Perzeption oder Wahrnehmung ist. Um aber etwas begrifflich fassen zu können, muss ich es denken können. Daher setzt die Fähigkeit der Apperzeption die Fähigkeit des begrifflichen Denkens voraus. (STEKELER, 2014, p. 111)

The apperception of which Kant speaks to us is extremely important for Hegel, because it brings with it the idea that all the knowledge we can have access to is conceptually mediated; only conceptual thought is capable of guaranteeing us the apperception of our own knowledge, the self-awareness of our own cognitive activity. However, we shouldn't assume that Hegel is completely affiliated with Kant's transcendental philosophy, which is seen as still too much of a subjectivist philosophy, a philosophy of reflection. Self-consciousness, as Kant understands it, presupposes an abstract-logical subject that must be able to accompany and organize the individual's representations. We can therefore see that Kantian self-consciousness suffers from what will later be called methodological individualism, as if self-consciousness wasn't always the result of social mediation within what Hegel calls the absolute knowledge. This is why "Hegel ist nun aber keineswegs ein Bewusstseinsphilosoph im transzendental- oder reflexionsphilosophischen Sinn. Das heißt, Hegel beginnt keineswegs mit einer nicht weiter befragten Voraussetzung des begrifflichen Denkens oder denkenden Subjekts." (STEKELER, 2014, p. 112). For Hegel, the thinking subject, this self-conscious subject, capable of following its own thoughts and making explicit what was still implicit in the first three figures of consciousness, arises only through the dialectic of recognition, in the struggle for recognition between two consciousnesses. This is when we enter the terrain of self-consciousness, at which point we come across the first appearance of absolute knowledge in its most incipient form.

In the three figures of consciousness, "the object proves rather not to be like that in truth; instead, this in-itself turns out to be a mode in which the object is only for an other" (HEGEL, 2010, p. 72) Consciousness has experienced that its object is never

in-itself, but that it is constituted as a for-an-other. This becomes clear at the end of the figure of understanding, where it is stated that "behind the so-called screen which is supposed to conceal the interior, there is nothing to be seen unless we go behind it ourselves, not only in order that we may see, but also that there may be something behind there that can be seen." (HEGEL, 2010, p. 71). If, before, consciousness' subjective certainty regarding its cognitive activity faded into falsehood, because the objective truth showed itself to be different, now the subjective certainty that consciousness has of itself is confirmed in the objective truth, because the object, to the extent that it is known, confirms the subjective certainty of consciousness. It is for this reason that it is now possible for consciousness to make explicit what was previously implicit for it in the apprehension of the object, because in knowing the object, consciousness is ultimately knowing itself. As Hegel states,

> self-consciousness is the reflection out of the Being of the sensory and perceived world, and essentially the return from otherness. As self-consciousness, it is movement; but since it distinguishes only itself as itself from itself, the difference, as an otherness, is immediately sublated for it; the difference is not, and self-consciousness is only the motionless tautology of: I am I (HEGEL, 2010, 72).

Self-consciousness is the reflexive movement of finding oneself in the being-other, in the being of another object. The movement of affirming oneself without the friction with the other, without the determined negation of the other, is not a movement as such, but only the tautological and abstract imposition of a self-absorbed Self, as we find in Kant and Fichte. For self-consciousness, being-other is one of the moments that leads to the unity of self-consciousness with itself, a unity in which it considers the difference and equality between subject and object. As a unity of difference and equality, self-consciousness is characterized by Hegel as desire: "this unity must become essential to self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness is desire in general" (HEGEL, 2010, p. 73). Self-consciousness, desire in general, only achieves this unity through a double object: firstly, the negation of the sensible and perceptive object by marking it with the sign of the negative, and secondly, the recognition of itself in the object marked by this negating opposition. In this respect, Hegel concludes: "self-consciousness presents itself as the movement in which this opposition is sublated and the equality of itself with itself arises for it" (HEGEL, 2010, p. 73).

This reflexive movement of the self-consciousness to find sameness with itself by denying the Other-being is not exclusively its own, but that of life as such. Self-consciousness is a living being that is immersed in life. According to Hegel, life

> infinity as the sublatedness of all differences, the pure movement of axial rotation, the repose of this infinity as absolutely restless infinity; independence itself, in which the differences of the movement are resolved; the simple essence of time which, in this equality-with-itself, has the solid shape of space. (HEGEL, 2010, p. 73)

The infinitude of life[5] is the result of the negation and conservation of the finite moments that make it up. Also defined as a flow, the infinitude of life is its own independence, because all the differences it encounters are negated and conserved in their unity. The difference between life and self-consciousness is that the latter is aware of this infinite unity of difference for itself: "is the unity for which the infinite unity of the differences is; [life], however, is only this unity itself, so that it is not at the same time for itself" (HEGEL, 2014, p. 137). In light of this, both self-consciousness and life lacking self-consciousness are independent. Each living being, as a member of life, wants to be independent, to deny the other and to recognize itself in its infinite unity of differences. All living beings encounter the object of their desire and try to subjugate it in order to satisfy the certainty of their own independence from the object.

> self-consciousness is thus certain of itself only by sublating this other that presents itself to self-consciousness as independent life; self-consciousness is *desire*. Certain of the nothingness of this other, it posits this nothingness *for itself* as its truth, annihilates the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as *true* certainty, as the sort of certainty that has arisen for it in an *objective manner*. (HEGEL, 2010, p. 75)

Self-consciousness is desire because of the certainty of itself acquired through the suspension of the independence of the object, which in turn objectively ratifies the truth of subjective certainty, confirming its own independence. In the third volume of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* dedicated to the *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel states that the subject "beholds its own lack, its own one-sidedness, sees in the

[5] It's worth noting that this concept of life as the movement that seeks independence is very close to the idea that life seeks to preserve a unity, however precarious and evanescent it may be. We will see that life, according to Bataille, when understood from this Hegelian perspective, is being stripped of its uselessness and excessiveness. For the French philosopher, the Hegelian concept of life is trapped within a serious and servile grammar of finitude, from which laughter is excluded.

object something belonging to its own essence and yet missing from it. Self-consciousness is in a position to sublate this contradiction since it is not just being, but absolute activity" (HEGEL, 2007, p. 155). In this sense, self-consciousness is desire, because it is, in essence, a negating activity, or even a negating negativity.

This implies that self-consciousness is a radical absence of *a priori* positive determination about its own essence, which is constituted *a posteriori* through a negating action. However, it only becomes effective as such when it negates a specific object, namely another self-consciousness, when it desires the desire of the Other: "*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness* [...] There is *a self-consciousness for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness come to be for it" (HEGEL, 2010, p. 75-76). By desiring the desire of the Other, of another self-consciousness, the self-consciousness confirms its independence and becomes aware of the implicit presuppositions that condition its cognitive activities. It is in this relationship between two self-consciousnesses that, according to Hegel, the pure concept of spirit arises, in other words, in this incipient relationship lies the potential for the realization of the ethical substance, which will lead, at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to absolute knowledge. The search for the satisfaction of the desire of each self-consciousness results in the fight for recognition, since both of them desire and negate the other in order to satisfy the certainty and independence of the self.

> At first, the process will present the side of the inequality of the two, or the bifurcation of the middle term into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only recognized, the other only recognizing. (HEGEL, 2010, p. 77)

The pure concept of spirit has a close connection with what will later be presented as absolute knowledge, because the former is already the latter, but still in its undeveloped form, without concreteness. In this first moment of recognition, the relationship is one of inequality, there is still no real reciprocity between those concerned. However, despite being an unequal dynamic, we already find the duplication of self-consciousness in its unity, in other words, there is a movement in which one self-consciousness finds itself in the other, as a double of itself. This relationship of inequality is the result of the masterly and servile position that each of the self-consciousnesses assumes at first. The master is recognized by the slave, but the slave is not recognized by the master. The master is the one who dared to put his own

life on the line, risking death by submitting the other self-consciousness, while the slave is the one who feared death and chose to submit to the master's commands. It is on this horizon that the slave feels fear of death, of the absolute master, and so becomes anxious:

> That is to say, this consciousness has had anxiety, not about this or that and not just at odd moments, but anxiety for its whole essence; for it has felt the fear of death, of the absolute lord. In this it has been internally dissolved, has trembled through and through within itself, and everything fixed has quaked in it. (HEGEL, 2010, p. 80)

When the slave felt fear of death, of the absolute master, he felt anxiety at the possible dissolution of his whole essence, of his totality. It can therefore be seen that what constitutes self-consciousness as such, desire, this negating negativity, is what opens one up to anxiety. It is because it is desire in general that one experiences anxiety. The concept of desire as lack therefore implies an anxiety that unveils its own negativity, death, the absolute master. Anxiety in the face of death is part of a desiring economy based on lack.

Faced with this anxiety, the slave works. Work, according to Hegel, is "desire *held in check*, fleetingness *staved off*, or work *cultivates*. The negative relation to the object becomes its *form* and something *permanent*, because it is precisely for the worker that the object has independence" (HEGEL, 2014, p. 150). As a servile consciousness, which works and constantly negates the natural world by constructing another one in its place, the slave forms and constructs for himself a second nature, an essentiality that distances him or at least assuages the anxiety that comes from the fear of the absolute master, of death.

> For, in cultivating the thing, the serving consciousness's own negativity, its Being-for-itself, becomes an object for it only through its sublating the being, the form, opposed to it. But this objective *negative* is just the alien essence before which it has trembled. Now, however, it destroys this alien negative, posits *itself* as such a negative in the element of permanence, and thereby becomes *for itself* a *being-for-itself*. (HEGEL, 2010, p. 81)

The slave's work not only results in something positive, but also brings with it a negative dimension, namely that negating quality proper to the desiring self-consciousness that remains in nothingness. This means that the slave objectifies his anxiety in the face of death, makes anxiety no longer something merely subjective, but

transforms it into an object. Labor performs an *Aufhebung* through which an object is formed, but at the same time carries the instability proper to self-consciousness. This product of work, which is endowed with permanence and impermanence, stability and instability, fixity and vacillation, is nothing other than the ethical substance, the absolute knowledge. It is only from the anxiety and consequent work of the slave that an objectivity emerges that is capable of coordinating and socially organizing social dynamics and thus enabling reciprocal recognition. The objectification of this anxiety in the ethical substance is very well characterized by Hegel when he talks about the customs and laws of a nation:

> As the singleton in his *singular* labour already *unconsciously* accomplishes a *universal* labour, so again he also accomplishes the universal labour as his *conscious* object; the *whole* becomes, as a whole, his product, for which he sacrifices himself and precisely in so doing receives back from it his own self.—There is nothing here which would not be reciprocal, nothing in which the independence of the individual would not, in the dissolution of its Being-for-itself in the *negation* of itself, give itself its *positive* significance of being for itself. This unity of Being for another or of making oneself a thing, and of Being-for-itself, this universal substance, speaks its *universal language* in the customs and laws of its people (HEGEL, 2010, p. 142)

On the horizon of *Sittlichkeit*, of absolute knowledge, the reciprocal sacrifice contained in the singular work of each individual in society would result in the formation of a universal language specific to that people through its customs and laws. These customs and laws would therefore be the objectification of the subjective-individual anxiety of everyone in the community. The reciprocal sacrifice of work takes place within a earnest and serious life, constantly concerned with the realization of a community capable of pacifying the anxiety in the face of death that underlies all work: “And so it is no longer the levity of the previous shape [individuality], which only wanted the singular pleasure; on the contrary, it is the earnestness of a high purpose which seeks its pleasure in displaying the excellence of its own essence, and in promoting the welfare of humanity” (HEGEL, 2010, p. 257). We can say, following Hegel, that the welfare of humanity is the slave’s attempt to sublimate the anxiety in the face of death, which always remains the slave’s ultimate limit.

There is nothing more distant and external to servile self-consciousness than laughter, because absolute knowledge, the realization of reciprocal recognition through

collective work, requires the seriousness of work, of its shaping negativity. After all, excessive laughter, according to the German philosopher, is proof of banality and only for those who are alienated from the interests that really matter:

> A man of reflection never, or only rarely, abandons himself to peals of laughter; *Pericles*, for example, is supposed not to have laughed any more after he had dedicated himself to public affairs. Excessive laughter is rightly held to be evidence of dullness, of a foolish mentality that is insensitive to all great, genuinely substantial interests and regards them as external and alien to it. (HEGEL, 2007, p. 82)

Suffering from the same prejudice as the citizens of Abdera, Hegel sees excessive laughter as foolishness, a madness that is not in accordance with the seriousness of the interests of the polis, of *Sittlichkeit*. While Plato wanted to banish poets from the polis, Hegel would easily expel those who laugh excessively, like Democritus. Hegelian absolute knowledge is opposed to Rabelaisian gay knowledge. Perhaps it is because Pinel was the main medical reference for Hegel that he does not continue the Hippocratic and Rabelaisian tradition, relegating the gay knowledge of laughter to a foolishness that should have no place in *Sittlichkeit*. The welfare of humanity is not a laughing humanity, but one that works reciprocally to soothe the anxiety in the face of death that persists daily, but which remains irreducible, because death is an absolute master.

2.2. The *Introduction to the reading of Hegel* and the end of anxious history

As is well known, Kojève was one of the main people responsible for the reception of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in France. By replacing his predecessor, Koyré, in courses on the philosophy of religion offered at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Kojève introduced the intellectuals of his time to what for him was the heart of Hegel's work: the dialectic of master and slave. Among the intellectuals who attended his classes, two interest us here: Georges Bataille and Jacques Lacan. In order to understand the relationship between desire and anxiety in these two authors, we need to look at some of Kojève's main contributions. As we explore Kojève's interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, especially as we find it in the *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* and in *The Idea of Death in Hegel's Philosophy*, it is worth briefly pointing out that Kojève's reading was never intended to be an introduction *to Hegel*, but rather an introduction to *a reading of Hegel*. By this, we mean that Kojève, commenting on the Hegelian text, was trying to outline and follow a philosophical itinerary of his own, which certainly didn't exempt him from the responsibility of having a minimally coherent treatment of the German philosopher's work. This is what he tells us in a letter to the Vietnamese philosopher Tran-Duc-Thao:

> Je voudrais signaler, toutefois, que mon œuvre n'avait pas le caractère d'une étude historique; il m'importait relativement peu de savoir ce que Hegel lui-même a voulu dire dans son livre ; j'ai fait un cours d'anthropologie phénoménologique en me servant de textes hégéliens, mais en ne disant que ce que je considérais être la vérité, et en laissant tomber ce qui me semblait être, chez Hegel, une erreur. Ainsi, en renonçant au monisme hégélien, je me suis consciemment écarté de ce grand philosophe. D'autre part, mon cours était essentiellement une œuvre de propagande destinée à frapper les esprits. C'est pourquoi j'ai consciemment renforcé le rôle de la dialectique du Maître et de l'Esclave et, d'une manière générale, schématisé le contenu de la phénoménologie. (KOJÈVE, *apud* Jarczyk & Labarrière, 1990, 134)

Although Kojève follows his own philosophical path, the sad and serious atmosphere of Hegelian philosophy persists in the Russian philosopher's courses. Once again we see the close connection between the idea of a desiring economy based on lack and the appearance of a concept of sad anxiety. This atmosphere becomes even grimmer when Kojève's philosophical thinking is strongly influenced by another author whose thinking suffers from the same sadness: Martin Heidegger.

2.2.1. Heidegger and Kojève's *Atheism*

As mentioned above, Alexander Kojève, in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, proposes his own interpretation of the main moments of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Although his reading preserves much of Hegel's philosophical project, it is still a heterodox reading. One of the reasons for this *sui generis* reading of Hegel is the Heideggerian influence that permeates the Kojèvian reception of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Pirotte,

> Si en effet l'*Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* encore à venir porte la marque pour ainsi dire « cryptée » de Heidegger, mentionné ça et là dans de courtes notes, l'exhumation récente de l'essai sur l'*Athéisme*, rédigé deux ans avant le début du séminaire consacré à « la pensée religieuse de Hegel » selon le programme d'étude fixé par Koyré, nous révèle de façon éclatante que c'est bien sur des assises heideggeriennes, conçues comme les fondements d'une anthropologie phénoménologique, que reposera non seulement l'interprétation kojévienne de la *Phénoménologie de l'Esprit*, mais encore le futur « Système du Savoir ». (PIROTTE, 2005, p. 32)

The Heideggerian influence on Kojève can already be found in the Russian philosopher's unfinished essay called *Atheism*, written in 1931, in which the author tries to deal with the difference between a theistic and an atheistic phenomenological anthropology, that is, to distinguish two opposing ways of dealing with the groundlessness of human existence. Theistic anthropology, on the one hand, reifies something outside the world, God, in order to deny nothingness, death; on the other hand, atheistic anthropology confronts the radical otherness of this nothingness without hypostatizing an extra-mundane entity, dealing with the most specific possibility of human existence, *being-for-death*. At first, Kojève lists two subcategories of the theistic position, a pure position and a qualified one. The pure theist affirms the existence of a God lacking any kind of predicate, which in turn ends up making this position similar to the atheist one, since a God without a predicate is the same as nothing. The position of the qualified theist goes further and actually predicates God, but is unable to attribute singular predicates to him that distinguish him from profane things, making God once again something as undefined as his non-existence. Kojève understands, then, that it is not enough to say that an atheist is someone who doesn't believe in God and a theist someone who does. A more detailed differentiation is needed.

Kojève uses two concepts that he forges from Heideggerian philosophy: “human being in the world” and “human being outside the world”. The first concept is the one that has the most support in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology as we find it in his 1927 work *Being and Time*. *In-der-welt-sein*, being-in-the-world, far from referring to the physical-spatial position of the human being in a place, points much more to one of the main ontological structures that constitute the being of the entity *Dasein*. To say that *Dasein* is in the world means that it is on a horizon permeated by networks of meanings and significant everyday references, in which *Dasein* is “used to, familiar with” (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 55). *Dasein* can be in the world in different ways, such as "to have to do with something, to produce, order and take care of something, to use something, to give something up and let it get lost, to undertake, to accomplish, to find out, to ask about, to observe, to speak about, to determine...." (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 103). All these modes of being, both practical and theoretical, revolve around what he calls *taking care* (*Besorgen*), the utilitarian relationship that *Dasein* establishes with entities that are at hand (*Zuhandensein*), that is, that are given as ontologically finished entities, unlike *Dasein* itself, unveiled in its existential possibilities. Utensils are practical and theoretical objects with which a utilitarian horizon is established. Every useful thing “is essentially ‘something in order to…’. The different kinds of ‘in order to’ such as serviceability, helpfulness, usability, handiness, constitute a totality of useful things. The structure of "in order to" [‘*um-zu*’] contains a reference [*Verweisung*] of something to something” (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 69). The world of being-in-the-world does not concern the totality of the entities at hand, but the referential and meaningful totalities that are constructed daily by *Dasein* as it occupies itself.

Throughout *Being and Time*, in addition to being-in-the-world, Heidegger examines a series of other ontological structures, such as being-with (*Mit-sein*), disposition (*Befindlichkeit*), understanding (*Verstehen*), interpretation (*Auslegung*), discourse (*Rede*), but the ontological structure that unites all of these structures is named by the author as care (*Sorge*). As the structural totality of *Dasein*, care is the ontological structure that brings together three temporal dimensions of being-in-the-world: that of engaging in future projects concerning the possibilities of being-in-the-world; that of always being thrown (*Geworfenheit*), having already been in the world and that of being in the world insofar as it deals with utensils, intramundane entities. However, the world, *Dasein*'s network of references and meanings, which

guarantees an apparent stability and foundation, is precarious in the face of the radical otherness that is *Dasein*'s death. It is in this context that Heidegger begins to thematize *Dasein* as being-for-death[6].

Dasein, as cure, anticipates itself in the future, which in turn throws it into an expectation (*Erwartung*) about its most extreme possibilities, that is, its own death:

> Being-toward-death is the anticipation of a potentiality-of-being of that being whose kind of being is anticipation itself. In the anticipatory revealing of this potentiality-of-being, Dasein discloses itself to itself with regard to its most extreme possibility. [...] Its ontological constitution must be made visible by setting forth the concrete structure of anticipation of death. [...] Death is the ownmost possibility of Dasein. (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 251-252)

By launching itself into the future, *Dasein* remains in a position of expectation in the face of its own death as a possibility, but this creates a problem for Heidegger, because death, being the limit of the possibilities inherent to the world inhabited by *Dasein*, is the *impossible*. *Dasein* does not have its own death on its horizon of possibilities, because, being in the world, all its possibilities concern the projects that make up its network of meanings and references. The impossibility of thinking about radical impossibility in the horizon of possibilities of the world is what makes Heidegger note that it is a vain effort to think of death as a way of accessing it:

> Thus if being-toward-death is not meant as an “actualization” of death, neither can it mean to dwell near the end in its possibility. This kind of behavior would amount to "thinking about death," thinking about this possibility, how and when it might be actualized. Brooding over death does not completely take away from it its character of possibility. It is always brooded over as something coming, but we weaken it by calculating how to have death under our control. [...] However, Dasein relates to something possible in its possibility, by expecting [*Erwarten*] it. Anyone who is intent on something possible, may encounter it unimpeded and undiminished in its "whether it comes or not, or whether it comes after all." But with this phenomenon of expecting has our analysis not reached the same kind of being toward the possible which we already characterized as being out for something and taking care of it? (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 250-251)

As much as *Dasein* mulls over and calculates its own death, such an endeavor is still a form of occupation that takes place within the world, removing from death its

[6] The reason for our investigation into the Heideggerian fundamental ontology and his concept of being-for-death is that this concept is the access route to Heidegger's understanding of anxiety. As we will see below, Kojève reads the Hegelian concept of anxiety in the light of the Heideggerian concept of being-for-death and anxiety. Perhaps this is the reason why Kojève seems to aggravate the heavy and sad atmosphere of Hegelian anxiety.

character of impossibility. How, then, could death be thematized by *Dasein* without being absorbed by the horizon of possibility of the world, of occupation, of usefulness? “How is it existentially possible for this constant threat to be genuinely disclosed?” (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 254). The author answers that it is the affective disposition of anxiety that makes us genuinely understand the possibility of impossibility, of nothingness:

> In anxiety, Dasein finds itself faced with the nothingness of the possible impossibility of its existence. Anxiety is anxious about the potentiality-of-being of the being thus determined, and thus discloses the most extreme possibility. […] Being-toward-death is essentially anxiety. (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 254)

Anxiety is what reveals the nothingness that is death, the complete impossibility in the face of the possibilities of *Dasein*'s world[7]. However, it is not in *Being and Time* that Heidegger discusses nothingness in detail, but in his inaugural speech at the University of Freiburg, known as *Was ist Metaphysik?*

In this speech, Heidegger develops the thesis according to which anxiety manifests nothingness: "Das Nichts ist die vollständige Verneinung der Allheit des Seienden" (HEIDEGGER, 1955, p. 29). It is in the experience of profound boredom that the totality of intramundane beings manifests itself. It's not boredom in front of a movie or a book, but a boredom “wie ein schweigender Nebel hin- und herziehend, rückt alle Dinge, Menschen und einen selbst mit ihnen in eine merkwürdige Gleichgültigkeit zusammen. Diese Langeweile offenbart das Seiende im Ganzen” (HEIDEGGER, 1955, p. 30). To the extent that boredom[8] manifests this totality, human beings experience the complete lack of a foundation for the totality of the world, thus revealing themselves to be nothing. This leads Heidegger to state that

> Wir „schweben“ in Angst. Deutlicher: die Angst läßt uns schweben, weil sie das Seiende im Ganzen zum Entgleiten bringt. Darin liegt, daß wir selbst - diese seienden Menschen - inmitten des Seienden uns mitentgleiten. Daher ist im Grunde nicht „dir“ und „mir“ unheimlich,

[7] In the context of Heideggerian existential analysis, the impossible is revealed by anxiety, just as in Hegelian philosophy, as an insurmountable limit. This insurmountable character will appear again in Kojève. Because the impossible is insurmountable, the horizon of possibilities acquires a tense and serious atmosphere, because one is always waiting for the possibility of death, of the impossible. When we reach Bataille and Kierkegaard, we will see that each author, in their own way, strives to think of ways to make the impossible possible.

[8] In the same lecture, Heidegger also raises the possibility of joy being the affective disposition responsible for revealing this totality, a joy at the existence of a loved one. However, he doesn't develop this idea, instead focusing on the seriousness of boredom.

> sondern „einem“ ist es so. Nur das reine Da-sein in der Durchschütterung dieses Sehwebens, darin es sich an nichts halten kann, ist noch da. (HEIDEGGER, 1955, p. 32)

Heidegger wants to point to the fundamental role of nothingness in showing human beings their *Dasein*. It is only in the face of the nothingness manifested by anxiety that the human being steps back from the totality of his world and then emerges “die ursprüngliche Offenheit des Seienden als eines solchen: daß es Seiendes ist - und nicht Nichts” (HEIDEGGER, 1955, p. 34). Since the human being is suspended in nothingness and therefore has no *a priori* foundation that defines his essence, he experiences the original openness of nothingness as the extreme possibility of being able to be that being that he himself has always been and is: *Dasein*. This is what Heidegger has in mind when he says that

> Nur auf dem Grunde der ursprünglichen Offenbarkeit des Nichts kann das Dasein des Menschen auf Seiendes zugehen und eingehen. Sofern aber das Dasein seinem Wesen nach zu Seiendem, das es nicht ist und das es selbst ist, sich verhält, kommt es als solches Dasein je schon aus dem offenbaren Nichts her. (HEIDEGGER, 1955, p. 34)

Nothingness is the condition of possibility for *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world, it is the original openness of nothingness that makes the human being an entity that has an understanding of being as such and can therefore question itself about it. By being suspended within nothingness, the human being transcends the ontological status of animals, things and utensils, which do not have an understanding of being and do not question themselves about it. In this sense, suspended in nothingness, the human being transcends simply given beings, which can be seen in their freedom to be in different ways:

> Da-sein heißt: Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts. Sichhineinhaltend in das Nichts ist das Dasein je schon über das Seiende im Ganzen hinaus, Dieses Hinaussein über das Seiende nennen wir die Transzendenz. Würde das Dasein im Grunde seines Wesens nicht transzendieren, d. h. jetzt, würde es sich nicht im vorhinein in das Nichts hineinhalten, dann könnte es sich nie zu Seiendem verhalten, also auch nicht zu sich selbst. Ohne ursprüngliche Offenbarkeit des Nichts kein Selbstsein und keine Freiheit. (HEIDEGGER, 1955, p. 35)

Dasein transcends the world of beings because it itself is not just any being, but that being which acquires an understanding of being insofar as it is, relates to its being by always being the being that it is. While it is true that the original openness of

nothingness manifests itself in the anxiety felt in the boring everydayness of the totality of worldly beings, it is also true that being manifests itself as such only when *Dasein* is suspended in nothingness. It is precisely because of this transcendence that death is a question only for the human being, for *Dasein*. Suspended in nothingness, *Dasein* has before it a nihilating abyss that makes it understand its own finitude. It can be said that only the human being dies, that is, only he ceases to be. With this brief overview of Martin Heidegger's philosophy, we are conceptually prepared to understand how Kojève appropriates it to achieve his goal of differentiating the anthropological positions of theism and atheism.

According to Kojève, human beings are in constant interaction with the things around them, between an "I" and a "not-I". In this interaction, a homogeneity is built up between the human being and everything that is not him. He calls this everyday homogeneity "human being in the world", a clear reference to Heidegger's "being-in-the-world". In addition, there is also what Kojève calls the "human being outside the world", which for the theist is God and for the atheist is nothingness. On the one hand, we have the homogeneous world of the human being, structured by the totality of references and meanings constructed in everyday life, on the other hand, we have a radical and heterogeneous otherness that transcends the human world, whether it be God or nothingness. Thus, both the theist and the atheist project before themselves a "human being outside the world". Kojève, drawing on Heidegger's reflections on death, understands that the "human being outside the world" is death itself, that is, the radical limit of the homogeneous "human being in the world", with God and nothingness being two different ways of dealing with death. The relationship with death established by the theist is one in which one passes from the "human being outside the world" to the "human being in the world". Perceiving themselves in a homogeneous continuity with God, the theist lives a contradictory relationship between worldly life and death, which is both the end and the continuation of their life. For the atheist, the relationship with death is also contradictory, because he claims that there "exists" a pure absence, a pure nothingness, beyond his "human being in the world", while at the same time claiming that there is no "human being outside the world". Since nothingness is a radical absence, the atheist affirms that this nihilating negativity must exist, even if only in its absence. The difference between the theist and atheist position can be understood in the difference between the way each position deals with death. The theist tries to soften the

radical inevitability of death by conceiving of a positive being outside the world, while the atheist deals directly with the nothingness in which he is suspended, with death. Despite the differences, Kojève observes that both positions are contradictory, because they postulate, each in their own way, something that is outside the human world, be it God or nothingness.

2.2.2. Self-consciousness suspended in desire

Two years after the *Atheism* essay, continuing his reflections on theism and atheism, Kojève was invited by the epistemologist Koyré to give lectures at the École des Haute Études on Hegel's religious thought. These lectures were transcribed by one of his students, Raymond Queneau, and then brought together under the name *Introduction to reading Hegel*. Kojève's *Introduction* continues his theoretical itinerary of *Atheism*. Much more than an untainted reading of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the Russian philosopher's text attempts to highlight the atheism implicit in Hegelian philosophy. This becomes apparent in the summary of the first year of his course:

> My lecture was intended as an extension of Professor Koyré's course on Hegel's philosophy of religion. Koyré analyzed the texts preceding the *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. I have devoted this lecture to the study of Phänomenologie, following his method of interpretation and based on the guidelines of his course. It is first and foremost a question of examining Hegel's religious ideas. But the method Hegel uses in *Phänomenologie* does not allow the religious parts to be isolated, and so it was necessary to comment on the whole work. Unfortunately, it was only possible to explain the first three chapters and part of the fourth. This work contains the phenomenological description of all the religious attitudes that man can take when living as a historical Being in the spatiotemporal world (all of which, incidentally, had already been realized in the course of history when the *Phänomenologie* appeared). (KOJÈVE, 2014, p. 55)

The Kojèvean reading key is evident here. He is interested in reading the different figures of consciousness in *Phänomenologie* as different religious positions that consciousness takes in the course of the work. As we shall see, the last and most complex of the figures of consciousness, absolute knowledge, will be, according to the Russian philosopher, the atheist position, that is, the position in which the human being does not posit any transcendent foundation for his existence and assumes for himself the

role of a subject suspended in nothingness, but who precisely for this reason is the subject of his history:

> These different religious attitudes must also be considered as integral elements (*Momente*) that are *aufgehoben* (that is, suppressed when they are isolated, but preserved and sublimated in what is true) in the integral attitude of the man who has fully realized his essence, that is, of the man who has fully and perfectly understood himself, that is, of the absolute philosopher who lives at the end of history, in short, of Hegel, who only is and can only be what he is because he wrote the comprehensive description of these religious attitudes. (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 124)

Let's start with Kojève's reading of chapter IV of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, at which point, as we saw in the section on Hegel, self-consciousness and the pure concept of spirit emerge. It is in this chapter that the human being is thematized by Kojève not only as a cognizing being, but also as a desiring practical-political being that confirms its own independence as a human being distinct from other self-consciousness and animals. Through Kojève's Heideggerian eyes, this passage from consciousness to self-consciousness is read as the passage from animality, lacking the original openness of nothingness, and still trapped in the ontological fixity of the closed being, to humanity, suspended in nothingness, free in its *being-able*. Kojève reconciles the negating negativity of the desiring consciousness-of-self with the original negativity of nothingness that defines *being-for-death*, something that is not unlike the Heideggerian theoretical horizon: "das Nichts ist der Ursprung der Verneinung, nicht umgekehrt" (HEIDEGGER, 1955, p. 36). However, this Heideggerian reading distances itself from Hegelian thought insofar as it endorses an ontological dualism between nature and culture, attributing freedom of negativity only to human beings, leaving nature with the necessity of positivity.

Already in the introduction to his reading of Hegel, Kojève makes clear the Heideggerian contours of his exegesis of the Hegelian text:

> Man is Self-Consciousness. He is conscious of himself, conscious of his human reality and dignity; and it is in this that he is essentially different from animals, which do not go beyond the level of simple Sentiment of self. […] For there to be Self-Consciousness, Desire must therefore be directed toward a non-natural object, toward something that goes beyond the given reality. Now, the only thing that goes beyond the given reality is Desire itself. For Desire taken as Desire – i.e., before its satisfaction-is but a revealed nothingness, an unreal emptiness. Desire, being the revelation of an emptiness, the

> presence of the absence of a reality, is something essentially different from the desired thing, something other than a thing, than a static and given real being that stays eternally identical to itself (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 3-5)

It can be seen that Kojève is using the ontological difference between entity and being, as found in Heidegger, to think about the difference between the animal and the human being. The animal is the closed being, lacking the original openness of nothingness, and the human being is *Dasein*, suspended in the original openness of nothingness. On the one hand, the animal is an entity like any other given entity, whose way of being is always the same, without any possibility of understanding being; on the other hand, the human being is that entity open to the possibility of being-able. The nothingness in which self-consciousness, the human being, is suspended in desire, a revealed and unreal void, an opening towards the being-able. Nothingness and desire, therefore, are identified by Kojève as the genuinely human ontological determination[9]. Drawing on the Hegelian conception of desire, Kojève explains that the ontological passage from entity to being, from the given thing, the animal, to *Dasein*, to self-consciousness, is due to the difference of the object negated and assimilated by desire. The positive constitution of a desiring being is a function of what it negates:

> Generally speaking, the I of Desire is an emptiness that receives a real positive content only by negating action that satisfies Desire in destroying, transforming, and "assimilating" the desired non-I. And the positive content of the I, constituted by negation, is a function of the positive content of the negated non-I. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 4)

Animal desire negates a given object, so it will only be a Sentiment-of-Self; human desire negates the desire of another Self-Consciousness, so it will be Self-Consciousness. The animal, by denying a plant, for example, elevates itself above the plant, affirms its independence from it, but does so depending on the recognition of a given, merely static being, which means that it remains on the same ontological level as the plant. It's different with the human being, because by negating another desire, its recognition depends on another desire, which in turn gives it a negative ontological status.

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[9] This more detailed discussion of the Kojèvian concept of desire as a revealed nothingness is necessary for the future incursions we will make into Bataille's critique of the sadness and servitude of desire as lack, of this dialectical negativity. We also know that, as well as having influenced Bataille, the Kojèvian concept of desire is central to understanding what we will later say about desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis.

> Therefore, Desire directed toward another Desire, taken as Desire, will create, by the negating and assimilating action that satisfies it , an I essentially different from the animal "I." This I, which "feeds" on Desires, will itself be Desire in its very being, created in and by the satisfaction of its Desire. And since Desire is realized as action negating the given, the very being of this I will be action. This I will not, like the animal "I," be "identity" or equality to itself, but "negating-negativity." In other words, the very being of this I will be becoming and the universal form of this being will not be space, but time. Therefore, its continuation in existence will signify for this I: "not to be what it is (as static and given being, as natural being, as 'innate character') and to be (that is, to become) what it is not. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 5)

The "I" created in and by the satisfaction of desire, of the negation of the other's desire, will be constituted as a desiring being, a being that houses within itself the negativity-negation of its own desire, in other words, a being that is endowed with action, a being that is crossed by static being and its negation, nothingness, by its spatiality and its negation, time. This is why the human "I" will not be identical to itself, it is not purely a static being, but this paradoxical relationship of an "I" that is not what it is, a natural and spatial being, and is also what it is not, a social and temporal being. This is where the Heideggerian ontological difference that we have already talked about reappears, but now within the Hegelian theoretical horizon. This brings us to the heart of the Hegelian-Kojevean theory: the desire of the human being is the desire of the other:

> Now, to desire a Desire is to want to substitute oneself for the value desired by this Desire. For without this substitution, one would desire the value, the desired object, and not the Desire itself. Therefore, to desire the Desire of another is in the final analysis to desire that the value that I am or that I "represent" be the value desired by the other: I want him to "recognize" my value as his value, I want him to "recognize" me as an autonomous value. In other words, all human, anthropogenic Desire-the Desire that generates Self-Consciousness, the human reality – is, finally, a function of the desire for "recognition. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 7)

Desire can only be *anthropogenic*, humanizing, when it has another desire as its negated object, when it makes the desire of the other desire and recognize the value that I myself am or represent, that is, my radical independence from any determination, because, deep down, I am a self-consciousness whose foundation is the very lack of foundation. Kojève gives us two examples to illustrate how the desire for the desire of the other occurs. Both examples show us the ambiguity contained in the statement that

the desire of the human being is the desire of the other. Kojève's first example concerns the erotic desire between two people, who do not desire the body of the other as such, but rather the desire of the other.

> Thus, in the relationship between man and women, for example, Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other; if he wants "to possess" or "to assimilate" the Desire taken as Desire – that is to say, if he wants to be "desired" or "loved," or, rather, "recognized" in his human value, in his reality as a human individual. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 6)

The second example shows that human desire also desires natural objects with the same aim as above, because by desiring natural objects we would not be desiring them in their very naturalness, but for the reason that they are desired by others. In this sense, desiring them is the same as desiring to be recognized. We can see, then, that human desire is guided and permeated by what the other desires, indicating a certain level of alienation of desire, which is guided by the desire of the other. We desire something because the other also desires it; if I possess it, I will be satisfying my desire to be desired and recognized by the other:

> Likewise, Desire directed toward a natural object is human only to the extent that it is "mediated" by the Desire of another directed toward the same object: it is human to desire what others desire, because they desire it. Thus, an object perfectly useless from the biological point of view (such as a medal, or the enemy's flag) can be desired because it is the object of other desires. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 6)

The choice to desire an object is never natural, it is never given, one always desires an object within a social context permeated by other desires that determine the conditions of possibility for my own desire[10]. That's why this second example can be understood as the condition for desire in the first example, because a man's desire for a woman's natural body or vice-versa is also an attempt to desire an object because others desire it.

However, according to Kojève, the recognition of one's value as a self-consciousness does not really take place without first fighting for prestige, in other words, without putting one's own life on the line. Unlike Heidegger, who takes little interest in explaining the process of ontological differentiation, Kojève tries to explain the transcendence of animality into humanity in Hegelian terms. According to the

[10] It's hard not to notice in advance how Lacan will appropriate this social dimension of desire in order to think about the desiring dynamic between the subject and the Other around the phallic signifier.

Russian philosopher, it is by negating the animal desire, based on preserving its life, that the human being realizes and proves itself as self-consciousness, as a void in the heart of being. Negating life, risking one's own animal life, is the movement of transcendence towards the realm of freedom, in which desire no longer has self-preservation as its goal, but the desire for another self-consciousness. Therein lies the struggle for prestige, which takes place between two self-consciousnesses in an attempt to show the other who is really independent, who really risks and negates their natural animality, acquiring the human value of freedom:

> For man to be truly human, for him to be essentially and really different from an animal. his human Desire must actually win out over his animal Desire. Now, all Desire is desire for a value. The supreme value for an animal is its animal life. All the Desires of an animal are in the final analysis a function of its desire to preserve its life. Human Desire, therefore, must win out over this desire for preservation. In other words, man's humanity -"comes to light" only if he risks his (animal) life for the sake of his human Desire. [...] And that is why to speak of the "origin" of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of the risk of life (for an essentially nonvital end). (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 6)

This fight for prestige takes place between two self-consciousnesses, each of which aims to negate its animal life and be recognized for its human value. However, as we know, one of these self-consciousnesses is unable to carry out this movement, because it fears death and gives up to its desire for recognition, to be recognized as free, causing its servitude in the face of the desire of the self-consciousness that actually risked its animal life. Here we find that asymmetrical relationship between master and slave. The master, who risked animal life and transcended animality, is recognized as independent by the slave, who, in turn, feared death and renounced his desire for recognition, is recognized by the master only as a given thing, not as an autonomous self-consciousness.

However, if the master's independence is mediated and recognized by the slave, a thing for the master, then the master is not really an autonomous self-consciousness, because he is being recognized by a thing, a given being. If to be a self-consciousness is to be recognized by another self-consciousness, then the master has in fact deceived himself, because he recognizes the slave as a thing and is recognized by that thing. His life is reduced to enjoying the products of the slave's labor. We then see that the supposed independence and autonomy of the master becomes much more its opposite, he has no freedom. He can remain a master or become a slave, but he doesn't want the

latter position, so he is ontologically reduced to an “I” identical to himself, exactly as a thing.

> But if the Master has no desire to "overcome" – and hence no possibility of “overcoming" – himself as Master (since this would mean, for him, to become a Slave), the Slave has every reason to cease to be a Slave The Master is fixed in his Mastery. He cannot go beyond himself, change, progress. [...] Therefore, Mastery is the supreme given value for him, beyond which he cannot go. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 21-22)

On the other hand, the slave, who was apparently reduced to a thing, shows himself to be the one who actually has freedom, at least the possibility of freedom on his horizon. Although he didn't risk his life because he trembled in the face of death, of the absolute master, he felt anxiety and thus dissolved any fixed determination of his being, thus opening himself up to the possibility of emancipating himself through work, desire *held in check*, which forms an objective reality from which he could finally recognize himself as an independent self-consciousness.

> This slavish consciousness was afraid not for this or that, not for this memento or that, but for its [own] entire essential-reality: it underwent the fear of death, the fear of the absolute Master. By this fear, the slavish Consciousness melted internally; it shuddered deeply and everything fixed-or-stable trembled in it. Now, this pure universal [dialectical] movement, this absolute liquefaction of every stable-support, is the simple-or-undivided essential-reality of Self-consciousness, absolute negating-negativity, *pure Being-for-itself*. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 21)

The servile consciousness has *in itself* the self-consciousness, in other words, in its servile existence is the germ of freedom, the negating negativity that makes it capable of leaving its position of servitude and actually becoming self-conscious. Unlike the master, who cannot change, who is fixed in his thingness, the slave can overcome himself, he is suspended in the original openness of nothingness, as Heidegger would say. The slave's non-fixity is not only in the dissolution of his essential reality through anxiety, it is present in an objectively real way insofar as he works and negates raw nature, forming a human world for himself. Work becomes the way in which the slave gradually denies his ties to the natural world. The slave is the one who manages to produce his own history, his own future:

> The future and History hence belong not to the warlike Master, who

> either dies or preserves himself indefinitely in identity to himself, but to the working Slave. The Slave, in transforming the given World by his work, transcends the given and what is given by that given in himself; hence, he goes beyond himself, and also goes beyond the Master who is tied to the given which, not working, he leaves intact. If the fear of death, incarnated for the Slave nn the person of the warlike Master, is the *sine qua non* of historical progress, it is solely the Slave's work that realizes and perfects it. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 23)

Although the future and History do not belong to the master, Kojève understands that the master is necessary for the process of formation and emancipation of the slave. In fact, the master does not participate in human history, since he does not work and therefore does not help to negate nature and build a human world. However, the master is important because of his role in instilling anxiety in the slave. During the life-and-death fight for prestige, the slave witnessed a terrible power on the part of the master, who became the embodiment of the anxiety of death. It is precisely this anxiety in the face of this absolute master, of death, that makes the slave work and emancipate himself:

> The Master, then, is the catalyst of the historical, anthropogenic process. He himself does not participate actively in this process; but without him, without his presence, this process would not be possible. For, if the history of man is the history of his work, and if this work is historical, social, human, only on the condition that it is carried out against the worker's instinct or "immediate interest", the work must be carried out in the service of another, and must be a force work, simulated by fear of death [...] It is by work in the Master's service performed in terror that the Slave frees himself from the terror that enslaved him to the Master. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 25)

The master is present in human history as the "representation" of death, of the dissolution of the slave's being. The whole of human history, and therefore human work, is carried out at the service of the absolute master. Incarnated in the master, death makes him absolute to the point of transforming him into the indelible mark which makes the slave live to serve the master. Faced with an existence based on and sustained by the horror of death, we can imagine how burdensome and sad it can be. Kojève makes clear the affective atmosphere in which the slave lives his life before the absolute master[11]:

> In mortal terror man becomes aware of his reality, of the value that the

[11] This sad and serious dimension of servile life is a fundamental point for us to understand where Bataille is coming from in opposing the Hegelian dialectic transmitted by his master Kojève. We see here that the joy and lightness of laughter are completely excluded from the slave's historical process.

