

The duality of melancholy: Walter Benjamin and some contributions from psychoanalysis

A dualidade da melancolia: Walter Benjamin e algumas contribuições da psicanálise

La dualidad de la melancolía: Walter Benjamin y algunos aportes del psicoanálisis

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ABSTRACT

In this text, we outline part of the doctoral thesis that seeks, based on the term melancholy in psychoanalysis and in Walter Benjamin, to draw parallels with the time of violence and passivity that we have been facing. Bringing elements of the infantile and the death instinct, as well as trauma and experience, we seek to associate the evil of our time with the possibilities engendered in the collectivity, when the melancholic moves from individualism to exercise a rebellious social position. Education as a culture has much to gain from this movement, which yearns for the transmission of knowledge in social narratives.

Keywords: Education. Melancholy. Collectivity. Infantile. Trauma.

RESUMO

Neste texto esboçamos parte da tese de doutorado que busca, com base no termo melancolia na psicanálise e em Walter Benjamin, traçar paralelos com o tempo de violência e passividade que viemos enfrentando. Trazendo elementos do infantil e da pulsão de morte, assim como do trauma e da vivência, buscamos articular o mal de nosso tempo com as possibilidades engendradas na coletividade, quando o melancólico passa do individualismo para exercer uma posição social rebelde. A educação enquanto cultura tem muito a ganhar com esse movimento, que anseia pela transmissão de saber nas narrativas sociais.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Melancolia. Coletividade. Infantil. Trauma.

RESUMEN

En este texto esbozamos parte de la tesis doctoral que busca, a partir del término melancolía en el psicoanálisis y en Walter Benjamin, establecer paralelismos con el tiempo de violencia y pasividad que venimos viviendo. Trayendo elementos del infantil y la pulsión de muerte, así como del trauma

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y la experiencia, buscamos articular el mal de nuestro tiempo con las posibilidades engendradas en la colectividad, cuando el melancólico transita del individualismo para ejercer una posición social rebelde. La educación como cultura tiene mucho que ganar con este movimiento, que anhela la transmisión de saberes en narrativas sociales.

Palabras clave: Educación. Melancolía. Colectividad. Infantil. Trauma.

Just like Sigmund Freud wondered how the human being, even after so many technological and social advances, could turn once again to war, we find ourselves paralyzed by the horror that plagues our time after some apparent progress. Dark times. The death drive commands the scene once again and a melancholy seems to spread in our society in different communities and in diverse ways. We are faced with an overly agile time, in which the sharing of images that need to be quickly digested advances, social networks in which being seen, liked and looked at is paramount; a time of unbridled consumption, which produces unthinkable amounts of mental garbage daily; a time of natural catastrophes and assembled catastrophes.

In addition to the image presented by haste, individualism is an important character in the social scene. Collectivity and the sharing of lived experiences become jargon, widely disseminated on social media, but little experienced, while self-knowledge, independence, and the search for personal satisfaction fiercely overlap the notion of community. As an increase to all this, a new pandemic was established in the world at the beginning of 2020, bringing to light all the elements mentioned above, but with an increase in drama, in which lives were paralyzed and turned inside out by the mourning of what was being lost, precisely because it was impossible to scale. In the meantime, melancholy's aggressiveness found straightforward ways to manifest itself, both in self-destructive and combative movements.

In 1933, Freud wrote "Why war?", a text written at the request of the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation to promote dialogues between different intellectuals of the time. In an exchange of correspondence, Einstein sent a letter to Freud on July 30, 1932, asking a blunt but frustrating question in Freud's eyes. Einstein asked if there was any way to rid humanity of the threat of war.

In his reply, Freud (2006 [1933]) introduced the death drive, which, in contrast to the life drive, is developed as an impulse that aims to achieve stillness, projecting itself towards an effort to die and disconnect. While the life drive would have union as its impetus, the death drive would seek disunity, and, in the end, self-destruction. In this sense, the primitive lived experiences of human beings, who are constantly under the threat of death, and the evolution of organisms themselves, always remind us how close we really are to death. It is like a phylogenetic inheritance, as Freud (2006 [1923]) liked to say, an inheritance that is written in our *this* — the most primitive part of our being, which is formed from the repeated lived experiences to which our ancestors were subjected, in each cell. It is the constant dance of life and death drives that elicits life, with its advances and setbacks and its tendency to return to the inorganic state — and this constant movement of creation and destruction is manifested in the subject's entry into culture through their body, fantasies, and behavior — always in a singular way and also integrated into that community where the person is inserted.

