

THE UNCANNY AS A POLITICAL CATEGORY: PSYCHOANALYSIS, QUEER THEORY, AND EXPERIENCES OF INDETERMINACY¹

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ABSTRACT. Here we investigate the political function of the *Unheimliche*, considering it as converted, through the norm, into abjection in certain cases of homophobia and transphobia. In some of these cases, normalized subjects experience the menace of dissolution of their ego as unproductive, when confronted to uncanniness, read as inhuman, monstrous. The subjective circuit of the abject-uncanny triggers anxiety, which in turn causes identity vacillation and points to an experience of indeterminacy. Thus, we point to forms of life in which indeterminacy can be lived productively.

Keywords: Violence; anxiety; helplessness.

O ESTRANHO COMO CATEGORIA POLÍTICA: PSICANÁLISE, TEORIA QUEER E AS EXPERIÊNCIAS DE INDETERMINAÇÃO

RESUMO. Judith Butler se apropria de vários conceitos da psicanálise, mas não explora o estranho (*Unheimliche*) freudiano. Trata-se, aqui, de investigar a função política desse conceito, considerando que a norma o converte em abjeção, como em casos de homofobia e transfobia. No encontro entre um sujeito cujo semblante sexuado é estruturado dentro da hegemonia heterossexual e um sujeito com semblante abjeto, o primeiro espera ver i(a), um outro-espelho de sua imagem narcísica, mas se defronta com a, o estranho abismo do desejo do Outro. Com Lacan, esse *Unheimliche* é produtor de angústia no eu do sujeito, o que faz vacilar suas identificações em uma experiência de indeterminação. Porém, nossas formas de vida sustentam ficções identitárias demasiado rígidas, que convertem essa angústia do indeterminado em medo e violência. Em certos casos de homofobia e transfobia, um sujeito com semblante normalizado vivencia de maneira improdutivo a ameaça de dissolução do seu eu frente a um estranho que é tido como abjeto, inumano, monstruoso. Torna-se crucial pensar formas de vida em que experiências de indeterminação possam ser vividas de maneira produtiva, em que identificações sejam mais porosas em relação àquilo que não se reduz à forma determinada de um eu.

Palavras-chave: Violência; angústia; desamparo.

EL EXTRAÑO COMO CATEGORÍA POLÍTICA: PSICOANÁLISIS, TEORÍA QUEER Y LAS EXPERIENCIAS DE INDETERMINACIÓN

RESUMEN. Se trata de investigar la función política del *Unheimliche* freudiano, considerándolo como siendo convertido, por la norma, para la forma de abyección, en ciertos casos de homofobia y *transfobia*. En algunos de esos casos, un sujeto con semblante normalizado vivencia de modo improductivo la amenaza de disolución de su yo frente a un extraño visto como inhumano, monstruoso. El circuito subjetivo del extraño-abyecto dispara la angustia, vacilando las identificaciones y apuntando para una experiencia de indeterminación. Así, esbozamos formas de vida en que la indeterminación pueda ser vivida productivamente sin generar miedo o violencia.

¹ *Support and funding:* Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq)

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Palabras-clave: Violencia; angustia; desamparo.

Introduction

Psychoanalysis appears constantly in the work of the philosopher Judith Butler as an instrument of dialogue and reading, providing a series of theoretical resources to think, for example, gender and its regulatory constitution through normalization. Even so, psychoanalytic theory is not something in which Butler "immerses" (Knudsen, 2010, p. 166): rather, it seems to a great extent that the author of *Gender Trouble* is able to arrange "a meeting or some kind of a reunion between psychoanalysis and broader social movements, cultural policies and issues relating to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersex" (p. 167). Taking into account its purpose, the Butlerian approach of psychoanalysis is more centrally based on the use of Freudian reading on melancholy, this in order to articulate the psychic processes of introjection and identification with lost love-objects that result in melancholic - and, because of it, gendered - production of the self. This notion has been present since *Gender trouble*, from 1990, and was deepened in *The psychic life of power*, from 1997.