> simple fact of living has for him; only thus does he take account of the "seriousness" of existence. But he is not yet aware of his autonomy, of the value and the "seriousness" of his liberty, of his human dignity. […] It is not sufficient to be afraid, nor even to be afraid while realizing that one fears death. It is necessary to live in terms of terror. Now, to live in such a way is to serve someone whom one fears, someone who inspires or incarnates terror; it is to serve a Master. […] It is by serving another, by externalizing oneself, by binding oneself to others, that one is liberated from the enslaving dread that the idea of death inspires. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 24-28)

Noting the importance Hegel attributes to seriousness in order to achieve absolute knowledge, Kojève observes that the slave's existence is serious. This seriousness, according to him, is due to the finite nature of human beings, the possibility that they can make mistakes and fail in their purpose: "The finiteness of every historical action – that is, the possibility of an absolute failure – is what engenders the seriousness characteristic of a man's actual participation in History" (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 253). In the seriousness of working on a reciprocal basis, human beings are able to recognize themselves in the product of their work, in this world whose image reflects themselves, in other words, a world in which the "essence" of the human being, of the slave, is no longer alienated from them, in which they are in fact the foundation of themselves, with no master to dominate them. Since the section of this work dedicated to Hegel, we know that this social configuration corresponds to the ultimate figure of consciousness, absolute knowledge, the moment that would establish an effectively symmetrical relationship between everyone, that in fact the *I* would be a *We* and the *We* would be an *I*. In Kojève's reading, absolute knowledge would be the same as the "end of history", when Hegel's circular system would come to an ultimate end. At the end of history, all the contradictions between subject and object, thought and being, bourgeoisie and proletariat would be definitively resolved. Because he doesn't postulate any transcendent foundation for the human world itself, Kojève believes that at the end of history human beings will actually face death, finally becoming aware of their radical finitude:

> It is death that engenders Man in Nature, and it is death that makes him progress to his final destiny, which is that of the Wise Man fully conscious of himself and therefore fully conscious of his own finitude. Thus, Man does not arrive at Wisdom or at the fullness of self-consciousness so long as, in the way of the vulgar, he feigns an ignorance of the Negativity that is the very source of his human existence, and that is manifest in him and to him, not only as struggle

> and labor, but moreover as death or absolute finitude. (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 133)

In absolute knowledge, the self-conscious human being, unlike the ordinary person, would be completely aware of his death, would have faced and dealt with the nothingness that "grounds" his existence, understanding himself as absolutely finite. It's as if in absolute knowledge, at the end of history, the human being finally can live an authentic existence, as Heidegger would say. Of course, the concept of the end of history does not appear in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*; it is much more the result of Koyré's misreading of Hegel, which Kojève appropriates in order to understand the totality of the Hegelian system. According to Kojève,

> It is known that Hegel asserted that his knowledge is circular, and that circularity is the *necessary* and *sufficient* condition of *absolute* truth – that is of *complete*, *universal*, and *definitive* (or "eternal") truth. […] This conception entails a very important consequence: Wisdom can be realized, according to Hegel, only at the end of History. It was always known that for Hegel, not only does the coming of Wisdom complete History, but also that this coming is possible only at the end of History. This is known, but why this is true is not always very well understood. (KOJÈVE, 1980, p. 94-95)

In Kojève's reading, the circularity of knowledge would imply its ultimate and eternal completion, which would be enough to affirm that Hegel was presupposing the end of history, or rather, using a religious expression of Hegel that Kojève takes from the *Lessons on the History of Philosophy* and the *Lessons on the Philosophy of Religion*, the Sunday of life. Working and serving the anxiety of death during the week, on Sunday, the slave finally gets to rest after having finished his work. He could finally rest because he had dealt with his nothingness, now his anxiety in the face of death no longer horrifies him, he is at peace with his finitude. Without fear of death, without the absolute master, there is no longer any reason to work. During the week the slave was employed, working in anxiety and building his world, on Sunday he finds himself unemployed, without any anxiety and with nothing to do.

In *The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel*, Kojève reflects on the place of death in its relationship with human desire and its ultimate satisfaction in absolute knowledge, at the end of history. According to the Russian philosopher, "Hegel's absolute Knowledge or Wisdom and the conscious acceptance of death understood as complete and definitive annihilation are one and the same" (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 124). As we said above, absolute knowledge is synonymous with authentic existence for Kojève,

the unreserved acceptance of human finitude that stems from the absence of any transcendent foundation. Having finally accepted his finitude, the human being becomes singular, becomes aware of his freedom and radical independence within his history and practical action. He no longer relies on any kind of otherworld. This is why absolute knowledge for Kojève corresponds to the complete satisfaction of the human desire for recognition, because the value that it is in itself is effectively recognized. To corroborate his thesis, Kojève refers us to a passage of "capital importance" located in the preface to the Hegelian work:

> Death, if we wish so to call that unreality (Unwirklichkeit) is what-there-is-that-is-most-terrible (Furchtbarste), and to sustain [maintenir] death is what requires the greatest force. Powerless beauty hates the understanding, because it [the understanding] demands (zumutet) this of it; which it [beauty] is not capable of. Now the life of the Spirit is not [that] life which shudders (scheut) before death and [merely] protects itself (rein bewahrt) from wasting-away (Verwiistung), but [it is] that [life] which supports death and conserves (erhalt) itself in it. Spirit achieves its truth only in finding itself in absolute rending (Zerrissenheit). It [Spirit] is not this [prodigious] power by being the Positive which turns away (wegsieht) from the Negative, as when we say of something: this is nothing or [this is] false, and having [thus] gotten rid of it (damit fertig), we pass on therefrom to something else; no, Spirit is that power only to the extent that it contemplates the Negative full in the face (ins Angesicht schaut) [and] abides (verweilt) with it. This abiding-with [sejour-prolonge] (Verweilen) is the magical-force (Zauberkraft) which transposes (umkehrt) the Negative into given-Being (sein). (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 124)

With this passage, Kojève seeks to emphasize the importance, in Hegel himself, of the unreal negativity of death as the motor responsible for the life of Spirit, of absolute knowledge. Spirit as such is not terrified of death, it faces it head-on and endures the absolute tearing apart by abiding with it. The result of this tearing apart is the transposition of the negative into Being-given, in other words, the tearing negativity of death produces something new, and this is the movement of the human being throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* according to Kojève: the continuous recognition of oneself as being-for-death, finite being, to the point where this desire for recognition is satisfied in absolute knowing. But for this to happen, it is necessary to abide with death, it is necessary to tear oneself apart next to the negativity of death: "It is death that engenders Man in Nature, and it is death that makes him progress to his final destiny, which is that of the Wise Man fully conscious of himself and therefore

fully conscious of his own finitude" (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 133). The absolute master, death, which haunts and horrifies the human being, is what makes him develop his awareness of his own finitude. This death is not something external to the human being, it is within his being, which is why "he is [a] death that lives a human life" (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 134). He is the negative incarnation of death in a natural body.

It is important to note that, according to Kojève's scheme, death in absolute knowledge would be subject to independence, that is, the negativity of death would be subject to the positivity of the value of independence that the human being acquires by knowing that he is the foundation of himself, without any possible transcendent God:

> Now it is only by being, and by feeling to be, mortal or finite that is, by existing and feeling himself to exist, in a universe without a beyond and without a God that Man can affirm and make known his liberty, his historicity, and his individuality, [ah] “unique in the world”. (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 135)

The ultimate satisfaction of the human desire to recognize itself as the value that it is coincides with the complete closure and completion of the Hegelian system, in which the human being acquires a positive determination in the face of its lack of foundation, in the face of its fundamentally negative determination. The anxiety of death remains insurmountable, and work is the activity that could guarantee some kind of positive foundation. Laughter is not mentioned or thematized in any of Kojève's texts that we have discussed here. Using a Heideggerian jargon, we could say that Kojève suffers from a forgetfulness of laughter. However, one of his most laughable and subversive disciples, Bataille, will not let this go unnoticed and will try to find in the seriousness of dialectical negativity the moment of laughter, of an excessive negativity that produces *nothing* (*rien*).

3. Georges Bataille: the concept of laughter

It is well known that Georges Bataille was not only influenced by Kojève's reading of Hegel, but was also strongly influenced by the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Bataille's appropriation of Kojève's Hegel is not just a mere assimilation of the Hegelian theoretical framework, but goes in the direction of going beyond the limits of dialectical rationality, that is, scrutinizing what happens to human beings once they reach the end of history, absolute knowledge. Bataille intends to think about the human being beyond the sad and serious atmosphere of work, beyond desire as lack and sad anxiety in the face of death. Unlike Hegel and Kojève, Bataille understands that desire is lack only when it is seen from the point of view of the restricted economy of the productive negativity of dialectics. This restricted economy, however, would find itself on the broader horizon of the general economy, guided by desire as exuberance and excess. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche appear as two philosophical sources that help him not only to explore this general economy of excess that subverts the restricted economy of the productive negativity of dialectics, but also to provide him with a series of concepts that enable him to propose a new joyful and sovereign concept of anxiety that overcomes the servile and serious way of dealing with death. We will now see that the process of elaborating this new joyful and sovereign concept of anxiety is, in fact, the attempt to create a *concept of laughter*.

3.1. Servile anxiety and sovereign anxiety

3.1.1. Sacrifice and unemployed negativity

Attentive to Kojève's reading of Hegel, Bataille's thinking was strongly influenced by the Russian philosopher. This influence was not only expressed within his thought, but in his own singular existence, as expressed in the following statement in *On Nietzsche*:

> From 1933 (I think) to 1939, I followed the course that Alexandre Kojève devoted to the explication of the Phenomenology of Spirit (brilliant explication, equal to the book: how often Queneau and I left the little room suffocated-suffocated, nailed). During the same period, through countless readings, I kept current with developments in the

> sciences. But Kojève's course broke me, crushed me, killed me ten times. (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 281)

The reader is amazed at the impact these classes had on Bataille, especially when, at first, we realize that it was a course on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a work that deals with epistemological, political and aesthetic issues. Obviously, such themes can touch and cross the existential dimension of those who deal with them, but even so, Bataille tells us that Kojève's classes broke, crushed and killed him ten times over. Perhaps one way of understanding the reason for Bataille's virulence lies in the fact that his teacher's lectures, as we have seen, were a Heideggerian reading of religious thought in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. By approaching each of the figures of consciousness as a religious attitude towards nothingness, in which human existence is suspended, Kojève offered his students a perspective according to which Hegelian philosophy was a philosophy of atheism, precisely because the summit of the circle of Hegelian knowledge closes at absolute knowledge, the moment when human beings effectively become aware of their death and their lack of foundation. Kojève also states that at the end of history, human beings become their own "God":

> If one wants to talk about "God" in Hegel, therefore, one must not forget that this "God's" past is Man: it is a Man who has become "God," and not a God who has become Man (and who, moreover, again becomes God). […] Thus the Phenomenology ends with a radical denial of all transcendence. Revealed-infinite-eternal-Being – that is, the absolute Spirit – is the infinite or eternal being of this same Being that existed as universal History. This is to say-that the Infinite in"question's Man's infinite. (KOJÈVE, 1980, 167)

Having said that, Bataille's feelings of being torn apart are understandable, because, as far as we know, the question of the end of history was a subject of great interest to him. What would actually happen at this moment? What would human beings be without fear of the absolute master, death? What would he be without working, since he defined himself through his work? What would be the existential consequences of the human being becoming "God"? These and other questions must have tormented, crushed and in fact killed Bataille ten times over. It is probably for no other reason that, in 1937, Bataille drafted a letter addressed to X, Kojève. The letter deals precisely with the theme of the end of history, in which we see Bataille beginning his immanent twisting of Kojève's own Hegelian system:

> Si l'action (le «faire») est comme dit Hegel la négativité, la question se

> pose alors de savoir si la négativité de qui n'a « plus rien à faire » disparaît ou subsiste à l'état de "négativité sans emploi »: personnellement, je ne puis décider que dans un sens, étant moi-même exactement cette « négativité sans emploi » (je ne pourrais me définir de façon plus précise). Je veux bien que Hegel ait prévu cette possibilité : du moins ne l'a-t-il pas située à l'issue des processus qu'il a décrits. (BATAILLE, 1973a, p. 369)

The issue here is the ontological status of the human being from the moment when its negativity is no longer employed, that is, when it ceases to be a negativity that works by producing, forming and cultivating the different figures of consciousness. This employed negativity is what Hegel calls determinate negation, the driving force behind the dialectical movement of the entire *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Determinate negation for Hegel is the way to propose a radical skepticism, a form of negation that doesn't annihilate determinations and reduces them to an abstract nothingness, to a mere “no”. Unlike the negation of abstract skepticism, Hegel's skepticism understands that negation is always a “not-this”, a “nothing-this”, which consequently produces a new determination from the previous negation, and so on. Each new determination, the result of a determinate negation, immanently contains the negation of itself, making determinate negation understood as the work of the negative, a work that negates an immediate given. Determinate negation, this work of the negative through which something is produced, would be responsible for the development of the figures of consciousness. Consciousness, by immanently and incessantly negating itself, would, according to Hegel, not follow the path of doubt, but the path of despair:

> Natural consciousness will prove to be only the concept of knowledge, or knowledge that is not real. But natural consciousness immediately takes itself to be real knowledge, and so this path has a negative meaning for it, and it counts what is in fact the realization of the concept as the loss of its own self; for on this path it loses its truth. The path can therefore be regarded as the way of doubt, or more precisely as the way of despair; for what happens on this path is not what is usually understood by doubting, shaking some supposed truth or other, followed by a convenient disappearance of the doubt and a return to that truth again, so that in the end the Thing is taken as it was in the first place. (HEGEL, 2018, p. 37)

Each of the figures of conscience, or religious attitudes, according to Kojève, goes through the despair of losing the truth that it supposed itself to be or to have, because at the limit of its pretensions to truth, it is faced with its untruth, with its limit in relation to what it initially intended. This movement is felt by consciousness as the loss

of itself, losing its truth. Because of the virulence of this negativity, no consciousness would be saved from this loss of self, thus making the path to absolute knowledge a path of despair. Determinate negation, immanent to the figure of consciousness, is responsible both for its death and for the birth of another, more developed and complex figure. The work of determinate negation destroys in order to build, which is why it is at the heart of the architecture of the Hegelian system.

It was this determinate negation that Kojève was talking about when he quoted that passage of "capital importance" from the preface to the *Phenomenology*. Death in Hegel, according to the Russian philosopher, is thought of within the horizon of a determinate negativity, because death in Kojève's Hegel is a death that produces, a death that has the purpose of producing positivity at the heart of its negativity. This is evident in Kojève's absolute knowledge, since it implies the ultimate positivity of the human being to the extent that he becomes radically aware of his finitude. The summit of the negativity of death is, for Kojève, the summit of the independent life of the human being. Death, the negative, is always subjected to independent life, to the positive. This is why Kojève understood that the end of history would be the moment of rest for the worker, because the determinate negation of death would finally be contained.

Let's go back to the question that Bataille asks himself when facing the end of history. What happens to human negativity when it is no longer employed, when the work of determinate negation comes to an end and can rest on the Sunday of life? Bataille's answer is that the end of history would not put an end to negativity as such. Human work, desire held in check, at the summit of absolute knowledge, would be satisfied, but this satisfaction would not be complete, because it would give rise to dissatisfaction insofar as there would still be negativity, desire: unemployed negativity[12]. Now, on the Sunday of life, there is still negativity, but one that doesn't work. This idle negativity, like the other negativity, is desire, but it's a desire that doesn't operate through determinate negation, because it doesn't work, it's a “négativité vide de contenu” (BATAILLE, 1973a, p.371). If this is the case, what does this desire desire?

In *Hegel, Death and Sacrifice*, Bataille deepens his reflections on this negativity devoid of content, this new conception of desire. He states that “the privileged manifestation of Negativity is death, but death, in fact, reveals nothing” (BATAILLE,

[12] There we already find an important idea for the entire generation formed by Kojève's classes: the satisfaction of desire is never complete, because there is always something left, the satisfaction of desire does not end in completeness, but in its incompleteness.

1990, p. 19). He understands that precisely because this negativity is void of content, death becomes the only way for this void to be realized, in other words, this desire is a desire to die, to torture, to sacrifice. Taking up and re-appropriating some of Kojève's ideas about death in Hegel and some of the German philosopher's own quotes, Bataille argues that if the human being is an unemployed negativity, void of content, then he is death itself, nothingness. He begins the article with the following quote from Hegel, which comes from the *Conferences of 1805-1806*, the period in which he was writing his *Phenomenology*:

> Man is this night, this empty Nothingness, which contains everything in its undivided-simplicity (Einfachheit): a wealth of an infinite number of representations, of images, no one of which precisely attains to the spirit [dont aucune ne lui vient précisément à l'esprit], or [even morel which are not as really-present (gegenwartig). It is the night, the interiority-or-intimacy (Innere) of Nature, which exists here: [i.e.,] [the] pure personal-Self. [...] It is this night that we perceive when we look into a man's eyes: [we then immerse our gaze) in a night that becomes terrible (furchtbar); it is the night of the world which [then] presents itself (hangt entgegen) to us. (HEGEL *apud* KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 155)

A long quote that attempts to highlight the radical negativity that constitutes the human being. If, on the one hand, this unemployed negativity, this night, is at the core of the human being, on the other hand, the negativity employed, the determined negation, would only be a further manifestation of this night. Thus, Bataille is trying to distinguish two types of desire that operate from different, but not mutually exclusive, negativities. One desire would be the desire for death, the other would be the desire to recognize oneself as independent[13]. For Kojève, desire was only the desire to recognize oneself as independent, which implied submitting the negativity of death to the positivity of human independence. For Bataille, human desire is fundamentally a desire for sacrifice, because only sacrifice is capable of revealing to human beings the death that they themselves are. This becomes clearer in the following passage, in which Bataille draws on the Kojèvean reading of Hegel's "formula" concerning the life of the Spirit in the face of the laceration of death. Bataille explains further how he conceives of this desire for unemployed negativity, devoid of content:

[13] Understanding the difference between the determined negativity of dialectics and the unemployed negativity of sacrifice is fundamental to understanding the distinction we will soon make between anxiety in its dimension of expectation and instant. This is where the presence of a negativity that produces a sad and a joyful anxiety begins to emerge.

> Actually, the problem of Hegel is given in the action of sacrifice. In sacrifice, death, on the one hand, essentially strikes the corporeal being; and on the other hand, it is precisely in sacrifice that "death lives a human life." It should even be said that sacrifice is the precise response to Hegel's requirement, the original formulation of which I repeat. (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 18)

We can see how Bataille is twisting the Kojèvean reading of Hegel. When Kojève says that the human being is "[a] death that lives a human life" (KOJÈVE, 1973, p. 134), he means that the human being is a negativity-negating, a nothingness, a desire for recognition that has its ultimate satisfaction in absolute knowledge. However, as we have seen, absolute knowledge submits the negativity of death to the positive recognition of the human being as independent, death is not really lived. So, in the end, the human being is not fulfilled as the death that he himself is. On the other hand, the desire to sacrifice is in fact the human desire that best represents the movement of the spirit to face death head-on, because through sacrifice death is actually lived, that is, it is not postponed, refused or subjected to the positivity of the recognition of human independence. In this sense, it is only in sacrifice that death lives a human life, because death, which is the human being, is actually living human life, that is, death itself. Death is experiencing itself, or rather, the human being is experiencing its own death as such. Thus, the desire for unemployed negativity, for death, what the human being is as such, does not seek the mere consciousness of human finitude, which in the Kojèvean scheme would mean the recognition of a positivity independent of the human being, but death as such. In other words, the desire for unemployed negativity does not want positive recognition of itself, but negative non-knowledge of “itself”, which in turn calls into question the ipseity of “itself”. Therefore, for Bataille, the core of human desire is desire for sacrifice.

However, for death to really live a human life, death itself would have to be revealed to the human being, but it is nothingness itself, unemployed negativity, devoid of content, and so it reveals *nothing*:

> In theory, it is his natural, animal being whose death reveals Man to himself, but the revelation never takes place. For when the animal being supporting him dies, the human being himself ceases to be. In order for Man to reveal himself ultimately to himself, he would have to die, but he would have to do it while living – watching himself ceasing to be. In other words, death itself would have to become (self-)consciousness at the very moment that it annihilates the conscious being. (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 19)

The question then arises as to how human beings can actually reveal their own death without actually dying, because if they objectively die, they won't be able to reveal anything. Bataille's answer is that the human being always needs a subterfuge, in other words, a spectacle: “This difficulty proclaims the necessity of spectacle, or of representation in general, without the practice of which it would be possible for us to remain alien and ignorant in respect to death, just as beasts apparently are” (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 20). This is where sacrifice comes into play once again, because, relying on the investigations of Mauss and Hubert found in *On Sacrifice*, Bataille realizes very well how their description of the sacrificial spectacle provides scientific support for what he is proposing from his twisting of Hegel. In the essay, the French anthropologists begin by listing and describing the main characters in this spectacle: the sacrifier, who is responsible for immolating the victim; the sacrificer, the priest who mediates between the sacrificer and the victim; the place and the instruments, the location and time of the scene, as well as the instruments used to carry out the ritual and, finally, the victim: “The scene is now set. The actors are ready. The entry of the victim will mark the beginning of the drama” (MAUSS & HUBERT, 1964, p. 28). As they point out, the victim in the sacrifice is not something external to the sacrifier; to say that it is associated with the sacrifier is not enough either. Basically, what happens is that the sacrifier identifies with the victim so much that what happens to the victim is felt by the sacrifier as if it were happening to him. The victim

> is merged in him. The two personalities are fused together. At least in the Hindu ritual this identification even becomes so complete that from then onwards the future fate of the victim, its imminent death, has a kind of reverse effect upon the sacrifier. Hence an ambiguous situation results for the latter. He needs to touch the animal in order to remain united with it, and yet is afraid to do so, for in so doing he runs the risk of sharing its fate. The ritual resolves the difficulty by taking a middle course. The sacrifier touches the victim only through the priest, who himself only touches it through the intermediary of one of the instruments of sacrifice. (MAUSS & HUBERT, 1964, p. 32)

It is this spectacular structure of sacrifice that Bataille is referring to when he mentions the need for a spectacle so that human beings can reveal their death to themselves. Sacrifice, therefore, is the paradigm of this strange human desire not for recognition, but for death. By watching the victim die, the sacrificer watches himself die, but in the end, the latter doesn't die, and the tragedy becomes a comedy: “In the

sacrifice, the sacrificer identifies himself with the animal that is struck down dead. And so he dies in seeing himself die, and even, in a certain way, by his own will, one in spirit with the sacrificial weapon. But it is a comedy!" (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 19).

Bataille then deals with the pleasurable aspect of this satisfaction of the desire to die, of sacrifice. Kojève dismissed the idea of a kind of happiness or pleasure in the satisfaction of recognition, because the awareness of death would not make human beings happier or give them pleasure. The satisfaction of the desire for recognition would only offer human beings a sense of pride, a feeling that they are now the masters of their own history, different from all other beings. However, Bataille, now furnished with another concept of desire, affirms that the satisfaction of this strange desire for sacrifice and tearing apart can be reconciled with pleasure. According to him,

> *pleasure*, or at least sensual pleasure, is such that in respect to it Kojève's affirmation would be difficult to uphold: the idea of death helps, in a certain manner and in certain cases, to multiply the pleasures of the senses. I go so far as to believe that, under the form of defilement, the world (or rather the general imagery) of death is at the base of erotism. (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 23)

Although the laceration of sacrifice can be reconciled with pleasure, this doesn't mean that human beings aren't saddened by death in their daily lives. In fact, the sad way of dealing with death is the most recurrent within the horizon of rationality. This was made clear in the passages of the *Introduction to reading Hegel* where we saw Kojève underlining the degree of seriousness that death brought to human life, making life heavy to live. However, this does not mean, for Bataille, that it is not possible to experience anxiety and the death it implies in a joyful way. Sacrifice is once again taken up by him, since in sacrificial rituals it is possible to find a festive dimension, announcing "a blind, pernicious joy and all the danger of that joy, and yet this is precisely the principle of human joy; it wears out and threatens with death all who get caught up in its movement" (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 23).

This principle of human joy points to a curious relationship that human beings establish not only between pleasure and death, but between death and joy. The French philosopher gives two examples to show this relationship. He tells us about the Irish and Welsh custom of the wake, which consists of laying the coffin of a dead person open, while family and friends start an intense party with dancing and drinking. Also notable is Mexico's Day of the Dead, where everyone deals with death in an amusing and

playful way. By this, Bataille is not saying that dealing joyfully with death means ignoring it, diminishing its importance:

> On the contrary, gaiety, connected with the work of death, causes me anguish, is accentuated by my anguish, and in return exacerbates that anguish: ultimately, gay anguish, anguished gaiety cause me, in a feverish chill, "absolute dismemberment," where it is my joy that finally tears me apart, but where dejection would follow joy were I not torn all the way to the end, immeasurably. (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 25)

It is within this theoretical horizon that Bataille hints at two possible ways of dealing with the anxiety of death: a sad and servile way, represented by the slave who is horrified by death and works to avoid it, and a joyful and sovereign way, represented by the master who risks his life, facing death head-on. In other words, the servile way of dealing with anxiety is found in the world of work, which is based on utilitarian and calculating rationality with the aim of conserving life, that is, avoiding death, the greatest human limit, the ultimate interdict of his existence. In this everyday life, human labor, with its desire held in check, negates and consumes the object of raw nature in a rational manner, forming a cohesive and minimally intelligible, grounded world. The other way of dealing with anxiety corresponds to a sovereign attitude, which carries with it a disruptive and sudden dimension, at which point the order and harmony of the world of work is shattered and interrupted.

In this theoretical framework, we realize that although Bataille is using Hegelian concepts, he is subverting a certain grammar of finitude inherent in his system, a grammar that is anchored in dialectics, in determinate negation, in the work of the negative. As we have seen above, this negativity cannot reveal the unemployed negativity that the human being is, but, as Bataille observes, the Hegelian system has in itself the way out of itself: "one cannot say that Hegel was unaware of the ‘moment’ of sacrifice; this ‘moment’ is included, implicated in the whole movement of the *Phenomenology* — where it is the Negativity of death, insofar as it is assumed, which makes a man of the human animal” (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 21). We can see here a trait that runs throughout Bataille's philosophical itinerary, which is to find in Hegelian philosophy a negativity that implodes negativity itself. Recognizing within the Hegelian system that which allows it to be deconstructed, Bataille, in *Inner Experience*, criticizes Kierkegaard, who failed to see that Hegel already provided the key to getting out of it in his system:

> No one more than him understood in depth the possibilities of intelligence (no doctrine is comparable to his-it is the summit of positive intelligence). Kierkegaard made a superficial critique of it in that: 1) he had an imperfect knowledge of it; 2) he only opposes the system to the world of positive revelation, not to that of man's non-knowledge. (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 109)

Hegel would have extended the possibility of intelligence, of reason, to the point where his system shows the possibility of what escapes the rationality of its architectonics, which is why Kierkegaard's critique, despite being important because it highlights the importance of the singular, still remains superficial. In this sense, Bataille understands his own effort as paradoxical to say the least: to speak discursively, from within the servile rationality of the Hegelian dialectic, of what cannot be spoken of by it, that is, everything that appears as sovereignty and is eluded by reason: "to emerge through project from the realm of project." (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 46). This is not an easy task, because

> La conscience se refuse à la totalité du monde et elle nie piteusement ce qui l'excède […] Elle émascule tout, elle mutile le monde, mais que faire? Que j'entre dans son jeu pour la battre avec ses armes, je luis ressemble et c'en est fait de ma violence. Je suis à sa façon un petit homme parlant, faisant de la parole sa loi. (BATAILLE, 1988b, 524)

Using the servile rationality of discourse and dialectics to get out of it is not a task that presupposes a position outside of itself; it has to be done within what you want to get out of. Sovereignly dealing with the anxiety of death has no place, therefore, outside the servile way of dealing with it. With this in mind, let's take a closer look at each of these dimensions of human existence.

3.1.2. The servile expectation and the sovereign moment

The question of the temporality experienced by human beings is central to understanding what is servile and sovereign about these ways of dealing with the anxiety of death. The world of work is servile because every action or project is made with the future in mind, always postponing the ultimate consumption of the product of labor. Even when there is consumption, it is done in a calculated and regimented way, since it is aimed at the future, not the present moment: "We can say, in other words, that

it is servile to consider duration first, to use present time for the sake of the future, which is what we do when we work." (BATAILLE, 1988a p. 198) For Bataille, human beings experience this world of work in a servile way in their monotonous daily lives, because everything in it serves a purpose, namely not to die. Similar to the Heideggerian *Dasein*, in whose average daily life he occupies himself with utensils at hand, the servitude pointed out by the French philosopher takes place in a context of expectation about the future. Existence is always outside of itself, it is an *ek-stase*. Faced with the possibility of impossibility, i.e. death, the absolute master, the human being works:

> "Action" is utterly dependent upon project. And what is serious, is that discursive thought is itself engaged in the mode of existence of project. […] Project is not only the mode of existence implied by action, necessary to action – it is a way of being in paradoxical time: it is the putting off of existence to a later point. (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 46)

In this postponed existence, therefore, we find ourselves in a desiring economy based on lack, since the human being, in recognizing himself through his work, a desire held in check, needs to negate an object in order to satisfy his desire for recognition. In this servile existence of the anxiety of death, of nothingness, human beings work to refuse the radical nature of this death by becoming independent, one with themselves, as if they could submit their nothingness to the positivity built up by their work. This search for identity is what Bataille calls the "will to autonomy". Anxious because of his incompleteness, his unfinishedness, the human being works to heal this wound of the negative that he himself is: "This being *ipse*, itself constituted from parts and, as such – being result, unpredictable chance – enters into the universe as the will for autonomy" (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 85). Here we find Bataille's appropriation of Kojève's Hegelian reflections. According to the French thinker, therefore, servile existence is an existence of *ipseity*, that is, one in which human beings seek autonomy and identity with themselves through work, dominating and negating objects. It's important to remember that servile existence doesn't just concern work *per se*, but all actions that imply the postponement of existence, all human projects permeated by discursiveness, intention, will and expectation. All these servile ways of existing involve the anxiety of death and the desire for recognition through the relationship between a subject and an object, an

attempt to achieve autonomy, identity and completeness through the negation and assimilation of objects.

This is why we say that servile existence is based on a desiring economy of lack, because in it there are supposed objects capable of filling the lack of a ground in human existence. In the end, the anxiety of death that drives the servile desire for the life of work gives human life a weight of seriousness, a gravity that melancholizes it:

> je hais l'angoisse qui : a) me fatigue; - b) me rend la vie à charge, me laisse incapable de vivre; c) me retire l'innocence. L'angoisse est culpabilité. […] L'innocence est d'ailleurs une idée abstraite, l'absence de culpabilité ne peut être négative: elle est gloire. Le contraire, à la rigueur: l'absence de gloire est la culpabilité. Coupable signifie sans accès à la gloire. (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 343)

In this passage, which mixes autobiographical and theoretical dimensions, Bataille specifies what kind of anxiety he hates. He doesn't hate any kind of anxiety, but that which is felt on the horizon of servile existence. This anxiety confines the human being to a discontinuous, isolated and oppressive existence. The main point here is to understand the link that Bataille makes between servile anxiety and a sad and serious life, incapable of being lived. This servile existence that experiences the horror of anxiety, based on a desiring economy of lack, leads to a certain kind of nihilism, since the present is lived for the sake of the future. It is only in the beyond, that is, in the future, in absolute knowledge, that I will be able to realize myself, never here and now. In anxiety, "tout est lassant, trop d'obstacles me lassent" (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 295). In this primacy of the future of servile existence, in fear of death, human beings get involved in projects that make them experience a constant expectation (*attente*) of the next project, the next action. According to Bataille, in his article *La souveraineté*:

> La crainte de la mort apparaît dès l'abord liée à la projection de soi dans le temps futur qui, étant un effet de la position de soi comme une chose, est en même temps la condition de l'individualisation consciente. C'est l'être que le travail rendit consciemment individuel qui est dans l'angoisse. L'homme est toujours plus ou moins dans l'angoisse, parce qu'il est toujours dans l'attente: dans une attente qu'il faut nommer attente de soi. Car il doit se saisir soi-même dans le temps futur, à travers les résultats escomptés de son action. (BATAILLE, 1976a, p. 266)

However, sometimes this expectation is suddenly frustrated and something extraordinary occurs, something that interferes with and disrupts the harmonious order

of the world of work: the miracle. If we can understand this rational world of work as a profane world, which has been completely disenchanted by the instrumental rationality of the orderly and efficient administration of production, distribution and consumption, then everything that is not reduced to this profane world presents such heterogeneity that it is felt as something sacred, something outworldly. It is in this context that we can understand what Bataille calls a miracle: an event whose heterogeneity acquires a sacred status in the face of the profane and servile homogeneity of the world of work, an event which, because it calls into question the ordering of this world, is not servile, it is sovereign. The miracle

> C'est en effet l'instant où nous sommes jetés hors de l'attente, de l'attente, misère habituelle de l'homme, de l'attente qui asservit, qui subordonne l'instant présent à quelque résultat attendu. Justement, dans le miracle, nous sommes rejetés de l'attente de l'avenir à la présence de l'instant, de l'instant éclairé par une lumière miraculeuse, lumière de la souveraineté de la vie délivrée de sa servitude. (BATAILLE, 1976a, p. 257)

The moment[14] corresponds to a certain type of cut made in this existence suspended in the expectation of the future, a cut that brings human beings into the present, making them actually live what was previously only being postponed. By not obeying the servile and profane temporality of the world of work, the moment is felt as something miraculous, acquiring a divine aspect in the face of profane everyday life. Expectation (*l'attente*) plays a fundamental role, because it is in this expectant and postponed life of the servile man that something can arise that frustrates this expectation. In everyday life, the individual gets up, has breakfast, works, has lunch, works and goes to sleep with the expectation of achieving autonomy and thus building a world endowed with meaning and foundation, where nothing wavers. With the miracle, Bataille is telling us that something happens, something disappoints this expectation and everything results in *nothing*, in the absence of meaning or purpose:

> Chaque fois qu'elle se résout en RIEN, l'attente déçue suggère un soudain renversement du cours de la vie. Parfois une crise de rire ou de larmes épuise la possibilité d'effervescence qui s'ouvre à ce moment. Mais souvent la transgressions amorcée se développe en transgressions démesurée: l'attente déçue annonce le règne de l'instant, frayant la voie du désordre sexuel et de la violence, de la

[14] We'll go into the Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean heritages of this concept later when we deal with sovereign anxiety as laughter, a wasteful repetition. That's why it's important for us to look at the concept of the moment now.

> festivité et des dilapidations effrénées. (BATAILLE, 1976a, p. 211)

In a footnote to the same article, Bataille observes that when he speaks of the miraculous experience of the moment, he is not talking about the *néant* of the philosophers, that is, nothingness as the locus of a negating negativity capable of being recognized in its ontological independence, but of an even more radical nothingness, a nothingness that appears in the realm of the moment as simply *rien*, as *no-thing*. So when expectation results in nothing, we're dealing here with that unemployed negativity that doesn't obey the rationality, purpose, teleology and productivity of employed negativity, of the world of work. We can say that this nothing is a negativity that doesn't affirm anything or posit anything, that doesn't produce anything, which in turn means that it's not a rational and measured negativity, but an excessive negativity, negating without any expectation of the future. Therefore, nothing is felt as an excess, an unbridled and senseless negation, without any impediment to consuming everything in the present moment; it is, therefore, pure indeterminacy. It is for this reason that frustrated expectations open human beings up to experiences as overwhelming as those he described in the previous passage, because they are "expressions" of that moment in which the negativity employed in the world of work is unemployed, opening it up to a virulent excessiveness. This moment is precisely the moment when human beings deal with the anxiety of death in a sovereign way[15].

A sovereign way of dealing with death does not mean overcoming death as such, but overcoming the fear of it, without submitting to the servile effects that this fear imposes on the human being. If the fear of death in servile existence causes human beings to see themselves dying humanly, that is, imagining the possibility of their terrible death in the future, in the sovereign existence of the moment they do not die humanly:

> Si nous vivons souverainement, la représentation de la mort est impossible, car le présent n'est plus soumis à l'exigence du futur. C'est pourquoi, d'une manière fondamentale, vivre souverainement, c'est échapper, sinon à la mort, à l'angoisse de la mort du moins. Non que mourir soit haïssable - mais vivre servile est haïssable. L'homme

[15] If before we were differentiating dialectical negativity from unemployed negativity in order to make anxiety understandable as a servile expectation and as a sovereign instant, now this last distinction is what will soon allow us to perceive in Bataille two concepts of desire: a servile desire, based on lack, and another sovereign desire, based on excess. These differentiations are important because they already provide the coordinates for understanding how Bataille opposes sad anxiety to joyful anxiety, i. e. laughter.

> souverain échappe à la mort en ce sens: il ne peut mourir *humainement*. (BATAILLE, 1976a, p. 267)

In political terms, considering the philosophical grammar of the modern western tradition, we can retain to the central idea that sovereignty has to do with not depending on anything or anyone to legislate, that is, to define the rules that should orientate (social) action: sovereign is the stance that autonomously determine the normative environment in which the subject lives (and dies). However, here Bataille radicalizes its meaning: sovereignty doesn't even depend on the laws that one institutes to oneself or others; in other words, sovereignty implies not submitting to the need to be oneself, to a fixed identity, as if the determinate character of these laws had a sort of reflection on determining the character of the subject bounded to them, or at their "service" (hence, a servile subject). To live sovereignly is to risk one's life, which means that the sovereign is the one who confronts the servile life he is submitted to. This is expressed in that moment when the negativity employed is stripped of its usefulness, the moment when the sacred light of the miracle illuminates the profane world. So, in the end, to live a sovereign life is to not retreat from experiencing an excessive and lacerating moment inherent in unemployed negativity, the moment of *rien*. As well as this moment being sovereign, it is also fundamentally joyful, leading to play, celebration and laughter.

In his article *Sommes-nous là pour jouer ou pour être sérieux?*, Bataille appropriates Huizinga's ideas on play to better understand how joy is linked to the sovereign moment of human existence. In his book *Homo Ludens: a study of the play-element in culture*, Huizinga tries to highlight some of the fundamental traits of play, this activity which, although it is not only present in human beings, it is in them that it gains a depth worthy of investigation. Huizinga lists some of the fundamental features of play, which are:

> The ritual act has all the formal and essential characteristics of play which we enumerated above, particularly in so far as it transports the participants to another world. This identity of ritual and play was unreservedly recognized by Plato as a given fact. He had no hesitation in comprising the sacra in the category of play. (HUIZINGA, 1980, p. 18)

Play and ritual practices also have close connections with the party. It is a physical and temporal space whose purpose is to engage in free activities, the ultimate goal of which is not subject to everyday life. For this reason, Huizinga states that "in the

very nature of things the relationship between feast and play is very close. Both proclaim a standstill to ordinary life" (HUIZINGA, 1980, p. 21). It can be seen, then, that Bataille uses this essay by Huizinga to support his claims about this aspect of human life that does not allow itself to be reduced to the seriousness of the Hegelian dialectic, of work, of the servile expectation of the future: "Je crois que, sur ce point, Huizinga apporta la note exacte: c'est la catégorie du jeu qui a le pouvoir de rendre sensible la capricieuse liberté et le charme animant les mouvements d'une pensée souveraine, non asservie à la servitude" (BATAILLE, 1988c, p. 104).

However, perhaps one of the reflections of the German historian that most interests Bataille is the association he makes between gambling and potlatch. In Marcel Mauss' anthropological investigations into exchange regimes based on the gift, such as the ones found in the peoples of Melanesia, the American Northwest and elsewhere, the anthropologist is particularly interested in a more radical form of these regimes, in which the agonistic character is fierce: the potlatch. The potlatch is a great solemn feast in which agonistic exchanges take place. There is fierce competition because the giver seeks to achieve a position of prestige and honor before the recipient by giving in an exaggerated and sumptuous manner. Sometimes the rivalry in these exchanges reaches such a point that "Consumption and destruction of goods really go beyond all bounds. In certain kinds of potlatch one must expend all that one has, keeping nothing back. It is a competition to see who is the richest and also the most madly extravagant" (MAUSS, 2002, p. 47). The exchange of wealth here aims to humiliate the other and demonstrate power, superiority and magnanimity. The exchange is a provocation, a kind of challenge to test the recipient's ability to repay the gift received with "interest". It is thanks to this agonistic and competitive aspect that Huizinga associates potlatch with the dimension of play. For him, the potlatch can be called, "strictly speaking, 'play' – serious play, fateful and fatal play, bloody play, sacred play, but nonetheless that playing which, in archaic society, raises the individual or the collective personality to a higher power" (HUIZINGA, 1980, p. 61).

This proximity between play and the act of "putting oneself at stake" is central to Bataille's conception of sovereignty, since *mettre en jeu*, putting oneself at stake, points to a departure from a serious and servile order to a joyful and sovereign one. It is in play, in the moment of sumptuous and useless destruction, that human beings find themselves sovereign and joyful. For Bataille, play has to do with the excess of

unemployed negativity, with the *rien* of the moment, which tears human beings apart. If in the world of work the human being is serious, in the game he is joyful: "À partir de là, nous pourrons définir généralement la situation de l'homme dans le monde. Il lui est incessamment imposé de choisir la mort, ou trouver que la mort et le monde sont sérieux (ce que traduit la servilité du travail)" (BATAILLE, 1988c, p. 116). However, not just any game is capable of putting servile existence at stake. It's not a question, for example, of playing a game of soccer and then getting out of servitude, or drinking excessively on a night of partying. For the game to put the human being as such at stake, it must put at stake what defines his own servile life, that is, his anxiety of death, the ultimate limit of his individual life, around which his identity and self-preservation are oriented. This is why he distinguishes between minor and major play. Minor play refers to those activities of leisure and relaxation which, in effect, partially remove us from the servile dynamic of the world of work, but do not actually subvert it:

> Il existe d'une part un jeu *mineur*, qui survit à l'abdication de celui qui accepte le travail, qui ne demande nullement la pleine révolte, qu'est le défi porté sans tristesse à la mort. Ce jeu n'est qu'une détente au cours d'une vie que domine le sérieux, qui compte toujours infiniment plus que le jeu […] Ces jeux mineurs, ces golfs et ce tourisme en troupe ces littératures molles et ces philosophies exsangues sont la mesure d'une immense abdication, le reflet de cette triste humanité qui préfère le travail à la mort. (BATAILLE, 1988c, p. 116)

On the other hand, the major play, according to Bataille, is the play that puts the very being of the human being at stake, without any kind of utility or purpose. This becomes clear in the way Bataille, at certain moments, names this experience of losing oneself: the chance. Golf and other amusements can be occasions for chance, but most of the time they are reduced to mere relaxation. What is at stake in the chance is the very limit of human life, its anxiety at death as such. Therefore, when the anxious person runs away from anxiety and works slavishly, they are also running away from chance, from the major play, from the sovereignty of the moment: "The foolishness of his anguish is infinite. Instead of going to the depths of his anguish, the anxious one pratters, degrades himself and flees. Anguish however was his chance" (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 35). The term "chance", in terms of its etymology, denotes more than the mere idea of luck (*bonne chance!*), it is linked to the way the dice are thrown, to the chance of the dice falling, to indeterminacy. For this reason, "the 'will to chance', part of the title

of *On Nietzsche*, precisely insofar as it opposes the ‘will to power’, is a will to put oneself entirely at stake, not to (be lucky enough to) win it." (SCHEIBE, 2017, p. 12)

To conclude our reflections in this section, we would like to highlight some central aspects of our journey so far: the desiring economy of the world of work is based on lack, since human beings seek an object to make them autonomous in the face of their constant fear of death, of their nothingness. In the sovereign moment of the miracle, the human being, or what is left of him at that moment, is crossed by a desiring economy of excess, where nothing is missing. This doesn't mean that in this excessive economy the human being finds some foundation where he can now supposedly feel complete and fulfilled; on the contrary, nothing is missing because he himself doesn't exist as a lacking person, as a discursive and working consciousness. The excess that runs through him in this major play is felt by him as death itself, giving this excessive experience a negative meaning, stemming from a lacerating negativity that is radically indeterminate and inhuman.

