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## DEATH, CULTURE, HEAVY METAL AND INNER EXPERIENCE: SENSATION AND AFFECTIVITY<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT.** The present study aimed to investigate the possible relations between thanatological referentials present in heavy metal and the affective and sensory experience associated with death by participants of this artistic and cultural field. The research was based in a idiographic and qualitative introspectionist approach for the study of consciousness, whose proceedings culminated, in a first moment, in the identification and description of the emerging phenomenology of these experiences, in a second moment, in the discussion of the cognitive and affective processes underlying the emergence of the phenomenological content; and finally, in a third moment, in the discussion of the possible relations between the reported phenomenologies and the circumscription of death in heavy metal. Taken as a whole, the data indicated that both, the affective field and the sensory field reflects that the inner experience of death theme reflects major parameters of death representation in the West, which appear to overlap the narrower field of death representation in heavy metal.

**Keywords:** Death; consciousness, culture.

## MORTE, CULTURA, HEAVY METAL E EXPERIÊNCIA INTERNA: SENSAÇÃO E AFETIVIDADE

**RESUMO.** O presente estudo buscou investigar as possíveis relações estabelecidas entre referenciais tanatológicos presentes no heavy metal e as experiências afetivas e sensoriais associadas à morte por partícipes deste campo de expressão artística e cultural. A pesquisa foi conduzida com base em metodologia introspeccionista de base qualitativa e idiográfica para o estudo da consciência, cujos procedimentos culminaram, em um primeiro momento na identificação e descrição das fenomenologias emergentes das referidas experiências; em um segundo momento na discussão dos processos cognitivos e afetivos subjacentes à emergência dos conteúdos fenomenológicos; e, em um terceiro e último momento na discussão de possíveis relações entre as fenomenologias reportadas e a circunscrição da morte no heavy metal. Tomados como um todo, os dados indicaram que, tanto no campo afetivo quanto no campo sensorial, a experiência interna do tema da morte entre os sujeitos reflete conhecidos parâmetros de representação da morte no ocidente, os quais parecem se sobrepor ao campo mais restrito de representação da morte no heavy metal.

**Palavras-chave:** Morte; consciência, cultura.

## MUERTE, CULTURA, HEAVY METAL Y EXPERIENCIA INTERNA: SENSACIÓN Y AFECTIVIDAD

**RESUMEN.** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar las posibles relaciones entre referencias teratológicos presentes en el heavy metal y la experiencia sensorial y afectiva asociada con la muerte por los participantes de este campo de expresión artística y cultural. La investigación se realizó con base en metodología introspeccionista de base cualitativa e ideográfica para el estudio de la conciencia, cuyo procedimiento culminó, en un primer momento, en la identificación y descripción de la fenomenología emergente de esas experiencias, en un segundo momento, en la discusión de los procesos cognitivos y afectivos que subyacen a la aparición de los contenidos fenomenológicos; y, en el tercero y último

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momento, en la discusión de las posibles relaciones entre la fenomenología informada y la circunscripción de la muerte en el heavy metal. Tomados en su conjunto, los datos indicaron que tanto en el campo afectivo cuanto en el campo sensorial la experiencia interna del tema de la muerte refleja conocidos parámetros de la representación de la muerte en el occidente, que parecen superponerse el terreno más estrecho de la representación de la muerte en el heavy metal.

**Palabras-clave:** Muerte; conciencia, cultura.

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## Introduction

For all its existential relapses, death is considered an object of emblematic centrality in our mental life, producing effects at different levels of affective, cognitive and behavioral processes (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999). According to Cave (2012), death constitutes an object of subjectivation based on the interaction of the subject with a myriad of cultural references, constituted on a scale that, between societies, continues to vary between two poles where we find at one end the culture of a conception of death as a biological finitude, and at the other end, a conception of death as a passage to immortality.

The idiosyncrasies of each of these extremities as well as their possible intersections along this scale constitute the different perspectives and aesthetics of death rooted in cultures, which functioning as psycho-sociological elements, often assail the vast field of our experiences before it. These references, which specify the meaning of death in each culture, are therefore usually thought as cognitive, affective, social and cultural mediators of our experiences with the vast thanatological spectrum, acting as a symbolic parameter in the construction of our processes of subjectivation of death (Kovács, 2008).