Other psychoanalytic concepts, such as fantasy and the drive, are very important, explicitly or implicitly, in the development of books such as *Bodies that matter*, from 1993, and *Giving an account of oneself*, from 2005. This because, in our view, the drive works as a background, as the reverse of the performatives and gender narratives, functioning as an "unperformable" (Butler, 1993, p. 234), opaque and unconscious counterpart of what is performed. That is why the drive depends on a phantasmatic circuit in order to be realized, in the subject of the unconscious, the - gendered - assumption of his/her sex, so as to guide him/her, albeit minimally, in relation to its desire and the desire of others.

In Butler's more recent works, such as *Dispossession*, from 2013, psychoanalysis also seems to persist to some extent through the realization that the subject, parasitized by the unconscious, is not reduced to the self, but, on the contrary, carries with himself a whole load of alterity that dispossesses and decentralizes himself in ways that cannot always be said, pointing to the fictional aspect of all identity. Thus, the philosopher takes from psychoanalysis, mostly, the definitions of ego, melancholy, identification, introjection, drive and fantasy. However, we believe there is still great theoretical and political potential in a Freudian concept that, so far, has not properly been explored by Butler: the *Unheimliche*, the strange, the uncanny-familiar (Freud, 1919/2010).

In our view, this concept, which is eminently aesthetic, has not yet had its political implications sufficiently worked out, neither in the psychoanalytic literature nor in the Butlerian literature. This opens up a rich path of inquiry, an interface between social psychology, political philosophy and psychoanalysis. Such path will allow us to innovate both formulations: psychoanalysis' and Butler's theories. The philosopher only rarely flirts with the *Unheimliche*, for example, in *Frames of War*, when she states that the normative production of a life is "perpetually haunted by its ontologically uncertain double" (Butler, 2009/2016, p. 22), or even in *Gender trouble*, when she signals the processes of exclusion that form the uncanny as an abject person (Butler 1990/2015a, p. 230). Therefore, we follow the path of thinking the uncanny as a political category, in order to glimpse the political beyond the current figures of the human and its possibilities of recognition, as indicated by the philosopher herself: "the strange, the incoherent, that which falls 'outside', gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might be well constructed differently" (Butler, 1990/2015a, p. 191).

To do so, we will begin with an approximation between the uncanny and the abject, and then add to the discussion the contributions of Safatle (2012) about the (productive/unproductive) experiences of indeterminacy developed in a dialogue with Axel Honneth's elaborations on the sufferings from indeterminacy. This will allow us to rethink the status of the abject in the subject's psychic economy, with the aim of building other forms of life. This signals to circuits of affections capable of turning into productive the unproductive experiences of indeterminacy suffered by some subjects that are structured and recognizable within the current norm, due to the excess of identitarian demands implied therein. It is something that produces violent effects in their relations with those who challenge these hegemonic grammars of recognition, that is, the uncanny and the abject. In this way, we point towards ways of life

in which subjects can circulate suffering less from determinacy, being more able to deal with the anxiety of the indeterminate without resorting to violence.

The readings of Judith Butler

Judith Butler's theories assume that the categories of sex and gender, far from symmetrically representing the classic nature-culture dichotomy, are both constructs of power, already involved in the very terms and concepts with which we negotiate to address problems. For Butler (1990/2015a), we only have the notion of a binary sex, male-female, because we build it from binary gender norms, which forcibly engender the conditions for the emergence of male subjects, female subjects, the masculine and the feminine, which results in the retroactive optical illusion of a natural sex, a substance prior to discourse that would merely be expressed in traditional gender performances.

Such norms would provide a matrix of intelligibility for the processes of subjectivation, at whose horizon the subjects could be recognized as humans by normatively emerging as men or as women. This occurs insofar as subjects are constrained to repeat a series of acts, gestures and body stylizations within an improvised scene, citing a norm that does not exist prior to its application. It only exists during the very process of being produced, applied. This means that the normative regime of compulsory heterosexuality, the field of intelligibility with which we binarily produce subjects, depends on their own repetition in order to continue existing and regulating the production and recognition of subjects. Hence the concept of performativity: "a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer" (Butler, 1993, p. 234).