So far we have dealt with the relationship between employed negativity and unemployed negativity, servitude and sovereignty, work and play, seriousness and joy, lack and excess as if they were radically opposed aspects of human existence, bordering on a kind of rigid dualism, whose terms do not interact. However, if our exposition has followed this path, it has only been in order to facilitate the understanding of certain central elements of Bataille. Indeed, these dimensions are irreconcilable and never form a cohesive whole, but this does not mean that they are not related. Remember that if Bataille operates dialectically with them, it is not to reduce them to the slavish architecture of dialectics, but to find a way out of this system.

3.1.3. Sovereign anxiety and the object without objective truth

We know that the world of work, of teleologically-oriented action, of projects, is structured around the horror of the anxiety of death. This horror makes life serious, melancholic, suffocating and oppressive. Everything that involves death is rejected in the world of work, implying a horror of all kinds of violence that could jeopardize this ordered and cohesive life. In *Eroticism*, Bataille lists some cultural formations that try to deal with this horror of the violence of death. The burial of loved ones, who matter so much to human beings, is presented as an attempt to hide and conceal the image of the

dead human body, an image that has the contagious power to remind them of their own death:

> For each man who regards it with awe, the corpse is the image of his own destiny. It bears witness to a violence which destroys not one man alone but all men in the end. The taboo which lays hold on the others at the sight of a corpse is the distance they put between themselves and violence, by which they cut themselves off from violence. (BATAILLE, 1986, p. 44)

In this passage, we find a certain ambivalence on the part of the human being when faced with the violence of death, the taboo. Although the corpse evokes repulsion and distance in human beings, to the point of burying it, Bataille notes that it also evokes fascination, in other words, attraction and closeness. This strange ambivalence is easily perceptible in those moments when we do and don't want to visualize the image of a corpse. What could explain this? Drawing on Freud's psychoanalytical contributions on the prohibition of incest in so-called "primitive" societies in *Totem and Taboo*, Bataille draws from these ideas some interesting implications for thinking about the relationship between human beings regarding the profane (servile) and the sacred (sovereign).

With the aim of shedding light on the phenomena of obsessive neurosis in its relation to the Oedipus complex, Freud turned his attention to totemic societies, that is, societies whose social organization is structured around a totem that underpins all the social obligations of a clan or lineage. Based on the anthropological data of his time, Freud notes that where the totem is found, there is also "a law against persons of the same totem having sexual relations with one another and consequently against their marrying. This, then, is 'exogamy', an institution related to totemism" (FREUD, 2004, p, 4). In the course of his first chapter, Freud presents various ethnographic accounts that demonstrate the complexity of kinship structures and individual attitudes that serve as a buffer and obstacle to preventing an incestuous relationship from actually occurring between members of the same clan or phratry. Faced with these social efforts against the horror of incest, Freud concludes the following: "Thus the explanation which we should adopt for these strictly enforced avoidances among primitive peoples is that put forward by Fison, which regards them merely as a further protection against possible incest" (FREUD, 2004, p. 19). Thus, the degree of severity of these impediments would be proportional to the human desire for incest, in other words, the interdict regarding incest

would be more severe the more the incestuous union was desired. This is where the taboo comes in: “Faced with the taboo, human beings have an ambivalent attitude towards their taboos. In their unconscious there is nothing they would like more than to violate them, but they are afraid to do so; they are afraid precisely because they would like to, and the fear is stronger than the desire” (FREUD, 2004, p. 37). The ambivalence towards the taboo follows the following “logic”: I fear and am horrified by the interdict precisely because I strongly desire to break it, because something constantly inclines me towards what is forbidden. In Freud's theoretical framework, this interdict is incest, since adult human desire is incestuous because its fundamental model object is the support object (*Ahnlenungsobjekt*), the mother or father.

In the light of Freud's reflections, let's return to Bataille. We know that, for him, the ultimate interdict of human existence is not incest, but the anxiety of death. The interdict, as a taboo, generates horror to the same extent that it is desired by human beings. This means that the interdict of the anxiety of death is much more the result of the violent desire that human beings have to transgress this interdict, in other words, to die. This was already stated, in other terms and with other theoretical mediations, at the beginning of this chapter on Bataille, when we said that human beings desire death, sacrifice. However, we still didn't have a more adequate understanding of what the serious and joyful, servile and sovereign dimensions of human life are, which help us to contextualize what this desire for torment actually is. In *Eroticism*, the French philosopher emphasizes this ambivalent attitude towards the interdict of anxiety:

> Violence, and death signifying violence, have a double meaning. On the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly. (BATAILLE, 1986, p. 45)

If so far we have emphasized the horror of the anxiety of death as what prevents human beings from living a sovereign life, as if the horror linked to this taboo were something isolated from sovereign life, we now see that the seriousness and servitude of this fear and horror are “negative” expressions, or even reactive, that human beings feel when a sovereign movement, an excessive desire, makes them want to sacrifice themselves, to transgress the taboo of anxiety. We have therefore acquired another perspective on the relationship between work and play, servitude and sovereignty, employed and unemployed negativity. The servile way of dealing with the anxiety of death is nothing more than a reaction to his desire to live a sovereign anxiety, the

moment, the miracle: “L'angoisse est la peur, elle est en même temps le désir de se perdre (un être isolé doit se perdre, il doit, en se perdant, communiquer)” (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 336). Therefore, at the heart of work and projects is the attempt to unemploy the negativity employed, the individual’s attempt to lose himself. The servitude of the interdict is the necessary basis for a sovereign transgression to take place. To understand this better, we must return to the Bataillean distinction between a restricted economy and that of a general economy[16].

The point of view of the restricted economy refers to the much-talked-about dimension of the world of work, in which we have a finite and lacking perspective on the universe, because, as discursive beings who are aware of death, of nothingness, anxiety presents itself as the limit, the taboo that signals the insurmountable impossibility of the human being. On the other hand, if we adopt the point of view of the general economy, we are dealing with life, that is, with a cosmic and expendable energy that, flowing through the Earth's biosphere[17], always seeks to exceed the limits it imposes on itself, because that is the only way it can grow and surpass itself. On the horizon of a general economy, we are dealing with the ultimate energy source of our solar system, the Sun. The earth, irradiated by this exuberant energy source, has an overabundance of energy on its surface:

> living matter receives this energy and accumulates it within the limits given by the space that is available to it. It then radiates or squanders it, but before devoting an appreciable share to this radiation it makes maximum use of it for growth. Only the impossibility of continuing growth makes way for squander. Hence the real excess does not begin until the growth of the individual or group has reached its limits. (BATAILLE, 1988d, p. 29)

Because of the globe’s overabundance of energy, all living beings have an amount of energy available that exceeds what they really need to survive, to stay alive. This implies that all living beings are permeated by an energy that puts pressure on their limits; this excess is suffocated within limits that it constantly tries to transgress, because there is no more growth, just an absurd and useless amount of energy:

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[16] This distinction can also be understood as the distinction between the sad and joyful dimension of anxiety. We will soon see that laughter breaks out when there is a transition from the restricted to the general economy, which is why we are discussing these two economies now.

[17] For his investigations into the general economy, Bataille uses the concept of the biosphere from the Soviet geochemist Vladimir Vernadski, author of The Biosphere, giving a scientific content to a series of ideas that at first glance appears to be a mere ontological postulate.

> Supposing there is no longer any growth possible, what is to be done with the seething energy that remains? To waste it is obviously not to use it. And yet, what we have is a draining-away, a pure and simple loss, *which occurs in any case*: From the first, the excess energy, if it cannot be used for growth, is lost. (BATAILLE, 1988d, p. 31)

This loss, this useless expenditure of energy, is the luxury, the ostentation of an immense amount of energy, an exaggerated consumption that is of no use whatsoever, because it is not used for growth, for the maintenance of the living being. On the contrary, this luxury, this expenditure, puts the very limit of the living being at stake, since the pressure of this exuberant energy transposes the limit that previously kept it one with itself. Therefore, the expenditure of this excess energy is death itself, caused by the excess of life itself. This is why Bataille relates death as one of the forms of expenditure, the result of a sovereign desire to lose oneself which: "In this respect, the luxury of death is regarded by us in the same way as that of sexuality, first as a negation of ourselves, then – in a sudden reversal – as the profound truth of that movement of which life is the manifestation" (BATAILLE, 1988d, p. 34).

If at the beginning of our investigation we started from the point of view of the restricted economy, we now know that it can never be thought of in isolation, because it is within the general economy. Approaching the human being from the point of view of the general economy also implies the restricted economy, because its limit as a living being is the anxiety of death, nothingness:

> There can be anguish only from a personal, particular point of view that is radically opposed to the general point of view based on the exuberance of living matter as a whole. Anguish is meaningless for someone who overflows with life, and for life as a whole, which is an overflowing by its very nature. (BATAILLE, 1988d, p. 39)

We understand, then, that there is an economically restricted point of view only when we are talking about the human being, because he alone, as Kojève would say, is an unreal nothingness that feels anxiety. However, according to Bataille, as he is immersed in a general economic flux, his negativity, his nothingness, is just unemployed negativity that is employed by the restricted economy of discursive and instrumental reason. Here we finally understand the relationship between employed and unemployed negativity: the latter is "expressed" through the former, in other words, human beings can only exceed themselves by transgressing their own taboo. If his limit is the anxiety of the nothingness of death, then he only overcomes his limit and exceeds

himself by transgressing this same anxiety within the world of work. At the heart of employed negativity lies the violent and excessive movement of unemployed negativity. At the heart of desire as lack is desire as excess[18]. Thus, it is not through a pure general economy that the human being exceeds himself, he does so through the world of work itself, the restricted dimension of the world of work:

> Inner experience is led by discursive reason. Reason alone has the power to undo its work, to hurl down what it has built up. Madness has no effect, allowing debris to subsist, disturbing along with reason the faculty for communicating (perhaps, above all, it is rupture of inner communication). Natural exaltation or intoxication have a certain "flash in the pan" quality. Without the support of reason, we don't reach "dark incandescence". (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 46)

Inner experience is another name that Bataille gives to this sovereign moment, to anxiety surpassed, the *mise en jeu* of the finite and discontinuous being that the human being is in his servile life. This passage is of the utmost importance. One cannot live sovereignly in the face of anxiety by abdicating reason, which means that Bataille is rejecting any kind of romantic access to this sovereign moment. Ecstasy is not achieved through an ecstatic feeling, but through the self-destructive movement of reason coming out of itself. In Bataille's first volume of his *Summa Atheologica*, *The Inner Experience*, he says

> "I teach the art of turning anguish to delight", "to glorify": the entire meaning of this book. The bitterness within me, the "unhappiness" is only the condition. But anguish which turns to delight is still anguish: it is not delight, not hope – it is anguish, which is painful and perhaps decomposes. (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 35)

So the question arises: how can we “use” the dialectical rationality of the world of work to transgress its own interdict, anxiety? How can the sad anxiety of the

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[18] In a way, Bataille is here taking up the Platonic definition of desire as it was explained in *The Symposium* through Diotima's speech: “During a banquet celebrating the birth of Aphrodite, the god Resource, intoxicated by an excess of nectar, ended up falling asleep in Zeus' garden. Meanwhile, Poverty, who wasn't invited to the banquet because she wasn't a goddess, was waiting at the door begging for scraps. At one point, noticing Resource's drunkenness, Poverty invades Zeus' garden and, trying to make up for her lack of resources, unites sexually with Resource, thus conceiving Eros. The son of Resource and Poverty, Eros’ nature carries the ambiguous nature of his parents: “he is always poor and, far from being the tender and beautiful creature that most people imagine, he is in fact hard and rough, without shoes for his feet or a roof over his head. [...] His nature is neither that of an immortal nor that of a mortal, but in the course of a single day he will live and flourish for a while when he has the resources, then after a time he will start to fade away, only to come to life again through that part of his nature which he has inherited from his father. Yet his resources always slip through his fingers, so that although he is never destitute, neither is he rich” (*Sym* 203d - 204a).

Hegelian system be transformed into joyful anxiety? This is the aim of the following chapters: to explain how Bataille manages to transform anxiety into laughter. To try to follow the theoretical steps that made him the "le premier j'ai décrit la «communication»[19] et sa connexion avec l'angoisse" (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 542).

[19] The Bataillean concept of communication is in the same semantic field as the concept of inner experience. Communication refers to the communicative dimension that occurs between discontinuous beings at the moment when they experience the loss of self, the negative experience being precisely the opportunity for them to come out of their existential isolation and communicate with the other in the ecstasy of their tearing apart. Thus, communication is related to the joyful dimension of existence, to laughter. Bataille believes that he was the first to show the connection between anxiety and laughter.

3.2. Dying laughing: the moment of sovereign anxiety

To say that anxiety becomes delight, laughter, is still too simple, as it doesn't provide us with a "positive" characterization of this sovereign moment that was so fascinating to the French philosopher. An interesting way to follow the nuances of this concept is to return to the interlocution that Bataille establishes with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. The critical force of these two authors is strongly appreciated by the French thinker, especially with regard to the critical arsenal they provide to Hegelian philosophy (of Kojève): "The Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean traditions digesting the Hegelian" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 292). Thus, these two authors allow the French philosopher to develop the idea of an anxiety beyond servitude, as we have seen so far. Sovereign anxiety has been characterized in a very abstract way, merely as what is not servile, but now we must deal with it in more detailed terms and characterize it for what it really is: laughter as wasteful repetition.

In *Guilty*, we find a chapter entitled *Laughter and Trembling*, parodying the title of Kierkegaard's work, *Fear and Trembling*, in which Bataille states that "Le rire est le saut du possible dans l'impossible – et de l'impossible dans le possible. Mais ce n'est qu'un saut : le maintien serait la réduction de l'impossible au possible *ou l'inverse*" (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 346). The title of the chapter already indicates that one of the theoretical references underlying his reflections on laughter is Kierkegaard. The leap, a concept developed by Kierkegaard to describe the double movement of faith, is part of his reflections on repetition and the moment. In a text called *Nietzsche's Laughter*, Bataille takes up the Kierkegaardian binomial possible/impossible in the context of the leap of faith and links it to the Nietzschean idea of the eternal return of the same. According to the French philosopher, the eternal return of the same is "L'hypertrophie de l'impossible, la projection de chaque instant dans l'infini, met le possible en demeure d'exister sans attendre - au niveau de l'impossible. [...] Le retour éternel ouvre l'abime, mais est sommation de sauter" (BATAILLE, 1973d, p. 313). The eternal return of the same is what hypertrophies the impossible, making it possible for human beings, opening the abyss to them and inviting them to leap. Nietzsche's concept of the eternal return of the same, as presented in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is accompanied by the

concept of the moment (*Augenblick*), making repetition and the moment once again theoretically central to think human existence.

It should be noted, then, that if we want to enter into the Bataillian conception of a sovereign anxiety that expresses itself as laughter, understood as wasteful repetition, we have to understand how the French philosopher uses Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's concepts of repetition and moment as a critique of the servile concept of anxiety present in the Kojèvian Hegel. From this, we will be able to read in Lacan the resonances of this strange Bataillean conception of anxiety that is realized as laughter, as wasteful repetition, especially at times when the psychoanalyst seems to be relying on a direct reading of Kierkegaard, as if this were the only or the main theoretical reference for re-reading the Freudian concepts of anxiety and repetition.

3.2.1. Kierkegaard and the leap of laughter: from the possible to the impossible

Despite the scarce literature on the relationship between Georges Bataille and Søren Kierkegaard, it is known that the French philosopher was not only a tireless reader of the Danish, but was also part of the first generation of authors responsible for his reception in the 20th century French-speaking philosophical scene, alongside Jean Wahl and Lev Chestov (LLEVADOT, 2012). In Bataille's view, Kierkegaard stands out from the so-called "thinkers of existence", such as Heidegger, Sartre and Jaspers, who took an overly intellectual approach to the universal structures of existence, of the human being in general[20]. For them, there is still the primacy of experience over knowledge, "mais la connaissance, l'exercice professoral, déborde (surtout chez Sartre). Ce n'est plus la vie subjective de l'individu qui pose les questions mais l'exigence même de la pensée" (BATAILLE, 1988d, p. 283). Kierkegaard, on the other hand, would not reproduce this intellectual hypertrophy since his writing is motivated by the anxious impasses of his *own* subjective and singular life, not by a demand for knowledge. The Danish philosopher deals with the paradoxical universal and singular, objective and

[20] As we know, the existential analysis undertaken by Heidegger in Being and Time is part of a larger project towards a fundamental ontology capable of returning to the forgotten question of the meaning of being. Aware of this, Bataille does not fail to notice that the Heideggerian approach to ontology is also overly intellectual. Like other attempts to subordinate the inner experience of anxiety to ends other than itself, "it was also possible to subordinate it to knowledge as does the ontology of Heidegger" (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 7).

subjective, necessary and contingent dimension of human existence to the extent that he *himself* is permeated by this split.

Kierkegaard seeks to oppose the totalizing pretensions of Hegelian philosophy to "cet aléa du possible qui peut être ou n'être pas et nous laisse suspendus dans l'angoisse. Il était, lui, un existant : même si l'existence, ce qu'il crut, était le péché, il la voulait en lui-même exaspérée, tendue et suspendue" (BATAILLE, 1988d, p. 282). Furthemore, Bataille's own observation about his closeness to Kierkegaard should not go unnoticed: "Je ne veux rien mépriser les apports de Heidegger, de Jaspers, encoré moins la lumière d'angoisse que projettent les écrits de Kierkegaard: cette lumière aussi m'éclaire, etc. Coïncidence de résultats tenant à des méthodes différentes" (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 542). Although he follows a different method to Kierkegaard, Bataille nevertheless recognizes the Kierkegaardian light that illuminates him. Let's start to outline the presence of the Danish philosopher's concept of anxiety in Bataillian thought with his most Kierkegaardian work: *Guilty*.

Guilty, in French, *coupable*, can be translated both as guilty and as severable, unfinished, not-all. In this sense, the human being would not be whole for Bataille, it would be split, pointing us back to the paradoxical and non-totalizable dimension of the poles that make up the human being according to Vigilius Haufniensis, the pseudonymous author of *The Concept of Anxiety*. For Haufniensis, the human being is determined as spirit, which wants to achieve the synthetic totality of the dimensions that make it up (body and soul, finitude and infinitude, necessity and possibility, and time and eternity). To the extent that the human being attempts the possibility of the realization of the self, of the synthesis with itself, anxiety arises for him as the vertiginous and indefinite nothingness of his possibility, of *his being-capable-of*. This is Adam's[21] situation in the face of the mysterious words that God uttered when he forbade him to eat the fruit of knowledge. Anxiety arose when Adam was faced with his own possibilities:

> The prohibition induces in him anxiety, for the prohibition awakens in him freedom's possibility. [...] Only the possibility of being able is present as a higher form of ignorance, as a higher expression of anxiety, because in a higher sense it both is and is not, because in a

[21] Unlike Kojève, Kierkegaard does not rely on the anxiety felt by the slave before the Absolute Master; his main reference for thinking about anxiety is the biblical passage from Genesis. This preference for the religious atmosphere of anxiety can be read as an attempt to forge a concept of anxiety that is resistant and irreducible to the dialectical horizon in which the slave's anxiety is found.

> higher sense he both loves it and flees from it. (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 44)

This means that anxiety is different from fear, which has a specific object in front of which human beings are able to objectify their fear. No one is anxious in the face of an object, but rather in the face of the indeterminacy of nothingness: “If we ask more particularly what the object of anxiety is, then the answer, here as elsewhere, must be that it is nothing” (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 96). The concept of anxiety “the concept of anxiety is almost never treated in psychology. Therefore, I must point out that it is altogether different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility” (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 42). Fear lacks the dialectical ambivalence typical of anxiety, since fear is simply the dread of something that threatens the human being, while anxiety signals precisely the attraction towards what we fear most, the vertiginous possibility of freedom. For this reason, Haufniensis tells us that the human being “flee away from anxiety, he cannot, for he loves it; really love it, he cannot, for he flees from it” (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 44). Anxiety is felt ambivalently, it is “a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy” (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 42).

This same ambivalence of anxiety pointed out by Kierkegaard is underlined by Bataille in *Guilty*. According to Bataille, anxiety is both fear and the desire to lose oneself, to sacrifice oneself, which brings us back to the reflections we made in the previous chapter about the desire for suplice: “L'angoisse est la peur, elle est en même temps le désir de se perdre”[22] (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 336). This statement is not too dissimilar to the Kierkegaardian idea presented by Anti-Climacus in *Sickness unto Death*, according to which the self in sin, in despair, that is, in a bad relationship with itself, seeks precisely to die so that it can establish another relationship with itself: “the torment of despair is precisely this, not to be able to die. So it has much in common with the situation of the moribund when he lies and struggles with death, and cannot die” (KIERKEGAARD, 2013a, p. 277). Kierkegaardian anxiety manifests both the desire for the death of this desperate self and the fear of it, since the possibility of this new relationship between the self and itself implies precisely the *being-capable-of* and the nothingness inherent in it.

[22] The theoretical justification for this ambivalence in Bataille's horizon can only be satisfactorily understood in the course of our work. For now, it's just a question of highlighting Kierkegaard's influences on Bataille.

For Kierkegaard, the loss of this self would occur in what he calls the decisive moment, or even in the paradox. In the third chapter of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis provides another definition of anxiety which, according to him, only says the same thing as the previous definition. He states that anxiety is the moment (*Øieblikket*): "In the individual life, anxiety is the moment" (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 81). And what would the moment be for him? Haufniensis understands the moment to be "that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited, whereby time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time" (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 89). According to Haufniensis, eternity, in the individual life of the human being, is experienced as the future. He tells us that "this is because the eternal first signifies the future or because the future is the incognito in which the eternal, even though it is incommensurable with time, nevertheless preserves its association with time" (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 89). We can see, then, that Haufniensis refines his definition of anxiety, as it now refers not only to the nothingness of the possibility of freedom, but also to the unknowable nature of the possibility of the future, of eternity. In attempting to synthesize the paradoxical dimensions of the spirit and thus escape from despair, human beings are faced with the unknowability of nothingness.

Johannes Climacus, in his *Philosophical Crumbs*, takes a closer look at the moment. In this work, the pseudonymous author deals with the problem of grasping the truth, a problem that stems above all from Socratic reflections, as set out by Plato in his dialog, *Menon*. The Socratic-Platonic position on access to truth is classic: to know is to recollect. The human soul has all the immutable truths that it grasped in the world of ideas, where it was before being imprisoned again in a sensible body, which is responsible for forgetting these same truths. According to Johannes Climacus, "from a Socratic perspective, every temporal point of departure is *eo ipso* contingent, something vanishing, an occasion" (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 89). The author wants to underline the fact that in the Socratic perspective, the moment, the effective starting point in which the human being decides from his own singularity, is reduced to the occasion, to the objective determination of the occasion. Socrates, the teacher, is the occasion for the apprentice to recollect the truth in which he already is. The objectivity of the occasion is decisive in the subjective experience of the human being: the truth is already in the human soul, all that remains is to recollect it with the help of the master.

We can therefore conclude that, in the Socratic-Platonic model, human beings have no choice but to conform to the past: “where the occasion and the occasioned correspond to each other, in the same way as the answer in the wilderness to the cry, the moment does not appear, but is swallowed up by the eternity of recollection” (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 101). The future, i.e. the possibility of the future, has no validity, so there is not even anxiety, the possibility of freedom.

In opposition to this view, Johannes Climacus presents us with the Christian perspective. The true teacher is God, the one who is truth itself and the opportunity for the apprentice to become aware of his non-truth, his sin, because only in this way can the apprentice grasp a truth that he didn't really know. Confronted with his non-truth, the human being has the opportunity to position himself at the decisive moment and thus deal with his future, with the possibility of freedom, with the infinite that transcends his finitude, the truth of the god. Surrendered to the truth of this master, he “becomes a different person, not in the facetious sense of becoming another of the same quality, but a qualitatively different person, or as we will call it, a new person” (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 96). Only in the Christian horizon of truth can we effectively speak of a decisive moment, in which the human being is anxious and deals with his non-truth, with the finite limits of his temporality in the face of the eternity of God, of the future. In the moment, “he who has been born thinks of himself as having been born, he thinks of this transition from not being to being” (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 97). The temporal character of anxiety can then be understood insofar as it is that moment, a glimpse (*Øieblikket*), in which the possibility of the future imposes itself like a vertiginous abyss. The moment of anxiety, as we can see, implies a decision, a conscious decision in the face of the unknowable future: “The moment appears precisely in the relation between the eternal resolution and the incommensurable occasion” (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 101).

The moment, at the height of anxiety, is the tension between the temporal and the eternal, reality and possibility, the knowable and the unknowable. Therefore, the moment that overwhelms the human being is his rebirth insofar as he experiences the collision of understanding with the unknowability of his own future. This moment is also called a paradox:

> If we posit the moment, then we get the paradox, because, in its most abbreviated form, the paradox could be called the moment. It is with

> the moment that the learner comes to be in error. The person who knew himself becomes confused about himself, and instead of self knowledge he receives sin-consciousness, etc.. (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 122)

The paradox occurs insofar as the relationship between the poles of the human being is not resolved in a harmonious synthesis. On the contrary, a part of the infinite and eternal unknowable always insists on remaining irreducible to the finite and temporal understanding's attempt to grasp it, further exacerbating the unknowable and eternal abyss of the future. In this paradox, the human being is no longer certain of himself, of his fixed and firm reality. This is why it is said that "the moment of decision is *foolishness*" (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 123). It is foolishness because, instead of providing a synthetic and harmonious resolution of the paradoxical poles that make up the human being, anxiety, or rather, the moment, takes this paradoxical condition to the extreme. Split by this disharmonious opposition, "he who believed he knew himself is no longer certain whether he is a stranger creature than Typhon, or whether there is not in his being a milder and more divine part" (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 112).

Gabriel Marcel, in *Homo Viator*, recognizes in Bataillian thought "a metaphysic of the instant which is directly derived from Kierkegaard" (MARCEL, 1951, p. 189)[23], reinforcing our hypothesis that Kierkegaard is one of the main references for Bataille's concept of anxiety and, therefore, that of the moment. We can therefore see that we are faced here with a concept of extreme importance for Bataille and for the development of our work: the moment. As we can see, the decisive moment in Kierkegaard produces a process of de-subjectification, in which a given subjective configuration ordered within a horizon of comprehensibility is subjected to foolishness, to something of the order of incomprehensibility that cannot be grasped by reason. Bataille tells us something very similar: "Mais l'instant! C'est toujours le délire infini…" (BATAILLE, 1988e, p. 285). What is most important to point out now is the difference that separates Kierkegaard from Bataille with regard to this concept. Although this concept is a meeting point between the two authors insofar as the moment is this moment of de-subjectification, of losing oneself, for Kierkegaard the moment directs the human being towards the eternity of the future, while for Bataille the moment subjects him to the eternity of the

[23] It's worth noting that Gabriel Marcel's statement has a critical tone. It's also important to point out that we don't agree with Marcel's assertion that the concept of moment came directly from Kierkegaard, because, as will become clear later, Nietzsche is another central reference for the Bataillean concept of moment.

present. Roughly speaking, the Bataillean moment provokes this disruption of identity insofar as it removes the human being from the servile rationality of the world of work, in which every moment is subjected to the future, so that existence is no longer postponed:

> C'est en effet l'instant où nous sommes jetés hors de l'attente, de l'attente, misère habituelle de l'homme, de l'attente qui asservit, qui subordonne l'instant présent à quelque résultat attendu. Justement, dans le miracle, nous sommes rejetés de l'attente de l'avenir à la présence de l'instant, de l'instant éclairé par une lumière miraculeuse, lumière de la souveraineté de la vie délivrée de sa servitude. (BATAILLE, 1976a, p. 257)

Let's return to Kierkegaard. What the truth of this paradoxical moment brings about in human beings is repetition, a Kierkegaardian concept that doesn't mean reproducing the same thing, but creating a new meaning for something from the past[24]. The human being no longer recognizes himself as he was before, not because he has become something that has no relation to what he was before, but because he has taken up in a new way what he was. This is why Johannes Climacus states that the truth of the moment turns man into a "qualitatively different person, or as we will call it, a new person" (KIERKEGAARD, 2009a, p. 96). The human being undergoes a rebirth in repetition. The theme of repetition is the subject of investigation in his text *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, written under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius, at the beginning of which the author provides us with a differentiation between the ways of experiencing temporality in recollection and repetition:

> Repetition and recollection are the same movement, just in opposite directions, because what is recollected has already been and is thus repeated backwards, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forwards. Repetition, if it is possible, thus makes a person happy, while recollection makes him unhappy, assuming, of course, that he actually gives himself time to live and does not, immediately upon the hour of his birth hit upon an excuse, such as that he has forgotten something, to sneak back out of life again. (KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 3)

[24] So far, we have dealt with the concepts of anxiety and moment in Kierkegaard, but these concepts are not enough for us to approach the way in which Bataille's appropriation of the Danish philosopher allows him to construct his concept of laughter. We still have to deal with the Kierkegaardian concepts of repetition and faith, enabling us to visualize the French thinker's theoretical movements more clearly.

Constantin is taking up the opposition between the Socratic-Platonic moment and the Christian moment, the former focused on the past and the latter on the future. Recollection, so dear to Plato's epistemological and ethical theory, repeats something backwards, causing what has been lost to be repeated in the past. Repetition, on the other hand, like the paradoxical moment that emerges in the leap of faith, turns towards the future, causing something lost to be recollected forward. Both recollection and repetition are about dealing with a loss, with something one no longer has. However, they are different ways of dealing with this loss, because recollection establishes a sad life in the face of this loss, while repetition provides a joyful life in the face of it.

Later on, Constantin begins his psychological analysis of a melancholy young man who finds himself trapped in a set of memories about his beloved that make him feel guilty for abandoning her. He can't forget her and the harm he would have done to her. During his analysis, Constantin realizes that the young man had already started his relationship with the girl by recollecting a loss, as if she were just an occasion for him to recollect something previously lost:

> He was deeply and passionately in love, this was clear, and yet he was already, in the earliest days, in a position to recollect his love. He was basically finished with the whole relationship. Simply by having begun, he advanced such a terrific distance that he had leapt right over life. It would make no great difference if the girl died tomorrow. (KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 7)

He jumped over life because he wasn't relating to his beloved, but to the occasion she was for him to fantasize and ruminate on some lost object. The situation was as follows: only by ending the relationship could he realize his poetic tendencies to recollect the loss she represented to him. For this reason, the author states that “the great advantage of recollection is that it begins with loss. This is its security — it has nothing to lose” (KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 8). From the recollection of the loss, the young man drowns in poetic activity, making it clear to Constantin that the recollection was a source of aesthetic pleasure for the young man, which, however, was not unaccompanied by contempt and self-deprecation. He idealized the girl and thus re-translated the loss he so loved to adorn with his poetry.

In the meantime, Constantin tries to carry out a peculiar experiment: traveling back to Berlin and artificially repeating the same pleasant experiences he had there the last time. The experiment tries to find a repetition of the same in the objective world,

but it fails, because during the whole trip some detail changes compared to the last time. He lists a series of changes in the same situations he had experienced before: the journey was extremely uncomfortable because his carriage was too full; the landlord of his accommodation had got married; the play he had seen didn't entertain him as much as before. So he concludes: “I made no great discovery, yet it was strange, because I had discovered that there was no such thing as repetition. I became aware of this by having it repeated in every possible way” (KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 37). Constantin's experiment was intended to prove the existence of external repetition, i.e. reproduction of the same, finding the same in the same, without any kind of change from the past. Rather, his experiment attests to the impossibility of repetition as an external and objective reproduction of the same.

However, his conclusion, despite being a realization of the non-existence of repetition as a reproduction of the same, surreptitiously points out the existence of another type of repetition, an internal and subjective repetition. Constantin notes a strange dialectic within his conclusion: from the failure of repetition comes the repetition of failure. The repetition of failure comes back as confirmation that repetition is, in essence, not a reproduction of something external, but the internal repetition of difference, that is, the repetition of the singular and subjective experience that human beings have at every moment of their lives, even when they find themselves in the same situation as before. The term “subjective” implies less the idea of being relative, as opposed to the supposed universality of the objective, than the idea that subjective repetition deals with the existential sphere of the human being, in other words, what influences the constitution of a good relationship between the self and itself. By creating a new meaning for something lost in the past, repetition culminates in the rebirth of that self that died at the decisive moment. This is why repetition is a recollection towards the future: it rediscovers in the future an experience that repeats the singularity of a past experience in a different way. In light of this, it can be said that the repetition of the singular experience is experienced as a failure, because it is everything that diverts and frustrates the expectation of finding the same in the same. By rediscovering the same thing in a different way, Constantin, as an experimenter of external repetition, despite not being able to recognize the exceptionality of internal repetition as such, is at least able to indicate its traces.

Frustrated with his experiment, Constantin returns to tell us the story of the young man in love who, after suddenly disappearing, talks to him again through letters. In these letters, the young man is amazed by the *Book of Job*, in which he is tested by God and stripped of all his riches and loved ones. God, making a bet with the devil, decided to test whether Job would remain faithful to him. Faced with this trial, Job, despite disagreeing and maintaining his position as a man of integrity and righteousness, remains faithful and does not slander God. The young poet praises and exalts Job's use of his freedom in insisting on his innocence, despite the immeasurability of divine power:

> This is what is great in Job, that the passion of freedom in him is not quelled or calmed through a false expression. This passion is often quelled in a person under similar circumstances, in that a faintheartedness or trivial anxiety has allowed him to believe he suffered for the sake of his sins, when he did not do this at all. (KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 65)

Revisiting the Kierkegaardian concepts worked on so far, we can say that Job didn't back down in the face of the anxiety-arousing possibility involved in questioning God's decision. Even in the face of the possibility of *being-capable-of*, Job decides to live the foolishness of the decisive moment, he decides to open himself up to a relationship with God. Even though he is finite and temporal, he doesn't back down in the face of the infinitude and eternity of the future, of this God who could easily kill him at any moment and without any plausible justification. This is Job's greatness. At the end of the biblical passage, a thunderstorm appears, finally recognizing Job's innocence.

> The storm has blown itself out — the thunder is past — Job has been chastened before the ranks of humanity — the Lord and Job have come to an understanding, they are reconciled, ‘the secret of God’ is again upon Job’s tabernacle as in the days of his youth. People understand Job. Now they come and eat bread with him and sympathize with him and comfort him. His brothers and sisters each give him ‘a piece of money and an earring of gold’. Job is again blessed: ‘and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before’. That is what I call a *repetition*. (KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 69)

Inspired by Job’s religious atmosphere, the young man in love interprets Job's repetition as something objective and universal, as if this repetition were the model to follow for his own repetition. Thus, the young man in love ends up repeating the failure

of Constantin's experiment, as he seeks repetition in the reproduction of the same. As if the repetition were a reproduction of Job's repetition, the young man is passively waiting for a storm: “I wait for a thunderstorm — and for a repetition. And yet, if only a thunderstorm would come, I would be indescribably happy, even if my sentence were that repetition was impossible” (KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 70). In the young man's poetic hands, repetition is relegated to a passive wait for a storm that could lift him out of his melancholy, thus abdicating what was most great about Job and indispensable for any repetition: the activity of the decisive moment responsible for opening up to the infinite and eternal, to the future. The young man uses Job's repetition to avoid the existential singularity of his own repetition. When he receives the news that his beloved has married another man, the young man thinks he has carried out the repetition:

> She is married, to whom I do not know, because when I read it in the newspaper I felt as if I had been struck and I dropped the paper. Since then I have not been able to bring myself to take a closer look at the announcement. I am back to my old self. This is a repetition. I understand everything, and existence seems more beautiful than ever. (KIERKEGAARD, 2009b, p. 74)

However, this supposed internal repetition of the young man in love is, according to Constantin, a failed repetition due to his passivity. Like Constantin, the young man tried to reproduce a repetition, transforming something genuinely singular into a technical procedure that can supposedly be reproduced in the same way as before. In both situations, both Constantin's experiment and the young man's supposed repetition, the failure of the repetition is due to the pretension to artificially reproduce an event in the same way as before. Curiously, we can see from this second failure another important feature of the repetition of the new, namely that repetition only exists thanks to the decisive moment, the activity of freedom.

Based on these characterizations of repetition in Kierkegaard, we can try to summarize this concept as follows: repetition is the recollection of something forwards, towards the future; it presupposes an activity on the part of the subject, who must face up to the foolishness of the decisive moment and, finally, it gives a new meaning to what has been lost when, in spite of expectations of returning to the same thing, it repeats the singularity of the previous experience in the face of the same situation. Thus, we can say that repetition is always expressed as a failure to reproduce the same. Genuine repetition only exists if, at the decisive moment, the human being fails to

reproduce the same, because this failure is the sign that what was before is presenting itself again in a new way.

Kierkegaard, in *Fear and Trembling*, written under the pseudonym Johannes *de silentio* and published a week after *Repetition*, provides a better characterization of repetition, this time dealing with its relationship with faith. The paradigm of faith for Johannes is the biblical passage of Abraham, who, faced with God's divine orders, decides to sacrifice his own son, Isaac. Abraham is a man of faith even before Isaac's birth, because despite God's promise that one day his son would come, a long time passed before that moment. Although it took a long time and he felt that God had forgotten his promise, since Sarah, who was already very old, had passed her fertile period, Abraham persisted in his faith: “He accepted the fulfillment of the promise, he accepted it by faith, and it came to pass according to the promise and according to his faith” (KIERKEGAARD, 2013b, p. 51). However, some time after Isaac's birth, Abraham receives a divine command from God to sacrifice his long-awaited son, the one around whom Abraham's entire life revolved: “All was lost! Seventy years of faithful expectation, the brief joy at the fulfilment of faith” (KIERKEGAARD, 2013b, p. 52). Abraham doesn't back down in the face of God's command, he remains faithful to God and decides to obey the command. However, despite obeying, he still has faith that he will get his son back. That's why, as in the case of Adam, “What they leave out of Abraham's history is dread; for to money I have no ethical obligation, but to the son the father has the highest and most sacred obligation” (KIERKEGAARD, 2013b, p. 63). Abraham is anxious because of the unknowable nothingness of the future, of what will become of the one he loves most and must protect, his son. And as Haufniensis tells us, “if an individual defrauds possibility, by which he is to be educated, he never arrives at faith; then his faith will be the sagacity of finitude , just as his school was that of finitude” (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 157). It is necessary to go through the potential that forms the possibility of anxiety in order to arrive at faith. And this was the case with Abraham, considered by Johannes *de silentio* to be the father of faith:

> All that time he believed-he believed that God would not require Isaac of him, whereas he was willing nevertheless to sacrifice him if it was required. He believed by virtue of the absurd; for there could be no question of human calculation, and it was indeed the absurd that God who required it of him should the next instant recall the requirement. He climbed the mountain, even at the instant when the knife glittered he believed ... that God would not require Isaac. He was indeed

> astonished at the outcome, but by a double-movement he had reached his first position, and therefore he received Isaac more gladly than the first time. (KIERKEGAARD, 2013b, p. 75)

It is because he has faith that Abraham is caught up in the decisive moment, the sacrifice of his son. The faith that makes Abraham experience the paradoxical moment involves a double movement. First there is the movement of infinite resignation, that is, giving up finitude infinitely, giving up all of it. Then there is the more complex and less comprehensible movement for Johannes *de silentio*, the movement of believing that he will regain what he has resigned himself to, even if it is rationally impossible for this to happen. The author illustrates this movement to us as a leap, like the leap of a dancer who loses his ground the moment he jumps towards infinity and then lands in finitude again:

> It is supposed to be the most difficult task for a dancer to leap into a definite posture in such a way that there is not a second when he is grasping after the posture, but by the leap itself he stands fixed in that posture. [...] The knights of infinity are dancers and possess elevation. They make the movements upward, and fall down again. (KIERKEGAARD, 2013b, p. 84)

The knights of infinity are those who manage to make this leap of faith, who infinitely give up what they love most and get it back. Abraham, called the father of faith by Johannes de silentio, is the paradigm of this knight, who went through God's trial and successfully made the leap, recovering Isaac.

The knight of infinity, or of faith, is the one who lives the infinite eternity of the moment in his finite daily temporality, always opening himself up to what appears impossible in a given horizon of possibility. In other words, we can say that the knight of faith is the one who manages to make the impossible possible: “Spiritually speaking, everything is possible, but in the world of the finite there is much which is not possible. This impossible, however, the knight makes possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by waiving his claim to it” (KIERKEGAARD, 2013b, p. 89). The knight of faith is the individual who doesn't settle for a given existential configuration, he always wants the impossible to become possible. He can “live joyfully and happily every instant by virtue of the absurd, every instant to see the sword hanging over the head of the beloved, and yet to find repose in the pain of resignation, but joy by virtue of the absurd-this is marvellous” (KIERKEGAARD, 2013b, p. 101). This is the

soteriological aspect of the leap of faith. By making possible what was previously considered impossible, faith removes the human being from the hermeticism of the self in despair, that is, from a self that cannot die and reconfigure itself in another way. Abraham's case is paradigmatic, because from then on he looked at Isaac differently.

Abraham received Isaac for the first time with great joy, after seventy years of waiting. However, this joy was short-lived, as God's terrifying command took away from Abraham what he loved most. When God asked for the sacrifice, Abraham made the double movement of faith. He infinitely surrendered his son and, just for that, he was able to receive Isaac back with more joy than the first time. This is the repetition produced by faith. Abraham repeated that first joy of his birth when he received Isaac back. The repetition is not simply in the fact that Abraham recovered Isaac, but in the fact that the first joy is repeated in another way, giving Isaac a new meaning for his father. This second joy, the repetition of the first joy, is the same thing that was recovered in a different way, being a deviation from the past, a failure to reproduce it. Therefore, the same thing that was repeated becomes the same that is different, new. We therefore understand that repetition, the return to a new sameness, can only occur through faith, through the double movement from the possible to the impossible and from the impossible to the possible.

We can see that repetition has a clear link with the concepts explained so far. Facing anxiety brings the human being closer to faith, to that leap that occurs at the decisive moment when you decide to resign yourself infinitely from an object and recover it again, repeat it, recollect it in the future. In short, we can say that Kierkegaardian repetition points to the future, it happens in the anxious moment when the leap from the possible to the impossible occurs. We can see, then, that all of these concepts used by Kierkegaard aim to make human life happy, focused on the possibility that at first appears impossible.

We've already mentioned that Bataille, in his text *Laughter and Trembling*, uses the binomial possible and impossible to deal precisely with laughter as a leap from the possible to the impossible and from the impossible to the possible. Following the Kierkegaardian indications that provide us with the theoretical horizon to understand Bataille's statement, we can say that laughter is also composed of a double movement. First there is the movement from the possible to the impossible, the delirious experience of the moment, of laughter itself. However, it is not possible to remain in the

impossible, in the moment, because it is violence, excess and destruction, which is why the second movement occurs, the movement from the impossible to the possible: “Le pur bonheur est dans l'instant, mais de l'instant présent la douleur m'a chassé, dans l'attente de l'instant à venir, où ma douleur sera calmée. Si la douleur ne me séparait de l'instant présent, le «pur bonheur» serait en moi” (BATAILLE, 1988f, p. 478).