In addition to the well-known economic interests that motivate wars, we are surprised that human beings can still kill each other on a large scale. In this regard, Freud (2006 [1933]) pointed out that war can no longer be understood as a simple motivation for the duel, which aimed to safeguard

honor in a society full of customs and pride, since the goal is to kill the other simply because they are different, in the maximum expression of the extermination of otherness engendered by denial and hatred. Collectively speaking, war would then be a forceful manifestation of the death drive, inherent in the human and therefore inevitable.

Also resorting to a comparison with the survival instinct, which can kill to survive, we realize that death in war goes beyond this shallow assumption that accounted only for the savanna man and never for the civilized man (a term used by Freud). On the contrary, any will to live would leave the path dictated by war and would cause a soldier to abandon their post to seek the certainty of survival, so that the weight of love for the homeland and the desire to belong to a group, for instance, which result from cultural lived experiences, overlap even the instinct. This shows us that war damages relationships, mental health, and even reproduction; it exterminates all sides involved, leading to death not only the opponent, but the compatriots sent to the battle front, and even indirectly those in the rear. Not long ago in our history, even children were sent to war, forming the well-known infantry, which had no other purpose than to die to offer more chances to the most valuable pieces, as happens in chess — in which pawns sacrifice themselves lightly to give game room to knights, bishops, kings, and queens.

Understanding that there is a satisfaction of the death drive in the making of war, and that our thirst for destruction is embodied in the aesthetics of horror staged on the battlefield, Freud (2006 [1933]) claimed, in his letter/text to Einstein, that we only have indirect means of fighting war, enabling the death drive to find other means of satisfaction, the well-known substitutes of which psychoanalysis speaks so much. In other words, the proposal is to seek to transform the object and not the origin, force, or goal — characteristics known to be immutable in the drive. Considering that the death drive is inevitable to the psychic constitution, let it be possible to lose it, to usurp it. From this perspective, it is beautiful to see how Freud stitches all this together while stating that the details that permeate interpersonal encounters will influence this endeavor, considering that the diversity and quality of support for the drive make all the difference in the destinations that are possible. Thus, Freud suggests more love, more identification, and better education for leaders.

In his letter, Freud (2006 [1933], p. 206) ultimately questions the “usurpations committed by the executive power of the State and the prohibition established by the Church against freedom of thought”, showing that he knew well all the motivating forces of wars and bringing to light facets of what we thought were exterminated in our society, but which finally proved to be only dormant. In this regard, the war itself to which Freud alluded can be compared to the daily violence of the periphery in the drug traffic war and in the violence we suffer in face of this avalanche of misshapen times that incessantly repeat the nonsense, the void, the trauma.

Walter Benjamin, a renowned German philosopher and essayist, on the other hand, also used the term melancholy to discuss the effects of social relations of power, especially from the Industrial Revolution on, in which modernity and the impoverishment of human experience seemed inherent to a culture that was now series-produced. Culture in the sense that it configures the very history of man and his community, in a shared narrative that can reinforce the alienation of the human being in the face of the consolidation of capitalism and the massification of communication. Benjamin is remarkably close to Freud and psychoanalysis in several ways, and practice in the field of education makes us return to them to try to create lifeboats for the times of violence in which we live. Thus, we set out towards the constant encounter of the individual and the collective, drawing a parallel between them in this text, while we weave points about topics such as trauma, shock, social bond, and childhood, in order to think of education and culture as engines of alienation and, concomitantly, of creation.

We propose to think of education as an exercise in the transmission of socio-cultural heritage, which is present in the most hidden places of everyday life. The conditions of construction of a common world depend on this transmission. In this sense, we take education from an expanded perspective, which includes and goes beyond schooling, spreading through the territories of production and transmission of ways of life. Within the scope of this article, we will dedicate ourselves to thinking about theoretical aspects of the exercise of this transmission in our time.

SHOCK AND SILENCING

Melancholy was already a psychiatric diagnosis when Freud took it for study in the iconic text “Mourning and Melancholia.” Freud (2006 [1917]) was faced with the need to distinguish sadness from melancholy, considering that the whole process of sadness was related to the notion of grief — whether the loss of a person, an idea, a feeling, a fantasy or even the loss of an object in which the subject invested emotionally (in other words, intended libido).

If the process of mourning is inevitable in life, Freud (2006 [1917]) says that melancholy does not have the same weight. Melancholy is characterized by the prolongation of the state of mourning, from which the subject finds no means of getting out. Libido is retained in the Self, licking the wounds of the loss of the other, which to some extent led us to lose part of ourselves. Trying to heal the damage caused by the overwhelming loss, the Self needs to return to invest in itself, because when it threw itself towards the other it deposited part of itself in it.