Thus, it is expected that the human interaction with such references will result in direct effects in the field of subjectivity and its basic processes (Kastenbaum & Aisenberg, 2000). According to Ariés (2012), in the West, one of the most central meanings of death is related to its forbidden character, which feeds its representation as an impediment to the realization of life. If we consider the relationship established by the subjects with this great reference, we can conceive how it interacts with the promotion of a series of psychological processes, such as the triggering of behaviors and cognitions of self-preservation; the experience of affections of a fearful and distressing nature before death; among others.

Considering the impacts of culture in the process of subjectivation of death, in the present study, we sought to investigate the possible relationships established between thanatological references in heavy metal as a field of expression and culture, and the contents of affective and sensory experiences associated with death by participants of this field. Specifically, we start from a theoretical-methodological articulation with a view to the introspectionist and idiographic exploration of this phenomenon, based on the application of a semi-structured interview of exploratory approach of cognition and psychological processes, trying to understand how the symbolologies and thanatic aesthetics inherent to heavy metal can produce effects in the dimension of the phenomenology of the inner experience of the subject in the face of the theme of death.

The selection of this population occurs within the scope of a socio-cognitive proposal for the study of death, interested in tracking the degrees of inflow of the thanatological references coming from a specific culture in the forms of subjectivation of the death of its participants. With the terminology "thanatological references", we try to denote here, the whole network of meanings linked to death within the Heavy Metal movement. In this field, death is often an important aesthetic and symbolic element of its ideological, artistic and cultural expression (Christe, 2010). According to Weinstein (2000), in general, the symbolologies of death present in this field are anchored in semiotic axes that highlight typically grim, terrifying, macabre and metaphysical aspects related to the theme, reflecting different ranges of interpretation, both biological and existentialist, of its origin and status in human existence.

The presentation of death in Heavy Metal is based on a semiotic specificity, in the sense that the theme is constructed based on a singular set of thanatological meanings emerging from its aesthetic and conceptual production. According to Christe (2010), semiotic elaborations carried out in the theme of death in the context of the heavy metal culture are expressed in discourses as well as through album covers, album lyrics, tattoos, clothing and garments in general. For instance, in heavy metal, it is quite common to observe death being represented by the classic image of the reaper, the skulls, or the image

of cemeteries. Still according to the author, in short, the aesthetic, discursive and musical elements linked to the content of the lyrics show an extensive range of meanings related to death, that is, linking to themes ranging from the universe of the macabre, the morbid and the terrifying, to themes about the melancholic, metaphysical and existential universe.

From this observation, we assume that this singularity inherent to the thanatological expression of death in Heavy Metal can produce effects in the modes of subjectivation of death among its supporters, understanding these effects as a result of the experiences of the subjects with such expressions.

The exploration of the process of subjectivation of death through subjective contents emerging from the contact of the subject with thanatological symbolologies seems to be of interest to the construction of an understanding about how culture as a system of dynamic organization of semiotic references that presupposes the interaction between subjects and technological artifacts of a given society (Paivio, 2007), participates in this process. This is because these contents seem to be especially informative of the singularity and quality of the interaction established by the subjects with cultural parameters of thanatological representation.

However, the scientific investigation of the impacts of such types of parameters on the constitution of the elements that make up the inner experience of the subject when in contact with the vast thanatological spectrum has been relatively scarce in the psychological studies of death in general. An exception worth mentioning is the field of study of the existential status occupied by the contents of the inner visualizations of the subjects who went through near-death experiences (Fenwick, 2013), which has sought to understand the content of these visualizations from the relationships established by the subjects with thanatic symbolologies belonging to the imagination of death in the cultures in general.

According to Brown (2011), heavy metal, as an object of scientific research, has been investigated more widely in context of the human sciences. In psychology, studies about heavy metal are interested in examining the relationship between musical preferences and risk indicators in youth, social deviance and delinquency. In sociology, anthropology and related fields, a broad field of research has investigated themes related to moral values and heavy metal, the role of culture in lyrical, aesthetic and musical conformation of styles within metal, among others.