Once again, the critical dimension of Bataille's appropriation of the leap cannot be overlooked: if for Kierkegaard the leap involves salvation, due to the existence, even if negative, of God, for Bataille this is not the case insofar as he takes the Nietzschean statement of the death of God seriously. This will become clear later, but it should be noted that for Bataille the leap does not save the human being, because, according to him: “Le salut est misérable en ce qu'il met le possible après, qu'il en fait la fin de l'impossible” (BATAILLE, 1973d, p. 313). The Kierkegaardian leap of faith presupposes that “in virtue of the fact that with God all things are possible” (KIERKEGAARD, 2013b, p. 94), the human being recovers the finite possibility that he has resigned himself to, which in turn would elude the radicality of the impossible. Bataille believes that Kierkegaard is positing the radical negativity of impossibility by identifying it with God. However, according to Bataille, “la limite de l'homme n'est pas Dieu, n'est pas le possible, mais l'impossible, c'est l'absence de Dieu” (BATAILLE, 1973d, p. 312). Bataille's procedure is to peel off what Kierkegaard has glued together: God and the impossible. Bataille tries to do justice to the negativity of the impossible by identifying it with the absence of God. In one passage, the French thinker takes up the biblical passage of Abraham and Isaac to show that for Abraham's sacrifice to be truly radical, it would take not the revelation of God, but the complete absence of God:

> God as the lamb substituted for Isaac. This is no longer sacrifice. Further on there is naked sacrifice, without Isaac. The sacrifice is madness, the renunciation of all knowledge edge, the fall into the void, and nothing, neither in the fall nor in the void, is revealed, for the revelation of the void is but a means of falling further into absence. (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 51)

In any case, what should be clear here is that the double movement of the leap in both Kierkegaard and Bataille entails repetition, the differential recovery of the same as a new sameness that deviates from the previous sameness. For Bataille, the differential repetition of the same, the new sameness, corresponds to laughter. Laughter is the re-encounter with a lost immanence constituted by unemployed negativity, making this

re-encounter an encounter with deviation and failure as such, since what is recovered is the tearing indeterminacy of unemployed negativity itself. We'll deal with this in more detail later.

The Kierkegaardian concept of anxiety, articulated with the concepts of moment, leap and repetition, points to the insufficiency of the Hegelian system to encompass the singular existence of the individual. Something of the order of the impossible is never really mediated by dialectics, highlighting the paradoxical and non-synthetic dimension of human life. As we have seen, Bataille appropriates all these concepts to carry out his critique of the Hegelian system (of Kojève) without, however, failing to carry out his own critique of these Kierkegaardian concepts[25]. Bataille's appropriation of them always ends up short-circuiting the temporal dimension of the future that they carry. Under the French thinker's pen, anxiety, moment, leap and repetition create a conceptual constellation in which the present moment is what removes the human being from their postponed existence in the future. However, in order to better understand this, we must now begin our journey through the dialog that Bataille establishes with Nietzsche.

3.2.2. Nietzsche and the eternal return of waste

It is known that Bataille, as well as being part of the first generation of authors to receive Kierkegaard in French-speaking countries, was also one of the main people responsible for the process of denazifying Nietzsche's philosophy. Bataille says he laughs "at those who, in attacks or exploitations, confuse Nietzsche's position with that of Hitler. [...] I'd like to put an end to this crude equivocation" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 6). If the reconstruction of Bataille's readings and appropriations of Kierkegaard requires the reader to have a magnifying glass to read between the lines, the same cannot be said of his appropriation of Nietzsche. Not only because Bataille says that "with a few exceptions, my company on earth is that of Nietzsche… [...] Nietzsche alone offers me his solidarity-saying we" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 19), but mainly because Bataille dedicated his third volume of the Summa Atheologica to his reading of the German philosopher: *On Nietzsche*. As was the case with Kierkegaard, Bataille's appropriation of Nietzschean philosophy is not without its criticisms and distancing, which is clear from the following statement by the author about the process of writing his book:

[25] Repetition is not a concept often used by Bataille, so we will have to risk systematizing what this concept would be for him, given that repetition is a central part of his theoretical horizon.

“Nietzsche wrote ‘with his blood’: whoever criticizes him or, better, *experiences* him can only do so by bleeding in his turn” (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 7). Let's see how Bataille dialogues with what was one of the few companies on earth.

> Nietzsche was the philosopher of the "will to power" ; he presented himself as such; he was received as such. I think that he was rather the philosopher of evil. It is the attraction, the value of evil that, it seems to me, gave meaning to what he wanted to say when speaking of power. (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 7)

According to the French philosopher, Nietzschean philosophy is a philosophy of evil, not of the will to power. If he was interested in the will to power, it was because of the value of evil that he saw in it. Evil, for Bataille, has to do with everything that is considered useless for the cohesive and homogeneous life of the world of projects, which sees everything that has meaning and purpose as good. Bataille is not only dealing with the concept of the will to power, but also with the famous Nietzschean project of the revaluation of all values, which involves questioning the value of values that have hitherto been taken for granted, namely Christian values. In this regard, it would be interesting to go through some theoretical elements of Nietzsche’s concept of will to power in order to understand his project of a revaluation of all values and, with it, the annunciation of the greatest of all weights: the eternal return of the same.

Like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche was also interested in psychological research. In *Human, All Too Human*, the German philosopher tells us that psychology is the science that investigates “the origin and history of the so-called moral sensations” (NIETZSCHE, 1996, p. 32). Given this definition, we can say that this science focuses on the historical dimension of human morality. In another passage from *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche gives us a more complete understanding of his psychology as a theory of the will to power:

> All psychology so far has been stuck in moral prejudices and fears: it has not ventured into the depths. To grasp psychology as morphology and the *doctrine of the development of the will to power*, which is what I have done – nobody has ever come close to this, not even in thought: this, of course, to the extent that we are permitted to regard what has been written so far as a symptom of what has not been said until now. (NIETZSCHE, 2002, p. 23)

Nietzschean psychology is, in essence, a morphology and theory of the evolution of the will to power. According to Nietzsche, the will to power is the movement proper to life as such, a movement whose sole purpose is to surpass itself. This physiopsychological force, given its presence in nature and culture, is not to be confused with an instinct for self-preservation, which is much more an epiphenomenon resulting from the will to power. Hunger, generally considered to be a manifestation of a conservation instinct, is not aimed at conserving the existence of a being. The act of eating an animal or plant is the being's attempt to take possession of what it eats, to feel its power and sovereignty over others: "It is not possible to take hunger as the *primum mobile*, any more than self-preservation. To understand hunger as a consequence of undernourishment means: hunger as the consequence of a will to power that no longer achieves mastery" (NIETZSCHE, 1967, p. 345). In order to seize and enforce the power of this will that drives all beings, it is necessary to have an obstacle, a resistance, from which the will to power can feel its potency, feel that it has managed to overcome some barrier, some limitation. In this sense, the will to power does not refer to a single center of force, but to a multiplicity of centers that are constantly in an agonistic relationship, one trying to dominate the other. Not in order to preserve itself, but in order to feel its power. Nietzsche illustrates this with the example of protoplasm:

> The will to power can manifest itself only against resistances; therefore it seeks that which resists it-this is the primeval tendency of the protoplasm when it extends pseudopodia and feels about. Appropriation and assimilation are above all a desire to overwhelm, a forming, shaping and reshaping, until at length that which has been overwhelmed has entirely gone over into the power domain of the aggressor and has increased the same. (NIETZSCHE, 1967, p. 346)

Protoplasm feeds itself for no other purpose than its growth, its power. The idea of a drive for self-preservation only makes sense when the will to power becomes useful, when it becomes a means and not an end in itself. We could say that the will to power is useless, while the drive for self-preservation is useful: "what one calls 'nourishment' is merely a derivative phenomenon, an application of the original will to become *stronger*" (NIETZSCHE, 1967, p. 373). The tendency to self-preservation would establish the means by which life should be preserved and kept alive. The movement of life is not reduced to a rational calculation of what would be useful for its survival, a calculation that seeks pleasure and avoids displeasure. The excessive

movement of life shows the opposite: “One cannot ascribe the most basic and primeval activities of protoplasm to a will to self-preservation, for it takes into itself absurdly more than would be required to preserve it; and, above all, it does not thereby ‘preserve itself,’ it falls apart” (NIETZSCHE, 1967, p. 345). The will to power is life as an end in itself, it is the useless and excessive movement that sometimes ends up putting a being's very life at stake. In this sense, life has no purpose outside of itself: “Life is only a *means* to something; it is the expression of forms of the growth of power. [...] One kind of means has been misunderstood as an end; conversely, life and the enhancement of its power has been debased to a means” (NIETZSCHE, 1967, p. 376). The relationship between end and means has been inverted. Life is a means to its own growth, it is the means that has itself as its end, but this relationship has been inverted, life has been misunderstood as a means to something other than its growth. The end of life is not the means, but the other way around: its means is its own end.

The will to power is therefore a critique of the primacy of the future, of promise, of constancy: “becoming must appear justified at every moment (or incapable of being evaluated; which amounts to the same thing); the present must absolutely not be justified by reference to a future, nor the past by reference to the present” (NIETZSCHE, 1967, p. 377). The will to power only expands to the extent that the present is experienced as such, not as something that is useful for a future goal or as a rumination on the past. This calculative dimension of means to ends is much more a weakening of the will to power and its excesses. It is to the present moment on earth that Zarathustra invites his followers, not to the future: “I beseech you, my brothers, *remain faithful to the earth* and do not believe those who speak to you of extraterrestrial hopes!” (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 6).

Bataille reads the uselessness and foolishness of the will to power as that which escapes any kind of teleological and utilitarian imposition. It is a refusal of any morality that seeks to establish an ultimate purpose for the human being, as occurs in Christianity, so criticized by Nietzsche. This useless excess is what Bataille means by evil. However, the French thinker finds a contradiction in Nietzsche. If the will to power is this excessive uselessness par excellence, unsubmissive to any utility or purpose, then the Nietzschean project towards the overman ends up surreptitiously imposing an ultimate purpose on the will to power:

> If I have been understood, the "will to power," considered as an end, would be a step back. Following it, I would return to servile fragmentation. Once again I would give myself a responsibility, and the good that is the desired power would control me. Divine exuberance, the lightness expressed by Zarathustra's laughter and dance, would be reabsorbed. (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 13)

In an implicit way, Bataille is distancing himself from Nietzsche here, because, instead of endorsing the thesis of a will to power that aims to propose the overman as "the meaning of the earth" (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 6), that is, as a new human species that overcomes the morality of the slave and asserts itself on the basis of its own values, Bataille is proposing a will to chance. In the eyes of the French thinker, "the Will to power is equivocal. It remains in a sense the will to evil, finally the will to expenditure, to risk. The anticipations of a human type-linked contradict a principle of risk, which requires free results" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 150). Using a passage from Nietzsche against himself, Bataille would be saying that the will to power, or even laughter, in the German's hand would not yet be "moraline-free" (NIETZSCHE, 2005a, p. 4).

Whether it's the concept of the will to power or the will to chance, both concepts come up against the theme of laughter, a theme so dear to Nietzsche and Bataille. Nietzsche often addresses laughter, but, as Bataille rightly points out in one of his notes on his objective and non-phenomenological way of dealing with laughter, he states: "Phénoménologues (Kierkegaard, Hegel compris): l'essentiel échappe (les noces, combien secrètes, de la vie et de la mort). Nietzsche seul se situe du côté de la gloire et du rire. [...] Nietzsche est moins explicite (sur le rire) que Kierkegaard (sur l'angoisse)" (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 542). Indeed, the theme of laughter is dealt with by Nietzsche, but not in such an explicit way, challenging the reader in the task of making sense of it. Perhaps the silence about laughter was a way of not destroying it with the seriousness of philosophy. In the prologue to *Twilight of the Idols*, he lets off steam about the dangers of destroying joviality while writing the book:

> It is quite an achievement to stay cheerful in the middle of a depressing business, one that has more than the usual number of responsibilities: but what could be more important than cheerfulness? [...] this sort of destiny of a task forces him to keep running out into the sunlight to shake off a seriousness that has become heavy, all too heavy. (NIETZSCHE, 2005b, p. 155)

In Nietzsche, laughter is both a means of criticizing the nihilism of Western metaphysics and an authentic experience of the growth and explosion of the will to power in the human being. These two dimensions are closely connected. Based on his psychological diagnosis of a decadence, a decline in the will to power of his times, Nietzsche states that the human being is in a dangerous situation: nihilism. “What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devaluate themselves*. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer” (NIETZSCHE, 1967, p. 9). However, this is not just any nihilism, but a passive, reactive nihilism in which, faced with the lack of an ultimate value to give meaning to human life, human beings establish values that deny life. Nietzsche aims to transform this passive nihilism into an active one, in which the ultimate value of the human being is life itself, the will to power.

According to Nietzsche, moral values are the result of the way in which human beings appreciate life, just as moral values condition the way in which life is appreciated. Those who seek to escape the suffering caused by the force and virulence of life, depreciate life given the suffering inherent in it, and appreciate the transcendent afterlife that is supposed to be reached after death. This resentful way of appreciating life, of removing its value, ends up establishing a hierarchy between human life and the promised heavenly life, creating moral values of “good” and “evil”, belonging to the so-called slave morality. Everything that denies the violent movement of life is considered “good” and everything that affirms it is “evil”. Slave morality is the morality of sadness, heaviness and melancholy. Western metaphysics devalues life by operating with

> *imaginary causes* (“God”, “soul”", “I”, “spiri”", “free will” - or even an “unfree” one); completely *imaginary effects* (“sin”, “redemption”, “grace”, “punishment”, “forgiveness of sins”). [...] This entirely *fictitious* world can be distinguished from the world of dreams (to the detriment of the former) in that dreams *reflect* reality while Christianity falsifies, devalues, and negates reality. (NIETZSCHE, 2005a, p. 13)

On the other hand, those who assert themselves in the face of suffering and life's hardships in a jovial and friendly manner, appreciate life precisely because it is in its inconstancy and movement that it is possible to live more intensely. This noble way of appreciating life has itself as a value, which in turn produces noble moral values, which he calls the morality of the master, according to which the “good” is everything that

attests to the increase in power and the “bad” is everything that weakens that power: “What is good? – Everything that enhances people's feeling of power, will to power, power itself. What is bad? – Everything stemming from weakness” (NIETZSCHE, 2005a, p. 4). Noble morality is, so to speak, the morality of laughter, joviality and joy. Only those who deal comically with the tragic dimension of life know how to laugh at the suffering inherent in it. This is why Nietzsche says that “the most suffering animal on earth invented for itself – laughter” (NIETZSCHE, 1967, p. 517). It is precisely because it is the animal that suffers the most that human beings "invented" laughter, because only laughter can cheer up their tragic existence. Laughter then becomes a way for the German philosopher to counteract slave and nihilistic morality since his successful revolt against noble morality: “‘The Masters’ are deposed; the morality of the common people has triumphed. You might take this victory for blood-poisoning (it did mix the races up) – I do not deny it; but undoubtedly this intoxication has succeeded” (NIETZSCHE, 2007, p. 19). Since then, the values natural to the very power of life have been inverted: what is good for life has been considered as evil, and what is bad has been considered as good:

> This ‘bad’ of noble origin and that ‘evil’ from the cauldron of unassuaged hatred – the first is an afterthought, an aside, a complementary colour, whilst the other is the original, the beginning, the actual *deed* in the conception of slave morality – how different are the two words ‘bad’ and ‘evil’, although both seem to be the opposite for the same concept, ‘good’! But it is *not* the same concept ‘good’; on the contrary, one should ask *who* is actually evil in the sense of the morality of *ressentiment*. (NIETZSCHE, 2007, p. 22)

Against the passive nihilism of slave morality embedded in Western metaphysics, Nietzsche sees in laughter, in the will to power, the ultimate expression of noble morality, of joy. In the late preface to *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which the author tries to make a self-criticism years after the publication of his youthful work, he tells us: “you should learn to *laugh*, my young friends, if you are really determined to remain pessimists. Perhaps then, as men who laugh, you will some day send all attempts at metaphysical solace to Hell- with metaphysics the first to go!” (NIETZSCHE, 1999, p. 20).

Critically appropriating the Nietzschean project of a revaluation of all values, Bataille seeks to oppose no longer a morality of the master (“good”/“bad”) and a

morality of the slave (“good”/“evil”), but rather a morality of decline and another of the summit. The morality of decline values what is commonly considered the good, the preservation and conservation of beings through the rational and teleological consumption of energy. The morality of the summit, on the other hand, values that which leads us to evil, that which destroys the realm of purpose, of rational consumption, opening the being up to costly, useless consumption, death:

> The summit corresponds to excess, to the exuberance of forces. It carries tragic intensity to its maximum. It is linked to limitless expenditures of energy, to the violation of the integrity of beings. It is therefore closer to evil than to good. Decline – corresponding to moments of exhaustion, to fatigue – gives all value to the concern for conserving and enriching the being. Moral rules arise from it. (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 32)

If, on the one hand, the morality of the summit corresponds to the tragic intensity of excess, of the expenditure of energy, something close to the Nietzschean will to power, on the other hand, the morality of decline is where the moral rules responsible for slowing down and taming excess emerge. The moral of the summit holds as good “the contempt that beings have for their own interests. [...] evil would be the existence of beings – insofar as existence implies their separation” (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 31). The morality of decline understands that “the good is given first as good for a being. Evil seems to be harm done – obviously to some being” (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 31). We find again Nietzsche's perspectivist procedure, according to which what is considered good for one morality is considered evil for another, and vice versa. It is necessary, however, to point out that the morality of the summit, insofar as its object is evil, short-circuits morality as such, because the summit, when reached, frees the being enclosed in its ipseity to the realm of uselessness and lack of purpose, of morality. The morality of the apex, therefore, is a paradoxical morality that searches for a strange object, which we will talk about in more detail in the next chapter, capable of transgressing the bonds of morality:

> I am speaking of moral concerns, of the search for an object whose value sweeps all others away! Compared to the moral ends that are normally proposed, this object is incommensurable, in my eyes: these ends seem dull and deceptive. [...] It's true: concern for a limited end sometimes leads to the summit toward which I strive. But by a detour. (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 3)

The summit reached by this morality of excess is just another way Bataille calls the inner experience, that sovereign anxiety that erupts in the transgressive moment when the object without objective truth escapes, thus interrupting the servile expectation of decline, in which there is a world ordered by the teleology of morality: “The laughter that undoubtedly has the summit for an object is born of our lack of awareness of it” (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 68). Now, we begin to realize that this strange object that causes sovereign anxiety is precisely what causes laughter, not as distinct phenomena, but as identical. After all, anxiety overcome is still anxiety, but sovereign anxiety, the transgressive moment of laughter: “gay anguish, anguished gaiety cause me, in a feverish chill, ‘absolute dismemberment’, where it is my joy that finally tears me apart” (BATAILLE, 1990, p. 25). We'll return to the object aspect of sovereign anxiety and laughter later. For now, let's continue our reflections on Nietzsche and Bataille.

As we saw in the previous chapter on Bataille's reading of Kierkegaard, laughter is the double movement that occurs between the possible and the impossible, the radical negativity that lacks a moral foundation or purpose. However, according to Bataille, this radical impossibility is only shown through the Nietzschean doctrine of the eternal return of the same, called by the French thinker the “hypertrophy of the impossible”. The idea of the eternal return in Nietzsche is completely linked to noble morality and, therefore, to laughter. This idea emerges in the chapter entitled On the Vision and the Riddle in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, when the main character is climbing a mountain with a dwarf on his back, symbolizing the gloomy pessimism of Western metaphysics. At one point, Zarathustra remembers that he has an abysmal thought with him that not even the dwarf can bear, and he musters up the courage to free himself from its weight and shouts: “‘Stop, dwarf!’ I said. ‘I – or you! But I am the stronger of us two – you do not know my abysmal thought! That – you could not bear!’” (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 125). Squatting on a rock, the dwarf observes Zarathustra pointing to a portal called the Moment (*Augenblick*). The prophet then begins to explain that there in that portal are two eternities, the eternity of the future and the eternity of the past:

> “See this moment!” I continued. “From this gateway Moment a long eternal lane stretches backward: behind us lies an eternity.
> Must not whatever can already have passed this way before? Must not whatever can happen, already have happened, been done, passed by before?

> And if everything has already been here before, what do you think of this moment, dwarf? Must this gateway too not already – have been here?
> And are not all things firmly knotted together in such a way that this moment draws after it all things to come? Therefore – itself as well?
> For, whatever can run, even in this long lane outward – must run it once more! –
> And this slow spider that creeps in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things – must not all of us have been here before?
> – And return and run in that other lane, outward, before us, in this long, eerie lane – must we not return eternally? –" (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 126)

The eternal return of the same, presented by the prophet in this passage, is an abysmal thought precisely because it challenges human beings to live every moment of their lives as if that present moment, whether happy or sad, were going to repeat itself again, repeating itself eternally. This thought, on the horizon of the revaluation of values, is of paramount importance to Nietzsche, because what would be valued in this thought would not be the afterlife, the transcendent, but the present, earthly life. The eternal return of the same is the abysmal thought that must be embraced by man so that he can overcome himself and thus be reborn as an overman: "Mankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman – a rope over an abyss. [...] What is great about human beings is that they are a bridge and not a purpose: what is lovable about human beings is that they are a *crossing over* and a *going under*" (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 7). According to Giacoia,

> the moment is absolutely imponderable, it is that extraordinary moment - a monstrous, formidable, prodigious moment, in which we decide whether what we now want to happen, in the here and now, can be desired "*sub specie aeternitates*", that is, as being eternal, eternally resuming. (GIACOIA, 2023, p. 20)

Then Zarathustra saw a young shepherd in agony because a snake had bitten into his throat and was still stuck there. Horrified by this sight, the prophet tried to pull the snake out but was unable to remove it from his throat: "Had I ever seen so much nausea and pale dread in one face? Surely he must have fallen asleep? Then the snake crawled into his throat – where it bit down firmly" (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 127). Suddenly, he had the idea of shouting at the man to bite the snake and cut off its head. Obeying Zarathustra, the shepherd got rid of the snake. How can we understand this riddling

vision of the prophet? The serpent, a symbol of the eternal return of the same, insofar as it is represented suffocating the shepherd, shows that this abysmal thought really isn't for everyone. Because it is a thought that implies the eternal experience of even the most acute sufferings of human existence, few are those who can bear it without devaluing life, without denying it, which is perhaps why the dwarf who weighed down Zarathustra's ascending life disappears from the scene after he presents his thought. Recovered from the attack, Zarathustra saw him rising from the ground, but he didn't see "no longer shepherd, no longer human – a transformed, illuminated, *laughing* being!" (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 127).

Taking into account what has been said so far, we see that the Nietzschean moment, unlike the Kierkegaardian one, is the moment of the present, not the future. It is not a moment in which the human being opens up to the unknowable possibilities of the future. Furthermore, what characterizes the eternal return of the same is precisely the outburst of divine laughter in those who have overcome their condition as mere men and emerge as supermen, shaking off the weight of nihilism:

> How much is still possible! So *learn* to laugh over and past yourselves! Lift up your hearts, you good dancers, high! higher! And don't forget good laughter either!
> This crown of the laughing one, this rose-wreath crown: to you, my brothers, I throw this crown! I pronounced laughter holy; you higher men, *learn* – to laugh! (NIETZSCHE, 2006, p. 240)

However, this doesn't mean that the two moments aren't close to some degree. The Nietzschean moment, like the Kierkegaardian one, implies a decision in which something is lost. As we saw in Kierkegaard, it is in the decisive moment that the knight of faith resigns infinitely and recovers everything again in a re-signified way, as in the case of Abraham and Job. In Nietzsche, the loss involved in the moment of the eternal return of the same is an expenditure of life, of the will to power, the result of the decision to live each present moment without worrying about any ultimate meaning of life other than its own growth, the overcoming of oneself as a man. It's for no other reason that Nietzsche also calls the eternal return of the same thing the eternal return of waste: "Der furchtbarste Gedanke einer ewigen Wiederkehr der Vergeudung. Die vergeudete Menschheit (und alles Ringen und Grosse ein ewig zielloses Spiel) (Schlange und Hirt)" (NIETZSCHE, 1988, p. 588).

Bataille's reading of the eternal return of waste, as he does with the concept of the will to power, takes into account its equivocality in terms of the way Nietzsche articulates this idea within a philosophical project for the future, towards the overman. Thus, if on the one hand, the eternal return points to the useless waste of human life by inciting the experience of the here and now, of the present, on the other hand, Nietzsche slows down and tames this waste by offering a utility:

> In a sense I think it's necessary to invert the idea of the eternal return. It is not the promise of infinite repetition that lacerates but this: that the moments caught in the immanence of the return suddenly appear as ends. That one not forget that the moments are in every system envisioned and assigned as means: every morality claims: "that each moment of your life should be motivated." The return unmotivates the moment, frees life of ends and thereby initially destroys it. (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 14)

By freeing life from any end, Bataille understands that the eternal return is the thought that consummates the death of God, that is, the absence of any foundation capable of making positive the radical nature of the impossible, as Kierkegaard did. The eternal return is

> L'hypertrophie de l'impossible, la projection de chaque instant dans l'infini, met le possible en demeure d'exister sans attendre - au niveau de l'impossible. Ce que je suis ici et maintenant est sommé d'être possible: ce que je suis est impossible, je le sais, je me mets à hauteur d'impossible : je rends l'impossible possible, accessible du moins. [...] Le retour éternel ouvre l'abîme, mais est sommation de sauter. (BATAILLE, 1973d, p. 313)

It becomes clearer here how Bataille is articulating Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to erode Hegelianism and thus overcome servile anxiety as it is found in the slave of Hegelian philosophy (of Kojève), transforming it into sovereign anxiety, in laughter: “Hegel élaborant la philosophie du travail (c'est le Knecht, l'esclave émancipé, le travailleur, qui dans la Phénoménologie devient Dieu) a supprimé la chance — et le rire.” (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 341)

The Nietzschean hypertrophy of the impossible is the realization of the complete absence of a God and thus radically affirms the limits of our horizon of possibility and impossibility. The transgressive inner experience of laughter, anxiety surpassed, could not really be lived if there were the possibilities of God eluding the interdict of anxiety

in the face of nothingness. However, Bataille notes that this hypertrophy of the impossible is only an invitation for the leap, for laughter. The eternal return of the same is not enough in itself to one to achieve the impossible, there needs to be a double movement from the possible to the impossible and from the impossible to the possible. Kierkegaard, working with the idea that anxiety is what brings human beings closer to the leap of faith and, therefore, to the decisive moment that repeats what has been lost, provides a constellation of concepts that allow us to think about these movements between the possible and the impossible. The possible is the order of projects, the morality of decline, the life of submission to the future, in short, the life of the slave who works. The impossible, on the other hand, is everything that cannot be assimilated into the Hegelian system as conceived by Kojève and Bataille. However, we mustn't forget that this Bataillean leap that causes laughter to erupt, the wasteful repetition, is not the result of a decisive moment in which the subject decides to leap. This leap is much more the result of the appearance of a strange explosive object that comes along and strips the subject of their identity, returning them to a lost state of immanence. It is the sudden appearance of this object and the immanence of laughter that we will now deal with.

3.2.3. The immanence of laughter and the repetition of a strange object

Throughout this work, we have insisted on the coincidence between sovereign anxiety and laughter. Taking this coincidence as established, for didactic reasons we will only use the concept of laughter, but bear in mind that it corresponds to sovereign anxiety[26]. We have also discussed some passages in which Bataille makes evident the link between laughter and the emergence of a strange object without objective truth that returns, that repeats. It is now time to establish a more detailed definition of the Bataillian concept of laughter, which we will justify in the course of this chapter: *laughter, as a leap from the possible to the impossible and from the impossible to the possible, is the wasteful repetition of the lost immanence experienced at the moment when the object without objective truth appears*. One of the things that stands out in this definition is the existence of an object without objective consistency. We have already

[26] We haven't yet differentiated between different types of laughter. At the end of this chapter, we will deal with the differentiation of different types of laughter, which is important so that we don't confuse yellow laughter with the laughter that Bataille tells us so much about. For now, the laughter we are referring to is the major laughter, a laughter that almost kills us.

mentioned this object above, but now we are able to understand it as the object that causes (sovereign) anxiety, laughter, at the very moment it appears before the subject.

Before our journey through Bataille's reading of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, we were dealing with the passage from a sad, lacking economy of desire to an exuberant, joyful economy of desire, the transformation of anxiety into delight, into laughter. We can now understand the transformation of servile anxiety into laughter from the double movement between the possible and the impossible, where the possible refers to the economy of lack and the impossible to the economy of excess. As we well know, laughter begins with the leap from the possible to the impossible, not the other way around, which means that it is from the sad desiring economy, from the servile and rational world of action that we are able to transform anxiety into laughter: “la vie des hommes est toujours un dialogue du possible et de l'impossible. Chacun de nous, s'il le peut, se tient au possible : il s'arrête au moment où la certitude se fait. Le possible alors se retire et l'impossible commence” (BATAILLE, 1988g, p. 296).

As we also know, the horizon of possibility of the world of work is constituted by the continuous process of negativity employed, of determined negation. Human work, or any kind of action aimed at an end, desires in a restrained way the objects it negates so that it can satisfy the desire to recognize itself as an independent being. Human action, seen only from the point of view of possibilities, is the movement towards the self-preservation of its ipseity, negating objects with the expectation of staying alive in the future. In the servile world, the human being transforms the set of negated objects into a great mirror from which he recognizes and guarantees his identity. His actions follow that will to autonomy, through which everything acquires its own image, so that everything is possible, right and makes sense, because nothing is different from himself.

He searches endlessly for a supposed ultimate object that is capable of guaranteeing complete autonomy, the being that completes his lack: “*Ipse*, the tiny particle, that unpredictable and purely improbable chance, is condemned to wishing itself to be other: all and necessary.” (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 85) Returning here to the intricate perspective of the economy of lack and excess, or even the morality of decline and summit, human beings, from the point of view of the morality of decline, have this autonomy and total completeness as their ultimate good, but when they reach it, they end up sliding and reaching evil, the summit, the loss of self. Bataille understands that

this search for completeness, the good from the point of view of the morality of decline, is nothing more than a movement that is ultimately buffeted by the movement towards the summit, towards insufficiency, towards evil, towards the wasteful loss of oneself. As we have emphasized, for this to happen, an object is necessary, a snare, through which it is thought that completeness can be found:

> The need for an attraction – the necessity, found in the autonomy of human beings, of imposing one's value upon the universe-introduces from the outset a disordered state in all of life. What characterizes man from the outset and what leads up to the completed rupture at the summit is not only the will for sufficiency, but the cunning, timid attraction on the side of insufficiency. (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 88)

However, this servile movement of expectation has at its core the sovereign movement of excess, so, in the end, the declining search for autonomy, for that lure, for that illusory object that would complete the human being, was nothing more than the search for what in that object triggers the summit, the loss of self: "In the summit, what attracted me – responding to desire – was the surpassing of the limits of being" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 145). Sovereign desire has only one object of desire, the beyond of being, that is, everything that an individual being is not, the nothingness (*Néant*)[27]. As this excess is only realized as such to the extent that it sets itself a limit that can be transgressed, this desire needs to make a detour through the snare of a false object, whose function is to insert the human being into the order of the possible, of finality, and consequently into the possibility of the impossible[28]. A mask with the appearance of an object is necessary so that, in the end, completeness is not achieved, but rather the loss of self, laughter:

> Le fantôme du désir est nécessairement menteur. Ce qui se donne pour désirable est masqué. Le masque tombe un jour ou l'autre, à ce moment se démasquent l'angoisse, la mort et l'anéantissement de l'être périssable. A la vérité, tu aspires à la nuit, mais il est nécessaire de passer par un détour et d'aimer des figures aimables. La possession du

[27] Properly speaking, sovereign desire as such has no object, because, like the will to power, it aims at nothing other than itself, its growth, its excess. Unlike servile desire, sovereign desire has no object of value to which it is directed, it is a desire without an object, because it lacks nothing that would subject it to the servitude of seeking an object that completes it.

[28] We saw in the chapter on Bataille's general economy that there needs to be a limit to the expenditure of energy, excess. This idea, as you can imagine, is very much in line with the Nietzschean concept of the will to power, which always needs resistance to attest to its own growth. However, because human being is not immersed in the purity of a general economy, as he is also part of the restricted economy, Nietzsche can only be acted upon by Bataille insofar as he is articulated with the Hegelian/Kojèvian dialectic.

> plaisir qu'annonçaient ces figures désirables se réduit vite à la possession désarmante de la mort. Mais la mort ne peut être possédée : elle dépossède. C'est pourquoi le lieu de la volupté est le lieu de la déception. La déception est le fond, elle est la dernière vérité de la vie. Sans la déception épuisante - à l'instant même où le cœur manque - tu ne pourrais savoir que l'avidité de jouir est la dépossession de la mort. (BATAILLE, 1973c, p. 402)

This strange object reveals death to the subject. Deceived by the attractive masks that only reflect his desire for autonomy, for the conservation and preservation of his ipseity, in order to escape the anxiety in the face of death, that is, of nothingness, suddenly this same nothingness reveals itself to him in front of him. Let's understand this nothingness:

> For me, *nothingness* is the limit of a being. Beyond definite limits – in time, in space – a being no longer exists. For us, this non-being is full of meaning: I know that I can be *annihilated*. […] Fundamentally, the transcendence of the being is this nothingness. It is only if it appears in the beyond of the nothingness, in a certain sense as a given fact of nothingness, that an object transcends us. (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 181)

Nothingness, death, only exists in a context of transcendence in relation to animal immanence. Here Bataille is following the Heidegger-Kojevian terminology, according to which the human being is in transcendence when compared to the animal, because the former is suspended in nothingness. It is only because humans are in a state of transcendence, in a state of discontinuity, that they experience a certain kind of nostalgia[29] for the continuity of the animal immanence in which they once participated and which is now lost. Having lost this immanence, human beings try to repeat it:

> On the most fundamental level there are transitions from continuous to discontinuous or from discontinuous to continuous. We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. [...] Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent

[29] This nostalgia, as Bataille rightly observes, is not a nostalgia for the return of nature as such. In his book *Theory of Religion*, the French thinker emphasizes the fictional and poetic character of our representations of immanence, of that distant past in which we were not yet separated from it: “In reality, we can never imagine things without consciousness except arbitrarily, since we and imagine imply consciousness, our conscious-ness, adhering indelibly to their presence. [...] Just as we can speak fictively of the past as if it were a present, we speak finally of prehistoric animals, as well as plants, rocks, and bodies of water, as if they were things, but to describe a landscape tied to these conditions is only nonsense, or a poetic leap” (BATAILLE, 1989, p. 20).

> thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is. (BATAILLE, , p. 14)

Thus, circumscribed in the discontinuity of transcendence, whose anxiety in the face of nothingness, of death, is manifest as humanity's greatest interdict, the limit of what is possible, the human being longs to recover, to repeat, that state of continuity, of immanence. This immanence refers to the negation of nothingness (*Néant*), of death. However, it is extremely important to specify what kind of negation is involved in immanence: "The state of immanence signifies the negation of nothingness [...] By 'negation of nothingness', I am not imagining some equivalent to the Hegelian negation of negation" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 145). This negation of immanence[30] doesn't correspond to the Hegelian determined negation, which tells us that it doesn't work, it doesn't produce anything from its activity. To deny the nothingness of death in the Hegelian sense would be to postpone it, because then it wouldn't actually happen. So how can we understand the singular negation of laughter? Let's try to outline the essential moments of laughter's leap from transcendence to immanence.

When the subject, in the expectation of confirming their wholeness, negates the mask of the object, of nothingness, a mask with which the subject was intimately identified, the subject experiences, through the negation of this mask, its own nothingness of its death, the beyond of its own being. If the expectation was completeness reflected in the mirror-mask that covered up the object, the nothingness, the result is a deadly frustration. This frustration, the fall of the mask of the object, of nothingness, makes the subject face death head-on without actually dying[31]. We know that "nothingness overpowers us, it strikes us down" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 65), but when the anxiety in the face of this nothingness suddenly dissipates, we also get rid of the tension inherent in it. Laughter erupts at this sudden change, this leap, or even communication: "Essentiellement, ce dont le rire procède est la communication" (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 390). This abrupt passage, or rather, this slippage from a state of

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[30] In the chapter on Lacan, we'll see a similar statement. According to Lacan, the summit of anxiety occurs when the lack is missing. In the context of his teaching, this takes place when the image of the lack, the imaginary dimension of the phallic signifier (minus phi), suddenly appears to the subject in such a way as to negate the very negativity of the phallus, around which the subject feels at home (Heim). It follows that this phallic negativity, the support of the lack inherent in desire, is missing, leading to the emergence of the object a and with it the experience of a negative excess, an anxious jouissance. These moments will be explained in more detail in the chapter on Lacan.

[31] What we said at the beginning about the subterfuge of sacrifice as a spectacle through which human beings can experience death without dying still applies here. Deeply identified with the victim, the sacrificer experiences his death by annihilating him, he sees himself die.

tense discontinuity to a relaxed continuity is what Bataille calls communication. In communication, beings communicate insofar as they lose themselves in immanence together (in group laughter) or in pairs (in an erotic relationship). Taking the example of laughter, Bataille states:

> If a group of people laugh at an absent-minded gesture, or at a sentence revealing an absurdity, there passes within them a current of intense communication. Each isolated existence emerges from itself by means of the image betraying the error of immutable isolation. It emerges from itself in a sort of easy flash; it opens itself at the same time to the contagion of a wave which rebounds, for those who laugh, together become like the waves of the sea – there no longer exists between them any partition as long as the laughter lasts; they are no more separate than are two waves, but their unity is as undefined, as precarious as that of the agitation of the waters. (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 95)

Communication brings the subjects/sexualities of the group into contact, but through communication that goes beyond the limits of language. This occurs through a contagious contagion that passes through, like an electric discharge in lightning, those subjects who are now intimately connected. This communication, however, does not correspond to an original unity between the subjects/ipseities of the group. They relate to each other like two waves, in other words, they are separated, but this separation is as indefinite and precarious as the fluid movement of water.

When nothingness, death, suddenly appears, the tension of expectant anxiety is quickly suspended and laughter erupts: “Soit un système relativement isolé, perçu comme un système isolé, une circonstance survenant me fait l'apercevoir lié à un autre ensemble (définissable ou non), ce changement me fait rire à deux conditions : 1º qu'il soit soudain; 2° qu'aucune inhibition ne joue.” (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 389). This means that in order for communication to actually elicit laughter, this slippage must be sudden and the impossible must not be inhibited by God or by any form of positive definition of the impossible. Laughter momentarily refuses the knowledge of nothingness, of death, even though it knows that this knowledge exists:

> Elle implique, selon Charles Eubé, «le refus d'accepter ce qu'au plus profond de nous-mêmes, nous savons». En effet, le rieur, en principe, n'abandonne pas sa science, mais il refuse de l'accepter pour un temps, un temps limité, il se laisse dépasser par le mouvement du rire, de telle sorte que ce qu'il sait est détruit, mais au fond de lui-mème il garde la

> conviction que tout de même ce n'est pas détruit. (BATAILLE, 1976c, p. 226)

The negation of nothingness that occurs in immanence, in laughter, corresponds to the refusal to give concern and importance to the knowledge that he has about his nothingness, his death. Using Freudian jargon, we can say that laughter is a *Verleugnung*[32] of nothingness. This is why Bataille states that "Laughter is on the side of immanence in that nothingness is the object of laughter, but it is thus the object of a destruction" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 181). Nothingness is the object of laughter, not in the sense that laughter determinedly negates nothingness; on the contrary, laughter simply refuses nothingness. By refusing *néant*, the human being recovers, repeats immanence. However, as we mentioned in a footnote above, this return to immanence is not a return to a pure nature in itself, at least not from the point of view of the human being, who is inserted at the intersection between excess and lack, between the general economy and the restricted one. So, as much as excess is a pure positivity in itself, the expensive excessiveness that the human being experiences in immanence is felt as a negativity without employment, a nothing (*rien*): "Only transcendences (discontinuities) are intelligible. Continuity is only intelligible in relation to its opposite. Pure immanence and the nothingness of immanence are equivalent, signifying nothing (*rien*)" (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 157). This makes it clear that nothingness, the beyond of being, everything that is not the human being, death, can be the nothingness of transcendence as well as that of immanence, but it can only be the latter if it is experienced in the moment as nothing (*rien*), not in expectant anxiety. According to Bataille, nothingness is, "à la rigueur, ce que n'est pas un être limité, c'est, à la rigueur, une absence, celle de la limite. Considéré d'un autre point de vue, le néant est ce que désire l'être limité, le désir ayant pour objet *ce que n'est pas celui qui désire!*" (BATAILLE, 1973c, p. 409). Nothingness, as everything that being is not, is the very absence of limits, it is immanence, and this is precisely what the human being desires. When nothingness is

[32] *Verleugnung* is the concept used by Freud to describe the denial mechanism of perversion. Unlike repression (*Verdrängung*), which points to the non-knowledge of castration, *Verleugnung* is a double movement in which the impression of the absence of the maternal phallus is accepted and denied, in other words, it is a denial that manages to maintain at the same time the knowledge and non-knowledge of something terrifying. According to Freud, the procedure of *Verleugnung* is to retain and give up a piece of knowledge, as is the case with the little boy faced with the lack of the maternal phallus: "He has retained (*bewahrt*) that belief, but he has also given it up (*aufgegeben*)" (FREUD, 1961c, p. 154). Laughter in the face of nothingness, of death, also shares this strange feat of simultaneously accepting and refusing unbearable knowledge.

experienced in the immanence of laughter, it means nothing, because the knowledge of death is refused.

Thus, we understand that the immanence of laughter does involve a positive waste, but it is experienced negatively as a nothing (*rien*). In the immanence of laughter, there is a paradoxical experience of an excess of unemployed negativity, an excess of radical indeterminacy, of *rien*. The loss of self in laughter, therefore, is not a loss in the negative sense, but in the positive sense:

> En fait l'activité improductive en général est toujours positive [...] Ainsi la perte réalisée dans les dépenses improductives en est une si l'on veut mais non selon la valeur négative du mot: elle peut, ici ou là, retarder l'accumulation désirable, mais l'énergie se perd *au profit de l'instant présent – qui est*, tandis que l'avenir *n'est pas*. (BATAILLE, 1988d, p. 300)

This energy is lost in favor of the present moment, more specifically, in the moment when the object of sovereign desire, nothingness, is unmasked and refused. Therefore, the leap of laughter is triggered at the moment when the nothingness that emerges revealing death is refused. In this moment there is a repetition, in the here and now, of a lost immanence:

> This object – without objective truth and yet the most shattering that I can imagine – I compare with a smile, with the limpidity of the beloved. No embrace could attain this limpidity (it is precisely that which slips away at the moment of possession). [...] This object, perceived in ecstasy, but in a calm lucidity, differs to some extent from the beloved. It is that which, in the beloved, leaves the lacerating impression-but intimate and ungraspable – of *déjà vu*. (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 63-64)

Nothingness is this object without objective truth because it is made up of three dimensions. The first is the nothingness objectified by the mask that guarantees it a positive and reified object consistency, its specular aspect that reflects its supposed independence and autonomy to the subject. The second is nothingness as that which underlies the mask and gives the subject the feeling of proximity to the negative limit of transcendence, being everything that does not confirm their ipseity. The third refers to the effective transgression of the limit of nothingness, of nothingness as an immanent

rien that is felt as a positive loss of self, an excess of negativity[33]. This is why Bataille understands that it is not reduced to the beloved object, to the lovely mask that covers up nothingness.

In any case, it's important to remember that the leap of laughter, this wasteful and immanent repetition, doesn't happen simply by an intentional action, it arises at chance. Chance is another name that the French thinker gives to the transgressive moment of inner experience, to the impossible, to putting oneself on the line, in short, laughter. By conceptualizing this miraculous moment as chance, he wants to emphasize its random dimension, like the whirlwind of possibilities evoked by the fall of the dice. Now, the return of chance, the repetition of randomness, of the impossible, occurs when we suddenly come across this strange object that we desire through masks. In a sense, this object is chance itself, because its appearance strips us of our transcendence and repeats that whirlwind of chance in the lost immanence. Since this chance is constituted by an unemployed negativity, by a *rien*, then its return is always marked by the deviation proper to the randomness of chance, that is, what returns is randomness itself in its novelty. However, let's remember that the lost immanence is always a poetic lie that is conceived within transcendence, which means that the return of chance is not the return of something that was actually lived, but which was supposedly lost when entering the state of discontinuity. Thus, laughter, as sovereign anxiety, is this chance that returns in the present moment when this object without objective truth appears.