In melancholy, the Self is impoverished, feeling that it has lost an invaluable part of itself, but that, in truth, it never had. Disgusted with the relationships they feel have massacred them, the melancholic one closes themselves in their own world, withdrawing emotionally from the encounters that life provides. Thus, they increasingly feed the feelings of void and annoyance that inhabit them, sealing with themselves a pact of impassive indignation, which shows in their total disinterest in others, in their assumed position of irony and criticism in relation to themselves and to others, as well as in their particular drama filled with distrust and hopelessness (Freud, 2006 [1914]; 2006 [1917]).

As we can see, the melancholic is a subject imprisoned by the destiny that was traced for them and the history of death and loss that constituted them. We can go back to a parallel of this lived experience when we think of the human baby. While the construction of narcissism, essential for life, operates for the emergence of a Self, which is a constant construction, the extreme helplessness experienced by the human baby configures a primordial moment in which the parents’ desire falls on the child with the weight of their own desire, making it impossible for them to discern what is theirs and what is the other’s, making the initial lived experiences so imperative for the infant.

Sándor Ferenczi (2011 [1929]), Freud’s contemporary, presented in the text “The unwelcome child and its death drive” the amount of death drive that is installed early in psychic life with the advent of birth and entry into culture, overlapping intensely with life. We know that, initially, the human baby is so dependent on the other who cares for them that their perception is precarious. Donald Winnicott (2006 [1975]), who was Ferenczi’s analysand, supported the idea that, more than just managing the child, changing their diapers, and feeding their body, it is essential to offer them food for the soul. They drink milk but feed on love. This movement that the caregivers offer works as a holding to the psyche, which goes through repeated lived experiences of helplessness in the first months of life and after. In other words, parents need to be good enough at enduring these manifestations of helplessness, without a sense having to be hastily made. Here we can see how the social mechanisms to silence anguish, as is the case with massive social media and its reproduction of content, equally harm subjects, acting as hurried caregivers — who take care only of the needs and are not available for the welcoming.

The good enough term is a gift left by Winnicott, as he considers, together, the need to support the child's psyche and the need to allow something lacking to the child: "this means that the mother (or part of her) finds herself in a permanent oscillation between being what the baby has the ability to find and (alternatively) being herself, waiting to be found" (Winnicott, 2006 [1975], p. 70). The caregiver offers herself as an object of love, allowing a game of presence and absence, in which the child can challenge themselves and the environment in a rhythmic way, experiencing together with the other their most ambivalent feelings in a distended time, which respects their immaturity. In this process, only after having tested the love of the object can the subject come to feel love for the other.

Here loving is assumed almost like a synonym for investing, preserving ourselves in a space between, being what frees us and gets us rid of the belief that we are total strangers to each other. In this sense, we can say that the typical tiredness of the melancholic evidences all the weight imposed on them to carry the certainty of lived experiences voided of meaning as if they were disconnected from the collective time, from the experience of history — effects of melancholy on the conditions of transmission from one generation to another, in which narrative forms are voided of symbolism.

In the meantime, we draw a parallel between image and lived experience in Benjamin and presentation and trauma in Freud. Presentation is constituted as a mark, something that has entered the psyche, but without passing through conscious perception, bringing in itself a traumatic dimension that, by not inserting itself in the representational circuit, returns with full force, and equally confuses past, present, and future, demonstrating the timelessness of the unconscious. Thus, presentation makes a mark of the encounter, but without any possible memory or symbolism, carrying in itself the idea of an intensity without borders. As an excess, the very existence of an unnamable thing instigates the notion of the traumatic, which cannot be metabolized by the Self.

We know the relationship between the topic of trauma and family helplessness in psychoanalysis, but its connection can also be intertwined with lived experiences of social helplessness. Trauma is highlighted here as the intense lived experiences that paralyze the subject, leaving a hole in the psyche, which causes dissociation. The lived experience of shock is equivalent to the annihilation of the feeling of existing, in which misplaced patches and points remain meaningless and without drainage. These points are enhanced by a lack of symbolic support from the other — which can be a family member, an analyst, a teacher, or even the State —, who denies or underestimates what the subject has experienced. The incomprehension, punishment, and silence of those who witness the trauma or its effects favor hopelessness and the feeling of inadequacy, causing the subject to deny their perception of what happened to them. When it needs to annihilate a part of itself, the Self becomes impoverished, evidencing loneliness (Ferenczi, 2011 [1934]).