With regard to ethnographic studies of death, mainly from the field of anthropology, it has long been pointed out that it is important to consider the varieties of expressions of death inherent in different cultures in the construction of the popular imagination on the theme, with a view to the impact of funeral rites, spiritual beliefs, among others, in the field of singular experience with death (Hidalgo, 2010). However, in the psychological field, there is still a persistent shortage of similar research. Investigating the process of signification of death from the exploration of its cognitive and affective indices in the light of the interface with cultural references that identify a thanatological specificity concerning the cultures of belonging of the individuals themselves would be important in the construction of a clearer understanding about the imbricated relationship between culture and subjectivity in the formation of the experience of the subject in the face of death.

In psychology, the state-of-the-art of death studies indicates a strong prevalence of investigations linked to contexts of action or clinical investigation, in hospital environments (Barbosa, Melchiori, & Neme, 2011). This seems to be due to the influences exerted by the researches of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1996) in the field of thanatological medicine, whose main scope was related to the mapping and description of different stages of psychic elaboration before death, experienced by patients with irreversible diseases and people who go through moments of mourning and loss in general. In parallel with the investigation of death in the clinical field, the formation of the concept of death has been another main topic of psychological investigation of death, but in the context of cognitive and developmental psychology (Roazzi, Dias, & Roazzi, 2010; Salvagni, Savegnago, Gonçalves, Quintana, & Beck, 2013).

Taken as a whole, we can say that the investigations coming from the fields of psychological investigation interested in the research of processes associated with the subjectivation of death are more constantly interested in the tracing of discursive constructions regarding the way in which the subject constructs his perspective and personal significance before the death and dying (Barbosa, Melchiori, & Neme, 2011). In spite of the evident importance of these types of semantic mappings for the understanding of the elements that participate in the construction of the thanatological meanings in general, data of another nature, coming from other psychological paths that participate in that process,

also seem to deserve the due attention of the research of the subjectivation of death. These are data that encompass the dimension of cognitive and affective processes that not only participate but also refer to the construction of this subjectivation by encoding the objects of the world in the form of subjective experience, among them, death; configured as an object of cognitive and affective representation.

The present study therefore seeks to partially fill this gap, taking into account the fundamental bond established between the fields of culture and subjective experience in the signification of death, to explore the qualitatively subjective correlates of the representation of death in subjects inserted in the cultural domain of Heavy Metal; seeking specifically to map the varieties of the affective and sensory content that are brought to their subjective experiences when death performatizes the function of triggering stimulus of psychological content.

The theoretical approach underlying the present research is based on a dynamic perspective of the relationship between cognitive, affective, cultural and intersubjective processes (Paivio, 2007), which understands conscious experience as an integrating core of these dimensions, by considering its function of input for external stimuli and output for self-generated stimuli, thus encompassing the three fundamental dimensions of subjectivity, namely: thought, affectivity and sensoriality (Chalmers, 2010); of which we are particularly interested in exploring the last two.

As a basis for the conceptual understanding of these dimensions in their association with the structuring of subjective experience, we use the taxonomy of occurrences of inner experience elaborated by Hurlburt (2011). In this author, sensations are regarded as a type of occurrence of conscious experience as long as they are perceived as a “sensory awareness”. Sensory awareness is classified as a type of inner occurrence that takes place in experience when the subject focuses attention on his sensory and bodily reactions to distinct objects of cognition, making the quality of these a primary aspect of his conscious experience.

The field of affections that constitute inner states is defined by Hurlburt (2011) with the term “feeling”, which relates to those conscious experiences accompanied by intense affective mediation, as in the cases of sadness, joy, fear, embarrassment, nervousness, among others. Consistent with the approach proposed by Hurlburt (2011), henceforth, the terminologies “sensory awareness” and “feeling” will be used to more appropriately designate the fields of sensations and affections, respectively, as being closely related to the general field of structuring of what the common sense conceives as an inner state or conscious experience.