We can see here that Bataille articulates Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean repetition to forge a concept of laughter as repetition that takes into account the idea of a recovery of a lost object in the present moment. According to Kierkegaard, repetition involves the decisive moment in which one decides to infinitely resign oneself to something in order to recover it in the future. This repetition is the return to the same thing in a new way, making it a new same. When this new same is recovered in the future, the re-encounter with it is marked by a failure, a deviation, since there is an inadequacy between what was hoped to be re-encountered and what is in fact re-encountered. The repetition of the eternal return of the same, according to Nietzsche,

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[33] The tripartition of this object without objective truth is very similar to the three registers that make up Lacan's object *a*. The mask that covers up the nothing can very well be read as the imaginary register that provides the object *a* with a narcissistic consistency. The nothingness seen as a negative limit is close to the phallus, understood by Lacan as the unveiling of the negativity of the symbolic Law, which, when transgressed, allows the object *a* to appear. Finally, the excess of negativity inherent in the *rien*, the result of the transgression of nothingness, comes close to the real character of the field of jouissance which is experienced by the appearance of the object *a*.

implies the present moment where both the future and the past converge, making life joyful and lighter by valuing the wasteful becoming that is proper to the will to power, to life. Laughter would be the effect of this sovereign morality that removes the sad weight of nihilism from the human being's back.

The Bataillean concept of repetition works with the Kierkegaardian concept insofar as it emphasizes the human being's anxious desire to regain what has been lost through a leap from the possible to the impossible. However, the repetition brought about by this leap, as we have seen, is not the work of a decisive and intentional moment turned towards the future, in which the human being would use his freedom. This leap occurs due to the sudden appearance of an object that removes it from the servile order of the future. This is where the Nietzschean concept of repetition comes into play, because the moment of the eternal return of the same is the present moment, in which life reaches its summit and ends in laughter. What is then repeated is the present moment supposedly lost in the past, the immanence of laughter, which is always taken up again as a chance, that is, as the tearing loss of the self, an excess of unemployed and indeterminate negativity. Bataille manages to maintain two crucial elements in both authors' concepts of repetition: the repetition of the new and the laughter of the present moment.

If Bataille's claim that Nietzsche was not explicit about the experience of laughter is true, the same can be said of the French thinker regarding the explicit formulation of his concept of repetition. In view of this, we were forced to make this conceptualization more explicit, establishing laughter in Bataille as his concept of repetition par excellence. We can now return to the initial definition of the chapter: Laughter, as a leap from the possible to the impossible and from the impossible to the possible, is the costly repetition of the lost immanence experienced at the moment when the object without objective truth appears. The wasteful repetition produced by this moment does not involve the future, but the experience of the immanent present, here and now. This repetition, as in Nietzsche, implies a great waste of energy, ruining the very ipseity of the subject.

Given what we've said so far, the question remains: what kind of laughter is Bataille talking about? In other words, is all laughter a repetition? Or are there laughs that don't reach the status of repetition? We think it's the latter. There are laughs in which the laugh does not reach immanence, as is the case with yellow laughter. In the

famous Discussion on Sin, Bataille states that the laughter he is talking about is happy laughter, not yellow laughter: “quant à rire jaune, c'est ce qui m'est le plus étranger. [...] Je ne peux parler que d'un rire fort heureux, fort puéril” (BATAILLE, 1973e, p. 356). Yellow laughter would be that bitter laughter, a laughter that is forced, much more the work of a rational intention than a breach of expectation. Bataille tells us that he hates “relaxed laughter, the smiling intelligence of "wits." Nothing is however more foreign to me that bitter laughter. I laugh naively, *divinely*. I don't laugh when I am sad; and, when I laugh, I 'm having fun” (BATAILLE, 2015, p. 58). The bitterness of yellow laughter happens when one laughs when one is sad, pretending to be happy, when deep down one is not at all ecstatic. Going back to the difference between a great play and a small play, we can say that there is also a great laugh and a small laugh. The latter refers to the bitterness of yellow laughter, while the greater, joyful laughter could be illustrated by the fit of laughter that Bataille himself had while crossing a street:

> What is certain is that this freedom, at the same time as the "impossible" whjch I had run up against, burst in my head. A space constellated with laughter opened its dark abyss before me. At the crossing of the rue du Four, I became in this "Nothingness" unknown-suddenly ... I negated these gray walls which enclosed me, I rushed into a sort of rapture. I laughed divinely: the umbrella, having descended upon my head, covered me (I expressly covered myself with this black shroud). I laughed as perhaps one had never laughed; the extreme depth of each thing opened itself up-laid bare, as if I were dead. (BATAILLE, 1988a, p. 34)

In his *Two Fragments on Laughter*, Bataille gives two other examples of laughter that involve communication, i.e. immanence. One of them is the laughter that breaks out in a child when it recognizes its mother[34] in front of it, and the other corresponds to tickling laughter. These two types of laughter involve communication insofar as they connect two beings:

> Apercevant sa mère (ou toute autre personne), un enfant en subit soudain la contagion: il la reconnait semblable à lui; il passe d'un système extérieur à lui au système qui lui est personnel. Le rire du chatouillement revient au précédent, mais le contact aigu — la rupture du système personnel (en tant qu'il s'isole au-dedans) - constitue l'élément accentué. En toute plaisanterie, un système se donnant pour

[34] Later, in his fifth seminar on the formations of the unconscious, Lacan will take up this exact example to begin his reflections on laughter. Like Bataille, he will say that this child's laughter communicates something to the mother that goes beyond language. We'll deal with this later.

> isolé se liquéfie; il tombe brusquement dans un autre. (BATAILLE, 1973b, p. 389)

Considering what has been said about Bataille and his concept of laughter, it is clear that, although he has never quoted or referenced the Rabelaisian tradition, he is within it. We could even say that Bataille goes beyond Democritus and Rabelais, since the French thinker uses the very seriousness and sadness of anxiety against itself, not using laughter as if it were an external and foreign remedy to what it seeks to cure. The therapeutic and liberating potential of laughter is not due to its exteriority in relation to anxiety; laughter is not to anxiety as black is to white. The liberating and healing power of laughter erupts in the very core of the sadness of anxiety.

We will now see that this is not the case with Freud, an author who, despite discussing both anxiety and laughter, ends up circumscribing anxiety within a grammar of finitude, which ends up making him, like Hegel and Kojève, postulate the insurmountability of sad anxiety. Let's see how anxiety and laughter are articulated in Freudian psychoanalysis, in order to address the relationship between anxiety and laughter in Lacanian psychoanalysis,

4. Sigmund Freud: the infamiliar between anxiety and laughter

The theoretical developments produced by Lacan with regard to the affect of anxiety and laughter are circumscribed within the horizon of the clinical problems and intuitions that Freud articulates in his works as a whole. That said, in this chapter we will go through some possible articulations between anxiety and laughter in Freud's work and then move on to Lacanian teaching. It is known that during his clinical career, Freud rethought and reworked several of his theoretical conceptions, such as his neuroticism, his theory of drives and, not least, his explanation of the origin of the affect of anxiety. In general, Freud points to a fundamental nuance within anxiety. On the one hand, we find an expectant character of anxiety (*Erwartung*) and, on the other, we have a traumatic character of anxiety (*Hilflosigkeit*). As well as providing the psychoanalytic basis for the concept of anxiety, Freud also provided fundamental theoretical elements for thinking about jokes and laughter within analytical treatment, which, to a certain extent, have therapeutic potential in the face of the sad and heavy atmosphere of anxiety felt by the analysand. However, as we shall now see, the therapeutic potential of laughter from a Freudian perspective is very limited, since his conception of castration anxiety is presented as an insurmountable condition of human existence, just like the anxiety of death in Hegel and Kojève.

4.1. Castration anxiety: between Erwartung and Hilflosigkeit

Even before Freud published his *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, he was already wondering about this affect in letters he exchanged with his then friend and confidant Wilhelm Fliess. In Draft A attached to a letter from 1892, Freud asks himself: “Is the anxiety of anxiety neuroses derived from the inhibition of the sexual function or from the anxiety linked with their aetiology?” (FREUD, 1966, p. 177). For a long time, approximately 40 years, Freud conceived of the origin of anxiety in these terms, namely as the result of the repression of sexual drives. After 1900, with the publication of the *Interpretation of Dreams* and the formulation of his first topographical model, the

Viennese psychoanalyst was able to give continuity to the hypothesis put forward in 1892. We find it in various articles he published. In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, from 1905, the author makes it clear how the non-realization of what he understands as libido, sexual energy, causes the affection of anxiety: “In this respect a child, by turning his libido into anxiety when he cannot satisfy it, behaves like an adult” (FREUD, 1953, p. 224).

Analyzing Gradiva's dreams and delusions in 1907, the psychoanalyst states that “the anxiety in anxiety-dreams, like neurotic anxiety in general, corresponds to a sexual affect, a libidinal feeling, and arises out of libido by the process of repression” (FREUD, 1959a, p. 60). In his 1909 exposition of the famous phobia case of Little Hans, Freud elaborates on the close link between anxiety and the fear of a specific object, the phobia. According to him, Little Hans suffered from a specific type of anxiety hysteria, one in which there is no somatic conversion as a result of repressed libido, but rather the choice of a phobic object capable of fixing the excess of free libido, which causes the anxiety. The phobia would therefore be a protective reaction against anxiety. Little Hans' anxiety hysteria would be a “exhibit feelings of anxiety and phobias, but have no admixture of conversion” (FREUD, 1955a, p. 116). The fear present in phobia would have an object from which to flee and protect itself, which is not the case in anxiety, since it “was, like every infantile anxiety, without an object to begin with” (FREUD, 1955a, p. 25). In 1910, during his lectures at Clark University, he still insisted on the same explanation: “Anxiety is one of the ego's reactions in repudiation of repressed wishes that have become powerful” (FREUD, 1957, p. 37).

It was in the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* of 1916 that Freud began to emphasize a very important characteristic of anxiety: expectation (*Erwartung*). Expectation is that temporal anticipation that the individual makes about their own future, projecting into the future the most pessimistic possibilities that may occur to them. People are immersed in this expectant, or even fluctuating, anxiety,

> foresee the most frightful of all possibilities, interpret every chance event as a premonition of evil and exploit every uncertainty in a bad sense. A tendency to an expectation[35] of evil of this sort is to be found as a character trait in many people whom one cannot otherwise regard

[35] The expectant character of anxiety pointed out by Freud reminds us of the concepts of anxiety discussed so far in this work. We don't know if he had any contact with Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*, but in fact his conception of anxiety as the expectation of some catastrophic event brings him very close to the Danish philosopher.

> as sick; one calls them over-anxious or pessimistic. (FREUD, 1963, p. 398)

It can be seen that this expectation is related to a kind of foreboding about some misfortune that may befall the individual. In his famous text, *The Uncanny*, from 1919, Freud links the sinister character of the uncanny with anxiety, which is at its core. Anticipating some of the intuitions he would elaborate about anxiety in 1926, the author tells us about the uncanny anxiety felt in the fear of losing one's eyes, a recurring theme in dreams, as an oniric substitute for the fear of castration: "A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated." (FREUD, 1955b, p. 231). In this sense, the expectation inherent in anxiety begins to take on more precise contours in terms of the danger anticipated by the subject. The expectation of anxiety anticipates a specific danger: castration. This reasoning is maintained in the important text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, from 1920, in which Freud, as well as reworking his drive theory, refines the distinction between anxiety (*Angst*), fear/tremor (*Furcht*) and fright (*Schreck*). According to him,

> "Fright", "fear" and "anxiety" are improperly used as synonymous expressions; they are in fact capable of clear distinction in their relation to danger. 'Anxiety' describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. 'Fear' requires a definite object of which to be afraid. 'Fright', however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise. I do not believe anxiety can produce a traumatic neurosis. There is something about anxiety that protects its subject against fright and so against fright-neuroses. (FREUD, 1955c, p. 12)

Anxiety involves a certain expectation of a future and possible danger, which establishes in the individual an anxious preparation (*Bereitschaft*) against this unknown danger. Fear has a specific object of danger that can be escaped from, like the phobic object, the horse, for little Hans. Fright, hitherto little discussed in its relationship with anxiety, occurs when the individual is taken by surprise by danger, without being prepared for it. Thus, Freud understands that anxiety is ultimately an attempt to protect oneself against fright. Later in the same text, the author makes it clearer that there is in fact a readiness for anxiety (*Angstbereitschaft*), an expectant preparation for a future danger, whose function is to protect the individual from this traumatic fright:

> It will be seen, then, that preparedness for anxiety and the hypercathexis of the receptive systems constitute the last line of defence of the shield against stimuli. In the case of quite a number of traumas, the difference between systems that are unprepared and systems that are well prepared through being hypercathected may be a decisive factor in determining the outcome. (FREUD, 1955c, p. 31)

In his text *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex*, Freud begins to consolidate the relationship that was merely hinted at in *The Uncanny* between anxiety and the castration complex. According to the author, there is a phase in the boy's libidinal development in which he no longer satisfies himself primarily orally or anally, but through his phallus: "This phallic phase, which is contemporaneous with the Oedipus complex, does not develop further to the definitive genital organization, but is submerged, and is succeeded by the latency period" (FREUD, 1961a, p. 174). This phase develops in conjunction with the Oedipus complex, allowing for two forms of sexual satisfaction: one active/masculine and the other passive/feminine. The masculine form occurs when the boy satisfies his sexual fantasies through his loving relationship with his mother, at the same time as he begins to perceive his father as an obstacle to his incestuous desires. The feminine form would be the satisfaction of his father's love insofar as it replaces his mother. The decline of the Oedipus complex is, in the case of the boy, the result of his horrified perception of the absence of the maternal phallus:

> But now his acceptance of the possibility of castration, his recognition that women were castrated, made an end of both possible ways of obtaining satisfaction from the Oedipus complex. [...] If the satisfaction of love in the field of the Oedipus complex is to cost the child his penis, a conflict is bound to arise between his narcissistic interest in that part of his body and the libidinal cathexis of his parental objects. In this conflict the first of these forces normally triumphs: the child's ego turns away from the Oedipus complex. (FREUD, 1961a, p. 176)

The main point here is that, according to the psychoanalyst, the castration fantasy implies that the supposed perpetrator of this punishment will be the father or any male figure of family authority, since the Oedipal dynamic causes him to maintain an ambivalent relationship with this paternal/masculine figure. The boy loves his father and wants to be like him, but hates him and wants to replace him. When he is confronted with his mother's lack of phallus, he fears that it was his father who was

responsible for his mother's supposed castration, leaving him to decide between the integrity of his phallus and the continuation of his incestuous desires. It is in this context of paternal threat that the boy cedes libidinal investment in his object of desire, the mother. Despite resolving the Oedipal impasse, the anxiety of castration remains indelible for the rest of his adult life. From then on, anxiety is conceived by Freud as that affection which anticipates the fear of losing some object of love, because the loss of this object would make the person relive the trauma experienced by the fright of castration (*Kastrationschreck*).

Finally, after reformulating various concepts in his theory, Freud, in 1926, now armed with his second topographical model and his new drive dualism, returned to the question of the origin of anxiety in his text *Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety*. In it, we see Freud's attempt to make the link between anxiety and the trauma of the castration complex experienced by the boy during his phallic phase clearer. Anxiety would no longer be the result of the repression of libido, but the very cause of the repression:

> The problem of how anxiety arises in connection with repression may be no simple one; but we may legitimately hold firmly to the idea that the ego is the actual seat of anxiety and give up our earlier view that the cathectic energy of the repressed impulse is automatically turned into anxiety. If I expressed myself earlier in the latter sense, I was giving a phenomenological description and not a metapsychological account of what was occurring. (FREUD, 1959b, p. 93)

If before the repressed libido was transformed into the affection of anxiety, now anxiety becomes the very reason for the ego, the seat of this affection, to repress certain libidinal tendencies. Already anticipated in his text on the uncanny and on infantile genital organization, Freud's idea here is that the anxious expectation of an undetermined danger occurs because it is, in essence, a protection against the trauma experienced in childhood by the fear of being castrated by the father, which he understands as the castration complex. It is in this context that Freud now understands the protective formation of the phobic objects of the Wolf Man and Little Hans:

> in both of them. It was the fear of impending castration. 'Little Hans' gave up his aggressiveness towards his father from fear of being castrated. [...] But the affect of anxiety, which was the essence of the phobia, came, not from the process of repression, not from the libidinal cathexes of the repressed impulses, but from the repressing agency itself. The anxiety belonging to the animal phobias was an

> untransformed fear of castrati(i)n, It was therefore a realistic fear, a fear of a danger which was actually impending or was judged to be a real one. It was anxiety which produced repression and not, as I formerly believed, repression which produced anxiety. (FREUD, 1959b, p. 108)

If anxiety has its core in the uncanny experience of the castration complex, this indeterminate fear of being castrated, then the subsequent emergence of anxiety would be the fear of reliving this previous trauma through the loss of another love object, which is always the fear of reliving a narcissistic wound, just as it was when you were terrified by the lack of the maternal phallus:

> the castration anxiety belonging to the phallic phase, is also a fear of separation and is thus attached to the same determinant. In this case the danger is of being separated from one's genitals. [...] The high degree of narcissistic value which the penis possesses can appeal to the fact that that organ is a guarantee to its owner that he can be once more united to his mother-i.e. to a substitute for her-in the act of copulation. Being deprived of it amounts to a renewed separation from her, and this in its turn means being helplessly exposed to an unpleasurable tension due to instinctual need, as was the case at birth. (FREUD, 1959b, p. 139)

The loss of this cherished object, the penis, elevated to the position of phallus insofar as it can be lost, involves a narcissistic loss, a loss of omnipotence and completeness presumed by the little boy. Marked by this traumatic experience of the castration complex, of helplessness (*Hilflosigkeit*), the individual maintains an expectant posture, a readiness for anxiety (*Angstbereitschaft*), through which he can protect himself from experiencing this trauma that could eventually be repeated:

> The individual will have made an important advance in his capacity for self-preservation if he can foresee and expect a traumatic situation of this kind which entails helplessness, instead of simply waiting for it to happen. Let us call a situation which contains the determinant for such an expectation a danger-situation. It is in this situation that the signal of anxiety is given. The signal announces: 'I am expecting a situation of helplessness to set in', or: 'The present situation reminds me of one of the traumatic experiences I have had before. Therefore I will anticipate the trauma and behave as though it had already come, while there is yet time to turn it aside.' Anxiety is therefore on the one hand an expectation of a trauma, and on the other a repetition of it in a mitigated form. (FREUD, 1959b, p. 166)

In this long passage, we find some elements that deserve to be highlighted. The expectation present in anxiety, as we have seen so far, corresponds to a readiness for anxiety, the function of which is to prepare the anxious subject for a future horrifying event, namely the traumatic helplessness experienced by them when surprised by the fear considered real of losing the phallic object. In short, anxiety is a sign of danger internal to the ego. This is the consequence of the new Freudian developments on anxiety. It is in the ego that the anticipation and expectation of the repetition of a trauma experienced in the past occurs. It is for this reason that the loss of another object, a substitute for the phallic object, will be experienced as anxiety, because it repeats the possibility of the narcissistic loss of the phallus, a trauma that so terrified the ego:

> Thus, the first determinant of anxiety, which the ego itself introduces, is loss of perception of the object. [...] Pain is thus the actual reaction to loss of object, while anxiety is the reaction to the danger which that loss entails and, by a further displacement, a reaction to the danger of the loss of object itself. (FREUD, 1959b, p. 170)

In his 1927 text on fetishism, Freud develops the relationship between the anxiety of the castration complex and the uncanny dimension of trauma. Trying to explain the mechanism by which the fetish is produced through the denial of the lack of the maternal penis, Freud understands that this impression is denied due to the fright (*Schreck*) inherent in it: “Probably no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital.” (FREUD, 1961c, p. 154). The fetish, therefore, would be man's attempt to deny this traumatic fright by choosing another object of libidinal value, in order to conceal the lack of a maternal penis. The anxiety of the castration complex, as we have seen, is an attempt to prepare for an undetermined danger, but it is also a repetition of this trauma experienced in an unexpected and surprising way in the fright (*Schreck*) of castration. We are interested here in the way Freud describes this trauma, that is, as something of the order of the unheimlich. The psychoanalyst states that

> It seems rather that when the fetish is instituted some process occurs which reminds one of the stopping of memory in traumatic amnesia. As in this latter case, the subject's interest comes to a halt half-way, as it were; it is as though the last impression before the uncanny (*unheimlichen*) and traumatic one is retained as a fetish. (FREUD,1961c , p. 155)

Given what has been said so far, we have the following picture of anxiety according to Freud. Anxiety is the affection that originates from the uncanny and traumatic fright of castration (*Kastrationschreck*) when the child is in the phallic phase and also within the Oedipal triangle. As the child doesn't want to suffer the great narcissistic wound of losing the phallus, he renounces the maternal object, replacing it with another love object. However, this substitution cannot erase the truth of an indelible trauma, namely that he can be castrated. Therefore, the fright (*Schreck*) of the castration complex, this uncanny trauma, is the origin of the subsequent anxiety that the individual will feel as he tries to prepare himself for the distressing possibility of being castrated. This anxiety will be triggered above all when a love object is lost, as if the child were reliving that primordial loss. Whether it's the breast, feces or any other love object throughout his life, anxiety always returns as a repetition of an object loss:

> The statement I have just made, to the effect that the ego has been prepared to expect castration by having undergone constantly repeated object-losses, places the question of anxiety in a new light. We have hitherto regarded it as an affective signal of danger; but now, since the danger is so often one of castration, it appears to us as a reaction to a loss, a separation. (FREUD, 1959b, p. 130)

In Freud, we find two concepts of anxiety, or at least two aspects of anxiety. Anxiety is the sign of a danger felt by the ego, in the face of which it prepares itself and keeps itself waiting (*Erwartung*) in order to protect itself from a sudden fright. It is also a reaction to a traumatic and uncanny loss of a love object, such as that of the mother, her breast, feces, etc. The uncanniness present in the loss of an object, however, doesn't just produce anxiety, it can also produce the comicality responsible for laughter.

4.2. The joke, comic repetition and laughter

In his 1919 article, *The Uncanny*, Freud observes the comicality present in some examples in which the uncanny appears in the phenomenon of the double, specifically in the form of repetition. The uncanniness of the comic occurs when

> one may wander about in a dark, strange room, looking for the door or the electric switch, and collide time after time with the same piece of furniture-though it is true that Mark Twain succeeded by wild

> exaggeration it turning this latter situation into something irresistibly comic. (FREUD, 1955b, p. 237)

Based on the 1905 text *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*, we understand that the uncannily comic character of the double, present in the repetitions illustrated by Freud, is due to the fact that "the comic is found – and first and foremost in people, only by a subsequent transference in things, situations, and soon, as well" (FREUD, 1960, p. 181). Taking the example of the person in the dark room looking for the door or the light switch, the comedy lies in the fact that the person incessantly stumbles and bumps into the same obstacle just as they are trying to reach the desired object. In this example, it's easy to see that, as in anxiety, this is a loss of object, since the "encounter" that takes place is not with the expected object, but with the same part of the same piece of furniture. Freud also gives us the example of when, lost in the streets of a small Italian town, he tries to get out of a street, "after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street" (FREUD, 1955b, p. 237). Once again we are faced with a comic uncanniness. Despite countless attempts to achieve a goal, we "find" the sudden loss of it. It is this sudden aspect that seems to permeate Freud's two examples and it is what makes these two stories comic, the sudden loss of an object. Now, it is this sudden loss of an object, accompanied by an expectation of achieving it, that provokes laughter.

Laughter, according to Freud, occurs when a large amount of psychic energy, previously invested in something specific, suddenly becomes useless: "laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge" (FREUD, 1960, p. 147). The moment the energy invested in an object suddenly proves useless, laughter erupts as the discharge of this free energy. This is what happens when the expectation of finding the door or getting out of the street suddenly becomes a futile effort. Above, we saw that the expectation of anxiety and the readiness it evokes implies the hypercathexis of psychic energy. Let's quote this passage again:

> It will be seen, then, that preparedness for anxiety and the hypercathexis of the receptive systems constitute the last line of defence of the shield against stimuli. In the case of quite a number of traumas, the difference between systems that are unprepared and systems that are well prepared through being hypercathected may be a decisive factor in determining the outcome. (FREUD, 1955c, p. 31)

Laughter, in this sense, can be understood as the moment when this expectation fails in its objective of preparing the individual for the traumatic and uncanny. In the comic encounter with something that frustrates this expectation, this hypercathexis becomes useless, resulting in laughter. This is when we realize the uncanny aspect of the comic repetition, the fact that it disarms the readiness for anxiety, the expectant preparation that seeks to protect the individual. We realize that both anxiety and laughter are the result of the loss of the object. Certainly not for the same reason. Anxiety arises as much from the signal in the face of danger as from the loss of an object, while laughter erupts when something from a comic encounter renders the hypercathexis energy unusable.

This anxious hypercathexis is very well observed in the way human beings use language as soon as they have to submit to the moral and rational demands of society, having to give up the playfulness and word games of childhood. The child finds greater freedom to play with language, deriving great pleasure from this uncompromising and experimental use; however, as they become part of society, they end up being subjected to reason. The joke has the function of escaping this pressure:

> He now uses games in order to withdraw from the pressure of critical reason. But there is far more potency in the restrictions which must establish themselves in the course of a child's education in logical thinking and in distinguishing between what is true and false in reality; and for this reason the rebellion against the compulsion of logic and reality is deep-going and long-lasting. Even the phenomena of imaginative activity must be included in this [rebellious] category. The power of criticism has increased so greatly in the later part of childhood and in the period of learning which extends over puberty that the pleasure in 'liberated nonsense' only seldom dares to show itself directly. (FREUD, 1960, p. 126)

If we take what Freud tells us about anxiety, we can even understand that the serious use of words is never unaccompanied by the tension of the energetic hypercathexis of castration anxiety, the way in which adults seek to protect themselves from this horrific danger. Reading back over his work on jokes, we can think that the serious use of words so present in adults seems to be related to the tension of a life in which the use of words accompanies the constant anxiety at the possibility of castration, of this uncanny trauma. After all, the Superego, this moral instance inherited from the Oedipus complex, evaluates and judges the actions of the ego in order to adapt it to the

moral and cultural demands of society, in order to keep it away from any possibility of recovering the infantile castration complex. Thus, alongside laughter, the joke is a way of transgressing the logical use of words, relieving the seriousness of the adult world, and also relieving the anxiety that plagues that same world. The joke, like laughter, involves an energetic reconfiguration that relieves the great psychic expense present in the serious life of rational language. In the joke, there is a gain in pleasure that "*corresponds to the psychical expenditure that is saved*" (FREUD, 1960, p. 118). This pleasure in the joke is reminiscent of the childish pleasure that the subject had when playing with words, before moral and linguistic rules were imposed on him. To recover this childish pleasure, human beings joke about the serious use of the words that have been imposed on them and make up jokes. The joke is about

> in focusing our psychical attitude upon the sound of the word instead of upon its meaning-in making the (acoustic) word-presentation itself take the place of its significance as given by its relations to thing-presentations. It may really be suspected that in doing so we are bringing about a great relief in psychical work (*Erleichterung der psychischen Arbeit*) and that when we make serious use of words (*der ernsthaften Verwendung der Worte*) we are obliged to hold ourselves back with a certain effort from this comfortable procedure. (FREUD, 1960, p. 119)

The pleasure of the joke involves an *Erleichterung*, that is, both a facilitation and a relief from the serious use (*ernsthaft*) of words. This gain in pleasure is not laughter as such, because the one who makes the joke doesn't laugh, only the one who receives it. In the joke, the gain in pleasure also ends up relieving the distressing tension of hypercathexis, saving the psychic expenditure so exhausted by the rational use of language.

In any case, it is important to note the proximity between the transgression of a serious use of language and the outbreak of laughter. Both jokes and laughter are human manifestations that point to an escape from serious life, to the relief of the energetic hypercathexis of anxiety, either through the gain of pleasure or through the sudden uselessness of energy. This interests us to the extent that jokes and laughter can appear as therapeutic resources in Freud, since, according to the Austrian psychoanalyst, the trauma experienced by the castration complex in childhood and the anxiety at the possibility of reliving this trauma are insurmountable challenges in analysis. According to him, both the man, in his aversion to the passive posture in the man, and the woman,

in her desire for the penis, cannot overcome this insurmountable rock of the trauma they experienced in childhood:

> At no other point in one's analytic work does one suffer more from an oppressive feeling that all one's repeated efforts have been in vain, and from a suspicion that one has been "preaching to the winds", than when one is trying to persuade a woman to abandon her wish for a penis on the ground of its being unrealizable or when one is seeking to convince a man that a passive attitude to men does not always signify castration and that it is indispensable in many relationships in life. (FREUD, 1964, p. 252)

In light of this, laughter and jokes would occupy an important place in analysis insofar as they would make it possible to relieve this insurmountable anxiety, a palliative remedy[36]. However, the therapeutic effect of jokes, and especially laughter, would be limited by the inescapable nature of castration anxiety. In the face of the Rabelaisian tradition, Freudian psychoanalysis would be skeptical about the therapeutic potential of laughter, acknowledging the palliative advantages of this remedy, but would not attribute to laughter the ability to overcome the sadness and seriousness of castration anxiety. As in Hegel and Kojève, anxiety would represent a grammar of finitude, and it would be up to Lacan, using Bataille, to transpose this grammar.

[36] Humor would also be a way of dealing with anxiety, we just need to remember the example of the prisoner who, on his way to his execution on a Monday, says: "'Well, the week's beginning nicely'" (FREUD, 1961d, p. 161). As Freud shows us in his article dedicated to humor, unlike the comic and the joke, humor presents the "triumph of narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure" (FREUD, 1961d, p. 162). Humor, therefore, could be a way of dealing with the anxiety of castration. However, despite humor's ability to provide pleasure and satisfaction from the refusal of suffering, Freud tells us that the humorous attitude consists "in the humorist's having withdrawn the psychical accent from his ego and having transposed it on to his super-ego" (FREUD, 1961d, p. 164). In view of this, Freud states that "humorous pleasure never reaches the intensity of the pleasure in the comic or in jokes, that it never finds vent in hearty laughter" (FREUD, 1961d, p. 166). Thus, because humor is narcissistic and does not provide effusive laughter, we understand it to be more of a defense against castration anxiety than a way of dealing with it head-on.

5. Jacques Lacan: anxiety is not without laughter

In the 1950s, Jacques Lacan began his famous “return to Freud”. This means that, in order to understand how Lacan conceives the concept of anxiety and laughter, we have to be attentive to the way in which the French psychoanalyst dwells on the Freudian reflections set out above. In general, we understand that both the concept of anxiety and that of laughter in Lacan will follow the path we pointed out in Freud, that is, these two affective phenomena are triggered by a loss of object. However, our aim in this part of the work is not just to reconstruct Lacan’s appropriation of Freud, but to show how the concepts of anxiety and laughter in Bataille appear as a way for Lacan to return to Freud insofar as he goes beyond the castration anxiety proposed by the Viennese psychoanalyst. In this sense, we also want to make it clear that it is through the Bataillean concepts of anxiety and laughter, set out in the previous section, that Lacan recognizes the legitimacy of the therapeutic potential of laughter in the face of the melancholy and seriousness of human life, thus inserting psychoanalysis within the Rabelaisian tradition.

Bearing in mind that the treatment of the concepts of anxiety and laughter can only take place within the three registers proposed by Lacan, “that are essential registers of human reality: the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real” (LACAN, 2013, p. 4), we will introduce the main elements of the three registers, taking Lacan's *Seminar V* as our starting point. From this contextualization, we will be able to deal with his different conceptions of anxiety, as well as his “theory” of laughter insofar as it is articulated with the theme of the comic, love and jouissance. In this way, we will be able to better visualize the changes and refinements that the concepts of anxiety and laughter undergo during the seminars in a more dynamic way, needing to interrupt our reasoning only when it is pertinent to add a specific development of the three registers and thus make the concepts of anxiety and laughter in a given seminar more intelligible.

5.1. Symbolic servitude and real sovereignty

5.1.1. The subject of enunciation and of statement

Lacan begins his fifth seminar by dealing with the way in which the symbolic truth of the subject of the unconscious emerges in conscious and rational speech, i.e. imaginary speech. To understand this, it is necessary to turn to the structuralist horizon from which the French psychoanalyst thinks about the Freudian concepts of conscious and unconscious. Having said that, let's take a brief tour of the contributions of Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology and Saussure and Jakobson's structural linguistics.

In 1949, in his famous article *The Effectiveness of Symbols*, Lévi-Strauss used his structuralist conception of myth, understood as a system constituted by the relationship of opposition between mythemes, to explain the therapeutic efficacy that myth has, whether in Western or so-called "primitive" societies. Lévi-Strauss tells us about a shamanic healing of the Cuna, in the territory of the Republic of Panama, in which a shaman helps to solve a difficult birth through a magical-religious chant. Healing, then, presupposes the existence of a transindividual and unconscious structure that makes it possible to rearrange its elements:

> The unconscious ceases to be the ultimate haven of individual peculiarities—the repository of a unique history which makes each of us an irreplaceable being. […] The unconscious, on the other hand, is always empty—or, more accurately, it is as alien to mental images as is the stomach to the foods which pass through it. (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963a, p. 202-203)

The unconscious is not empty because it lacks elements that constitute it, but because its elements are empty, consisting of formal elements that lack any given meaning, which are the very condition for the possibility of any meaning. In his famous work *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, we find the French anthropologist linking his structuralist conception of the unconscious to the Maussian theory of exchange to explain, among other things, the way in which the incest ban is the universal and

negative rule responsible for establishing the elementary kinship structure. For Lévi-Strauss, "the prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister or daughter to be given to others." (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963b, p. 481). Thanks to the prohibition of incest and its expression in the principle of reciprocity[37], different human groups, by exchanging women, can communicate and form alliances, building a social bond between them: "The primitive and irreducible character of the basic unit of kinship, as we have defined it, is actually a direct result of the universal presence of an incest taboo" (LÉVI-STRASS, 1963b, p. 46).

The element of kinship is a structure made up of four elements (brother, sister, father and son) that are linked together by two pairs of oppositions. This elementary kinship structure is already the result of a variety of unconscious, cultural and positive rules that condition the possible matrimonial exchanges between different human groups. Lévi-Strauss is drawing on the studies of structural linguistics in understanding the kinship system as a system made up of oppositional relationships between elements. More than that, he is treating the exchange of women as a communicative sign, just like the exchange of words. According to him, both women and words are responsible for mediating between different social groups, enabling a relationship of reciprocity and alliance:

> That the mediating factor, in this case, should be the women of the group, who are circulated between clans, lineages, or families, in place of the words of the group, which are circulated between individuals, does not at all change the fact that the essential aspect of the phenomenon is identical in both cases. (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963a, p. 61)

As we know, to make this point, the anthropologist is drawing above all on two classic authors of structural linguistics: Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. According to Saussure, language "language is a system whose parts can and must all be considered in their synchronic solidarity" (SAUSSURE, 2012, p. 87). In this system, the semantic value produced is the result of the relationship of the elements to each other,

[37] We don't intend to deal exhaustively with Lévi-Strauss' reflections on the unconscious and the elementary structures of kinship. What we're trying to do in this quick reference to the author is to introduce some basic notions that will help us understand how Lacan understands the communicational and mediating dimensions of language, which allow the aggressiveness of the imaginary relationship to be mitigated. We'll deal with this shortly.

because, in themselves, these elements are negative, empty of any positive semantic value *a priori*: "in language there are only differences without positive terms. […] Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact" (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 120).

The elements that make up language, this organic and cohesive system, are what Saussure calls signs. The sign, contrary to what is commonly understood, does not unite a thing with a word. The sign does not correspond to the union that would take place between a word in the dictionary and something external to the word itself. In fact, according to the Geneva linguist, the sign unites a concept and an acoustic image. The concept has to do with the semantic dimension of the sign, its signified, while the acoustic image refers to the sound visualization of the term used, its signifier. The signified and signifier that form a sign do not have a natural bond that unites them, they are joined arbitrarily: "The idea of 'sister' is not linked by any inner relationship to the succession of sounds *s-ö-r* which serves as its signifier in French" (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 67).

Language, as a combinatory system of negative and differential elements, is for Saussure an unconscious social fact that conditions the positive production of meaning. This unconscious dimension of language is underlined by him in the example of chess as a system analogous to language. In a game of chess, each piece on the board only acquires a value in the opposition that each has with the other. "The respective value of the pieces depends on their position on the chessboard just as each linguistic term derives its value from its opposition to all the other terms." (SAUSSURE, 2011 p. 88) However, in order to make this analogy more credible, Saussure warns the reader that the chess player would have to be an unconscious player, since the dynamics of *langue* do not obey any kind of conscious intentionality typical of the individual part of language, speech: "In order to make the game of chess seem at every point like the functioning of language, we would have to imagine an unconscious or unintelligent player" (SAUSSURE, 2011, p. 89).

This unconscious aspect of language is also investigated by Roman Jakobson. In his article *Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasie Disturbances*, Jakobson tries to establish the two processes by which language works based on two types of aphasia, a disorder in which the individual has difficulty making use of speech. First, he explains the general functioning of speech:

> Speech implies a selection of certain linguistic entities and their combination into linguistic units of a higher degree of complexity. At the lexical level this is readily apparent: the speaker selects words and combines them into sentences according to the syntactic system of the language he is using; sentences in their turn are combined into utterances. But the speaker is by no means a completely free agent in his choice of words: his selection (except for the rare case of actual neology) must be made from the lexical storehouse which he and his addressee possess in common. (JAKOBSON, 1971, p. 241)

The process of speech involves two linguistic processes that condition the conditions of possibility for the speaker's conscious articulation: selection and combination. Jakobson believes that the process of selection refers to what Saussure called the synchronic axis, the simultaneous dimension of the system, while the process of combination refers to the diachronic axis, the temporal dimension of the system. The thematization of speech in the light of the synchronic, vertical axis evokes the selection of phonemes from among several others that are available in the speaker's language, such as those present in the example of “pig” and “fig”. The selection of the phoneme /p/ implies the preterition of many other phonemes, including the phoneme /f/. When speech is approached from the diachronic, horizontal axis, it is a matter of combining phonemes in such a way as to link them together in an increasingly complex construction, moving from a word to a sentence, then to a paragraph and so on. This combination is already noticeable in the combination of the phonemes */p/* and */f/*. Jakobson associates the process of selection with the figure of speech of metaphor, which involves substitution by similarity of elements, and combination with metonymy, which involves combination by contiguity of elements.

Based on two different types of aphasia, Jakobson realizes that in each aphasia there is the inability of the aphasic to operate with one of these types of linguistic functioning, selection/metaphor and combination/metonymy. If one aphasic can't select phonemes, they just combine them; if another can't combine them, they just select them. One aphasic can produce metaphors but not metonymies, the other can produce metonymies but not metaphors. In a brief moment in his article, Jakobson associates the metaphorical and metonymic functioning of language with the processes of dream formation described by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: condensation and displacement:

> A competition between both devices, metonymic and metaphoric. is

> manifest in any symbolic process, be it interpersonal or social. Thus m an inquiry into the structure of dreams, the decisive question is whether the symbols and the temporal sequences used are based on contiguity (Freud's metonymic "displacement" and synecdochic "condensation") or similarity (Freud's "identification and symbolism") (JAKOBSON, 1971, p. 258)

How does Lacan appropriate these three theorists to consider psychoanalytic practice and theory? In *Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, Lacan draws on the contributions of Saussure and Jakobson, proposing a distinction between the field of language and the function of speech. In the field of language, we find ourselves on the horizon of the structural unconscious, made up of multiple relational possibilities between the elementary and negative units that make it up, the signifiers. This virtual and synchronic dimension of language is associated with the substitutive mechanism of metaphor. Language can only be realized in the concrete and diachronic dimension of speech. Speech contains the signifying effects of the unconscious signifier chain, which are constantly producing new signifieds. Speech, or discourse, functions according to the diachronic mechanism of metonymy. Considered a linguistic exchange, as Lévi-Strauss pointed out, speech serves to communicate between different individuals. Speech is responsible for intersubjective mediation and produces a "we", a network of reciprocity: "the speech value of a language is gauged by the intersubjectivity of the 'we' it takes on" (LACAN, 2006a, p. 247).

Approached from its communicational function, speech constitutes that third element that mediates the dual and aggressive relationship between two individuals narcissistically identified with their own ego. The ego is part of the imaginary dimension of the human being. What is meant by the imaginary is very well summarized in the short and famous article *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*, where Lacan, without using the concept of the imaginary yet, understands the narcissistic instance of the ego as the result of the mirror stage. The ego, the center of psychic synthesis, would be the precipitate of the introjection of the image of the other, an image that would provide the *infans* with a body schema capable of anticipating the creation of an illusory unity and totality of their own bodies, as well as of the libidinally invested objects. It would be due to the mirror stage that *infans* would emerge from a condition of body shattering, in which they had no control over or notion of their own body. The mirror stage would not be a stage in the subject's development, but the "ontological structure of the human

world" (LACAN, 2006b, p. 76), which would be the condition for the possibility of other subsequent identifications. Identified with the image of the other, the ego would end up relating to the other aggressively, because it would see the other as someone who is occupying the ideal place that the ego should be occupying. This is where speech comes in as a third mediator:

> But, thank God, the subject inhabits the world of the symbol, that is to say a world of others who speak. That is why his desire is susceptible to the mediation of recognition. Without which every human function would simply exhaust itself in the unspecified wish for the destruction of the other as such. (LACAN, 1991a, p. 171)

More than the constitution of a "we", of a mediation between individuals, concrete speech, insofar as it articulates the unconscious elements of language, speech is what makes it possible to reveal being, that is, the truth of the subject of the unconscious: "Certes, en tant que médiation, la parole nous unit à l'autre, mais au regard de la révélation de l'être, la réalisation de l'autre bascule vers la face imaginaire du transfert en tant que résistance qui fait obstacle à l'avènement symbolique" (BALMÈS, 2003, p. 13). The difference between these two types of speech is best summed up by Lacan's opposition between empty speech and full speech. Empty speech would be reduced to an imaginary speech through which the ego maintains itself in this instance of ignorance, failing to speak of what really involves his own desire. Full speech, on the other hand, would be that which reveals the being of the subject:

> the unconscious is the unknown subject of the ego. that it is misrecognised [meconnu] by the ego. which is der *Kern unseres Wesens*. Freud writes in the chapter of the *Traumdeutung* on the dream processes. with which I have asked you to get acquainted - when Freud discusses the primary process. he means something having an ontological meaning. which he calls *the core of our being*. (LACAN, 1991b, p. 43)

In speaking of this *Kern unseres Wesen* as the core of our being that is revealed through full speech, Lacan is taking up the Heideggerian concept of *aletheia* and linking it to desire as conceived by Kojève, that is, the revelation of a nothingness. We only have to turn to Heidegger's article *Logos*, translated by Lacan, to see how the concept of truth as *aletheia* was appropriated by the psychoanalyst to think about these two dimensions of speech explained above. According to Heidegger,

> *Λόγος* lets lie before us what lies before us as such, it discloses what is present in its presencing. [...] The *αλήθεια* rests in *λήθη*, drawing from it and laying before us whatever remains deposited in *λήθη*. *Λόγος* is in itself and at the same time a revealing and a concealing. It is *αλήθεια*. (HEIDEGGER, 1984, p. 70)

Logos, for Heidegger, does not correspond to the instrumental reason of *ratio*, but rather to the harvesting and gathering of being itself insofar as in its saying it shows itself. The saying of the *Logos* shows, lets being be seen, uncovers the very being that was previously hidden. However, this uncovering of the *logos*, or even of the *aletheia*, occurs through a concealment, which means that being is only unveiled by veiling itself. This is Heidegger's concept of original truth, truth as the (un)veiling of being. Lacan, appropriating this Heideggerian idea, will understand that

> that truth is a (dis)appearance of the subject of the enunciation into the subject of the statement. The subject, in sum, heir to all the features of Heidegger's Being, is now considered to speak himself in every statement – but also to disappear in every statement, since the subject speaks himself as nothing and as pure desire of self. (BORCH-JACOBSEN, 1991, p. 108)

That said, we can say that at the level of speech we can find two subjects, the subject of enunciation and the subject of statement. The subject of enunciation is speech seen from the unconscious perspective, from the unveiling of the truth of desire, from the revelation of the nothingness that is unconscious desire itself. The subject of statement is speech seen from the conscious perspective, from the veiling of the truth of desire from the imaginary identification of the ego. Insofar as speech is formed by the selection of unconscious signifiers, the subject of the unconscious is revealed, but it is veiled by the conscious speech of the subject of the statement, the ego: “the subject speaks to *himself with* his ego” (LACAN, 1993, p. 14). When the analysand speaks, he reveals the emptiness that he himself “is”, subject/desire, but he does so by veiling his desiring “being” in the conscious signifier articulation. Given this, in the 1950s, Lacan proposed as a therapeutic paradigm a clinic which, by paying attention to the analysand's speech, would allow him to recognize the negativity of his own desire. By crossing the imaginary dimension of speech, the symbolic dimension of speech would emerge, the subject of the unconscious. In this sense, the analytical clinic would aim to purify human desire insofar as it would make him recognize that his desire does not

desire a specific empirical and imaginary object, but rather the pure desire that is logically prior to the illusory effects of the image of the other. It is in this sense that we understand Lacan's statement in his second seminar that “desire as revealed by Freud, on the level of the unconscious, as desire for nothing” (LACAN, 1991b, p. 211)[38].