At this moment, it seems important to cast our gaze and our listening to trauma that is lived in the social bond, the trauma repeated in the collective sphere, that is not isolated in individual subjectivity. Whether in the lived experience of a declared war or an avalanche of sensations caused by modernity and the ways it operates, a passive position is established. Ferenczi (2011 [1931]) emphasized that, more than what happened in itself, what makes an event traumatic for the psyche is, *a posteriori*, not having the recognition by the other of what was experienced. What becomes unbearable and what properly configures trauma is this second moment, in which the subject's perception is denied and does not find the necessary resonance. This cruel mismatch leads to dissociation and denial of life. It is important to realize that this still happens today in the effects of the history of the dictatorship in our country and in cases of violence against women and Blacks, to name a few moments, when the narrative of the subjects is silenced and distorted by the discourse of part of the collective — especially that part that demands to remain the owner of the truth.

At the same historical time when Freud advanced in psychoanalytic studies, Benjamin (2012 [1936]) focused on the figure of the narrator, casting his gaze on the elder, who, through the shared speech of his lived experiences and his community's, praised the transmission of tradition. In a game of positions, Benjamin placed the narrator in relation to the one who has a desire to hear a story — to the one who stops and listens, sitting around a campfire or any object of symbolic value to his culture. It is interesting to think that every desire to hear a story is attached to these anonymous narrators, who do not need to be famous to have an audience attentive to their words, or, rather, they rightly operate with importance in the society they inhabit by having a place rooted in local culture and customs, far from the spotlight. The subject who carries the story, not in its facet of absolute truth, but in its perspective of experience, does not need to be the one who experienced the thing; it is enough that he presents himself as willing to narrate it, always in its fragmentary and specular character, weaving his life in the mesh of collective history.

To narrate, Benjamin claims, it is essential to have been in the position of listener, offering oneself as a driver of what is inexhaustible. In this sense, narrating is the juxtaposition of the individual and the collective, which unfolds in language and transcends, giving space to the “extraordinary” and the “miraculous” and thus enabling new openings (Benjamin, 2012 [1933], p. 219). Benjamin states that the narrator no longer lives when communication begins to occur from the perspective of haste, valuing information more than the act of narrating and its potency. While we receive news from all over the world, no longer daily as in Benjamin's time, but every second, through social media, we restrict ourselves to the immediacy of false accuracy. The news, when shortened in narration, comes to the subject as a shock. It does not offer the listener the possibility of interpretation, falling like a concrete block in which it is impossible to make erasures.

Following the developments of the text “The narrator,” we observe how Benjamin (2012 [1933]) naturally approaches the question of the narration of death. It is interesting that precisely death, which Freud (2006 [1912]) enunciated to be that which we are not able to apprehend and represent, takes over Benjamin's text. If those who listen to a story are not alone, the loneliness of death brings new directions in the wake of the narration. Death is no longer an impediment to it, since, being an individual lived experience *per se*, it gains collective status when engendered in a narrative. It is as if Benjamin was telling us that, as regards the impossible of death, we are bound to keep talking without ever completely saying everything.

In the same vein, the excess of descriptive techniques that are intended to imprint a “way of living” without realizing the poverty that afflicts us leads us to a movement of humanity, which capitalizes us to a new barbarism, in which, fixed in the position of lived experience, we are “satiated and exhausted” (Benjamin, 2012 [1933], p. 127), offering no space to the mysteries and slips of the narrative. Considering that in a way the human being aspires to free himself from all experience, to know everything and have everything — as Freud (2006 [1920]) would say, to return to the state of non-existence —, Benjamin presents a human tendency to crystallize in experience, which would be equivalent to a state of shock and impact, a sensory and informative avalanche, which keeps us in a position to devour everything and retain nothing.

The difference between lived experience (*Erlebnis*) and experience (*Erfahrung*) proposed by Benjamin (2012 [1933]) leads us to reflect on the collective process in the face of shocks, since the lived experience falls within the scope of private life, without being able to metabolize the events. In the lived experience, the individual is tied to what is fateful and to the sensations, because the excesses corrode them from the inside. In the recording of experience, the narrative process is already possible and the sharing of the stories of lived experiences turns what once seemed catastrophic into something more palatable. Community life, enriched with possible encounters, establishes the possibility of transmission, pulling the melancholic out of their miserable loneliness and putting them on a level of no longer just existing, but co-existing.

It is no wonder that Benjamin, like Freud (2006 [1920]), recalls the soldiers who returned mute from war, without being able to report anything about their lived experiences. The bombings and the use of extermination techniques and machines of World War I brought a new dimension to combat politics, in which personal skills and group strategies contributed little. Soaked in lived experiences, the soldiers could not become narrators, and it was impossible for them to leave traces of what affected them to their compatriots and descendants. Thus, analyzing the effects of lived war experiences, Benjamin presents a “mute generation of astonishment,” marked by trauma (Muricy, 1998, p. 17).