Based on this perspective, the study aims to perform a phenomenological description of the conscious state directed towards death (understood as a structuring experience of data that are related to the process of subjectivation of death), which, in consonance with the objectives and theoretical basis of the present study, will be accomplished through the adoption of an introspectionist methodology with a qualitative and idiographic basis. From this, it is sought to discuss how the emergent phenomenologies of these states reflect possible effects of thanatological references inherent to Heavy Metal.

## Method

### Type of study

The present study is part of an idiographic and qualitative context of research of affectivity and cognition in the consideration of its interface with culture. Due to its phenomenological emphasis, it was opted for a rescue and use of introspectionist methodology, from which it was protected the emic aspect of the datum investigated, exploring its emergence as an integral part of a more comprehensive process, the process of subjectivation of death. Since William James and Wilhelm Wundt, introspection has been classically defined as a psychological research method based on the self-inspection of consciousness (Mandler, 2007). In the research of contemporary consciousness, introspection has been recognized for encompassing the methodological scope of the so-called first-person approaches (Velmans, 2000), which

are inspired in the phenomenological attitude of philosophy to propose, from a scientific point of view, the empirical investigation of conscious experience in what is inherent to it (Pickering, 2000).

Following this approach, in the context of the present study, introspection aims to produce empirical data by exploring self-referenced information about what Nagel (1974) calls “what is it like” of the conscious experience, denoting “what it is like” to be immersed in a certain qualitative state of consciousness in a particular space and time. The choice of this type of procedure is, in this case, the possibility of identifying in depth what is common, and at the same time, what is idiosyncratic in such states (Pickering, 2000).

### **Participants**

Thirty-one participants inserted in the Heavy Metal scene of the city of Recife, Pernambuco, composed a sample of convenience so that a representation of subjects by affiliation to the group being researched was preserved. One subject was excluded from the data analysis because he did not produce sufficient content during the collection procedure. The research had as inclusion criterion the prerogative of the subject to have maintained his first contact with the Heavy Metal culture for more than two years. Given the predominantly male composition of the social group studied, there were 24 men (80%) and 6 women (20%) in the final sample composition (30 participants). The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 40 years (mean: 28.06).

### **Instruments**

A semistructured interview named EFEM (Cognitive-Phenomenological Interview of the Conscious State Directed towards Death, Magalhães, 2014) was elaborated to conduct the data collection. The structure of the EFEM was based on another instrument of exploration of the inner experience, named EFEA (Cognitive-Phenomenological Interview of the Self-conscious State; Nascimento, 2008), constituting as a step-by-step guide to obtain accurate reports on the content and structure of the conscious state directed towards death, being theoretically designed to explore the topology of the inner experience researched by Hurlburt (2011). EFEM is composed of three sequentially arranged phases to first promote the creation of an inner landscape where the conscious content can emerge, so that it is sequentially explored in subsequent moments (see Magalhães, 2014).

In the first phase of the interview, the participant was led to experience a state of consciousness characterized by directing attention to death, being verbally instructed to focus his attention on the theme for thirty seconds, after which the subsequent phase began, in which the subject was invited to reconstruct his experience from the production of a report of its contents according to the order of its succession in the determined time. In the third phase of the interview, we sought to explore in depth the contents of the experience of the participant, by asking specific questions about its typology and phenomenological nature, using the categories of inner content of Hurlburt (2011).

### **Data collection and ethical procedures**

The subjects were invited to participate in the research on the Heavy Metal concert sites themselves or through forums and social media on the internet associated with the local scene. The data collection phase was initiated after approval of the research by the committee on ethics in research of the Federal University of Pernambuco (Opinion No. 1,480,811). At the time of the collection, the objectives of the research were presented to the subject with the ICF (informed consent form) and after the signature of the form by the participant, the collection procedure was then initiated.

### **Data analysis**

The contents of the interviews were submitted to content analysis in its categorical variant, from which they were subsumed under broader categories according to criteria of semantic similarity, exhaustiveness and exclusivity (Bardin, 2015). For instance, terms referring to similar affective markers, such as sadness,

anguish, and grief, were allocated under the category of “sorrow”. The generated categories were then subsequently allocated under their respective phenomenal typifications (see table 1).