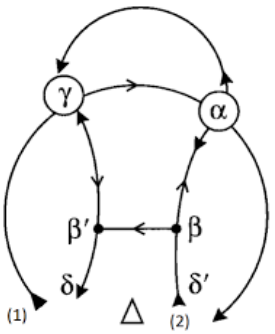
5.1.2. Phallic love in its relation to anxiety and laughter

Having said that, in *Seminar V*, Lacan deals with the Freudian *Witz* in order to elucidate the emergence of the truth of the subject of enunciation that ends up bursting into the subject of the statement, into the imaginary ego. This truth deals with one's own unconscious desire to be recognized by the Other as negativity, pure desire. It is important to note here that Lacan is not using Freud's text on jokes to deal with their comic aspect in itself, much less with a theory of laughter, since “the question of laughter goes a lot further than that of wit or the comic.” (LACAN, 2017, p. 117). He turns to Freud's text to deal specifically with the game of combination present in jokes, a game that provides an excellent entry point for the metaphorical and metonymic functioning of the unconscious structured as a language. According to Lacan, Freud's book deals with “a ‘verbal technique’, as they say. I say, more precisely, a ‘technique of the signifier’” (LACAN, 2017, p. 15).

The psychoanalyst takes up the famous joke of the famillionaire to draw some conclusions about the mechanism of meaning production present in the metaphor. To deal with this mechanism, Lacan uses a graph, which explains the way in which the joke is produced. In it, we see a line running from right to left, referring to the synchronic dimension of unconscious signifiers. This line is the unconscious synchronic chain, “permeable to the properly signifying effects of metaphor and metonymy, which implies the possible actualization of signifying effects at all levels, and down to the phonemic level in particular” (LACAN, 2017, p. 9). This chain cuts across the diachronic chain, from the left towards the right. This chain is lived continuously by the supposed identity of the ego, referring to the “common, everyday discourse, such as is admitted into the code of the discourse that I will call the discourse of reality we all share. This is also the

[38] The influence of the Kojèvian theory of desire is present here, according to which the human being desires the desire of the other, which in turn involves desiring the object desired by the other, such as the example given by the philosopher of the enemy’s flag.

level at which the fewest meanings are created, since meaning is already there and in some way already given" (LACAN, 2017, p. 10).



The letter *α* corresponds to the code, i.e. the place of the Other, the treasure trove of signifiers that permeate the history and culture of a given "subject". The letter *γ* refers to the message, the moment when truth emerges from the signifier combination of the joke, the revelation of its being. *β* refers to the *je*, that is, the subject of the unconscious, the subject of enunciation, and the *β'* names what Lacan calls at the beginning of this seminar the metonymic object, which, after the seventh lesson, will be called the phallus. For now, it is enough to understand that by "metonymic object" Lacan has in mind that object which, as in the metonymic functioning of language, is never reached, because it always escapes at the moment it is grasped. The psychoanalyst tells us that the joke is produced by three logical moments traceable in this graph. The first is the movement from *α*, the moment when the Other provides *β* with the code through which he can articulate his desire. Then, when *β* states himself by articulating the signifiers in and of the Other, the arrows emanating from him go towards the metonymic object *β'* and again towards *α*. The direction of the metonymic object indicates that there is an attempt to reach something, some object, in this case, the famillionaire, that is, Salomon Rothschild. Finally, the last moment is the emergence of a message that is itself the unveiling of truth, *γ*. This message diverges from the code, the signifier, which is usually used in rational discourse. Thus, when the code stated by *β* breaks through the conscious discourse of the imaginary, a new meaning is produced:

> witticisms are related to something that is profoundly located at the level of meaning. I am not saying that this is a truth, for the subtle allusions to some kind of psychology of millionaires and parasites - even though they contribute greatly to our pleasure, we will come

> back to this – do not explain the production of' "famillionaire". I am saying it's *the* truth. (LACAN, 2017, p. 18)

The truth mentioned in the passage above should be understood in the sense that we presented above, the truth as the unveiling of the being of the subject of enunciation. The joke, in dealing with the truth of the subject's being, creates new meanings that did not previously exist in a given configuration of meanings of the subject of the statement. It is from the relationship between negative and differential elements that something of the order of positivity emerges. However, this positivity, like the ego itself, is an illusion, because its consistency is always dubious, it can be called into question at any moment by another meaning. Basically, the mechanism of the joke is nothing more than the result of the metaphorical function that occurs between signifiers, alongside the forgetting of proper names, lapses and symptoms. Metaphor implies the substitution of one signifier for another and thus the quasi-erasure of a previous meaning and the emergence of a new one: It's in the relationship of substitution that metaphor's creative mainspring, creative force or power to engender – that's the word for it! – lies" (LACAN, 2017, p. 24). However, in order for this substitution of signifiers to take place, another mechanism of language functioning is necessary: metonymy. It doesn't involve the substitution of signifiers, but rather the "the transfer of signification along the chain" (LACAN, 2017, p. 65). According to Lacan, metonymy, not that of the conscious speech of the ego, but that which takes place at the unconscious level of the set of possible combinations of signifiers, is the condition for a metaphor to occur: "metonymy is the fundamental structure within which something new and creative, which is metaphor, can be produced" (LACAN, 2017, p. 67). Unlike Jakobson, who focuses only on the conscious functioning of metaphor and metonymy, Lacan finds in the unconscious both of these functionings in a mutual relationship. Like metaphor, which occurs on a paradigmatic plane, i.e. vertical, metonymy occurs alongside it, but only to the extent that it is repressed by metaphor:

> Unconscious metonymy has therefore to be referred to the vertical/synchronic axis of language; more specifically, it consists of a combinatory association by contiguity – and not of a substitutive association by similarity, as in the case of metaphor – that is ultimately linked to the conscious/diachronic/horizontal axis of speech at a specific point by a metaphoric substitution – that is to say, by repression. (CHIESA, 2007, p. 53)

This is the relationship between metaphor and metonymy. They intersect when something in the order of repression causes the potential meanings of the metonymic combinations of the unconscious to appear in a negative way in the order of the rational discourse of the ego. Metaphor, therefore, is what causes the metonymic dimension of unconscious desire, that is, the truth of the subject, to emerge only in the formation of the unconscious, which functions metaphorically. This also explains why Lacan insists on stating that repression and the return of the repressed are "the two sides of the same coin. The repressed is always there, expressed in a perfectly articulate manner in symptoms and a host of other phenomena" (LACAN, 1993, p. 12).

The metaphor is both the unveiling and the veiling of desire, it is a formation of compromise. As a metaphor, the joke, for Lacan, would be an attempt to recover a mythical jouissance[39] that one had with words in childhood, to the extent that the demand was met by the maternal Other. He explains how this happens through the concepts of need, demand and desire in his first formulations of the graph of desire. Lacan first tells us what this mythical satisfaction of the child, this full jouissance, is like. It takes place in three moments. The first is that of need. The child's need (δ') is emitted insofar as it emits a confused intention: "the young subject's intention, however confused you might suppose it to be, insofar as he makes an appeal, and that of signifiers, however disorganized you might suppose their use to be, inasmuch as they are mobilized by his efforts and his appeal" (LACAN, 2017, p. 81). The second moment is that of the demand produced in the place of the message (M), where the need is transformed into a demand as it comes into contact with the signifiers of the child's diachronic and conscious speech. The two lines intersect, closing off a retroactive direction that is addressed to the maternal Other:

> What began as need will be called demand, while the signifiers will come to a close on what, in as approximate a manner as you like, completes the demand's meaning, which constitutes the message that

[39] So far we have emphasized the proximity between Lacan and Heidegger through the psychoanalyst's use of the concept of truth. However, it should be noted that Lacan gradually distances himself from the German philosopher insofar as he begins to develop that dimension of human experience that is beyond the symbolic, beyond language, the real of jouissance. Zizek notes that "the difference with Heidegger is that Lacan, instead of accepting this agreement (sameness) between Being and logos, tries to get out of it, towards a dimension of the real indicated by the impossible junction between subject and jouissance" (ZIZEK, 2009, p. 13). In the context of the joke, we can already see that the truth revealed by the metaphorical formation of the unconscious points to something prior to language itself, this primitive jouissance. This will become clearer in the course of the work.

> the Other evokes – let's say the mother, granting the existence of good mothers from time to time. (LACAN, 2017, p. 81)

In the third moment, the two curves are completed beyond the message and the Other, which means that the demand addressed to the Other is met, that is, the object of love that the child demands is given to him. It is at this moment that the child experiences mythical jouissance at the level of diachronic discourse, that is, at the level of a supposed completeness, which is why it is such an unforgettable pleasure. Thus, according to Lacan, when Freud speaks of the child's pleasure in the playful use of words, he is saying that, before the seriousness of adult life, the child's demands were met by the maternal Other:

> with respect to signifiers, at the third moment there's certainly something that corresponds to the miraculous appearance - we have effectively made the assumption that it's miraculous, fully satisfying – of the satisfaction in the Other of the new message that has been created. This normally results in what Freud presents to us as the pleasure we get in the deployment of signifiers. (LACAN, 2017, p. 82)

However, Lacan tells us that there is something that cannot be reduced to either need or demand: desire. For him, desire arises in the equivocality of demand insofar as its imaginary aspect is inserted into the symbolic register. Demand, as the symbolic and imaginary remodeling of need, causes the child's request to acquire an equivocality in terms of the object it is aimed at. It is not reduced to the mere acquisition of an imaginary object, but evokes the desire to be recognized by the Other. This equivocality, already present in potential in the child's mythical satisfaction, is central at the moment when, as an adult and actually inserted into the serious life of language, the child makes a joke in order to recover this mythical jouissance.

To explain this, Lacan uses the graph again. However, now he shows that the production of the joke takes place in a subject who is already immersed in language and is trying to recover that lost primordial jouissance. For this reason, the moments will be different. The demand begins to be formulated by the Other as a treasure trove of signifiers, and no longer begins with a mythical subject prior to language. Thus, the first moment shows that conscious speech is addressed in response to a demand issued by the Other. The demand, as Lacan observes, is the same as "to confide in": "'*Demande*', which is so marked by themes of insistence in the concrete use of the term, even more

so in English than in other languages, but also in other languages, is originally '*demandare*', to confide in" (LACAN, 2017, p. 84) This means that the Other gives something of itself to the subject, who supposedly has what the Other lacks. Thus, the second moment shows that the conscious ego's speech is directed towards a metonymic object capable of meeting this demand from the Other: "This is an object that is admissible to the Other, the object of what the Other is willing to desire, in short, the metonymic object. Once it's deflected towards this object, it converges, at the third moment, on the message" (LACAN, 2017, p. 85). Finally, in the third moment, the message is produced from the reflection on this metonymic object. The demand made by the ego would be the metonymic object as a response to the initial demand of the Other. Thus, the demand is both a response to the Other's demand and a request for the Other to recognize the subject as what it lacks. It is clear here that the demand is not constituted from the subject, but from what the Other wants. However, in order to realize what the Other wants, the subject has no option but to use the Other's own signifiers to answer the Other what it wants from him: "This message is a formulation which is alienated from the very beginning insofar at it sets out from the Other, and which terminates on this side at what is, in some way, the Other's desire. The message is the meeting point of the two" (LACAN, 2017, p. 86).Thus, it is clear that in this context it is impossible to satisfy the demand, because there is an equivocation (*maldonne*) on all sides as to what is demanded by the Other and by the subject. It is also clear that the desire for recognition underlies the demand, since what matters to the Other or the subject is not the object itself, but the fact that receiving an object is synonymous with recognition. This recognition was supposedly achieved in mythical jouissance, once the demand had been satisfied.

The joke has precisely the function of recovering this satisfaction of the demand for the Other through the recognition of their desire. Lacan advises against thinking of this bit-of-sense of the joke as non-sense, because what is proper to the joke is much more the ambiguous expression *pas-de-sens*. The joke, as a metaphor, is as much a passage of meaning, a crossing of the bar of meaning, as it is a lack of meaning. This ambiguity preserves that dubious dimension between demand and desire present in the message addressed to the Other. Thus, the aim of the joke is not for the Other to authenticate the meaning of the joke, but that the meaning comes from the non-sense, thus preserving the ambiguity of the *pas-de-sens*:

> on manquerait l'essentiel de l'explication si l'on entendait simplement par là que l'Autre vient reconnaître le sens — tel sens — dans le non-sens; car ce sens, le sujet auteur du mot d'esprit y a déjà accédé; il faut bien plutôt entendre ceci: l'Autre vient reconnaître que le sens trouve sa source dans le non-sens. (BAAS, 2003, p. 67)

What the subject seeks with the joke is not for the Other to understand the imaginary meaning of the signifier combination, but rather what is presented as the hiatus through which it is possible to give a bit-of-sense to the joke. In making a joke, the subject seeks to produce a bit-of-sense that distorts the meanings of rational discourse and thus be recognized in the laughter of the Other. The joke, as a message, "questions the Other over this bit-of-sense. The dimension of the Other is essential here. [...] A joke is indissociable from the Other, who is charged with authenticating it" (LACAN, 2017, p. 88).

But what about laughter? So far, Lacan has mainly dealt with the role of the third party, the Other, so that the joke can be formulated. We've seen how the joke, as a metaphor, is a message from the subject addressed to the Other who seeks to rescue the mythical jouissance of childhood. However, we have only spoken of timid laughter. Baas observes that "de fait, dans tout son commentaire de la théorie freudienne du *Witz*, il n'est jamais question de cet éclat de rire auquel Freud attachait tant d'importance" (BAAS, 2003, p. 57). When dealing with laughter during his incursion into the joke, Lacan simply tells us "d'un «rire discret» (ce qui est une citation de Freud) ou d'un «sourire»" (BAAS, 2003, p. 54). We could think, along with Baas, that this erasure of laughter in the sphere of the joke is due to the fact that the supposed explosion of laughter is erased by the signifier that produces that laughter. Or even, following Baas, we could think that "peut-être alors est-ce parce que le rire peut également advenir dans le comique ou l'humour (lesquels doivent être distingués, selon Freud, du Witz) que Lacan entend chercher ailleurs que dans le rire ce qui fait la spécificité du mot d'esprit" (BAAS, 2003, p. 61). The truth is that laughter, as an energetic discharge, in the way it is characterized by Freud in his text on jokes, has not been addressed up to this point.

Explosive laughter will be approached by Lacan based on the proximity he traces between the symbolic phallus and love. In this seminar, love begins to be investigated when Lacan delves into the question of the comic: "What does the comic consist in? For the moment let's just limit ourselves to the observation that it is bound

up with a dual situation" (LACAN, 2017, p. 99). The comic is on the horizon of imaginary duality, of the narcissistic relationship that the ego establishes with its object insofar as the image it has of itself is an alienated image, coming from another person. However, since the beginning of this chapter we have insisted on the fact that for Lacan this imaginary can only guarantee consistency due to the combination of signifiers that have a signifying effect. As Lacan rightly reminds us, the images that come from the other and that form the ego "are activated, caught up in and used through the operation of signifiers" (LACAN, 2017, p. 105). Thus, the dual relationship between two ego's is never really just dual, but always presupposes a third party, the Other. When something of the symbolic order of the joke takes effect, these images themselves are affected by it:

> By playing with the signifier, man calls his world into question, right down to the root. The value of the spirited quip, which distinguishes it from the comical, is its possibility of playing on the nonsense that is fundamental to any use of sense. It is possible, at any moment, to call any element of meaning into question. By playing with the signifier, man calls his world into question, right down to the root. The value of the spirited quip, which distinguishes it from the comical, is its possibility of playing on the nonsense that is fundamental to any use of sense. It is possible, at any moment, to call any element of meaning into question. (LACAN, 2020, p. 287)

This passage shows us that the construction of the joke, despite depending especially on the Other as the treasure trove of signifiers and as the one capable of recognizing the subject of unconscious desire in the *pas-de-sens*, also needs the dual level between the two or more ego's involved in this construction. In the quote below, we can see the interlocution between the joke and the comic, between the ternary and the dual, between the symbolic and the imaginary:

> The little other, to call him by his name, contributes to the possibility of a joke, but it's within the subject's resistance - which for once, and this is highly instructive for us, I am rather seeking to provoke - that something that makes itself heard will resonate much further, and this means that the joke will resonate directly in the unconscious. (LACAN, 2017, p. 108)

We better understand the duality of the comic within the ternarity of the joke when we see Lacan defining the Other as a "living being, one made of flesh, even though it is not his flesh that I'm arousing" (LACAN, 2017, p. 106) and as that

transindividual locus constituted by “sentences or even the received ideas” (LACAN, 2017, p. 106). It is in the Other, permeated by the imaginary and symbolic register, that the metonymic object, the phallus, is found. It is the object that can acquire any image, as long as it occupies its place in the Other and thus guarantees its special status precisely because it is desired by the Other. The joke, insofar as it aims to recognize the desire of the Other, tries to make this recognition take place in this metonymic object:

> this is all about focusing the Other on an object. Let's say that, in the opposite sense to the metonymy of my discourse, it's a matter of bringing about a kind of fixation of the Other as discoursing on a particular metonymic object. In a way, this could be any object. It is not at all necessary that it have the slightest connection with my own inhibitions. It makes no difference, it will work with anything provided that the Other is occupied with some object at that particular moment. That is what I was explaining to you last time when I spoke about the imaginary solidification of the Other, which is the first position in making a witticism possible. (LACAN, 2017, p. 111)

The possibility of the joke presupposes the imaginary consolidation of the Other, it implies the imaginary reification of an object that is installed in the Other without being confused with it as such. However, for this imaginary objectification to take place, the Other is a *sine qua non*. In other words, there is no joke except in its relationship with the comic and vice versa.

We know that Freud, in his book on the *Witz*, initially tries to thematize the joke by distancing it as far as possible from the comic, investigating in depth the specificity of word games. At the end of the book, he does the opposite, addressing the intimate relationship between the two. We understand that this is what Lacan ends up doing in the seventh lesson of *Seminar V*. Like Freud, Lacan understands that the comic has to do with naivety, with the fact that there is no inhibition as to what is going to be said, which is why the comic, or naive, joke is not intended to express an unconscious content in a disguised way. The naive joke is permeated by ignorance and unawareness of what is going on around them. It is on this horizon that the French psychoanalyst finally begins to theorize about the explosion of laughter as everything that has to do with a liberation of the image. Thus, the explosive face of laughter only really takes place in the context of a naive joke, at the convergence of wit and the comic.

Before we go any further, it is worth noting that, so far, we have come across three ways in which Lacan approaches the subject of the joke. Firstly, we can say that he

deals with the joking functioning of the unconscious, in other words, the metaphorical functioning of the formations of the unconscious. He also addresses the joke as a formation of the unconscious that differs from others, such as lapses and forgetting, due to the fact that it is produced intentionally. Finally, Lacan addresses the joke in its comic dimension, that is, insofar as it occurs naively at the level of imaginary ignorance. The passage to the comic joke should not be understood as a discontinuity in relation to what he had been developing before the seventh lesson of *Seminar V*, but as Lacan's way of punctuating the way in which the imaginary ego, that is, the seat of ignorance and therefore of naivety, experiences these joke effects in a comic way. If before the attempt of the joke to recover a mythical jouissance was thought of above all in the light of the metaphorical and metonymic functioning, now, in the case of the comic joke, Lacan seems to put in the foreground the subject of the statement who doesn't know that he wants to be recognized by the Other. In this sense, it's as if Lacan understood that human beings produce jokes even when they don't (know that they) intend to be recognized by the Other. The ego, this ambulant comic joke, also wants to "restores an essentially unsatisfied demand its jouissance, under the double and moreover identical aspects of surprise and pleasure - the pleasure of surprise and the surprise in pleasure" (LACAN, 2017, p. 121).

This restitution of jouissance takes place in the laughter that erupts when the ego has its narcissistic image dissolved. In order to deal with the explosive laughter of the comic joke, Lacan gives us the image of a masked adult approaching a child, a scene that is very similar to the one already mentioned by Bataille in his *Two Treatises on Laughter*, where laughter occurs precisely between a child and its mother. Lacan tells us that laughter

> effectively touches everything that is an imitation, a doubling, a Doppelganger or a mask, and if we look at it more closely it's not just a matter of masks, but of unmasking - and unmasking at moments that are worth thinking about. You go up to a child with your face covered by a mask, he laughs in a nervous or embarrassed way. You move a bit closer, a manifestation of anxiety starts to appear. You take off the mask, the child laughs. But if you are wearing another mask beneath this mask, he won't laugh one bit. (LACAN, 2017, p. 118)

This narcissistic image, at first, causes anxiety, as it involves not knowing what to be in the face of the equivocity of the Other's demand or desire. The mask in question

is the embodied image of the Other, the image with which the child has identified and the reason why they feel so much anxiety in the face of it, since identifying with an image involves the anxiety of never knowing what one should be or do in order to satisfy the Other's desire. For the human being, the image of the other, the incarnation of the Other, “is very closely linked to the tension I mentioned earlier, which is always elicited by the object at which the tension is directed, leading it to be placed at a certain distance with a connotation of desire or hostility” (LACAN, 2017, p. 118). The anxious tension of this dual relationship, as we know, can only be sustained by the relationship between the subject and the Other, which would make it possible to recover the mythical jouissance by the recognition of the Other's desire. Thus, it is understood that laughter breaks out when the incarnate image of the Other, that image that we love and admire so much but at the same time are so anxious about, smashes to the ground[40]:

> it is here that the collapse of tension, to which authors attribute the instantaneous triggering of laughter, is produced. If someone makes us laugh simply by falling over, it is as a result of his more or less pompous image that we hadn't paid all that much attention to before. (LACAN, 2017, p. 119)

The relief of anxious tension occurs when the phallus appears in the image of the Other. As we know, the phallus is the signifier capable of pointing to the meaning of the Other's desire: “The phallus is nothing other than the signifier of the desire for desire. Desire has no other object than the signifier of its recognition” (LACAN, 2019, p. 479). Understood as a signifier, the phallus is what points to the inadequacy of any imaginary object that is supposed to be the ultimate object of our desire. If the imaginary object appears as that which could confirm the narcissistic identity of the ego, it appears this way because the phallus lies within it, “the fundamental signifier by which the subject's desire has to be recognized as such whether in the case of a man or a woman. The fact is that desire, whatever it may be, has this phallic reference in the subject” (LACAN, 2017, p. 257). It is thanks to its status as a signifier that the phallus is of the order of nothingness, of the unrepresentable, an object that can be understood as the index of inadequacy between desire and the imaginary object, always frustrating the egoic expectations of appropriating a supposed object that would be able to confirm the imaginary identity of the ego.

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[40] As we saw with Freud (and Bataille), laughter erupts when tension is abruptly relieved.

Thus, the phallus suddenly relieves the anxious tension in the face of the image of the Other because it is what implodes it. It is in the oppressive and tense atmosphere of anxiety that laughter breaks out. When the ego encounters it, the image of the Other is finally released and, consequently, the ego that is identified with it. Laughter erupts when this tension is suddenly suspended by the unrepresentability of the phallus, resulting in the destruction of that pompous and complete image that is so admired. Taking the example of the case of Hans, we can say that he would laugh if he had this anxious tension suddenly relieved by the fall of the image of this maternal Other:

> We burst out laughing when in our imagination the imaginary character goes on in his affected way, whereas what he is supported by in the real is lying spreadeagled on the ground. This is about the liberation of or from the image. Take this in the two senses [in French] of this ambiguous expression - on the one hand, something is freed from the constraints of the image while, on the other, the image is also free to wander off on its own. (LACAN, 2017, p. 119)

However, it is important to note that the phallus only takes place in a context where the most naive and comical joke we know is found, that is, love, the investment of a narcissistic libido towards the image of the Other. According to the French psychoanalyst, “following the very definition of love, ‘to give what one does not have’, is to give what he does not have, the phallus, to a being who is not it” (LACAN, 2017, p. 330). What makes love a comic joke is less the fact that you give what you don't have to a being that isn't it, and more the fact that it happens unknowingly, naively. No wonder Lacan says that “Love is a comedic sentiment” (LACAN, 2017, p. 123). Considering what has been said, we think that love could well be conceived as the paradigm of the comic joke, since it is of the order of demand insofar as the desire for the phallus is ignored and unknown and, therefore, the recognition of the Other that overflows in every act of love. Love, Lacan tells us in his *Seminar XX*, “is impotent, though mutual, because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One, which leads us to the impossibility of establishing the relationship between "them-two" (*la relation d'eux*). The relationship between them-two what? - them-two sexes.” (LACAN, 1999, p. 6). The demand for love is ignorant because it ignores the fact that it is the desire for the symbolic object that is supposed to bring about the union of the sexes, the recovery of that lost jouissance. Thus, love is the comic joke par excellence, as it is a message addressed to the image of the Other who ignores the impossibility of recognition. The

lover doesn't know, but loves nonetheless. The imaginary axis of the demand for love between the ego and the other, as the image of the Other, doesn't allow the ego to realize that it is sending a message that is, in the end, the desire for recognition capable of restoring that mythical jouissance. Unlike the punctual and conscious enunciation of a joke, the comic joke, like the diachronic line of the discursive speech of the ego, is continuous.

Having said that, we can say that the laughter resulting from the comic joke only takes place within the horizon of the tension of anxiety. Since *Seminar IV*, Lacan has been pointing to the relationship between anxiety and the desire of the Other, between anxiety and the equivocity of the demand of this mask of the Other. Let's remember Lacan's analysis in this seminar of the case of little Hans, who created a phobic object for himself because he felt threatened by his mother's devouring demand. In Hans' case, he was not yet in this register of lack, because he was not castrated. What made him anxious was the phallic image he had to be or possess in the face of a devouring maternal Other. In a way, Lacan anticipates here the famous expression "*che vuoi?*" present in the apology of the giant praying mantis with an expression taken from the first epistle of Peter, *quaerens quem devoret*:"The unfulfilled and unsatisfied mother around whom the child ascends the upward slope of his narcissism is someone real. She is right there, and like all other unfulfilled creatures, she is in search of what she can devour, *quaerens quem devoret*" (LACAN, 2020, p. 187).

This shows us, then, that, as in Bataille, in Lacan laughter not only presupposes and is caused by the very tension and oppression of anxiety, but also involves a loss of self, that is, of the limits of an always precarious ipseity or identity. Let's focus for a moment on the first similarity between the authors. As we have seen, Bataille believes that laughter is the sovereign moment in which the servile tension of knowing the possibility of death is suddenly refused. In this sense, there would be no laughter without anxiety, because a previous tension is necessary for its relief. Laughter would therefore be the result of the slide from knowing to not-knowing, from the possible to the impossible. What's more, laughter doesn't come from beyond anxiety, but through its intensification. In Lacan's view, laughter also occurs through a slippage that is effected precisely by that which conditions the tension of anxiety, the phallus. The search for the phallus is already the expression of an anxious search towards a jouissance resulting from the recognition of the desire of the Other. However, when the phallus is found,

there is no mirroring of the imaginary world, but rather its dissolution and the instantaneous passage from seriousness to joy, from the familiar to the uncanny. Lacan is following Freud in pointing to the comic as the pivot that makes the passage from the familiar to the uncanny. This is what happens in the comic story provided by Freud, and taken up by Lacan, of the children who make the familiarity of a children's play suddenly become uncanny because it is the staging of an adultery case: “The fact that the child goes straight to this enormous gaffe without incurring the least trouble triggers something that transforms into laughter. That is to say, it becomes very droll, with all the overtones of the strange that this word can entail” (LACAN, 2020, p. 288). As for the second similarity, the one concerning the loss of self, we understand that both authors approach laughter as an experience of excess negativity. For Bataille, the sovereign and transgressive moment of laughter would correspond to an expenditure of energy that would be felt negatively by the subject. However, the negativity of laughter would not be that Hegelian negativity, but rather that unemployed and indeterminate negativity, a simple nothing (*rien*). As a victim of this heterogeneous negativity, the subject loses its own identity and communicates with other beings who are also in the beyond of being.

Still in *Seminar V*, right after bringing up these reflections on anxiety and laughter, Lacan establishes a great proximity between the comic and jouissance: “It is not a coincidence when, in his lesson of March 5, 1958, he focuses explicitly on jouissance for the first time in his entire seminar project, his chief point of reference is comedy” (KESEL, 2009, p. 122). This allows us to trace, within Lacanian teaching, a certain dichotomy that already existed in Bataille, namely the opposition between the seriousness and servitude of language and the joy and sovereignty of jouissance[41]. In order to better understand how this is found in Lacanian teaching, let's now look at the relationship between these two poles in the transition from the 1950s to the 1960s, the moment from which Lacan, like Bataille, would lay the foundations for a conception of joyful anxiety, something that would only come to fruition in *Seminar X*.

[41] However, we don't intend to establish a rigid dichotomy between the seriousness of the symbolic and the joy of the real. In the course of this work, we intend to make it clearer that the symptom is a point of contact between the symbolic and the real.

5.1.3. The seriousness of language and the joy of jouissance

So far, we have used the concept of jouissance without pointing out that in the 1950s, Lacan, in general, was not yet conceiving of the real register of jouissance exactly as he would begin to understand it from 1960 onwards, in *Seminar VII*. Roughly speaking, for most of the 1950s, jouissance was still conceived as the phantasmatic usufruct of an object, as the consumption and assimilation of an imaginary and symbolic object, in other words, the phallus. The phallus, as we well know, only allows itself to be objectified and assumed in an imaginary relationship, in the comic joke of love, which, in *Seminar VI*, is better characterized as fantasy. Fantasy, as a comic joke, is not a mere image, but a scene constructed and ordered by the sliding of signifiers. Lacan defines fantasy as

> as a more or less fixed scenario of signifiers thanks to which the subject, sliding from one signifier to another, gains a certain consistency. It provides that subject with an anchoring point, not in the form of an imaginary "figure" ("Gestalt") as in the mirror stage, but in the form of a fixed series of signifiers. (KESEL, 2009, p. 31)

This means that if we have notice of the phallus, it is because the subject is in the fantasy horizon of love. When the subject reaches the phallus objectified in this fantasy, the lack of desire is realized as such. At that moment, jouissance arises, but it is still subject to the primacy of the desiring lack, since jouissance is at the service of desire. Let's remember that Lacan, in the 1950s, was still working with the idea of pure desire, according to which human desire desires nothingness in the imaginary object, that is, the phallus as a pure signifier: "Lacan's theory of desire, as it gained shape over the course of his sixth seminar, was about to 'close' the whole problematic of desire and its lack in on lack itself, a 'lack' operating as both the motor and the keystone of the autonomous symbolic order" (KESEL, 2009, p. 42). Only this signifier in its purity could make the subject recognize the radical negativity of his desire, his death, and thus satisfy his desire. Because jouissance is understood as the symbolic death of the subject, it is a satisfaction of desire that ends up in its dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction inherent in the subject's death, however, is what allows desire to return even more intensely, because it is precisely this dissatisfaction, the nothingness of death, that drives it. It is in this sense that we can say that before *Seminar VII*, jouissance is a function of

desire; death is not the end of desire, but only a stop so that the negative life of desire can be perpetuated: “Each time he speaks about enjoyment, it is primarily to explain the primacy of desire. [...] Enjoyment does not extinguish desire, but heightens and stimulates it” (KESEL, 2009, p. 123).

However, this doesn't mean that at some points in the 1950s Lacan wasn’t glimpsing the real dimension of jouissance. We think we can see this anticipation above all when Lacan, in his fifth seminar, thinks about jouissance from the perspective of comedy. The psychoanalyst provides some theoretical coordinates that allow us not only to identify jouissance with the real, but also to understand it as laughter that is beyond the symbolic. We only have to remember the link he makes between this and comedy. This is what opposes the desiring dynamics of the symbolic:

> The origin of comedy is narrowly bound up with the id's relationship to language. What is this id that we occasionally talk about? It is not purely and simply some original radical need, one that is at the root of the individualization of an organism. The id can only be grasped beyond the elaboration of desire in the network of language, only actualized at its limit. Here, human desire is not initially caught in the system of language that defers it indefinitely and leaves no place for the id to be constituted and named. (LACAN, 2017, p. 121)

The id seems to be Lacan's way of naming the human desire that doesn't allow itself to be seized by the nets of language and that, in a way, is prior to it. In a way, because the notion of a non-linguistic desire can only exist on the horizon of language, or rather, at its limit. The symbolic dimension of human desire would be an indefinite postponement of the id, of this non-linguistic desire. How can we not see here resonances of those Bataillean reflections on the servile life of work that postpones the sovereign moment to the future? In any case, what interests us here is Lacan's link between the comedy of the phallic signifier and the id that is irreducible to it, real jouissance. By taking comedy as a point of reference for thinking about the real of jouissance, Lacan would already be advancing the idea that the phallus is the “the signifier of jouissance” (LACAN, 2006c, p. 697), that the comicality of the phallus is capable of triggering something that points beyond the symbolic. The comic character of the phallus, therefore, is what triggers the jouissance of laughter:

> Where does comedy originate? We're told that it comes from the banquet at which, in a word, men say ‘Yes’ in a kind of orgy – leave

> this word in all its vagueness. The meal is constituted by offerings to the gods, that is, to the Immortals of language. Ultimately, the entire process of the elaboration of desire in language comes back to and comes together in consumption at a banquet. The whole detour is only taken so as to come back to jouissance, and the most elementary at that. (LACAN, 2017, p. 121)

The reference to the banquet, as we saw in the introduction to this work, comes above all from the representations that the Rabelaisian comedy makes of this moment of gay knowledge of laughter, a moment in which there is an excess of drink, food, obscenity and lust, a moment in which the subject has his imaginary identification dissolved: "the gaiety and laughter have the character of a banquet and are combined with the images of death and birth (renewal of life) in the complex unity of the material bodily lower stratum" (BAHKTIN, 1984, p. 80). Comedy represents this sacrifice of the specular and narcissistic image offered as a banquet to the Immortals of language, to the gods who, beyond the seriousness of language, consume all matter without any linguistic postponement. Sacrifice is something that is, in a way, inevitable, because it is in the very process of elaborating language that it seeks to regain lost jouissance, that divine banquet of which it is no longer a part. This is what Lacan tells us in the following passage, where he takes up a short story from Raymond Queneau, in which a student is questioned by his teacher about some historical wars. The student, in a comical way, replies in general terms "The dead! The wounded!":

> makes us remain in bondage to them. Something escapes us beyond the bonds that the chain of signifiers maintains for us. The simple fact that this refrain that is repeated from the start of the joke - namely, 'The dead! The wounded!' - makes us laugh is indication enough of the extent to which we are refused access to reality as soon as we penetrate it by means of signifiers. (LACAN, 2017, p. 101)

This link between the seriousness of labor servitude and the slippage of signifiers is constant in Lacanian teaching. In *Seminar I*, dealing with the relationship between master and slave beyond imaginary aggression, Lacan explains what happens to those who submit to the symbolic law: "A law is imposed upon the slave, that he should satisfy the desire and the pleasure [jouissance] of the other. It is not sufficient for him to plea for mercy, he has to go to work. And when you go to work, there are rules, hours - we enter into the domain of the symbolic" (LACAN, 1991a, p. 223). In *Seminar*

IV, Lacan likens language and its signifiers to a power plant that puts the subject through constant work: “It is language, which has been functioning here for as long as you can remember. [...] For as long as there have been functioning signifiers, subjects have been organised in their psychical systems by the specific play of the signifier” (LACAN, 2020, p. 42).

This does not mean that the jouissance achieved by comedy is not linked to that of tragedy, because, as Lacan observes, “a comedy always completes the tragic trilogy, and we cannot consider it independently” (LACAN, 1992, p. 245). But unlike tragedy, the character in comedy must come out of the plot unharmed for it to be a comedy. Otherwise, if the sacrifice of his image, of his mask, leads him to lose his eyes, as happened with Oedipus, or to actually die, as happened with Antigone, it is a tragedy. This is the case of the character Arnolphe, in Molière's play *The School for Wives*, who goes through a series of peripeties, but ends up saying “Phew!”. Thus, according to Lacan, the principle of comedy is that, no matter who the comic character in question is, he is required to “remains intact at the end. Whatever happens during the comedy is like water off a duck’s back. *The School for Wives* ends with a ‘*Phew!*’ from Arnolphe, and yet God only knows what extremes he has been through” (LACAN, 2017, p. 124). If, on the one hand, tragedy, according to Lacan, seeks to focus on the fatality of conflicts related to the different ways in which the signifier chain is linked at the level of the family and at the level of the community, a clear reference to *Antigone*, comedy will only focus on the fact that there is a moment of immediate consumption of this strange “substance” from which one is separated, the common flesh:

> Comedy arises at the point at which the subject and man attempt to adopt a different relationship to speech from that in tragedy. It's no longer a matter of committing to or adopting contrary necessities, nor is it a question of it being only one's own affair. It's a matter of that in which he has to express himself as a person whose destiny it is to absorb the substance and matter of this communion, profit from it, enjoy it and consume it. Comedy, one might say, is something like the representation of the end of the communion meal on the basis of which tragedy has been evoked. It's ultimately man who consumes all his substance and common flesh that has been presented there, and it's a matter of finding out what the outcome is. (LACAN, 2017, p. 246)

Well, this common flesh is nothing other than jouissance, this unbridled excess of the divine banquet. What was once postponed by the seriousness of the work of the signifiers is now consumed in the excessive moment of the banquet. This is laughter,

that joyful jouissance that is beyond the seriousness of the symbolic. The extra-symbolic and communicative dimension of laughter, of the flesh, is emphasized by Lacan in some later lessons of his fifth seminar:

> One has to have never observed a child over the course of his development in his first months to be unaware that even before speech, the first true communication - that is, communication with what is beyond what you are for him as a symbolized presence - is laughter. Whereas desire is linked to a signifier which happens to be the signifier of presence, the first laughter is addressed beyond this presence, to the subject behind it. (LACAN, 2017, p. 311)

The child's laughter is the first real communication experienced by this subject. This laughter, therefore, has to do with that mythical jouissance that the child experiences and which he will later try to recover through the phallic signifier in his loving relationship with the other. Thus, it doesn't matter so much whether the laughter here occurs before or after castration itself, because, as we already know, in the inarticulate demand addressed to the maternal Other there is already a minimal relationship with the symbolic structure and its signifiers: “In effect, before properly linguistic exchange occurs, all sorts of games - hiding games, for example, that so quickly make children smile or laugh - already involve symbolic action, strictly speaking” (LACAN, 2019, p. 31). Laughter is that true communication that goes beyond the presence of the Other, beyond the symbolic. If the symbolic dimension of the Other represents the presence of absence, or even the absence of presence, laughter is a communication that is not reduced to the communication of signifier exchanges, but a communication that goes beyond the presence-absence dialectic of the symbolic. The Bataillean influence couldn't be clearer here. Laughter, as in Bataille, is communication that occurs in the sliding of a closed system towards an open system:

> Au contraire, il s'agit bien du concept proprement lacanien de "communication", comme communication avec l'au-delà de ce qui peut s'articuler dans l'ordre symbolique immédiat, c'est-à-dire la communication avec l'inconscient. Le masque indique pour l'enfant qu'il y a autre chose que ce qui se présente factuellement à lui sur un mode symbolique, qu'il y a une autre scène que celle qui se donne immédiatement à lui. Si donc Lacan dit de ce rire de l'enfant qu'il est « la première vraie communication», c'est pour préciser immédiatement que cette vraie communication est «la communication avec l'au-delà de ce que vous êtes devant lui comme présence symbolisée», donc communication avec l'au-delà du symbolique. (BAAS, 2003, p. 73)

In his *Seminar VII*, dedicated to the ethics of psychoanalysis, the psychoanalyst further develops the relationship between the seriousness of the work of the signifiers and the joy of jouissance. On the one hand, we have the loving and narcissistic dimension of the imaginary that is sustained by the symbolic work of the signifiers towards the metonymic object of the phallus, and on the other, the excessive dimension of jouissance. We have seen that access to jouissance only takes place within love, this comic joke that presupposes the comic phallus. Continuing these reflections, Lacan tells us about the comicality of courtly love. In this way, he wants to emphasize the summit of love's comicality, that is, its attempt to plug the lack of foundation inherent in the Other with a narcissistic image capable of conferring on it the status of supreme Good, of an ultimate foundation of life. As we have insisted, love, as a comic joke, doesn't know that its love is much more the desire for a lost jouissance, *Das ding*:

> is that which in the real suffers from this fundamental, initial relation, which commits man to the ways of the signifier by reason of the fact that he is subjected to what Freud calls the pleasure principle, and which, I hope it is clear in your minds, is nothing else than the dominance of the signifier – I, of course, mean the true pleasure principle as it functions in Freud. (LACAN, 1992, p. 134)

Das Ding, the Thing, is that first true communication of the child, that mythical and primordial jouissance that is only presupposed a posteriori. This Thing is what suffers from submission to the servitude of the work of signifiers, the dominance of the signifier. Thus, courtly love, whose way of loving makes the Other such an important and central object that it signifies the very reason for the lover's life, is the drastic and comic attempt to recover this jouissance. Courtly love is the paradigm of sublimation for Lacan, that is, what elevates the object to the dignity of Thing: "the most general formula that I can give you of sublimation is the following: it raises an object to the dignity of the Thing" (LACAN, 1992, p. 112). As we said earlier, it was already possible to trace moments in the 1950s when Lacan anticipated the real dimension of jouissance, especially in the articulations he made between comedy and jouissance. Now, in the context of his seventh seminar, Lacan makes explicit the real character of jouissance, which is what most characterizes jouissance, that is, the fact that it is not reducible to the symbolic, much less to the imaginary.