The shortening of narration time and sharing of lived experiences presented by Benjamin leads him to ask, “what is the value of all our cultural heritage, if the experience no longer links it to us?” (2012 [1933], p. 124). Following the traces of this issue, it is impossible not to point to education as the transmission of a symbolic patrimony of knowledge and wisdom, while it seems important to take melancholy as an effect of this rupture in the bond with social heritage, which puts us in the midst of an avalanche of unpalatable lived experiences. Alienated¹, therefore, we reflect the effects of a weak social bond and not just an individual attribute, making it inevitable that we question how the blunt social melancholy that presents itself in our time affects culture, by eroding the affective ties, the possibilities of collectivity and fraternity, which seem to be the key so that lived experiences can sediment as experiences.

Freud claimed that the human being never totally abdicates satisfaction, they just transform it, enjoying it with its substitutes. Since the unconscious is built in the relationship of the internal with the external, it is always present, being the driving force of our life and demanding satisfaction, just as both the life and death instincts are relentless in their struggle for fulfillment.

If throughout life we win and lose, or rather, we create fictions that we win or lose, some losses manifest themselves even more painfully. In this way, we understand that we are all potentially melancholic, as we always lose an invaluable part of ourselves, of other ones, and of our bonds. We try, in this work, to elucidate how these apparently highly individual and private processes can present themselves on a large scale in public and collective life, including suffering effects from the conjectures that are socially imposed.

There is no doubt that the failure of transmission affects education, highlighting the path of impoverishment of the subjects, both young and adults, who renounce the encounter with the bases of history and those who came before them. Thus, let us elucidate that, when we go through socio-historical moments in which we do not know what to narrate or how to narrate, we are also circumscribed to the range of lived experiences. We have seen this, in recent years, manifested in a hardened way when, in the face of terror, narratives emerged quite readily.

As soon as the encounters are barred, we witness the increase of melancholy challenging the usual methods of transmission. For Callado (2008), boredom and melancholy are linked to the idea that civilization moves towards a continuous catastrophe, also functioning as responses to the fragmentary treatment of knowledge — characteristic of traditional science. In this sense, depending on how we structure the transmission of knowledge, we can reinforce the primitive elements of melancholy and, if it infiltrates education, we produce a feeling of hopelessness on a large scale.

In a 1930 text entitled “Left-wing melancholy,” Walter Benjamin analyzes writings that slipped easily through the community, infiltrating the herd movements afforded by the great popularity of image-messages that functioned as refreshments to the avid eyes of lazy readers — something like the effect of social media today, in which a text, to be read, cannot exceed 140 or 280 characters,

1 We are always a little alienated and adapted, and it is possible that we try to give vent to the desire to belong together with the satisfaction of the drives; finding this balance is difficult and requires constant work from each of us. The truth in psychoanalysis can only be circumscribed, never generalized.

much less than what we have in this single paragraph. Quick, emblematic, and easy ideas, in the format of media discourses, such as double meaning phrases.

By criticizing the left while subscribing to it, Benjamin shows that his critical position was more important than any affiliation to a scheme of thought. Starting from sensationalist speeches and highly impactful elucubrations, which serve only the intellectual elite, he points mainly to the discursive tool of fatalism, which, in an autophagic movement and in a “grotesque underestimation of the opponent”, embodies the position of the one who complains much and does little (Benjamin, 2012 [1930], p. 79).

The ode to “tortured stupidity” that Benjamin recalls (2012 [1930], p. 80) reminds us of our times by presenting melancholy as an effect of the arrogance of the one who sees nothing in front of him but his irregular and nihilistic frustration. Benjamin (2012 [1930], p. 79) seems to summarize these ideas when he says: “no one has ever settled so comfortably in such an uncomfortable situation”. In this regard, we understand that melancholy repeats the interpretation of hegemonic history, easily joining the winners in the social and political panorama; it rejects any identification with the defeated, silencing their death in order to deny the loss of this object in the mesh of their history — always collective. This movement, which Ferenczi (2006 [1933]) names as an identification with the aggressor in the singular field, may explain the apathy and conformism with which different populations around the world have been able to tolerate state crimes such as the genocides of indigenous and black people — and still tolerate them. In a broader sense, the production of mutism in the face of barbarism denotes a political interest in disarticulating individual thought and collective action.

Benjamin (2012 [1940]) reflected on the construction of history, noting that it is always structured after it has happened, when the oppressed no longer have a voice, and it is on top of their dead bodies that the winners’ apogee is produced. Thus, we understand how social conformism has been going hand in hand with the proliferation of personal services such as cleaners, event organizers, health coaches, career coaches, relationship coaches, home coaches, clothing coaches, who disregard ordinary life and are committed to producing successful people; in other words, illusory winners. Meanwhile, young people are the most impacted by this way of operating in an individualistic and consumerist society, reproducing a sometimes utopian and sometimes fatalistic posture towards life and the future — which may be directly linked to the melancholy we find in the clinic.