## Results and discussion

Table 1 shows the categories of inner experience and their respective subcategories of contents, in relation to the number of subjects who reported their occurrences in their experiences. It is worth noting that the emergence of terms denoting the occurrence of sensory representations, specifically gustatory, olfactory and tactile memories, led to the typification of “sensorial mental representations”, not found in Hurlburt (2011). Because they did not designate a sensory content in itself, but rather sensory representations, these contents gave rise to this new category.

**Table 1.** Categories of occurrences of inner experience related to death

Categories	Number of Subjects
<b>Feeling</b>	
C1: Anxiety	2
C2: Inanity	2
C3: Fear	6
C4: Sorrow	13
C5: Nostalgia	5
C6: Serenity	2
<b>Sensory Awareness</b>	
C7: Kinesthetic Changes	2
C8: Cold	2
C9: Oral dryness and changes in breathing	5
<b>Sensory Mental Representations</b>	
C10: Auditory Representation	2
C11: Olfactory Representation	3
C12: Tactile Representation	4

In compliance with the idiographic and phenomenological framework of the study, bellow, from each type of occurrence of inner experience investigated, we will present the results in their phenomenological, cognitive and cultural aspects, followed by discussions, and by type of inner experience, related to their specificities and other results of studies on death in different fields of psychology.

### Feeling

In all, 6 phenomenological categories related to the occurrence of feeling (Hurlburt, 2011) in the experience of the participants were identified, among them:

**C1 Inanity:** category that grouped the description of elements referring to an affective representation of nothingness, described as a “feeling of emptiness”, as illustrated in the following excerpt: *“The case of emptiness was more the sensation itself; it was not the image. Feeling of emptiness indeed. When I think of death or something closer.”* (Protocol 1).

**C2 Sorrow:** category present in almost half of the experiences directed towards death in the researched sample (see Table 1). It encompassed the phenomenology of different feelings, which they shared as a common feature for the representation of death as a “sorrow” expressed through feelings such as anguish, sadness, melancholy, frustration and alike. In short, feelings that indicated the experience of negative feelings before the imminent consummation of death, as we can see in: *“It is a lack of perspective, and it is a frustration. Frustration in the sense that if the person was expecting a life after death, a reward and had not.”* (Protocol 12); and in the passage: *“Anguish and sadness when I think of these dear ones, this friend, this aunt, my mother, my father, when I think about this possibility.”* (Protocol 21).

**C3 Nostalgia:** it gathered experiences of nostalgia related to memories of departed family members, as described in: *“It was a matter, um, of nostalgia indeed right, when you go to his house and you do not find him there to make jokes and clown around with him, it is more nostalgia”* (Protocol 17).

**C4 Anxiety:** a category that brought together experiences of restlessness and distress before death, as described in: *“The fact that I feel this immediacy, feel that I should act in a hurried way, causes a lot of anxiety”* (Protocol 11).

**C5 Fear:** this category indicated the fear of their own death and the death of relatives and loved ones; it is also related to the fear of death conceived as an unknown object. The phenomenology underlying the fear of death gains here a double aspect: first, it suggests a threatening meaning to the self or the selves of conviviality close to the self; the second aspect, suggests the existence of a fear provoked by the ignorance before the nature of the death. The first aspect we can see in: *“What causes fear? It is the fear that it happens to people I know, who are close to me.”* (Protocol 25). The second aspect, we see in *“... then it was when I started to have the sensation, the issue of fear, fear of not knowing what it is.”* (Protocol 19).

**C6 Serenity:** it encompassed feelings of serene and tranquil nature before death. This aspect of inner experience in a certain sense acquired the status of “relief”, since it emerged as a counterpoint to moments of tension and anguish, that is, they succeeded the experience of feelings inserted in other phenomenological categories, such as C2 Sorrow, as we can identify according to the following excerpt: *“It is like I said right, sadness indeed, a very heavy thing like that; then I took a breath, and felt something else ... a relief.”* (Protocol 12).