This becomes more evident now because Lacan understands that the jouissance resulting from the phallus, which arises within the comic joke, from love, does not have the function of maintaining the dynamics of desire, of signifier work, but of actually transgressing it. If previously the deadly character of jouissance was attenuated by being subjected to the primacy of the work of signifiers, now the death that jouissance causes is the very purpose of this work. Desire is now a function of jouissance, in other words, human desire is the desire for a radical death beyond the symbolic. The law of desire, marked by the order and reason of the phallic signifier, has no other objective than to transgress itself. This is why Lacan states, in his tenth seminar, that "*Only love allows jouissance to condescend to desire*" (LACAN, 2014, p. 179). It is only through this fundamental deception about the status of the Other as the supreme Good that something of the order of the phallus, of the comic, can emerge. It is through the phallus as the Law of desire that it is possible to transgress this same Law and access jouissance: "We are, in fact, led to the point where we accept the formula that without a transgression there is no access to jouissance, and, to return to Saint Paul, that that is precisely the function of the Law" (LACAN, 1992, p. 177). The laughter found in comedy has an intimate relationship with the jouissance experienced in the transgression of a signifying order organized by the phallic signifier:

> The sphere of comedy is created by the presence at its center of a hidden signifier, but that in the Old Comedy is there in person, namely, the phallus. Who cares if it is subsequently whisked away? One must simply remember that the element in comedy that satisfies us, the element that makes us laugh, that makes us appreciate it in its full human dimension, not excluding the unconscious, is not so much the triumph of life as its flight, the fact that life slips away, runs off, escapes all those barriers that oppose it, including precisely those that are the most essential, those that are constituted by the agency of the signifier. (LACAN, 1992, p. 314)

What makes human beings laugh is not life surrounded by imaginary and symbolic supports, but the escape from it at the moment when it slips beyond the barriers of the signifiers that enslave it. In the end, laughter has to do with a borderline experience of death that doesn't actually end in death.

In light of what we've said so far, it's clear that laughter and jouissance cannot emerge without the seriousness and tension of the work of the signifiers and the anxiety that accompanies it. It is only within the anxiety of the desire of the Other that the

phallus, the Law, can be transgressed. The relief caused by the joy of laughter does not exist without the anxious tension that the subject experiences during the work of the signifiers towards the phallus, the Law. The work of the signifiers imposes on the subject a serious, laborious and servile life, focused on the future, which, when transgressed, provides access to laughter. Laughter, as this excessive negativity of jouissance, is not subject to this servile negativity of the signifier chain, which makes us work and thus postpone the ultimate jouissance, laughter.

We understand that Lacan is reading the serious life of language, already pointed out by Freud, in a very Bataillean way, he is attributing to language the responsibility for the submission of our lives to the future and the continuous postponement of the moment. Freud, in his book on the *Witz*, tells us about a serious life, a life submitted to the logical and limited reasoning of rational language. Now, Lacan seems to be reading this linguistic seriousness of signifiers from what Bataille tells us about the servitude and seriousness of the work of productive negativity that postpones irrational consumption to the future. More than that, Lacan is pointing us towards the possibility of transgressing this seriousness, towards irrational consumption in the present moment: “Le rire peut être ainsi défini comme une manière de transgresser l'ordre de l'identification symbolique” (BAAS, 2003, p. 74). The jouissance of laughter, for Lacan, would result in the same Bataillean affirmation that laughter is the negation of nothingness, a negation that is not Hegelian, that is not inscribed in the symbolic structure of the signifiers. This strange negativity can very well be understood as the negation of the negativity of the signifiers that always postpone access to laughter. After all, the negativity of the symbolic structure is one that makes us slaves, in other words, inserts us into a regime of servitude.

There is a consensus that in *Seminar VII*, Lacan makes Bataille's influences more obvious. Safatle, for example, always refers to Bataille's influence when he mentions the concept of jouissance in Lacan: “if we want to find the true reference to the Lacanian use of the concept of jouissance, we should look to Georges Bataille” (SAFATLE, 2020, p. 61, *translated*). We agree with Safatle and other commentators, but we believe that Lacan's concept of jouissance is merely a way of appropriating the Bataillean concept of anxiety, because we know that Bataille’s laughter is not a laughter that lacks anxiety, but a joyful anxiety. We want to insist that if Lacan appropriates the Bataillean concept of jouissance, this is because Lacan was working with a Bataillean

concept of anxiety. This joyful anxiety, best described in *Seminar X*, is what makes Lacan, together with Bataille, propose a concept of anxiety that evokes in the human being a joyful and sovereign position in the face of death, which, as we saw at the beginning of our work, did not exist in Hegel, Heidegger and Kojève. Let's now begin a more detailed investigation of the concept of anxiety in Lacan, which will allow us to visualize this concept of joyful anxiety in *Seminar X*.

5.2. The pear of laughter

In his tenth seminar, Lacan discusses anxiety as *Erwartung* and *Hilflosigkeit*. In the previous chapter, we took a quick look at some of the features of the Lacanian conception of anxiety, but since our focus was on understanding how the author thinks about laughter, the specifics of anxiety were left in the background. Now, we will have the chance to approach the relationship between laughter and anxiety by putting the latter in the foreground. Let's take a look at some passages from Lacan's teaching, prior to *Seminar X*, where these two dimensions of anxiety are exposed. We will try to show that *Erwartung* refers to anxiety in the face of a danger that gives rise to the tension of a servile work of the signifiers, while *Hilflosigkeit* points to two forms of anxiety: a traumatic and symptomatic anxiety and a joyful and excessive one.

5.2.1. Anxiety between expectation (Erwartung) and trauma (Hilflosigkeit)

Laughter, as we saw in the previous chapter, presupposes anxiety. In this sense, we were talking about anxiety from the start, that tension which, when suddenly relieved by the phallus, is transformed into laughter, dissolving imaginary and symbolic identifications. But after all, what gives anxiety this tension? The answer: expectation, *Erwartung*. The expectation of anxiety refers to the anticipation of the repetition of a loss of object arising from castration. This loss also corresponds to anxiety as *Hilflosigkeit*. In the course of Lacanian teaching, this anxiety arising from the loss of the object, the *Hilflosigkeit*, is first thematized in its traumatic and tragic dimension, so present in the jouissance of symptomatic formations. Lacan then begins to make room for a *Hilflosigkeit* whose transformative and tragicomic character occurs only at the summit of anxiety. Let's see how these elements are articulated by Lacan in the course of his seminars.

In *Seminar II*, Lacan dwells at length on the famous dream of Irma's injection, a dream Freud himself analyzed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In a nutshell, Freud concludes that the dream was the result of his desire not to take responsibility for the supposed failure of the treatment of a family friend, Irma. In the dream, Freud is receiving guests at what appears to be a salon party when Irma appears. As soon as she arrives, he pulls her aside to tell her that if she's ill, it's her own fault, because she didn't

accept the solution proposed to her. She complains that her gastrointestinal symptoms are getting worse. Freud then inspects her mouth and throat, at which point he sees a white spot at the back of her throat. Freud then calls a doctor friend to help him with the diagnosis. Finally, Otto, another friend of Freud's, appears and gives Irma an injection. In subsequent analyses, the psychoanalyst noted that the white spot at the back of Irma's throat reminded him of the serious illness his eldest daughter had had a few years earlier.

Lacan, based on Freud's own argument regarding the satisfaction of desire present in dreams of anxiety, takes up the Freudian thesis that anxiety in dreams has its foundation in the anxiety of waking life: “anxiety-dreams exist. but what produced that anxiety is nothing other than what would provoke anxiety in waking life” (LACAN, 1991b, p. 125). Thus, Freud's anxiety at the fright of those difficult times of his daughter’s illness was being repeated in the anxiety dream. The anxiety of this dream has as its core the loss of an object, that is, his daughter, a loss that is “represented” in Freud's vision of Irma’s throat:

> There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands *par excellence*, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final revelation of *you are this – You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness*. (LACAN, 1991b, p. 154)

The anxiety that Freud experienced in the dream would have been triggered by the vision of the non-visible, of this flesh that presents itself in a formless way. It's impossible not to see a reference to Bataille in this characterization of anxiety as the formless and as flesh. The formless appears in *Documents*, where it is characterized as that element which is alien to any definition and which needs a definition, a form, in order to be truly formless: “Thus formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form” (BATAILLE, 1985, p. 31). The flesh, in turn, is thematized in *Eroticism*, where the French philosopher states that it is “the extravagance within us set up against the law of decency. [...] If a taboo exists, it is a taboo on some elemental violence, to my thinking. This violence belongs to the flesh, the flesh

responsible for the urges of the organs of reproduction" (BATAILLE, 1962, p. 92). Both the formless and the flesh are excesses that come from overcoming a form, a limit. Bearing in mind the chapter on Bataille, we know very well that these two concepts are in the field of the impossible, of the sovereign moment, that is, of joyful anxiety, of laughter. However, Lacan makes use of these Bataillean concepts to talk about the appearance of something that did not cause laughter in Freud, it is a dream of anxiety that repeats a past trauma, which means that Lacan is affirming the existence of a symptomatic dimension to this tearing experience of great anxiety[42].

Great anxiety is the anxiety felt at the loss of an object: "It is a Freud who has come through this moment of great anxiety when his *ego* was identified with the whole in its most un constituted form" (LACAN, 1991b, p. 159). The great anxiety would be given by the experience of the shapelessness not only of the form of Freud's ego, but also the very symbolic mainstay of the Viennese psychoanalyst. According to Lacan, the flesh and the shapeless would be a paradoxical image, that is, an image that reveals its own imaginary and symbolic dissolution, the result of the revelation of the real, of that which is most unnameable. They would be the

> apparition of an image which summarises what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real. of the essential object which isn't a object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence. (LACAN,1991b, p. 164)

We can see that Lacan's use of the concept of the real here is very close to his use in the 1960s, being that which not only every image dissolves in front of, but also in front of which even words and categories fail. Thus, since his second seminar, Lacan has been working with anxiety in its dimension of object loss, underlining its real aspect. However, this great anxiety felt by Freud, however real it may be, is still within a symptomatic and traumatic regime, which makes us think that the real in question, despite short-circuiting Freud's imaginary and symbolic, is somehow captured by a dynamic of symbolic metaphorization, in other words, the symptom. Lacan agrees with Freud that the anxiety dream, like the symptom, is a compromise formation, which for

[42] We will see in the chapter on repetition that Lacan tries to distinguish between two types of psychic encounters, a bad encounter, trauma, and a good encounter, which we propose to understand as laughter. We just want to point to the possibility that Lacan already had in mind that not every encounter with the real is joyful, but sad and traumatic.

Lacan involves a metaphorical formation: “All they have in common is a grammar. That's a metaphor” (LACAN, 1991b, p. 122). Thus, this great anxiety remains in the tension between the real and the symbolic.

In *Seminar IV*, based on Freud's reading of the relationship between anxiety and the emergence of little Hans' phobic object, Lacan reiterates, in his own way, the Freudian conception according to which phobia is a protective formation against anxiety, which would not have a specific object to fear. The phobia, by imaginatively framing an object whose phobic value would be inherent to it, attenuates and elides a more fundamental anxiety: “The appearance of the horse is secondary. Freud firmly underscores how it is shortly after the appearance of the diffuse signal of anxiety that the horse will start to function” (LACAN, 2020, p. 299). The phobic object is secondary, with the sign of anxiety being the primary element. According to the French psychoanalyst, the phobic object, “essentially linked to the sounding of an alarm signal. It is an outpost against an established fear” (LACAN, 2020, p. 15). However, what would the function of a phobic object actually be in the context of the signal of anxiety? The phobic object appears as an attempt by the subject who has not undergone castration to objectify the anxiety resulting from the lack of a symbolic castration. This is the case of little Hans, who, according to Lacan, was not castrated by his real father:

> The whole problem lies here. Little Hans has to find a suppletion for this father who persists in not wanting to castrate him. This is the key to the observation. It's a matter of seeing how little Hans will be able to bear his real penis, precisely in so far as it is not under threat. This is the fundament of the anxiety. What is intolerable in his situation is the shortcoming on the side of the castrator. (LACAN, 2020, p. 356)

The fact that he hasn't gone through symbolic castration puts him in a very anxious situation, as he remains hostage to the maternal Other's desire for what she wants from him. If he is not the imaginary phallus capable of satisfying the maternal Other's desire, then he must try to have the phallus that would complete his mother. But, as has already been said, Hans' father does not appear as the one who forbids access to the phallus, thus effecting castration, leaving Hans to feel powerless and submissive to the devouring designs of this maternal Other who wants something from him but he doesn't know what it is. The anxiety that Hans feels is a warning signal of the possibility of being devoured, that is, of being bitten by the maternal Other, which makes him objectify this bite in a phobic object as a form of protection: “-in short, the instant when

the subject is suspended between a moment at which he no longer knows where he is, and a shift towards a moment when he will become something in which he will never be able to find himself again. That's what anxiety is" (LACAN, 2020, p. 218). In other words, anxiety is that moment when the subject is suspended in expectation of an uncertain future.

In *Seminar V*, Lacan takes up anxiety as Erwartung from the case of little Hans. However, he adds a new nuance to this analysis. Lacan observes that Hans, faced with his mother's devouring desire, feels subjected, that is, objectified, about to be an object devoured by the maternal Other. Faced with this situation, Hans fantasizes for himself not only a phobic object, but also a plumber who would unplug the bathtub in the bathroom:

> The plumber is precisely there to desubjectify something, for little Hans's anxiety is essentially, as I told you, the anxiety of subjectification. Literally, at a certain moment, he realizes that in being subjected in this way, there's no knowing where it might lead. [...] He uses his fears to provide a beyond to this anxiety-provoking subjectification that he produces when the lack of this external domain, this other plane, appears. Something to make him afraid has to emerge if he is not to be purely and simply a subject-to. (LACAN, 2017, p. 176)

We know that since *Seminar VI*, fantasy has been understood as the support of the subject's desire, without which he cannot sustain himself as a desiring subject. The fantasy, whose formula is written ($◇a), therefore represents precisely the subject's attempt to sustain itself as a desiring subject insofar as, by identifying with the narcissistic object, it buffers its castration and the indeterminacy of its desire in relation to the desire of the Other:

> The barred subject marks the moment of the subject's *fading* in which the subject finds nothing in the Other that can clearly guarantee the subject, that authenticates him, that allows him to situate and name himself at the level of the Other's discourse – in other words, qua subject of the unconscious. It is in response to this moment that an imaginary element, the correlative term of fantasy's structure, arises to make up for lor: to stand in for, comme suppleant du] the missing signifier. (LACAN, 2019, p. 377)

As a substitute for the missing signifier that makes him anxious about the Other's desire, the subject resorts to identifying with an imaginary object, which is supposed to

be the object capable of satisfying the Other. Through the work of the signifiers, the comic joke of love makes the subject identify with the phallus, attenuating his anxiety in the face of the Other's desire, since he would have for himself the image of what the Other lacks. On the other hand, the fantasy would also increase his anxious expectation, because as he gets closer to the imaginary mask of the object, he gets closer and closer to what is behind it, the phallus and the jouissance it unleashes. The expectant anxiety in the face of death, of castration, makes the subject feel both attraction to the phallus, since it is its imaginary objectification that appeases the fear of its death, and repulsion towards the phallus, since the phallus is also what threatens to open the subject up to death, to jouissance[43]. Anxiety as a signal is summed up very well by the famous expression that Lacan takes from Cazotte's *The Devil in Love*. *Che vuoi?* appears

> the bellowing of the terrifying form that represents the appearance of the superego, in response to he who invoked it in a Neapolitan cave; the response is "*Che vuoi*?" or "What do you want?" The subject asks the Other what he wants. The question is asked from the place where the subject first encounters desire, desire being initially the Other's desire. (LACAN, 2019, p. 15)

When the subject first comes into contact with desire, in other words, with the desire of the Other, he feels he has no resources (*hilflos*) to deal with this great Other that can swallow him up, kill him and devour him. It is from this first traumatizing contact that anxiety arises as Erwartung, as the sign of danger:

> Here is what constitutes it. Finding himself in the primitive presence of the Other's desire as obscure and opaque, the subject has no recourse, he is *hilflos*. *Hilflosigkeit*, to use Freud's term, is known in French as the subject's "distress" It is the foundation of what, in psychoanalysis, has been explored, experienced, and qualified as "trauma". (LACAN, 2019, p. 17)

This lack of resources, this traumatic *Hilflosigkeit* that arises concomitantly with castration, the moment of first contact with the desire of the Other, establishes a continuous state of *Erwartung*, of attentiveness, of expectation as to the future, as to what this Other can do to him. The subject of the unconscious works slavishly and sadly to produce a fantasy against the possibility of this trauma being repeated, so that this

[43] This ambivalent dimension, as we have seen, was present in both Kierkegaard and Bataille. According to Kierkegaard, anxiety is a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy, while for Bataille it is the fear and desire of the human being to lose himself in death.

traumatic *Hilflosigkeit* doesn't happen again. This illustrates what happens to Freud in his anxiety dream, which ends up repeating a traumatic situation of object loss in a different way.

Fantasy, as we have insisted, is the product of the work of signifiers that enables the subject to protect themselves from the trauma of their castration and, therefore, from the desire of the Other. In fantasy, the subject naively identifies with the object without knowing that they are desiring the object of the Other's desire, the phallus. However, the closer the subject tries to get to this imaginary object, the closer he gets to the phallus and the castration trauma he is able to unveil:

> Inasmuch as a subject, qua desire – that is, in the fullness of a human destiny which is that of a speaking subject – approaches this object, he finds himself caught in a sort of impasse. He cannot reach this object qua object except by finding himself, as a subject of speech, effaced in a kind of elision that leaves him in the darkness brought on by trauma, and in what is, strictly speaking, beyond anxiety itself. Or else he finds that he must take the place of the object, substitute himself for it, and subsume himself under a certain signifier. (LACAN, 2019, p. 117)

Lacan emphasizes the impasse experienced by the subject insofar as he is sustained by the servile work of the signifiers, as he tries to reach the signifier of the Other's desire, the phallus. He has two options. Either he reaches it at the cost of his own imaginary and symbolic consistency, being elided in the night of trauma, the *Hilflosigkeit*, beyond anxiety as *Erwartung*; or he identifies, through fantasy, with this signifier in the servile expectation of avoiding the return of this traumatic night of castration. We understand this night of trauma as the real dimension of anxiety which, despite stripping the subject of his symbolic and imaginary consistency, keeps him in the symptomatic repetition proper to the symbolic. We support this understanding based on Lacan's use of the traumatizing aspect of anxiety in the face of the formless flesh of the real, an anxiety that is not *Erwartung*, but is still a traumatic *Hilflosigkeit*. This nuance between *Erwartung* and *Hilflosigkeit* is not unfounded, since Lacan himself notes that it had already been pointed out by Freud:

> I am already pointing out to you a nuanced distinction found in Freud's text, and which no one naturally has ever brought out regarding anxiety. We must not confuse the pure and simple loss of the subject in the darkness of subjective indetermination with something that is completely different from it: the fact that the subject be,omes

> alert or erect, as it were, when faced with danger. (LACAN, 2019, p. 124)

These two dimensions of anxiety should not be confused; they are completely different, but as we are seeing, they are closely related. Since Freud, anxiety has been as much a warning signal in the face of an undetermined danger as the loss of an object. Lacan is taking this distinction seriously. For him, the warning signal of anxiety, the *Erwartung*, comes from the first contact with the desire of the Other. The loss of an object does not anticipate anything, it is the experiential repetition of a traumatic *Hilflosigkeit*.

In *Seminar VII*, Lacan seems to add a new subtlety to this distinction between anxiety as the loss of the subject in the night of indeterminacy and anxiety as a warning. He tells us about the defensive nature of anxiety as a warning signal in the face of what would be absolute disarray. We can think of this as the summit of this anxiety when it reaches its most critical level, the moment when something fails in the fantasy produced by the work of the signifiers responsible. If in the expectant work of the signifiers one tries to defend oneself against a threat, in this absolute disarray there is no longer any danger to defend oneself against, because one is already in danger of this ultimate experience of anxiety:

> At the end of a training analysis the subject should reach and should know the domain and the level of the experience of absolute disarray. It is a level at which anguish is already a protection, not so much Abwarten as Erwartung. Anguish develops by letting a danger appear, whereas there is no danger at the level of the final experience of Hilflosigkeit. (LACAN, 1997, p. 304).

The passage from *Erwartung* to *Hilflosigkeit* involves a direct confrontation with danger, something that happens suddenly. The tension of the work of the signifiers that sustains the comic and fantastical joke of the phallus is suddenly interrupted, causing the subject to suddenly confront danger. In the seventh seminar, absolute disarray, a transformative *Hilflosigkeit*, the ultimate proposal of analysis, takes on a tragicomic aspect, beyond the tragic and symptomatic, as we have seen so far: “If the comic hero trips up and lands in the soup, the little fellow nevertheless survives. The pathetic side of this dimension is, you see, exactly the opposite, the counterpart of tragedy. They are not incompatible, since tragi-comedy exists” (LACAN, 1997, p. 314). Thus, if, at the

end of the analysis, the analysand is faced with the absolute disarray of anxiety, this is not without a comic dimension, since dealing with this disarray is also dealing with the unexpected and pathetic stumble of the phallus, of this signifier that gives rise to jouissance, to laughter. Let's remember that, in the same seminar, Lacan shows us that what makes us laugh is what escapes the barriers of the signifiers, what therefore doesn't repeat itself along the lines of a symptom, a symptomatic jouissance:

> One must simply remember that the element in comedy that satisfies us, the element that makes us laugh, that makes us appreciate it in its full human dimension, not excluding the unconscious, is not so much the triumph of life as its flight, the fact that life slips away, runs off, escapes all those barriers that oppose it, including precisely those that are the most essential, those that are constituted by the agency of the signifier. (LACAN, 1997, p. 314)

Lacan then directs us to a new subtlety regarding anxiety. It is not only the traumatic and symptomatic *Erwartung* and *Hilflosigkeit*, the night of the subject, but it can also be the ultimate experience of *Hilflosigkeit*, in which there is an absolute disarray, a transformation of the subject. In *Seminar II*, when he dealt with the real register of anxiety as trauma, as *Hilflosigkeit*, Lacan had in mind only the tragic and symptomatic aspect of great anxiety, the night of the subject. Until then, he had not yet developed the comic aspect of love and the phallus, much less laughter as something of the order of jouissance. The anxiety evoked by the loss of an object not only involves sad and traumatic suffering, it can also be seen as something that can provide the subject with a jouissance that can kill the subject with laughter. This is what will be explained in *Seminar X*, when the psychoanalyst deals with the difference between the symptom and anxiety as such.

In *Seminar VIII*, Lacan continues his theoretical developments on anxiety. In this seminar, he sets out to do the same as Freud, that is, to approach anxiety from an economic point of view, which in turn means also dealing with it from the point of view of a libidinal economy of the imaginary register. Adopting this point of view, Lacan takes up the optical scheme presented in his first seminar to show his disagreement with Freud on the status of the danger that anxiety signals to the ego. As we have seen, Freud, in *Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety*, understands that anxiety signals a danger internal to the ego, and that it is therefore impossible to escape it. Unlike fear, a sign of danger referring to something external, anxiety is a sign of internal danger. Well, Lacan

says that this rigid separation between internal and external is much more flexible than Freud imagines, because, after all, the consistency of the ego is the result of an illusion arising from the reflection of narcissistic objects. So, for Lacan, there is no clear separation between internal and external, as Freud believes. Anxiety, in this sense,

> is undoubtedly produced topographically in the place defined by *i(a)* - in other words, as Freud articulated it in his last formulation, in the place of the ego. But there is no anxiety as a signal except insofar as it is related to an object of desire, inasmuch as the latter disturbs the ideal ego - that is, the i(a) that originates in the specular image. (LACAN, 2015, p. 365)

Thus, once again reiterating Freud's differentiation between two forms of anxiety, Lacan emphasizes that anxiety as *Erwartung* and as *Hilflosigkeit* should not be confused. *Erwartung*, according to Lacan, is the essential element of anxiety as a signal of danger: "Its essential characteristic is *Erwartung*, and I designate it by telling you that anxiety is the radical mode by which a relationship to desire is maintained" (LACAN, 2015, p. 365).

In *Seminar IX*, these coordinates of anxiety as Erwartung return in the form of two images that are important to us. The first refers to the apology of the giant praying mantis. Lacan uses the observation that the female praying mantis has the habit of tearing off the head of her male sexual partner during mating. Thus, as an apology, it is used by Lacan to portray the anxious position we would occupy if we were dressed up as a male praying mantis face to face with a three-meter-tall female praying mantis. The main point is that the anxiety would arise from the possibility of having our head bitten off by the giant praying mantis, but we don't know if this will be the case, because even though we try to look into its eyes to interpret its desire, that is, the desire of the Other, nothing is reflected in them.

> Supposez-moi dans une enceinte fermée, seul avec une mante religieuse de 3 mètres de haut, c'est la bonne proportion pour que j'aie la taille dudit mâle, en plus, je suis revêtu d'une dépouille à la taille dudit mâle qui a 1.75 m, à peu près la mienne. Je me mire, je mire mon image ainsi affublée, dans l'œil à facettes de ladite mante religieuse. Est-ce que c'est ça l'angoisse? C'en est très près. (LACAN, 2018, p. 117)

Like it or not, this apology takes us back to that biblical passage analyzed by Kierkegaard to understand the anxiety Adam felt at God's mysterious words. Without knowing what they meant, Adam could only imagine that something bad could happen to him, namely death. The reference we make to Kierkegaard here is not unjustified, since, in *Seminar IX*, Lacan comments on having heard from some people who attended his seminars that, with the apology of the praying mantis, he was making a reference to a passage from *The Concept of Anxiety* in which the Danish philosopher tells us about the anxiety a woman feels when she receives a look of desire from a man[44]. The French psychoanalyst recognizes the similarity of his apology with Kierkegaard's example and, using the philosopher's concept of repetition, says that he is repeating what he said, in other words, he is introducing a new element into it which is of the order of anxiety when faced with the gaze of the other's desire, since, for Lacan, it's not just about the imaginary other, but about him insofar as he embodies a symbolic Other:

> Seulement si KIERKEGAARD l'a dit, la différence avec ce que je dis c'est, si je puis dire pour employer un terme kierkegaardien, que je le répète. S'il y a quelqu'un qui a fait remarquer que ce n'est jamais pour rien qu'on dit «*Je le dis et je le répète*», c'est justement KIERKEGAARD. Si on éprouve le besoin de souligner qu'on le répète après l'avoir dit, c'est parce que probablement *ce n'est pas du tout la même chose de le répéter que de le dire*, et il est absolument certain que, si ce que j'ai dit la dernière fois a un sens, c'est justement en ceci que le cas soulevé par KIERKEGAARD est quelque chose de tout à fait particulier et qui comme tel obscurcit – loin d'éclairer – le sens véritable de la formule que l'angoisse est le désir de l'Autre, avec un grand A. Il se peut que cet Autre s'incarne pour la jeune fille à un moment de son existence en quelque galvaudeux. (LACAN, 2018, p. 120)

Using Kierkegaardian concepts, we can say that Lacan is not merely rehashing the Kierkegaardian concept of anxiety, he is not repeating it backwards, but rehashing it forwards, inserting something new. The introduction of the register of the Other is due to his "return to Freud", in which Lacan repeats the Danish philosopher in a Freudian way, that is, taking into account the r philosopher in a Freudian way, that is, taking into account the role of the unconscious desire of the Other in the production of anxiety. In

[44] The passage: "Picture an innocent young girl; let a man fasten his desirous glance upon her, and she becomes anxious. In addition, she might become indignant etc., but first she will be in anxiety. On the other hand, if I picture a young woman fastening her desirous look upon an innocent young man, his mood will not be anxiety but disgust mingled with modesty, precisely because he is more qualified as spirit" (KIERKEGAARD, 1980, p. 66)

addition to this element, Lacan also uses Freud to insert another novelty into Kierkegaardian anxiety, namely *Hilflosigkeit*, castration triggered by the loss of an object. However, it has been said above that the Lacanian reading of the distinction between *Erwartung* and *Hilflosigkeit* takes place within the Bataillean theoretical framework, since it is in Bataille that we find a double concept of anxiety: a servile and expectant anxiety about the possibility of a catastrophic future and an anxiety that is the sovereign and joyful overcoming of that, laughter. The Kierkegaardian concept of anxiety is not enough for us to access Lacan's multifaceted reading of Freudian anxiety, as it is Bataille who provides a concept of anxiety focused on the present moment of jouissance, of laughter.

5.2.2. The real of anxiety: object *a* and laughter in *Hilflosigkeit*

So far, we have tried to show the subtlety between anxiety as *Erwartung* and two ways of conceiving anxiety as *Hilflosigkeit*. On the one hand, anxiety can be understood as a mere signal of danger in the face of the desire of the Other, a simple *Erwartung*, a tension inherent in the work of the signifiers that seek to avoid and anticipate, through fantasy, anxiety as loss of object, the *Hilflosigkeit*. As much as the loss of object is avoided and anticipated by the *Erwartung* of the work of signifiers, it always ends up repeating itself suddenly within the signifying chain, producing a short circuit in this servile negativity. On the other hand, *Hilflosigkeit* can take a traumatic and symptomatic form and a transformative form. The first form implies the symptomatic repetition of a trauma and the second brings about a subjective transformation. We maintain that it is in this latter anxiety that there is a close link between anxiety and jouissance, i.e. laughter. This will become clearer now, in his tenth seminar.

Lacan provides us with a framework for anxiety based on the three concepts dealt with by Freud in his famous article *Inhibition, Symptom and Anxiety*. Following this framework, Lacan seeks to address the minimum and maximum level of anxiety insofar as the subject is positioned before the desire of the Other. Thus, Lacan warns his listeners that the attempt to map out, or even classify, different ways of approaching or distancing oneself from anxiety should not be confused with a recurring procedure in philosophy of classifying the different affections of the human soul. According to him,

> I'm not developing a *psycho-logy* for you, a disquisition on the unreal reality that is called the psyche, but a disquisition on a praxis that warrants a name, *erotology*. It's a question of desire. And the affect by which we are perhaps prompted to bring out everything that this disquisition entails as a consequence, not a general consequence but a universal one, on the theory of affects, is anxiety. (LACAN, 2014, p. 14)

This anxiety chart is structured in such a way that the progression of the horizontal axis refers to an increase in difficulty and the progression of the vertical axis corresponds to an increase in movement. Inhibition is, so to speak, the "zero degree" of anxiety, not because there is no anxiety, but because inhibition, by interrupting the subject's movement, prevents him from dealing with the desire of the Other: “In inhibition, it's the halting of movement that's involved” (LACAN, 2014, p. 10). In inhibition there is no anxiety. Following the horizontal axis of inhibition, Lacan talks about impediment, a signifier whose etymology refers to a snare. Thus, impediment is a narcissistic capture which, because it is already close to jouissance, “that is to say, towards what is furthest from him, he encounters this intimate fracture, right up close, by letting himself be caught, along the way, by his own image, the specular image. That's the snare” (LACAN, 2014, p. 11). In the last quadrant of the horizontal axis of inhibition, we find the term "embarrassment" whose etymology refers to the bar, i.e. the barred subject, $, castrated: “The first horizontal row, which begins with inhibition and continues with impediment, ends up at this slight form of anxiety called embarrassment” (LACAN, 2014, p. 11). Embarrassment is the mild form of anxiety, since we are here at the level of anxiety as Erwartung, when the subject first comes into contact with the fact that, castrated, he doesn't know what he should be for the Other.

It is in this quadrant that Lacan places Kierkegaard's “concept of anxiety”: At the level of embarrassment stands what we shall legitimately call the concept of anxiety. [...] The concept of anxiety only emerges as such at the limit and from a meditation that everything suggests runs aground fairly quickly” (LACAN, 2014, p. 333). With this, Lacan wants to underline the fact that anxiety in Kierkegaard is not in fact anxiety, but what designates a relationship of limit and approximation to it. It was Kierkegaard who inserted the indeterminacy of the other's desire into the Hegelian theory of recognition, which presupposes transparency about the other's desire. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard is the one who opens the way to anxiety, but only stays on the limit. In his

Seminar XVII, when asked by a listener about his closeness to Kierkegaard on the subject of anxiety, Lacan replies:

> No one can yet imagine the extent to which people attribute thoughts to me. I only have to mention someone and I am said to be condescending. It's the very model of academic vertigo. Why in fact wouldn't I speak about Kierkegaard? It's clear that if I place all this emphasis on anxiety in the economy, for it's a question of economy, it's obviously not in order to neglect the fact that at a certain moment there was someone who represents the emergence, the coming into being, not of anxiety but of the concept of anxiety, as Kierkegaard himself explicitly calls one of his works. It's not for nothing that historically this concept emerged at a certain moment. (LACAN, 1991c, p. 144)

The symptom, in turn, located in the central quadrant of the chart, insofar as it is closely related to jouissance, is even closer to the last quadrant of anxiety. This means that in the jouissance of the symptom, the subject also experiences anxiety. The symptom, as we have seen before, has to do with a metaphorical concatenation of signifiers, which was developed in depth by Lacan in his *Seminar V*. In this seminar, the psychoanalyst emphasizes the relationship between the symptom and the castration complex, the former being the attempt to deal with the trauma of castration caused by the first contact with the desire of the Other:

> But what Freud also taught us is that a symptom is never simple and that it's always overdetermined. There is no symptom whose signifier has not been provided by a prior experience. This experience is always located at the level involving what is suppressed. Now, the heart of everything that is suppressed in the subject is the castration complex. It's the signifier of barred A that is articulated in the castration complex but neither necessarily nor always totally articulated therein. What is the famous traumatism we began with, the famous primal scene that enters into the subject's economy, which is in play at the heart and on the horizon of the discovery of the unconscious? (LACAN, 2017, p. 440)

Castration is the entry of death into life, of the negativity of the work of signifiers in the living *infans*, it corresponds to the limit between the symbolic and the real. The symptom is the repression of the castration complex, that is, the signifier that is missing from the desire of the Other, the phallus, written as minus phi ($-\varphi$) in *Seminar X*. This minus phi is the paradoxical image of castration, that which reveals to the subject its emptiness, its lack as soon as it has had its first traumatic contact with the

desire of the Other: “It is anxiety that, I told you last time, can come to be signalled at the place here designated by (-φ), castration anxiety, in its relation to the Other” (LACAN, 2014, p. 45). This means that the symptom tries to repress the phallus and enjoy this repression itself: “symptom is the return by means of signifying substitution of that which is at the end of the drive in the form of an aim” (LACAN, 1992, p. 110). As a compromise formation, the symptom allows a certain leakage of jouissance, which is why Lacan, in *Seminar X*, says that the symptom is “a leaking tap” (LACAN, 2014, p. 321) that we try to cover with a cork. In the same seminar, Lacan states that the symptom, “The symptom, in its nature, is jouissance, don’t forget this, a jouissance under wraps no doubt *untergebliebene Befriedigung*” (LACAN, 2014, p. 125).

This means that the quadrant of the symptom corresponds to that which best shelters this anxiety which, despite bordering on the real of jouissance, ends up remaining at the symptomatic level of the metaphor, enjoying the repression of the castration complex. Thus, we can understand the proximity of this anxiety to jouissance in the same way that we understand the idea that the subject enjoys his symptom, in other words, the jouissance he experiences is, so to speak, a morbid, sad jouissance. This would be the case of the repetition of a trauma, it is at the level of the repetition of symptomatic jouissance, as we saw in Irma's dream[45]. This symptomatic anxiety occurs when the phallus in its imaginary dimension, *minus phi* (-φ), is not missing. In this sense, we can understand this anxiety as the middle ground between Erwartung, concerning the dimension of the danger of castration in the face of the desire of the Other, and the joyful Hilflosigkeit of laughter, which we will investigate in more depth in a moment. Alongside the symptom, as last resorts against extreme anxiety, are the acting-out and the passage into the act, different ways in which the subject places himself outside the scene of desire and covers up jouissance. Acting-out refers to mourning and the act is the fantasy of suicide. What about anxiety as such, that is, anxiety beyond the repetition of a symptomatic jouissance? What does Lacan tell us about it in his tenth seminar?

Initially, Lacan introduces us to what anxiety is not. At first, the psychoanalyst continues the idea set out in previous seminars that anxiety arises to the extent that the subject is faced with the desire of the Other, which leads him to say that we could understand his graph of desire as a pear of anxiety. However, taking into account what

[45] We will see that Lacan, in his Seminar XI, uses another anxiety dream to illustrate the real and symptomatic character of trauma, which ends up covering up jouissance within the symbolic register.

we have developed so far in the present work, we can also say that the graph of desire is also the pear of laughter, because, after all, it is through the tense work of the signifiers that the relief of laughter can occur. Recalling the apology of the praying mantis and what it's all about, knowing what the Other wants from the subject: "*Che vuoi?, Que veux-tu?, What wouldst thou?*" (LACAN, 2014, p. 6). According to him, inquiry concerning anxiety is not new and has been carried out by a series of theorists who are said to belong to the philosophical tradition of existentialism. He mentions some names such as Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel and Chestov. Despite the efforts of this tradition to think about existence, Lacan observes that it suffers from a "disorientation" with regard to history. He then mentions Sartre, who probably seems to be the target of this criticism, implicitly referring to Lévi-Strauss's criticism of Sartre for his humanist conception of history. In any case, what interests us here is that Lacan claims that Sartre's approach to seriousness (sérieux) tries to reaffirm and ground the historical process in a Marxist humanism, according to which the subject is responsible for taking and directing the reins of his own history. Lacan affirms that this horse of history, from time to time, falls off:

> it may be remarked that the last one to come along and not perhaps the lesser of them, Monsieur Sartre, expressly applies himself not only to putting this horse back on its hooves, but back between the shafts that pull the said coach of history. It's precisely on this account that Monsieur Sartre has been much occupied with the function of seriousness and has wondered about it a great deal. (LACAN, 2014, p. 7)

The spirit of seriousness in Sartre leads to a position of conformism with reality, taking current reality as being natural and immutable. His entire investigative effort in *Being and Nothingness* is to understand the radical freedom inherent in the human being, in the subject. In this sense, seriousness was the path Sartre took to scrutinize anxiety in the human being, that is, the recognition that he does not need to conform to reality, because, deep down, he is possibility, but this reflected possibility generates anxiety. According to him, "anguish in fact is the recognition of a possibility as my possibility; that is, it is constituted when consciousness sees itself cut from its essence by nothingness or separated from the future by its very freedom." (SARTRE, 2003, p. 59) This possibility that cuts off the essence and establishes nothingness before the subject is what differentiates, for Sartre, fear from anxiety, because fear has an object,

while anxiety is the radical nothingness of its own possibilities. This indeterminacy inherent in the horizon of these anguishing possibilities takes the form of an expectation (*l'attente*) concerning the future, what may or may not happen.

Next, Lacan talks about another author with whom he himself came very close during his years of teaching: Heidegger. As we saw in the chapter on Heidegger's influence on Kojève, Heidegger states that being-for-death is anguish, that is, it is Dasein's most radical being, its most proper possibility: Anxiety is the "attunement which is able to hold open the constant and absolute threat to itself arising from the ownmost individualized being of *Dasein*" (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 254). According to Lacan, Heidegger reaches this conclusion through care (*Sorge*), this ontological structure concerning the everyday totality of *Dasein*. However, Lacan doesn't agree with Heidegger's route, because it doesn't actually reach anguish[46]: "Being-unto-death, to call it by its name, which is the inroad by which Heidegger, in his well-versed disquisition, leads us to his enigmatic examination of an entity's Being, doesn't really go via anxiety" (LACAN, 2014, p. 8). Like Sartre, Heidegger also insisted on differentiating fear from anguish, because in anguish "we do not encounter this or that thing which, as threatening, could be relevant. […] In what anxiety is about, the "it is nothing and nowhere" becomes manifest" (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 180-181). Another similarity with Sartre refers to the role of expectation in anguish, since anguish that is revealed in the face of Dasein's being-for-death places it in a position of expectation/anticipation (*Erwartung*): "In anticipating the indefinite certainty of death, Dasein opens itself to a constant threat arising from its own there" (HEIDEGGER, 2010, p. 254).

After making use of these two theorists on anxiety, Lacan says that he himself can provide his own conception of anxiety, taking expectation (*l'attente*/*Erwartung*) as the access route. Ironically, what is Lacan doing by announcing to everyone that his contribution on anxiety will follow the path of expectation? He frustrates our expectations. Speaking about the expectation he had of receiving a text he had been

[46] Zizek is of the opinion that Lacan would have chosen the Kierkegaardian concept of anxiety over the Heideggerian one: "with regard to anxiety, Lacan prefers Kierkegaard to Heidegger: he perceives Kierkegaard as the anti-Hegel for whom the paradox of Christian faith marks a radical break with ancient Greek ontology (in contrast to Heidegger's reduction of Christianity to a moment in the process of the decline of Greek ontology into medieval metaphysics). Faith is an existential leap into what (from an ontological point of view) can only appear as madness, it is a mad decision not guaranteed by any reason - Kierkegaard's God is, in fact, 'beyond Being', a God of the Real, not the God of philosophers" (ZIZEK, 2009, p. 13). We disagree with Zizek, because, as we have tried to show in this work, Lacan, in relation to anxiety, prefers neither Kierkegaard nor Heidegger, but Bataille. It is Bataille who emerges for him as the anti-Hegel by providing a concept of anxiety that goes beyond the servitude of future-oriented dialectical negativity.

waiting for in his hands, Lacan says that fortunately this expectation was fulfilled. Not only his own, but also that of everyone listening to him. He then wonders if that was what the anxiety was about, namely the expectation. His answer is negative: "As for me, upon my word, I can answer that this expectation, albeit just what it takes to bring a certain weight down upon me, is not, I believe I can speak from experience, a dimension that in and of itself gives rise to anxiety. I would even say, quite the contrary." (LACAN, 2014, p. 8) But wasn't his way of accessing anxiety precisely that of expectation?

> No matter how much time we spend on the nuances of this framing of anxiety, it will never be too long. Will you say that I'm seeking out this anxiety in the sense of reducing it to expectation, to preparation, to a state of alertness, to a response that is already a defensive response faced with what's about to happen? This, indeed, is the Erwartung, the constitution of the hostile as such, the first line of recourse beyond Hilflosigkeit. Although expectation can indeed serve, amongst other means, to frame anxiety, it isn't indispensable. There's no need for any expectation, the framing is still there. But anxiety is something else. (LACAN, 2014, p. 75)

Expectation is not indispensable, but it's not essential either. Anxiety is something else. Anxiety as such, and not the Kierkegaardian concept of anxiety, involves, as we have seen, the loss of an object. Before *Seminar X*, anxiety as the loss of an object already involved the stripping away of the subject's imaginary and symbolic supports. From *Seminar VII* onwards, the summit of anxiety, absolute disarray, would bring with it a tragicomic aspect due to the comical appearance of the phallus, followed by the outbreak of laughter, of jouissance. The anxious laughter of absolute disarray, of joyful *Hilflosigkeit*, would be the result of coming face to face with the lack inherent in the phallus, with its non-specular negativity. This becomes clearer now, when he makes it evident that in fact the summit of anxiety, the real of anxiety, involves a double lack that subverts even the work of the signifiers. The difference between the sad, symptomatic *Hilflosigkeit* and the joyful *Hilflosigkeit* becomes clear. The symptomatic anxiety that doesn't make one laugh is that felt by Freud in front of the white spot in Irma's throat, at the metaphorical level where jouissance is concealed, where the *minus phi* is not missing. The great anxiety that makes you laugh is the one in which the lack of *minus phi* is missing.