This means that norms are performative, that is, these norms, when produced and recalled by a series of specific acts, words or gestures within a normative horizon, create the very reality that they name (Butler, 1993, p. 2). Such horizon concerns heterosexual hegemony, that is, the fact that subjects have access to recognition only when their *semblants* are produced within a oppositional binary matrix, a matrix of intelligibility that depends on two terms - man-woman, masculine-feminine - to support its structuring. The question becomes complicated when the constraints of the norm produce not only a domain of intelligibility and recognition, but also a domain of unthinkable, unintelligible, uninhabitable bodies; that is, the abject (Butler, 1993, p. xi). In other words, the norm constructs not only its interior, that which is recognizable as a human figure, but also regulates an exterior that constitutes it, since it is constructed in relation to the norm itself: the field of the monstrous, the terrible, the harrowing, the abject that comes to stress the limits of the human - or of what can be recognized as human.

Such tensions concern the public appearance of figures such as drag queens, transvestites, transgender people, intersex people, homosexuals, bisexuals etc. These figures defy the heterosexual hegemony by challenging the reductionist binary logic that attempts to naturalize desire and sexuality so as to serve sexual reproduction. In our view, what the appearance of the abject produces is a point of hesitation in the identitarian fiction of some of the subjects structured within the hegemonic heterosexual matrix. This hesitation points precisely to the limits of gender performances, as Butler (1993) suggests: "what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable" (p. 234).

This notion of a point of opacity is also present in other moments of her work, as in *Giving an account of oneself* (Butler, 2005/2015b), in which the philosopher points to failures, inadequacies in any attempt to give a complete account of the self. This is because there are haze points indicating that the identity narratives of the self do not exhaust the subject of the unconscious. In our reading, this "sexually unperformable" element (Butler, 1993, p. 236), which works on the reverse of performatives and gender accounts, is precisely what concerns the drive, "an excess and opacity that falls outside the categories of identity" (Butler, 2005/2015b, p. 61). This idea will be central to us throughout the text, by being intertwined with the question of the uncanny. Thus, the grammars of recognition, always normative, do not account for a complete description of the self, since there will always be a point of estrangement that is internal to the subject and that dispossesses him. Due to the presence of this uncanny-familiar, this disturbing uncanniness that inhabits us silently, we think that psychoanalysis, with its concept of the *Unheimliche*, is a promising theory for thinking the relations of the abject with the

uncanny. Butler does not practically appeal to this Freudian concept, but we believe it is able to reach the core of this discussion.

The uncanny-familiar

The notion of the *Unheimliche*, an uncanny-familiar, appears in Freud's work in 1919, in reference to the figure of a dizzying, frightening double of the subject, an alterity element that produces a feeling of disturbing uncanniness as it makes confuse the barriers between the self and the other. This strange double becomes dangerously close, in a way that the subject seems able to convert to it at any moment. To Freud (1919/2010, p. 353), this is because there was something of the subject that he could not recognize as his own, being led to projectively point it as strange in the other.

Thus the uncanny-familiar refers to this conversion of what is most familiar to us into uncanny, of what escapes us, but at the same time constitutes and organizes us within ourselves. In this sense, deep inside the subject, there is a stranger who is not apprehensible, but whose presence does not deceive, so that when we see it in the other, we can only recognize it as uncanny. To clarify it, Freud (1919/2010) makes use of Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something that "should remain secret, hidden, but that appeared", came to light (p.338). This implies that "there must be a group, among the harrowing cases, where it can be demonstrated that the harrowing element is something repressed that returns" (p. 360).