It was common for the participants to report that during the time of immersion in their conscious states directed to death negative affections (encompassed under category C5 Fear, for example) were supplanted by positive affections of order of the category C6: Serenity, denoting the adoption of strategies of emotional regulation in the course of the process. Emotional regulation is conceptualized as the cognitive ability to establish conscious and/or unconscious strategies to maintain, increase or decrease one or more components of emotional response, including the feelings, behaviors and physiological responses that build the emotions (Gutiérrez & Muñoz-Martínez, 2013).

The fact that the affective facet of this conscious state is also characterized by the adoption of emotional regulation strategies, besides reflecting a cognitive attitude very present in our moments of daily contact with death, also matches data of studies of clinical (Hales, Gagliese, Nissim, Zimmermann, & Rodin, 2012; Widera-Wysoczańska, 1999) and neurocognitive area (Shihui, Qin, & Ma, 2010) about death; especially in what refers to their findings, indicate emotional regulation as a resource commonly used by the subjects in the development of their coping strategies in the face of death.

The categories about affectivity reflect the multifaceted aspect that characterizes the affective relationship of the human being with the death: if on the one hand, the death is represented as an object of distress and fear for being a demarcator of its finitude as a biological being, on the other hand, is also meant as an object that refers to the affective domains of peace and serenity (Kübler-Ross, 1996), which together represent the end of a physical or existential suffering, and in other cases the passage to a new life in a spiritual dimension (see Cave, 2012).

### Sensory awareness

The elements of inner experience constituted from modes of sensory information (sensorial consciousness, Hurlburt, 2011) were organized under three distinct categories of content:

**C7 Cold:** it referred to the association of the cold sensation with the representation of death by the participants, as in *"It is cold, death is a cold thing, and so you have the sensation of cold."* (Protocol 21).

**C8 Mouth dryness and changes in breathing:** it involved the consciousness of sensations related to the act of "swallowing dry" and perceiving the "dry mouth", in concomitance with changes in breathing. Both events made up the category, given that they occurred contiguously during the experiments, as we can see in the excerpts: *"It made to generate, um ... the sensation of dryness in the mouth, do you understand? Hence feeling the issue of dryness and everything else, and the breath changing due to the theme of death."* (Protocol 28) and *"The sensation of, I do not know, the salivation stopped and then like, I got a little scared and I was panting for breath."* (Protocol 24).

**C9 Kinesthetic Changes:** this category brought together events related to changes in proprioceptive agency, that is, changes in the recognition of body location and movement. The constituent data of this category are in line with typically emerging phenomenologies of out-of-body experiences and near-death experiences. Since, given their specificities, the phenomenologies of the first type of experience are usually present in the second type; we will work with the approach described by Fenwick (2013), which lists nine events customarily related to the phenomenology of the near-death experience, of which two were present in our data:

1) Out-of-body experience (EFC): *"As if I was actually floating, my body knows, as if it was leaving the body, as if there was a ... flowing energy and I was levitating, that is it you know."* (Protocol 26); *"You feel a little lost right, because the worst thing you have is to take an astral journey and get lost from your body, you have the feeling that you are dead, you cut the line of life."* (Protocol 20). 2) Journey through a tunnel towards the light: the participant describes his experience as being a fall through a dark tunnel *"Mostly dark around, as if there was a light focus at the beginning of the tunnel directed to the rest."* (Protocol 20).

### Mental sensory representations

Mental representations are inner cognitive symbols, mental contents that represent objects of the external reality (Paivio, 2007). Although it does not identify sensory properties in themselves, the emergence of sensory mental representations (i.e., mental representations associated with sensations) acquires importance in the context of the present study by pointing out the occurrence of sensory memories in the flow of the conscious experience directed towards death between the subjects. It is important to emphasize that the participants, when referring to such occurrences of sensory representations, used terms that immediately refer to the spectrum of the memory experience, especially the episodic type. In all, we can identify the organization of this mode through three categories, described below.