Castration anxiety, the *minus phi*, "refers to a certain phenomenon of lack" (LACAN, 2014, p. 136). This means that the anxiety arising from the lack of this lack goes beyond castration anxiety, because this symbolic lack is still of the familiar order

of lack, of the dialectic of signifiers between presence and absence. The *Hilflosigkeit* of this radical anxiety refers to the radical absence of castration, revealing a negativity of the real that tears the subject apart, opening him up to the jouissance of laughter. This real negativity is privation, because, as Lacan tells us, "Privation is something real whereas lack is symbolic" (LACAN, 2014, p. 135). It is the privation of the real, this negativity that produces nothing, that causes the negativity of the lack, of castration, to be lacking. From *Seminar X* onwards, anxiety as *Erwartung* is a sign of the possibility of a *Hilflosigkeit* that is not reduced to the symbolic lack presented by castration, to that sad and traumatic anxiety, but to the real privation that causes this lack to be lacking: "anxiety isn't the signal of a lack, but of something that has to be conceived of at a duplicated level, as the failing of the support that lack provides" (LACAN, 2014, p. 53). Lacan's overcoming of castration anxiety takes him beyond Freud himself, because, as we know, the Viennese psychoanalyst identified anxiety with castration. Anxiety as such is not reduced, as in Freud, to castration; there is an anxiety that is beyond it: "For Lacan, anxiety has a different constitution than castration pitched alongside the imaginary and symbolic registers" (BOGDAN, 2019, p. 7). This is where the centrality of the object *a* appears for the advent of anxiety at its most radical level of absolute disarray. This object is not reduced to the imaginary or symbolic: "Although in *Seminar X*, anxiety is linked to the object, it is about a different kind of object, not as lost or absent, which Lacan already elucidated in relation to the *Fort-Da* game" (BOGDAN, 2019, p. 7). The object *a* does not obey the dialectic of the negativity of signifiers between presence and absence, it is not reduced to the phallus. It arises when this symbolic lack of the phallus is missing:

> It's generally accepted that anxiety is without an object. This, which is not extracted from Freud's disquisition but a part of his disquisition, is specifically what I've been rectifying through my disquisition. You can therefore take it as read that, since I've gone to the lengths of writing it up on the blackboard for you in the style of a little memento – why not this one amongst others? – *it is not without an object*. (LACAN, 2014, p. 87)

Object *a* is this object that arises insofar as what sustains the lack is missing, when the *minus phi* (-φ) and the castration opened up by it are missing. However, this doesn't mean that the object *a* can't be felt in symptomatic anxiety; it is felt to the extent that it is bordered by the symptom, by castration, but it doesn't appear in its rawness and

nakedness as it does in radical anxiety. It is not before the phallus and castration, the lack, that the subject becomes anxious, it is precisely before the possibility of the lack of this lack. Thus, the phallus and castration make him anxious because they are one step away from the object *a*, from jouissance, from the real:

> Don't you know that it's not longing for the maternal breast that provokes anxiety, but its imminence? What provokes anxiety is everything that announces to us, that lets us glimpse, that we're going to be taken back onto the lap. It is not, contrary to what is said, the rhythm of the mother's alternating presence and absence. (LACAN, 2014, p. 53)

The object *a* presents a triple intersection between the imaginary, symbolic and real. When Lacan created the concept of object *a* in 1963, he wasn't talking about a purely real object, because it still needs an imaginary clothing capable of covering up the symbolic lack and real privation. This is why he tells us that the object *a* is a fake: This object *a* that the neurotic makes himself into in his fantasy becomes him much like gaiters do a rabbit. That's why the neurotic never makes much of his fantasy. It succeeds in defending him against anxiety precisely to the extent that it's a postiche *a*" (LACAN, 2014, p. 50). The fantasy that is established in the relationship between the subject and object a is a good example of the symptomatic production that occurs when the imaginary and symbolic dimensions of object a serve to plug the phallus and, in turn, the subject's castration, thus defending oneself from the real of this object, precisely that which causes anxiety. This means that the symbolic and imaginary identifications with the object a are central to the Lacanian theory of anxiety, insofar as these identifications allow the subject to deal with castration and the desire of the Other, allowing him to fill "the gap constituted by the inaugural division of the subject." (LACAN, 2004, p. 270). Having said that, it is clear that the servile work of the signifiers of the comic joke, of love, is still of great importance so that a fantasy can buffer anxiety in the face of the desire of the Other, making the subject identify with the object a. The narcissistic love present in the fantasy, sustained by the signifier chain, would be the way in which the subject identifies imaginary with the phallus, in order to access its real dimension of jouissance. It's for no other reason that in this tenth seminar, Lacan states that the "*only love allows jouissance to condescend to desire*" (LACAN, 2014, p. 179), that is, only through the comic joke of love can we come across the lack of the lack, that is, the lack of the *minus phi* (-φ) and thus access the joy of radical anxiety.

Unfolding this analysis of the object *a*, it should be noted that its real dimension is not only what consists of jouissance, of real, but it is also what makes it fulfill a new function hitherto unheard of in Lacanian teaching, that of object cause of desire. The object *a* is the object cause of desire because it refers to the rest of the symbolic operation of castration, of the *infans'* insertion into the world of language. In this operation, something of a residue is produced, giving the a posteriori impression to the castrated subject that something prior to their arrival in language has been lost. That which was supposedly lost, that object *a*, which one doesn't have, is what causes the emergence of a nostalgia for something that could repeat it. This is why Lacan differentiates between the object of desire, the phallus, and the object that causes desire: "I shall say that the object *a* – which is not to be situated in anything analogous to the intentionality of a noesis, which is not the intentionality of desire – is to be conceived of as the cause of desire. To take up my earlier metaphor, the object lies *behind* desire" (LACAN, 2014, p. 101). Something of the order of the real is mythically presupposed as prior to the servile entry into the world of language. In this sense, the desire articulated by the signifiers works slavishly in an attempt to recover this joy of the real, or even this mythical laughter of the *infans*, their first true communication. The summit of anxiety, the last quadrant, is the closest to jouissance, to laughter, to what appears as uncanny in the symbolic world of Erwartung and suddenly dominates the subject: "*Suddenly, all at once*, you'll always and this term the moment the phenomenon of the *Unheimliche* enters. You'll always find the stage that presents itself in its own specific dimension and which allows for the emergence in the world of that which *may not* be said" (LACAN, 2014, p. 75).

The object *a*, this real object that is the repetition of a mythical state of immanence and full jouissance, is for Lacan what triggers anxiety at its most critical level and jouissance, laughter. In this sense, the object a, the lack of the lack, is a non-linguistic negativity, a negativity, therefore, that refuses the lack without perpetuating it. This object, as in Bataille, is the one that, when it appears, restores a certain kind of nostalgic immanence, endowed with a joyful excessiveness that is nevertheless distressing. We have seen that this is a tragicomic *Hilflosigkeit*. This is not a symptomatic and sad anxiety which, because it is entangled in the signifier dynamic, is still subject to the future, but a joyful anxiety of the present moment which tears the subject apart and subjects them to absolute disarray. This doesn't happen without love,

because, as mentioned above, only love allows jouissance to condescend to desire. It is only the comic dimension of love that allows the object *a* in its function as cause to appear and thus repeat a mythical jouissance, or even mythical laughter. So, in the end, according to Lacan, what we really ask for in the demand for love is to die laughing:

> What we ask – of whom, I haven't said yet, but in the end, since we have to ask it of someone, it happens to be our partner, is it sure that the partner is the one? That remains to be seen in a second phase – what do we ask exactly? We ask for the satisfaction of a demand that bears a certain relation to death. It doesn't go very far. What we ask for it's *la petite mort* but in the end it's clear that this is what we ask and that the drive is tightly entwined with the demand of lovemaking, to *faire l'amour* if you will, *faire l'àmourir*, to do it to death, it's even *à mourir de rire*, to die laughing – I'm not accentuating the side of love that partakes of what I call a comical mood just for the sake of it. In any case, this is precisely where the restful side of post-orgasm resides. If this demand for death is what gets satisfied, well, good gracious, it's lightly satisfied, because one gets off lightly. (LACAN, 2014, p. 263)

What the subject wants with the comic joke of the demand for love is to die laughing, in other words, to die from this excess of jouissance. However, it's not a question of actually dying, which would be tragic, but of flirting with death in such a visceral way and still getting away with it, similar to the moment when we recover from a long, deep laugh and say: *Phew!* This laughter, as we have insisted, is the critical point of anxiety, it is the comic *Hilflosigkeit* of absolute disarray. Just as in Bataille, in Lacan, the summit of anxiety cannot be confused with the sad anxiety of *Erwartung*, an anxiety that signals a possible death. The psychoanalyst, by adding an ulterior subtlety to the anxiety, ends up nuancing the anxiety evoked by the flesh, and a symptomatic and traumatic *Hilflosigkeit* should not be confused with the comic *Hilflosigkeit*. However, this anxiety is only triggered by going through it. It is from the morbidity of a symptom that its tragicomicity can be drawn. This anxiety of castration, *minus phi* (-φ) is not only a jouissance of the symptom, it is also the condition of possibility for the death unveiled by castration to be transformed into life:

> I'm not telling you that castration anxiety is death anxiety. It's an anxiety that refers back to the field in which death ties in closely with the renewal of life. That analysis should have located it in this point of castration really allows us to understand how it may equally be interpreted as the reason why it is given to us in Freud's late conception as the signal of a threat to the status of the defended *I* [*je*].

> Castration anxiety refers back to the beyond of this defended *I* [*je*], to this foretoken of a jouissance that exceeds our limits, in so far as the Other here is strictly speaking called forth in the register of the real whereby a certain form of life is transmitted and sustained. (LACAN, 2014, p. 263)

The anxiety of castration, the *minus phi* (-*φ*), insofar as it reveals the emptiness of the phallic signifier, appears as the finitude of the subject, its limit, death. This is why Lacan emphasizes that castration is what signals the danger to the *I* (*je*). However, this anxiety of castration is what opens up the subject to what goes beyond and transgresses the very limits imposed by it. Thus, Lacan is proposing an understanding of anxiety that goes beyond the symptomatic anxiety of the *minus phi* (-*φ*), anxiety that is still in its symbolic dimension. It is only by overcoming its symbolic limits that a death is possible that opens the subject up to a certain form of life. Lacan warns us about this concept of life:

> Call it what you will, God or some such demigod - I think I've already indicated sufficiently in my talks that this doesn't lead us towards any metaphysical heights. An aspect of the real is at issue here, something that maintains what Freud articulated at the level of his Nirvana principle as life's property of having to pass, in order to get to death, by way of forms that reproduce those that gave individual form the opportunity of occurring through the conjunction of two sexual cells. (LACAN, 2014, p. 263)

The real would be what Freud called the death drive, that drive that wants to repeat a lost inorganic state, in which there was zero stimulation, death itself. This, however, is the very continuation of the life of the species, which continues beyond the individual organism, in the form of the germinal plasma. This death drive, however, is always paired with the life drive, which postpones the death of the organism and, in turn, the continuation of the life of the species. The Lacanian reading of these concepts seeks to strip them of their biological and positivist charge, understanding the real as the death drive which, seen *a posteriori*, is the cause of the symbolic dynamic, which, like the life drive, is both serving and postponing the death drive. This death drive, the real, when it achieves its satisfaction without the symbolic, repeats what was supposedly lost through symbolic castration, that is, jouissance, laughter.

Once again, we emphasize that the way in which Lacan appropriates this Freudian conceptual constellation could not be understood without his interlocution

with Bataille's theoretical support. We have seen that Lacan offers a re-reading of Freudian castration anxiety by overcoming it: "It is in the re-reading of Freud that Lacan shows the new way of approaching castration" (BOGDAN, 2019, p. 55). Castration, the lack, is no longer the ultimate source of the subject's anxiety, but what transgresses the limits of castration. What triggers the summit of anxiety is the excessive negativity of privation, not symbolic lack. This brings us back to Bataille's understanding of laughter as the negation of nothingness. Thus, we understand that the re-reading that Lacan explains and systematizes in *Seminar X* regarding anxiety has Bataille as its theoretical support, and not Kierkegaard. The psychoanalyst understands that this radical anxiety is not merely a sad death, but a death that makes us laugh when the tension of the work of signifiers is suspended. For Lacan, as for Bataille, the summit of anxiety is the moment: "the moment of anxiety is the instant when the object a becomes present in the place where I do not have, -φ" (BOGDAN, 2019, p. 9).

Not only that, but he also takes from the French philosopher the idea that the sudden relief of tension in this symbolic register occurs when an object with no objective truth opens it up to a joyful anxiety, a laughter, which doesn't point to the future, but to the present moment. Thus, although the symbolic is what guarantees the subject's family life, it is a servile life, a life oriented towards the future, always postponing the present moment. The real, in the "form" of the object a, is the nostalgic repetition that opens the subject up to life and kills them with laughter. The theme of the real dimension of repetition, therefore, already appears very clearly in *Seminar X*: "Is the function of repetition simply automatic and linked to the return, the necessary carrying-over, of the battery of the signifier, or does it have another dimension? Meeting this other dimension in our experience, if this has a meaning, strikes me as inevitable" (LACAN, 2014, p. 251). This reminds us of the Bataillean definition of repetition as we formulated it earlier, which also involves an object without objective truth that kills one with laughter. Let's see how Lacan follows up on these Bataillean ideas in his eleventh seminar on the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis.

5.3. Beyond the automaton: laughter and tychic repetition

In his *Seminar XI*, on the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis, Lacan goes on to develop some of the directions regarding the object that he outlined in his tenth seminar. One of the ways he pursues these developments is through the concept of repetition in its symbolic and real dimensions. It is on this horizon that we will see the Bataillean definition of repetition return more clearly, that is, as a wasteful repetition of laughter, a repetition that does not point to the future, as in Kierkegaard, but to the present moment.

Symbolic repetition refers to the servile automatism of the signifying chain, an idea that was already present in Seminar IX, where he talks a lot about an insistence on the repetition of signifiers, an automatism of repetition. This repetition, despite being a symbolic repetition, does not mean a repetition of the same thing, because to repeat a signifier is to repeat a negative difference, since it itself is empty of any meaning, which means that each recurrence of a signifier never refers to the same meaning, since its chain will always be different within the diachronic chain of speech. This means that, due to the positional character of the signifier, in the statement "A is equal to A", the second A is essentially different from the first A. What we find in this second A is the repetition of the difference. The function of the automatism of repetition

> c'est *qu'elle est là pour faire surgir, pour rappeler, pour faire insister, quelque chose qui n'est rien* d'autre en son essence *qu'un signifiant*, désignable par sa fonction, et spécialement sous cette face, qu'elle introduit dans *le cycle de ses répétitions* - toujours les mêmes en leur essence, et donc concernant quelque chose qui est toujours la même chose – qu'elle y introduit *la différence*, *la distinction*, *l'unicité*. (LACAN, 2018, p. 33)

Borrowing the concept of automaton from the Aristotelian theory of causes, Lacan, in his eleventh seminar, will understand that this symbolic repetition produces a difference coextensive with the negativity of the dialectical opposition proper to signifiers. The automatism of repetition is that work of the signifiers ordered by the pleasure principle that creates a fantastic scenario through which the subject can identify with the object *a* and buffer anxiety. As we already know, this work of the signifier, the automaton, is the expression of anxiety as *Erwartung*, that is, a defensive procedure against the appearance of the object *a* and the summit of anxiety. However, and here we

find the ambivalent aspect of anxiety again, the expectant tension of the work of signifiers is not only a protection against this jouissance, but it is also the way in which the object *a*, that mythical jouissance that causes desire, can be recovered insofar as it is understood as the rest of the symbolic operation. The anxiety present in the automaton is not only repulsion in the face of jouissance, but is also a signal of a blazing attraction towards the nostalgic repetition of the supposedly lost object *a*.

Here the references to Kierkegaard reappear in Lacan's speech. The repetition of the real would be something on the order of Kierkegaardian repetition, because, as we saw in the chapter on Kierkegaard, repetition for Kierkegaard is the return to the same thing in a new way, which in turn reveals the failure to return to what was previously expected: the identical reproduction of the same thing. However, if we remember correctly, the Danish philosopher provides a concept of repetition that occurs at the decisive moment when the subject consciously decides on the double movement of faith, the moment when he infinitely resigns himself to an object and recovers it twice in the future. Neither Abraham nor Job simply randomly bumped into something they had lost; rather, they had to consciously decide on the infinite resignation of what was once theirs in order to be able to receive everything twice over. Kierkegaardian repetition carries with it a consciously deliberative dimension that postpones the existence of the one who repeats towards the future.

Although Lacan mentions Kierkegaard when dealing with the real dimension of repetition, it is Bataille's theoretical horizon that we actually find in Lacanian teaching. We find a series of theoretical convergences that allow us to affirm that the Lacanian concept of real repetition is the result of the appropriation of the Bataillean concept of repetition. As in Bataille, Lacan's real repetition takes place through an object without objective truth, the object *a*; it coincides with the very summit of anxiety, that is, with jouissance in its lacerating dimension; both, happening in the present moment, frustrate the expectation of work. Repetition in its real aspect is much closer to the Bataillean conception than the Kierkegaardian one. This will become clearer later when we talk about the real of jouissance as the impossible. However, as we have emphasized, if in Bataille this repetition coincides with laughter itself, as a return to immanence, in Lacan, as we will see now, jouissance in real repetition can present a symptomatic and

traumatic dimension and a joyful and sovereign dimension[47]. For now, it's just important to note that this repetition that goes beyond the automaton is understood by Lacan as an encounter with the real:

> We have translated it as the with the encounter of the real. The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern. [...] What is repeated, in fact, is always something that occurs – the expression tells us quite a lot about its relation to the *tuché – as if by chance*. (LACAN, 1998, 54)

It is also important to bear in mind that these Bataillean elements are articulated by Lacan with the Aristotelian concept of tiquê (*tykhe*), a term that refers to the divinity of fortune, of luck. In *Seminar VII*, Lacan had already used this term to talk about the ephemeral and evanescent nature of happiness, playing with the French signifiers that make up the signifier "bonheur", happiness: "It's odd that in almost all languages happiness offers itself in terms of a meeting – *tykhe* – Except in English and even there it's very close. A kind of favorable divinity is involved. *Bonheur* in French suggests to us *augurum*, a good sign and a fortunate encounter" (LACAN, 1992, p. 13). Lacan notes that bonheur, composed of *bon* (good) and *heur* (luck, fortune), is homophonous with *bonheurt*, *bon* (good) and *heurt* (shock, sudden encounter) and *bonheure*, *bon* (good) and *heure* (hour). On the basis of these similarities, Lacan is pointing to the fact that happiness corresponds to a moment that erupts suddenly. We saw that in *Seminar X* the object a, the strange object at the summit of anxiety, that anxiety that kills us with laughter, suddenly appears when the lack is missing.

Following the subtleties that he inserts within the real field of anxiety, between a traumatic anxiety and a joyful anxiety, in *Seminar XI*, Lacan brings some nuances about *tykhe*, taking into account that the encounter of chance can be a bad encounter or a good encounter. This differentiation in the horizon of *tykhe* is typical of the Aristotelian theory of causes. According to Aristotle, "luck (*tykhe*) is called good when something good comes out, and bad when something bad, and it is called good fortune or bad fortune when the consequences are sizable" (*Phy* 197b1). It is in this context that Lacan

[47] Bearing this in mind, the opposition we made in the previous chapter between a symbolic seriousness and a joyfulness of the real is never that rigid, because symptomatic jouissance itself is intertwined with the symbolic register of metaphor.

takes up the question of trauma. Trauma is conceived by Lacan as a real dimension of repetition that has to do with a bad encounter. We can understand this as the repetition of a jouissance captured by the symptom, by the real repetition of the symptom. A real event, the trauma of *Hilflosigkeit*, is an experience that cannot be assimilated by the subject. Since Freud, trauma has involved the subject's inability to react to a sudden stimulus. We have seen that this trauma occurs when the subject first comes into contact with the desire of the Other, in other words, with castration, and is subsequently repressed by the symptom. This is the first moment in which trauma appears in psychoanalysis:

> The function of the *tuché*, of the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma. (LACAN, 1998, p. 55)

The first form in which *tuché* appears in the history of psychoanalysis is that of trauma, which does not mean that trauma is the only dimension of *tuché*, because, after all, trauma is only a bad encounter, not a good one. Responding to a question from François Dolto about libidinal development, Lacan states that this development cannot be understood as a natural maturation of the libido, but rather as a process guided by castration anxiety:

> The copulatory fact of the introduction of sexuality is traumatizing – this is a snag of some size – and it has an organizing function for development. The fear of castration is like a thread that perforates all the stages of development. It orientates the relations that are anterior to its actual appearance—weaning, toilet training, etc. It crystallizes each of these moments in a dialectic that has as its centre a bad encounter. If the stages are consistent, it is in accordance with their possible registration in terms of bad encounters. The central bad encounter is at the level of the sexual. (LACAN, 1998, p. 64)

The bad encounter is linked to castration anxiety. According to him, there is castration anxiety, *minus phi* (-φ), long before actual castration, since the subject has already experienced a variety of object losses. In all these losses, something unassimilable is felt by the subject as a violence to which they cannot react or elaborate. The repetition of traumatic loss leads to the repetition of castration anxiety. This is why we can say that the bad encounter, no matter how much it borders on the real, still

remains at the level of castration anxiety, an anxiety that doesn't make the subject die of laughter. In *Seminar XI*, the example that Lacan gives us of this bad encounter is that of the dream of the father who sees his own son on fire. After his son's death, the father lies in bed in the room next to the other room, where his son's body lies. In the dream, his son calls out to him, asking "*Father, can't you see I'm burning?*". According to Lacan, this is the moment of the imminent loss of an imaginary object:

> For it is not that, in the dream, he persuades himself that the son is still alive. But the terrible vision of the dead son taking the father by the arm designates a beyond that makes itself heard in the dream. Desire manifests itself in the dream by the loss expressed in an image at the most cruel point of the object. (LACAN, 1998, p. 59)

In a way, Lacan had already been showing this bad encounter of real repetition since his analysis of Irma's dream, where Freud saw the white spot at the bottom of his former patient's throat. However, at that time, he still didn't differentiate between a dustuchia (*δυστυχία*) and a eutuchia (*εὐτυχία*), that is, a bad encounter and a good encounter. Regarding the bad encounter, Lacan asks himself:

> Why is the fact here *dustuchia*? Why is the supposed maturation of the pseudo-instincts shot through, transfixed with the *tychic*, I would say—from the word *tuche*? For the moment, it is our horizon that seems factitious in the fundamental relation to sexuality. In analytic experience, it is a question of setting out from the fact that the primal scene is traumatic; it is not sexual empathy that sustains the modulations of the analysable, but a factitious fact. A factitious fact, like that which appears in the scene so fiercely tracked down in the experience of the Wolf Man—the strangeness of the disappearance and reappearance of the penis. (LACAN, 1998, p. 70)

The *dustuchia*, the bad encounter, brings the subject back, *après-coup*, to that terrifying experience in which, on coming into contact with the desire of the Other for the first time, they are symbolically castrated. This castration, as we know, establishes in the subject the assumption of a factitious fact, that is, the loss of an object due to the symbolic violence of language. In short, we can say, following Lacan, that the *dustuchia* is a real repetition of a symptom, it remains at the level of castration anxiety, *minus phi* (-*φ*). As in the metaphorical structure of the symptom, it has something that "is originally repressed there, and which always re-emerges in the ambiguity of lameness,

the impediment and the symptom, of non-encounter, *dustuchia*, with the meaning that remains hidden" (LACAN, 1998, p. 248).

Lacan also talks about a good encounter (*εὐτυχία*), which he deals with specifically within the context of the analytic transference, since one of his main aims in this seminar is to elaborate the idea that repetition is not reduced to the transference. For this reason, he isolates the concept of repetition in its symbolic and real dimensions, because this is the only way to understand what the transference is as such and what its relations are with repetition. According to him, "the transference is the means by which the communication of the unconscious is interrupted, by which the unconscious closes up again. Far from being the handing over of powers to the unconscious, the transference is, on the contrary, its closing up" (LACAN, 1998, p. 130). This is when the theme of love returns to Lacan's reflections. Since Freud, transference has been conceived as love, which for Lacan, as we know, takes us back to the narcissistic register of the imaginary. The transference, therefore, ends up performing the function of closing up the unconscious, of closing it up as soon as a crack opens up, revealing its negativity, desire:

> Is not this a fundamental structure of the dimension of love that the transference gives us the opportunity of depicting? In persuading the other that he has that which may complement us, we assure ourselves of being able to continue to misunderstand precisely what we lack. The circle of deception, in so far as it highlights the dimension of love at the point named. (LACAN, 1998, p. 133)

Love as this comic joke, this unnamed naivety, tries to convince the other that they possess what the subject lacks, the phallus, the signifier of jouissance, and is therefore the condition of possibility for the encounter with the object *a*. Lacan notes that the object *a* is also what, in conjunction with the transference, helps to close up the unconscious. The transference can only be sustained if the subject presupposes that there is a lost object and that it is found in the image of another, which is what would allow them to recover a mythical jouissance and thus their supposed lost completeness. The imaginary and transferential character of the object *a*, therefore, is essential for the closure of the unconscious. Let's remember that fantasy is established in the relationship that the subject establishes with object *a*. The fantasy is sustained by the work of the signifiers, which provide narcissistic consistency to the object *a*. In this case, object a serves as a shutter for the unconscious, as a mirror: "It is in this little mirror, which

shuts out what is on the other side, that the subject sees emerge the game by means of which he may [...] accommodate his own image around what appears, the *petit a*" (LACAN, 1998, p. 159). On the transferential horizon, the analyst assumes the position of object a for the analysand. At this level, the transference is not so far from what Freud says about the love dimension of the transference.

We know that the object *a* is constituted by the crossing of the three registers and that its radicality lies in what goes beyond the imaginary and symbolic, the real. Lacan realizes that the imaginary dimension of the object *a* prevents the opening up of the unconscious, the symbolic, and therefore what escapes the signifier chain, the real. Thus, the imaginary consistency of the object *a* shows that "the transference is both an obstacle to remembering, and a making present of the closure of the unconscious, which is the act of missing the right meeting just at the right moment [qui est *le manque*, toujours à point nommé, *de la bonne rencontre* (*εὐτυχία*)]" (LACAN, 1998, 145). This passage is extremely important. Transference is both what causes the closure of the unconscious and what causes the good encounter to fail (εὐτυχία). Since Freud we know that transference is not just resistance, but what makes treatment successful by involving the analysand in a process of confrontation with their fantasies. This means that the transference, for Lacan, is not only what causes the good encounter to fail, but also what makes possible not the bad encounter of trauma, but the good encounter, laughter as the summit of anxiety. This is what he means when he says that the "transference is the enactment [*mise en acte*] of the reality of the unconscious" (LACAN, 1998, p. 146).

What, according to Lacan, is the reality of the unconscious? Following Freud, the French psychoanalyst believes that this reality is sexual. The inherently sexual aspect of the unconscious is linked to death: "the link between sex and death, sex and the death of the individual, is fundamental" (LACAN, 1998, p. 150). This is because, as we saw above with regard to the death drive, it is the cause of unconscious desire structured linguistically, in the sense that at the heart of the work of the signifiers is the death drive's attempt to repeat that supposed mythical jouissance, a jouissance identified with the complete absence of the individual, death. The symbolic structure of language, based on the pleasure principle, is a postponement of what drives the signifier chain itself: death. The real of the death drive is what, in a sublimatory movement, desexualizes sexuality from the work of signifiers: "The real is distinguished, as I said

last time, by its separation from the field of the pleasure principle, by its desexualization, by the fact that its economy, later, admits something new, which is precisely the impossible" (LACAN, 1998, p. 167). As much as the real of the death drive is the cause of the movement of the work of signifiers, it doesn't "exist" until it is circumscribed between the sliding of signifiers. Therein lies the mutual relationship between sexuality and death, one is intrinsically related to the other. This becomes more evident when we remember that the phallus is the signifier of jouissance, that is, it is the Law through which we come into contact with the lack of the lack, the object *a*.

Having said that, we can say that Lacan understands that the main objective of analysis is to ensure that the transference is not just a resistance, a closure of the sexual and real reality of the unconscious, but rather the enactment (*mise en acte*) of the reality of the unconscious capable of provoking in the subject a good encounter (*εὐτυχία*) with the object *a*. A good encounter implies the dissolution of the transferential fantasy through jouissance as partial satisfaction of the death drive by bordering the object *a*: "This satisfaction is paradoxical. When we look at it more closely, we see that something new comes into play – the category of the impossible" (LACAN, 1998, p. 166) The satisfaction of the drive is paradoxical because it involves a good encounter with the object a, an encounter that is the repetition of an excess of negativity beyond the lack, the real of jouissance. Thus, what happens in the good encounter is the passage from the imaginary and symbolic possible to the real impossible. Therefore, Lacan, in a very similar way to Bataille, understands that the joyful repetition of the good encounter implies jouissance, the present moment in which the movement from the possible to the impossible takes place. The good encounter would not be the real repetition of a trauma in the form of a symptom that conceals jouissance, but would be that anxiety that makes the subject die of laughter and opens them up to life. Lacan understands that in this paradoxical satisfaction, the drive is experienced (*vécue*) by the subject:

> analysis, that is, after the mapping of the subject in relation to the a, the experience of the fundamental phantasy becomes the drive. What, then, does he who has passed through the experience of this opaque relation to the origin, to the drive, become? How can a subject who has traversed the radical phantasy experience the drive? [Comment peut être vécue, par un sujet qui a traversé le fantasme radical, comment dès lors est vécue la pulsion?] This is the beyond of analysis, and has never been approached. Up to now, it has been approachable only at the level of the analyst, in as much as it would be required of

> him to have specifically traversed the cycle of the analytic experience in its totality. (LACAN, 1998, p. 273)

To experience or live the drive is not the same as experiencing the real in its merely traumatic, symptomatic dimension, but rather experiencing it in terms of its subjective transformation, in terms of what opens up the subject to tragicomicity. The end of analysis corresponds to the radical crossing of fantasy, it involves going beyond the work of the signifiers, of the automaton. More than a crossing of the automaton, it involves the crossing of the bad encounter, of the trauma. The end of analysis, therefore, corresponds to the moment when the analysand manages, to some degree and in some way, to laugh at his symptom, to laugh at his death. The analyst, as this obturating object that mirrors the analysand, is the one who causes the object *a* to emerge as a mirror of its own death and life:

> The objet *a* thus has the remarkable property of furnishing an image of the subject, insofar as he is lacking in that image: a marvelous broken mirror, muddy and opaque, in which the subject can see himself as he is not and with which he can identify himself in his absence of identity. (BORCH-JACOBSEN, 1991, p. 232)

The aim of the Lacanian clinic is to enable the analysand to make possible a subjective configuration that was impossible until then. This is not about the possible/impossible binomial in its Kierkegaardian sense, because as we have shown, the impossible here does not correspond to the future, but to the excess negativity of the present moment that throws the subject into a deadly laughter. In this sense, the idea of a passage from the symbolic/imaginary possible to the impossible of the real finds its theoretical support in Bataille's understanding of this binomial. Experiencing the drive in its satisfaction is the same as experiencing the impossible, laughing at the whole horizon of possibility that has constrained the analysand until then. Thus, we can say that if in Bataille excess occurs at the moment when the human being laughs at death, in Lacan, therapeutic success occurs at the moment when the analysand laughs at castration and its correlative symptoms. By attributing a therapeutic potential to laughter, Lacan recovers, through his appropriation of Bataille, the long Rabelaisian tradition.

5.4. Laughter since May 68

Taking into account the length of Lacan's teaching, we have chosen to focus on the first eleven seminars, since a study that takes into account anxiety and laughter in his late teaching would require more time. However, in what follows, we will briefly outline the paths that Lacan follows to give continuity to what he dealt with up until Seminar XI, which would certainly be very interesting to delve into in a later work.

Lacan's reflections on a *dustuchia* and an *eutuchia*, that is, a sad and a joyful dimension of the real, point to the idea that jouissance is not always conducive to subjective transformation, that it can be captured and transformed into a jouissance capable of contributing to the maintenance of a certain symptomatic configuration, preventing the transformative potential of jouissance as an absolute disarray. This is how Lacan begins to approach the subject of laughter in 1968, in *Seminar XVI*. It is well known that it is in this seminar that Lacan begins to establish a more direct and continuous dialog with Marx and his critique of political economy. It is in this theoretical context that the psychoanalyst returns to the question of laughter. Laughter, no longer seen from the transformative potential of jouissance, becomes much more the manifestation of a jouissance that is repeatedly expropriated from the subject, which is why the object a begins to acquire the function of surplus jouissance: "Je veux dire, la conjonction du rire avec la fonction radicalement éludée de la plus-value, dont j'ai déjà suffisamment indiqué le rapport avec l'élision caractéristique qui est constitutive de l'objet *a*" (LACAN, 2006, p. 65).

Following this reasoning, laughter in capitalism would be a loss of laughter, a minor laughter, as Bataille would say. This is very close to the way in which Bataille, in his 1933 article *The Psychological Structure of Fascism*, understands facism, namely as a way of using and instrumentalizing the excessiveness of society's heterogeneity to the advantage of a fascist heterogeneity which, despite altering the structure of capitalism, does not subvert it. This alteration, therefore, is not an overcoming of capitalism, but a new way of putting its structure into practice. Thus, fascism carries out a movement that

> excludes all subversion, the thrust of these resolutions will have been consistent with the general direction of the existing homogeneity, namely, with the interests of the capitalists. As a result, the very structure of capitalism – the principle of which had been that of a spontaneous homogeneity of production based on competition, a *de*

> *facto* coincidence of the interests of the group of producers with the absolute freedom of each enterprise – finds itself profoundly altered. (BATAILLE, 1985, p. 156)

Aware of Bataille's Marxist reading of the transformation of the structures of capitalism, Lacan, from Seminar XVI onwards, perceives in capitalism a very specific way of instrumentalizing jouissance and, therefore, laughter. Laughter in this seminar refers to the capitalist's laughter when he realizes that, at the end of the production process, he has acquired more value than expected by having bought the commodity labor power. The value of this commodity, like any other, corresponds to the socially necessary working time, but this specific commodity, unlike the others, when consumed by the capitalist, produces value. Thus, in the face of this excess value expropriated by him, the capitalist laughs. In a similar way to the capitalist's laughter, the subject in capitalism laughs at the loss of their enjoyment, produced by the work of the signifiers. The surplus jouissance is the name Lacan gives to this capitalist way of jouissance, a jouissance that is always a non-jouissance: “Le plus-de-jouir est ce qui répond, non pas à la jouissance, mais à la perte de la jouissance” (LACAN, 2006, p. 116)

Later, in his Seminar XX, in the 1970s, Lacan began to give another name to this jouissance that is captured by capitalist dynamics. Like surplus-jouissance, "this jouissance is inscribed in the modalities of social reproduction and will be fundamental for the preservation of capitalism, to which Lacan will give the name 'phallic jouissance'" (SAFATLE, 2020, p. 60, *translated*). Phallic jouissance is that jouissance captured and mediated by the register of lack, of castration, which in turn mitigates the disruptive potential of laughter. As a supplementary jouissance capable of subverting the capitalist dynamics of phallic jouissance, Lacan begins to theorize about feminine jouissance, a jouissance that is not based on lack. We see here an attempt by Lacan to think of a jouissance, a laughter, that doesn't allow itself to be dominated by the more-of-joy, based on phallic jouissance. The laughter that would not be captured by the capitalist discourse would be the laughter of the order of feminine jouissance, a genuinely excessive and subversive laughter.

It was at this same time that Lacan brought up the concepts of the ethics of the well-said and of *gay sçavoir*, the latter of which, in a way, he had already mentioned twenty years earlier in *The Discourse of Rome*, but which had not been worked on much until then. In *Television*, from 1973, Lacan tells us that the good encounter, the *eutuchia*, is associated with the joy of the *gay sçavoir*, which is at the opposite pole of sadness:

“A l'opposé de la tristesse, il y a le gay sçavoir, lequel est, lui, une vertu” (LACAN, 2001, p. 526). Roughly speaking, the *gay sçavoir* has to do with the well-said, a saying that allows the subject to grasp some meaning, not stick to it:

> La vertu que je désigne du gay sçavoir en est l'exemple, de manifester en quoi elle consiste : non pas comprendre, piquer dans le sens, mais le raser d'aussi près qu'il se peut sans qu'il fasse glu pour cette vertu, pour cela jouir du déchiffrage, ce qui implique que le gay sçavoir n'en fasse au terme que la chute, le retour au péché. (LACAN, 2001, p. 526)

In the same speech, Lacan makes more explicit the disruptive potential of jouissance when it is not captured by the phallic logic of capitalism: “Plus on est de saints, plus on rit, c’est mon principe, voire la sortie du discours capitaliste, – ce qui ne constituera pas un progrès, si c'est seulement pour certains” (LACAN, 2001, p. 519). This statement makes us even more aware of Bataille's reverberations in Lacanian teaching, since the French thinker was not only the one who attributed great importance to the disruptive power of laughter against sad anxiety and capitalism, but also the one who once said: “je ne suis pas un philosophe mais un *saint*, peut-être un fou” (BATAILLE, 1973f, p. 218).

6. Laughing at capitalism: a critique of libidinal economy

In the course of this work, we have noticed that psychoanalysis, at least in its Lacanian version, continues the Rabelaisian and Hegelian-Kojèvian traditions. The latter takes an aversive and condemnatory stance towards laughter, since this excessive and unmeasured experience is of no use within the work of the negative. In an attempt to mitigate and buffer the radical and excessive negativity of death, this tradition submits it to the servitude of the future, postponing this excess through a constant work of appeasement. Anxiety and its serious atmosphere prevail in this tradition, and all that remains is for the subject to work to deal with the constant expectation of the possibility of their death. It has been observed that this Hegelian-Kojèvian tradition is, in a way, taken up by Freud insofar as his concept of castration anxiety circumscribes subjective experience within a sad grammar of finitude, in the face of which the subject has no option but to resign himself to his constitutive lack. Laughter, on the horizon of Freudian psychoanalysis, merely attenuates the tension caused by the energetic hypercathexis of expectant anxiety.

We have also seen that Lacan articulates the Hegelian-Kojèvian tradition that insinuates itself into the Freudian conception of anxiety with the Rabelaisian tradition of the therapeutic potential of laughter. This occurs through a constant dialog with Bataille's contributions on the servile and sovereign dimension of anxiety. For the French thinker, sad anxiety corresponds to the anxiety so thematized by Hegel and Kojève, namely the anxiety from which the subject seeks to escape by occupying himself and projecting himself into the future. However, we have seen that the limit that this anxiety presents to the subject is, in essence, the way in which they seek to exceed themselves and overcome this anxiety that confines them in a restricted economy. Laughter, a sovereign anxiety, is the moment when this sad anxiety turns into delight, opening the subject up to a limit-experience in which he flirts with the play of forces of a general economy, of excess. For the French psychoanalyst, the apex of anxiety is the moment when the lack, that is, the negativity of the phallus, is missing, causing the object to appear, launching the subject into the joyful experience of laughter. This anxiety is what kills the subject from laughing, stripping him of his imaginary and symbolic identifications. Through this intense dialogue with Bataille, Lacan manages to rehabilitate the therapeutic aspect of laughter by finding it in the capacity that the

analytical process has to provide the subject with a good encounter with the object *a*. This good encounter does not correspond to the exclusion or elimination of the bad encounter, the symptomatic jouissance of trauma, but rather its overcoming. In this sense, psychoanalysis would be able to provide the conditions for the subject to have a good encounter with the object *a* in a way that makes them laugh at their castration and the symptoms related to it.

Taking this into account, we can see that the Lacanian concepts of anxiety and repetition have a close connection. After *Seminar X*, one often gets the impression that Lacan no longer discusses the affect of anxiety during his teaching, or if he does, only in a very superficial way. However, anxiety, insofar as it is caused by the object *a*, reappears in *Seminar XI* in conjunction with the Lacanian concept of repetition. This proximity between anxiety and repetition brings us back to Kierkegaardian and Bataillenian reflections on the same ideas. For the Dinarmaque philosopher, the summit of anxiety is nothing other than the decisive moment, which is capable of effecting repetition through the double movement of faith. According to Bataille, the summit of anxiety is laughter, in other words, the wasteful repetition of the lost immanence experienced at the moment when the object without objective truth appears. We know that Lacan would not agree with the Kierkegaardian notion of repetition, which implies a conscious decision directed towards the future. For Lacan, the real repetition of the object *a* implies the sudden appearance of an object that removes the subject from its expectant dimension, which makes us think that anxiety, in his eleventh seminar, is approached within Bataille's theoretical horizon. The repetition of the object *a* is the moment when the subject is disturbed by the return of something of the order of the real, namely anxiety. In this sense, Lacan is always interested in the theme of anxiety, because repetition is the return of that which causes anxiety: the object *a*.

After having looked at the Bataillean concept of anxiety, we also saw that its duplicity is also found in Lacan, which allowed us to realize that Bataille is the main reference for the Lacanian concept of anxiety. Without this contextualization, we would end up attributing to Kierkegaard the merit of providing the psychoanalyst with a concept of anxiety that ultimately does not belong to the Danish philosopher. Certainly Kierkegaard is a theoretical reference for Lacan, but he is so to the extent that he is mediated by the psychoanalyst's reading of Bataille. Not only is Kierkegaard mediated by Bataille, but so is Nietzsche. Lacan's appropriation of Bataille shows us, in an

unexpected way, an infiltration of Nietzschean philosophy into the heart of Lacanian psychoanalysis. This approach to the German philosopher is generally abhorred by some Lacanian circles in Brazil today. Nietzsche, often considered the anti-Hegelian philosopher par excellence, is therefore somewhat foreclosed from Lacan's theoretical horizon. However, we see that Nietzsche is clandestinely located within the Lacanian concept of anxiety insofar as the summit of anxiety points to the present moment.

It is on the basis of Bataille's contributions on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that Lacan manages to provide himself with a concept of repetition that short-circuits the dialectical negativity of the signifying chain. The object *a*, a negativity associated with privation, not lack, disrupts the laborious concatenation of signifiers, which function through the binary opposition between presence and absence. As in Bataille, this means that there must first be a rational and conceptual mediation for something of the order of the impossible and the heterogeneous to be able to disrupt what rational mediation has constructed. There is no object *a* without the symbolic structure, in other words, it is not possible to encounter this excessive and indeterminate negativity without the determined and laborious negativity of dialectics. The seriousness of the dialectical negativity present in the symbolic structure is what makes room for the summit of anxiety, laughter, to erupt in real repetition, that is, at the moment when the object *a* appears. In this sense, the therapeutic potential of laughter in Lacanian psychoanalysis doesn't give up on an affection that is normally considered the reason why human beings are melancholy and sad: anxiety. Drawing on Bataille's reflections, Lacan could even say that anxiety has therapeutic potential to the extent that it leads to laughter. There is no sudden, comic relief from anxiety without the experience of anxiety.

In the course of Lacanian teaching, there is a radicalization of the therapeutic potential of laughter, since it begins to acquire a disruptive potential that goes beyond the clinical sphere, and even has the capacity to confront the desiring dynamic as it occurs in capitalism. Laughter thus becomes the theoretical operator that enables a critique of the capitalist libidinal economy. Laughter would not be a mere individual experience within the clinical setting, but would involve reconfiguring the way in which desire is socialized. The *gay sçavoir* of laughter breaks with the capitalist circulation of desire, which captures and expropriates its emancipatory excess from laughter. However, it is important not to oversimplify the political potential of laughter, since it is not necessarily an easy way out of complex political impasses. Just consider former

president Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who, after having administered a long process of genocide against the Brazilian people during the pandemic, finds himself laughing with impunity at home, without having suffered any major consequences.

Despite appearing late in his teaching, the Lacanian proposal towards laughter as a critique of the capitalist libidinal economy allows us to put forward some guiding hypotheses that can be worked on and verified in a subsequent work. It is known that one of the main theoretical references used by Lacan to understand the dynamics of the capitalist structure is the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser. Althusser's reading of Marx's critique of political economy was decisive in introducing the German philosopher into Lacanian teaching in the 60s. However, Lacan did not blindly appropriate Althusser's reflections, proposing his own psychoanalytic way of understanding the subject of the unconscious within capitalism. It is in this sense that laughter appears, that is, as the contribution that Lacan seeks to offer to the Marxist critique of capitalism. Following this line of reasoning, we could think that it is from Bataille and his concept of laughter that Lacan critically reads Althusserian Marxism. Lacan would have approached Althusser's Marxist philosophy in the light of the Bataillean concept of general economy, importing the excess of laughter as the disruptive element of the capitalist mode of production. Here are some hypotheses for our next work.

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