In this sense, we notice that Freud (1919/2010, p. 353) related the uncanny to the resurgence of an element prior to repression, belonging to a mythical time, "before the law", as if it was a strange kind of return of the repressed that the subject's self does not recognize. However, with Butler (1990/2015a) and well as with Lacan, we know how problematic it is to think of this original, given, neutral or even natural moment that would have already been there and which would have been repressed after the introduction of the law. This is why we will use Lacan and Safatle's appropriation of the *Unheimliche* concept to propose a re-reading of the Freudian proposal, without running into the theoretical trap of "before the law", "before repression", "out of power". Something that will help us to articulate the political perspective of the uncanny as an element of indeterminacy: the alterity, unspeakable and contingent bottom of identity determinations.

In Seminar 10, Lacan (1962-63/2005b) brings the *Unheimliche* closer to the experience of anxiety, retaking the Freudian definition in which it would be a sign in the self, the sign of a danger. This is because, since Seminar 1, the self represents a defense against the drive: "the self is structured exactly as a symptom" (Lacan, 1953-54/2009, p.27), being the "human symptom by excellence" (p.27), "this series of defenses, denials, exclusions, inhibitions, and fundamental fantasies that guide and direct the subject" (p.29). This means that the self is an instance of unknowingness [*méconnaissance*], which seeks to avoid the impossible that underlies desire.

Seminar 10 unfolds from this background, from the conception of the object *a* as that inapprehensible remain that is our most intimate existence, but which must be kept veiled, under the image of the other, *i(a)*, so that we can operate with him on his cause of desire. In Lacan's logic, the uncanny-familiar will be approached by the anxiety precisely as the appearance of the *a* causes anxiety in the subject's ego, for it is a disturbing pre-individual immaterial object that needs to be withdrawn from the scene of consciousness to be able to function in its place.

That is why Lacan (1962-63/2005b) advances the formulation that anxiety does not take place without an object; on the contrary, it happens due to the presence of the object *a*, which was to remain hidden, but was brought to light, challenging the protocols of identity which the "ego" built as its defense against unconscious desires, thus the danger of anxiety is precisely the imminent fading of this egoic defense. In this sense, we take advantage of the opportunity to make an articulation with politics by raising our hypothesis that anxiety can also be thought of as the presence of the abject, an abject object that I do not name or classify at first, but which constitutes me as a non-identitarian residue, something more than a set of statements.

The appearance of this abject re-enacts the instituting enigma of subjectivity: *Che vuoi?* What does the Other want from me? What am I before the Other's gaze? This is a fundamental question that can only be answered within a structure of fiction called fantasy: an assumption about the Other's desire

over myself, a movement that will inaugurate the history of the subject. Since there is no the Other of the Other, that is, there is no guarantee for desire, this response will always be contingent, crossed by an ontological inconsistency, by the gap that, at the same time, grounds and demands a subjective invention to circumvent it. Thus, if there is nothing in the psyche that the subject could situate as a male being or a female being (Lacan, 1962-63/2005b, p. 200), then we can come up with another hypothesis: gender, with its normative requirements, emerges as a fake response to *Che vuoi?*. This is because, given the impromptu scene in which each one is constrained to perform its gender, it is the fantasy that will create a script to tranquilize the anxiety, resorting, for example, to normative fictions of what counts as man and woman.

This phantasmatic script is singular, but often entails requirements which the subject's self, in its defensive structuring, may not be able to handle, preferring to ignore the uncanniness of its own desire. In this way, the subject may assume that what the Other wants from him is something that fits into a standardized demand for gender performatives. This defensive strategy has violent effects when this type of subject expects to see *i(a)*, a mirror of his narcissistic image, but confronts with *a*, the strange abyss of the desire of the Other. We argue that the appearance of this abject sets again into movement the phantasmatic responses - thus, without guarantees - created by the subjects whose selves were structured within the hegemonic modes of subjectivation, that is, of the heterosexual matrix. In a certain way, this brings the self of these subjects to the contingent and fictional background of their own history, to the contingencies of the infernal history of their own desire, which cannot be faced without anxiety. More so when the self of these subjects encounters what is terrible for them, monstrous on the edge of the inhuman, it produces the horror of dealing with the drive beyond the core of a normative regime, that is, confronting subjects whose *semblants* strain the limits of human recognition.