**C10 Auditory representations:** refers to occurrences of inner acoustic representations, all linked to hearing music, both of Heavy Metal style and of other musical styles, as we perceive respectively in the following excerpts: *"I heard some sections from some songs, you know? Playing. This story of my aunt, I constantly reminded myself, when I listened to the music of Shaman I remembered her."* (Protocol 10) and *"It was a classical song from the Roman period. That, time and again, when I think of these things I am listening."* (Protocol 11).

**C11 Olfactory representations:** related to the olfactory memories of odors experienced by the participants, linked to a dead animal, people and flowers, as illustrated respectively in: *"I think that the smell of death was from an animal that I rescued. The smell it spread about to die was something ... it was deep; you felt badly of so strong it was the smell."* (Protocol 27); *"My grandmother. I remembered the smell of the room, smell of old age. This I remember a lot, the smell that the sheets, that the bed had, this was a sensory experience that I really had."* (Protocol 9) and *"This has a lot in the countryside, it is a flower with very bright colors, and that they smell very peculiar. When I started the experience of those thirty seconds, I remembered that smell, exactly the smell of those flowers."* (Protocol 21).

**C12 Tactile representations:** the occurrence of this inner content was related to the tactile memories of the sensation of touching the body of other persons now deceased, as we observed in: *"I have memories of touching like this, of an uncle of mine, who was the first corpse that I touched, in a burial, and that thing, I always remember that."* (Protocol 18).



The occurrence of these sensory mental representations was associated with all other modes of internal experience. As an example, in the following protocol fragment, we have the case of an episode in which the C11 olfactory representations occurs in concomitance with the C7 Cold: *"I remembered that smell, right, precisely the smell of those flowers. And it's cold, death is a cold thing. Thus, you have the feeling of cold, and the smell associated with the smell of those flowers."* (Protocol 21). In this case, a category, sensory awareness (cold), was associated with an olfactory memory (smell of flower, olfactory non-verbal mental representation), highlighting western significances commonly associated with the idea of death in the West: coldness and flowers present at funerals.

We can observe the presence of a thanatological symbology typical of western culture in the sensory representational experience of some of these subjects when we consider that their sensory representations related to the smell of flower (Protocol 21) or to an odor referred to as a smell of old age (Protocol 9), accompanied inner visualizations (mental representations of visual content, see Hurlburt, 2011) associated with the cemetery environments and the room of an older person of the family already deceased (the grandmother), respectively. In the West, it is quite common for a person to opt for dying at home, with the family; on the other hand, it is also usual to have flowers of characteristic aromas in funeral rites.

For the most part, the subjective events investigated were constructed through the mutual association between the categories descending from the different modes of inner experience. It is important to notify that this association was marked by the ontological proximity of phenomenal contents in the interface with a singular and unique meaning to the experience of each participant. These singular meanings entangled the relationship between the inner contents, establishing a link between them within the experience as a whole. The following is a brief illustration of such a connection: *"Anguish is linked to the tactile sense of death. Fear also came, when it came to mind my mother, when I remembered that tactile part that was her little hand, of me holding her hand."* (Protocol 15).

Above, we notice that during the experience of the participant, affections of the order of fear (C5 Fear) and anguish (C2 Sorrow) are generated by the memory of a tactile sensation (C12 Tactile Representations), which somehow marked and marks his mode of subjectivation of death for the participant. According to the report, negative affections were added to the memory of a sensory event that constituted a painful moment of his life, reflecting an arid meaning of his experience with death.

This connection between distinct modes of inner content by means of a broader meaning of death was something quite present in our data set. Somehow, this reflects the way our mind works in integrating contents associated with death during the daily life. In daily life, we are taken by various stimuli by turning our attention to the subject of death: we watch a movie, read a book, witness a situation, and talk to people, among others.

The emerging categories of our sample reflect the multiplicity of cognitive and affective paths through which death opens to the subjective significance, which reflects a so-called status of bricolage, which according to Nascimento and Roazzi (2007) is characterized by the amalgamated way in which different modes of cognitive and affective representation are intertwined at the moment when we constitute death as an object present in our minds, taking our experience.