MELANCHOLY AND ALIENATION

Freud (2006 [1917], p. 250) asserted that, in melancholy, discouragement towards the world extends to such a severe inhibition that the subject loses interest in life and even loses their “ability to love”. We could say that the radical melancholic has no friends, no ties, distancing themselves from social life. Seeing themselves with such devaluation, they perceive themselves as deserving of all the miseries they can imagine, reducing at all times the effervescence of encounters, while their self-image remains rooted in the lived experience of abandonment — the melancholic — which we do not take here as a clinical structure.

We understand the melancholic states as being triggered by the omission of the narrators elucidated by Benjamin, who sometimes refuse to appreciate the infantile, invalidating the lived experiences filled with affection of the childhood of humanity and of those who listen to the stories. It is conjectured that, given to his own drive intensity, the subject who presents a melancholic disposition failed to give edges to their traumatic lived experiences. Current events activate a primitive state in which the early loss of an object affected the rhythm of the constitution of the psyche, alluding to the greater evidence of the death drive and its nefarious propulsions. With intense affections inoculated within itself, the Self becomes a bomb about to implode. And the

easiest destruction to perform, as Ferenczi (2011 [1934]) said, is self-destruction, which somehow at least releases the psychic load to some destination, in this case that which is most facilitated for the subject.

In this sense, the identification process always seeks itself, formulating a uniformity, in which it expects to find the same thing again and again. The tendency to homeostasis is the hallmark of the psyche, which essentially seeks to maintain the *status quo*, and it is only when faced with discontinuity that it is forced to take a new path. Therefore, the melancholic ends up torturing themselves with the repetition of pain, being able to speak badly of themselves with such shamelessness, as Freud (2006 [1917]) pointed out, since it is not them who speak in truth, but the inoculated object that lives in them, half dead.

Winnicott (2006 [1975]) brilliantly indicated that, in addition to a relationship with the object that occurs in the sphere of fantasy, it is essential that the child can use the other as the recipient of their death drive. For this, the latter must be present in reality and, thus, offer a counterpoint to the lived experience of helplessness, as the caregiver, who needs to be close to their baby to offer a specific action that restores the infant's psychic balance. And how have we been functioning in culture for our children and young people? Have we been giving them room to allocate their death drive? Studies show that in Brazil we punish poor and Black young people too much, while treating with indifference aggressive acts by white and rich young people, both attitudes being equally harmful to the construction of a social bond, so primordial in adolescence (Vidal *et al.*, 2015).

As our individual history is inseparable from our social history, as it is through insertion in culture and language that we become subjects of desire, there cannot be only one narrator of collective history. At this point, Arendt (1997 [1961]) suggests that the violent uses of authoritarianism in World War II produced such a traumatic effect that today's adults are paralyzed by positions of authority, fearing that the destructive impulse will overtake them. Giving up the function of guiding young people through the stories of the past, they confuse authoritarianism with authority, while reproducing historical silences. In order to avoid authoritarianism, history must be constituted and reconstructed through multiple voices. In this context, it is important to note that authority, which is different from authoritarianism, is essential in culture and education, as it is through it that adults authorize themselves to offer something to young people.

If, on the one hand, education is accused of plastering the subjects too much, it is also fundamental in the construction of human beings who know how to live in society. As Ferenczi (2011 [1934]) said, the greatest trauma occurs when the child realizes that, in order to enter society, they will have to give up part of their impulses. We need to learn to participate in a group formed before we were born and that has rules of coexistence sometimes even different from that of our family nucleus. And learning to navigate social relationships without feeling too alienated is no easy task, being resigned to the way things work and still being able to revolutionize small parameters — which is undoubtedly easier if we find a collective that wants more or less the same as us and represents us.

When it is touched by psychoanalysis, education can be the exercise of a critical position in relation to its praxis that preserves the condition of taking responsibility for its function, without abdicating the desire that it conveys. In this exercise, the educator throws themselves into the unknown without seeking certainty, but confident that they will be able to meet the other halfway. Thus, we can validate the several reasons we have for criticizing the educational plan in Brazil, the structures of schools, the lack of vacancies, the teachers' wages, the difficulty of companies to effectively create young apprentice programs, etc. But we can also witness educational processes that go beyond the spectrum of complaint and seek to provide creative spaces to the students' experience.