Regarded as a whole, the categories that constituted the affective and sensory phenomenology of the internal experience directed towards death in the sample studied illustrate a high impact exerted by the representations of death present in Western culture. This influence is reflected in the sense of finitude that permeated most of the categories of feeling. This sense of finitude, so present in our culture, tacitly marked much of the affective experiences of the participants, giving rise to feelings of anguish, fear, anxiety and sadness linked to death, highlighting the significance of its inevitability, often evoked in the West in the form of a representation of termination of life (Kovács, 2008).

Still regarding the effects of culture on the subjectivation of death, what we can infer from our data set is that there was a low association of representations of death coming explicitly from the Heavy Metal universe with the emergent phenomenologies. Only one person linked his experience directly to the field of Heavy Metal. The content was an auditory representation, being a specific music to the style (see excerpt from protocol 10, previously presented to exemplify category C10: Auditory Representations).

Based on the phenomenological primacy of the theoretical-methodological input used here, we consider as criterion for the verification of the presence of Heavy Metal as a cultural reference of the experience of the subject with death, the explicit mention of its part of some content that clearly denoted an association with the Heavy Metal, as it was in the case of the abovementioned participant.

It should be emphasized here that this type of data focuses on the phenomenology of inner states directed towards death, and not on a detailed explanation of the perspective of death of the subjects. This contributes to minimizing our ability to discuss in a more comprehensive way the reasons why Heavy Metal, as a culture, has apparently had a low influence on the significance of death in the broad sense. However, respecting interpretive limitations, our data extend the scope of the issue of the influence of culture on the significance of death to non-predominantly religious populations (i.e., Heavy Metal fans, see Weinstein, 2000).

The effects of socio-cultural determinants such as religion on the significance of death have been relatively researched in the field of interface between psychology and thanatology. In a study undertaken by Nascimento and Roazzi (2007), it was investigated from a socio-cognitive perspective, how the social representation of death in health professionals is structured, considering its relationship with religiosities. The study found differences in terms of how subjects affiliated with different religious perspectives, specifically Christian (Protestants, Catholics and Spiritists), construct pictorial significances about death.

It is interesting to note that the absence of references to the broad spectrum of religiosities in the reports of our participants, however, does not neutralize the similarities between the affective phenomenology here reported and the affective nucleus of the social representation of the emergent death between the aforementioned religious health professionals. This affective nucleus was composed of categories of the order of finitude, loss, macabre and sadness (see Nascimento & Roazzi, 2007), preserving similarities with the categories reported here. This suggests that in a general sense, affective dimensions of fear, anguish, and pessimism seem to produce effects on the affective constitution of the representation of death in spite of the absence or presence of religious beliefs.

In this sense, an important contribution of the present study may lie in offering an initial qualitative sample on how much the different ways to give meaning to death in the West seem to be supported under a great affective representation in common, probably due to the effect of the typically Western thanatological cultural references, which based on the preservation of a terrifying and at the same time pessimistic perspective before death (Ariès, 2012; Cave, 2012), provide an experience of subjectivation of death from affections of such nature. It seems that the particular cultural references (i.e., the references most directly related to the groups of belonging of the subjects), even those existing in Heavy Metal, are descended from these more comprehensive references, responsible for a majority construction of nuclei of affective subjectivation of death in the West.

## Final considerations

The present research sought to align the socio-cognitive and the phenomenological exploration of the significances of death using idiographic methodology. The proximity between these two facets in the structuring of the everyday conscious experience was reflected in our set of data, considering the recurrent interrelation existing between the two spheres in the construction of the explored psychological contents. It is expected that the results generated here may reflect on the understanding of the death as a cultural phenomenon of an existential nature, being extended to the field of clinical practice (see Schmidt, Gabarra, & Gonçalves, 2011), as well as to the field of research of the phenomenological scope of death in general (See Barbosa, Melchiori, & Neme, 2011; Barbosa, Melchiori, & Neme, 2011b; Widera-Wysoczańska, 1999).

The empirical effort here used was directed to the research on the question of the affective and sensorial elements that mediate our thanatological subjectivities in its interface with the culture. We believe that a first step may have been taken towards the construction of a research program interested

in the investigation of how death is subjectivated from cultures in whose core the theme is worked as the central object of affective and cognitive experience.

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