Several organizations such as the Morro da Cruz Autonomous Collective in Porto Alegre, Brazil, serve children and young people after school and have been developing an educational service that seeks to facilitate the insertion of students in the social bond, while boosting their potential. Enabling young people from the outskirts to feel worthy of dreaming is quite a challenge. And, although many institutions do not consciously work with the perspective of therapeutic education (Kupfer, 2000), we can point out that the structure of offering multiple workshops and educators works as pulverized references that escape the proposal of a single educator to embody the example to be followed. Other factors are an open pedagogical proposal, rescuing the feeling of being able to learn, and the very structure of the class spaces, which configure a different form of teaching-learning relationship.

Students attend an educational space in which they reflect critically on the situations of the current world, always seeking to respect themselves and others. In such a project we could observe the importance, for example, of receiving referrals for individual psychological treatment and referring young people also to having a space of protection like this, because sharing educational lived experiences makes another form of “healing” possible. A situation also comes to mind in which we were called to participate in a meeting of the care network of a student, a network that included large mental health and care institutions, whose staff complained about the family and the student, to the point of being afraid of them. Our perception, however, was completely different although the boy’s difficulties also appeared in our living space. His relationship with the team and colleagues was quite strong and he could demonstrate his creativity with freedom, maintaining a bond with us even after he had to move to another city.

This, of course, is a brief report, which does not aim to claim that some institutions do it right while others get it wrong, let alone that our approach always works, but rather to show that, depending on how the organization proposes education, relationships can assume other directions. Benjamin (2012 [1924], p. 256) stated that, to access the child, it is not necessary to have great strategies and productions, but rather that the adult can collect fragments of their own childhood, recognizing that “the earth is full of pure and counterfeit substances, capable of arousing children’s attention”.

As we focus on the topic of the infantile, we can create a line of connection between infantile, unconscious, and melancholy. It seems to us that, while we take the melancholic as one who refuses to accept the imperative of happiness present in Western societies, we can cast them as a rebel, who establishes a total distrust in human beings when faced with the impositions of the Church and modernity. Their insubordination is designed to react and not conform to the speed of communication, idealizations, in other words, to lived experiences and the void of experiences. While rehearsing this critique of the world, the melancholic also doubts themselves, letting themselves die because they cannot kill the way things are. Their biggest impasse is to deny cultural heritage and move away from conviviality, which for them is unbearable, because it seems that, there, a way out could be produced.

By isolating themselves from the cultural legacy, the melancholic becomes increasingly drenched in lived experiences and void of experiences. Both clinically and poetically, one can see how melancholy has a predilection for the night, the dark, and silence, seeking isolation and beauty there. To quit the mother’s apron strings and move towards the world of fantasy and hope, the metaphor of the night can function as a safe-conduct, a passage from loneliness to the sexual and mysterious. Thus, in this game of images presented by the melancholic, a certain aesthetic scope is denoted, which preserves something of the infantile potential, not only the deadly. There, the imperative of regret and indifference may slip into the desire for encounter.

In this regard, we can also look at the melancholic as one who is in the process of appropriating history, being able to rewrite it from a fictional perspective that the marginal position of melancholy

allows them. Those who allow themselves to explore cultural productions with a certain horror propose to take history against the grain, revisiting lived experiences — which have the effect of trauma — in a possibility of communion with barbarism. Benjamin (2012 [1933], p. 125) claimed that the poverty of experiences can impel subjects “to start forward, to start again, to be content with little, to build with little”.

If history narrates a time when the past, present, and future mix, causing a certain familiar strangeness to those who glimpse it, the image in Benjamin has a similar effect, referring to surrealism and, more specifically, to Proust’s aesthetics. In this aspect, the images gain prominence in his work, while tormenting and dazzling at the same time — what Benjamin also tried to produce with his writings, from the way he wrote.

Next, we propose that coming into contact with multiplicity, in other words, with castration, is the possibility of leaving the univocity of melancholy. Benjamin (2012 [1940]) presents this point in his “On the concept of History”, when he differentiates past from history. There are those who want to believe that there is a single, true story, but Benjamin points out that it is nothing more than a memory, a flash, an image that is impossible to apprehend in its entirety. Knowing that all that exists are interpretations and versions of a story, “Benjamin’s materialist historian deconstructs the plastered image of tradition and culture and searches for the signs of another possible story in the interferences of time, the past and the present” (Gagnebin, 2008, p. 82).

Cultural goods and transmission, however, are not exempt from barbarism. Benjamin (2012 [1940]) is quite careful when making this point, avoiding a naive position in the face of social ills. In a dual process, he considers that, precisely from the traumatic of historical lived experience, a new position can be created from this melancholic look, which distorts the progressive logic of seeing history. While some will take history without intermission, without gaps, and without stops, Benjamin argues that we can also think about it in the face of shock, thus extrapolating history as a simple reproduction of the past.

In the text on the German tragic drama, Soares (2010) points out that Benjamin works on melancholy, allegory, origin, differentiating tragic drama from tragedy. Taking the allegory as a partial, hopeless, and cunning element, she suggests that history can also be conceived as a tragic drama, as it can be rescued in an allegorical way. Bringing, in the very name of tragic drama, the dimension of grief and play, as a playful dimension of language, Benjamin (2012 [1925]) opens the possibility for melancholy to enable escape strategies for trauma.

The praise of lament in the Baroque finds solace only in the deviations made possible by the playfulness of games and poetry, which function as tools to appease tragedy, which Benjamin relates, among other things, to the influence of Kronos and Saturn, relentless gods of mythology who sustain the duality of time, sometimes destructive, sometimes creative. This “dualism that underlies melancholy allows a way out: ‘discovery can find the authentic in the strangest and most eccentric phenomena, in the most fragile and crude attempts, as well as in the most sophisticated manifestations of a period of decadence’” (Callado, 2008, p. 8).

In Freudian melancholy, the narcissistic wound of loss of object engenders a potential when it can wait for the return of what has been lost. The possibility of waiting is processed in time as a way of accessing what little by little can be configured as hope, a hope created from suffering, malaise, the static. Death drive that aims at destruction and that, in a small detour, can meet creation. This deviation to which we refer is the one advocated by Freud and Winnicott, when they point out that it is through the relationship with the other, who tries to inject love, care, and life, constituting a rhythmic game of encounter and mismatch, that it is possible to develop creativity for the displacement of objects, beliefs, and unconscious substitutes of place. In this sense, playing has a primary role in development and in common life — topics for another article.

As we have seen, melancholy as a social symptom may be due to the requirement of constant attention to events and information, producing in people a requirement to always be alert, which shortens narratives and overlaps the power of memories with the excess of the present. If all that remains are vague and fragile lived experiences, the void of melancholy is present. Depressed people, as they are more commonly called today, feel deeply dejected and powerless in the face of life, embodying a fatalistic position of giving up, finding themselves unable to make any change in the private and collective world. The boredom that plagues the melancholic works for them as a safe-conduct, which bars the passage of time, giving them the feeling of dribbling death, while the subject finds themselves devoid of the ability to create and dream. Little does the melancholic know that the collective experience is what relativizes death, as it connects us all to a transmission that transcends the individual. Through the idleness defended by Benjamin, melancholy can engender a unique creative potential in which contemplation and extended time cooperate to accept “that life is void of meaning,” making it possible to create symbolic outlets, as Benjamin found in Baudelaire. Similarly, Freud (2006 [1916]), in his writing “On Transience”, states that the beauty of things is precisely in their finitude, in being beautiful because they are not forever. In other words, it is in the enjoyment of castration, of the limit of time, in the passage of time, that we find the most unusual pleasure.

The melancholic has nothing to lose, for they do not believe in the future and despise part of the past. From this perspective, no one knows more about malaise than the melancholic, and this position allows them to open a breach, in which they inaugurate rebellion as a mode of social insertion, breaking with the *status quo*. If the cruel agitation of large cities is a new element for 19th century poetry, demanding a heroic posture from those who live with it, Baudelaire gives himself entirely to modernity, delighting in its nuances, while fighting it. Thus, Baudelaire sustains his passion for the topic of death and deviance, maintaining the paradox that Benjamin (2015 [1937]) will announce by deflagrating him as a subject who “liked solitude, but, if possible, in the midst of the crowd”, or a ragman, who sees in garbage a certain value. Baudelaire, like Benjamin, never shone, while his political position put him on the side of the oppressed and excluded. Both, in this sense, occupied the position of a melancholic, who carries indolence and authenticity as a means of accessing the truth — which is always relative.

Faced with dark times, we question whether barbarism can come to rob sophisticated outlets in which, even in a melancholic position, we can articulate unusual spaces of creation as we dismembered in Benjamin. As we have seen, melancholy transitions between two worlds, and can occasionally carry parts from one side to the other. Some indications in psychoanalysis lead us to the same point, when we think of the death drive as a motor for sublimation, based on the idea that a desexualized drive acts in the creative act. This fate of the drive enunciated by Freud in 1915 would be the engine of culture and an outlet for trauma, which deals with drive imprisonment. When the drive movement becomes once again possible, new outputs can be elucidated. Our thesis is that precisely the collective process schematizes this escape route, while it can itself operate as a new psychic record. Here, cultural transmission is imperative and is in a constant movement between internal and external, justifying the importance of education.

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