If this identity narrated by the self is conquered with much effort, from the long process of becoming a subject and building an ego, we can better understand the way in which the disquieting appearance of the abject causes anxiety. This is because "anxiety is always linked to a loss, that is, the transformation of the self", or "to a relation of two persons to the point of vanishing and to which something else must happen, which the subject cannot approach without certain dizziness" (Lacan, 1953/2005a, pp. 33-34). Thus, the familiar uncanniness and anxiety that are generated by the encounter with the abject will lead to the alteration of a certain image of the self, a vertiginous change that twists, makes the identity protocols of certain subjects structured within heterosexual binary hegemony falter. The dissolution of an image of oneself points, therefore, to the threats of instability of identity, which we will address ahead, along with Safatle (2012).

Experiences of indeterminacy

In his political and philosophical re-reading of psychoanalysis, Vladimir Safatle (2012, p. 132) resorts to the idea that there is something determining sexuality that does not allow it to be linked or reduced to an identity, to the unified image of a person, as a coherent unit of conduct. This element is precisely a source of indeterminacy that pervades every subject, as a corrosive force of the sexual, of the drive and object *a* that insists in haunting the psychic life. This means that the defensive structuring of the self, by the creation of a narrative identity, of a set of performative formulations, is not enough for totally concealing the infernal aspects that are also part of the human sexuality.

The attempt to completely identifying with an identity will always fail miserably, for there is an inescapable gap between, on the one hand, the symbolic narratives and the imaginary senses, and on the other hand, the real background full of negativity, which is the presence of the sexuality in us. Thus, as long as the subjective constitution is preceded by the Other, which founds the human by inoculating the drive through the path of the signifier, there is in the subject "a power of indeterminacy and depersonalization" (Safatle, 2012, p. 44) that turns against the restrictive character of current normative determinations and points to the instability and inadequacy of all finite determinacy, all logic of predicates, all the attempts to determine the identitarian attributes of a subject.

This is what human sexuality seems to have as its differential: due to the presence of the drive, because its desire is caused by a non-identitary and unknown element of the subject, that is, the object *a*, then "all [identitary, finite] determination will be eroded by a background of indeterminacy that

weakens its identity and its fixity" (Safatle, 2012, p. 44) Because of this, for Safatle, it becomes fundamental to dissociate the subject from the locus of the self-identity: the subject of the unconscious is not reduced to the self, the person or the identity. Instead, it becomes the name of the subjective division, of the tense process of negotiation between, on the one hand, socially recognized regimes of determination of entities and, on the other, indeterminated events, or marked by indeterminacy, that is, those events that remove the identity predicates from the subject, from his narrative about himself.

This opacity that demarcates the field of the subject of the unconscious has sexuality as the privileged place of its manifestation, inasmuch the sexual aspect aims beyond the present forms of recognition of the human figures. This is because, in psychoanalysis, the drive and the object *a* have a non-identitarian aspect, defying any attempt of narrative exhaustion of what someone is or claims to desire. Sexuality is what makes the effort to complete identification with the identity narrated and performed by the self falter, precisely because, with the gap of the unconscious, the self often seems not to coincide with itself, leading to disturbing experiences of estrangement. In these experiences, the subject's ego encounters distressing phenomena in which situations and objects that should be familiar appear, unexpectedly, outside of their usual normative protocols of identity and identification.

For this reason, sexuality is what presses on towards the recognition of new forms of life, having as horizon of expectations not an inclusion in the norm, but, rather, a recognition of what does not carry the current normative image of the human, of what escapes to an identitarian determination, but which constitutes each subject in a singular way: the opaque and negative character of the object *a*, of the drive, which generates subjective division, the inhuman background common to all of us. The disturbing experience of estrangement of the self by the encounter with desire precisely announces a kind of indeterminacy, that will allow us to make a bridge between Butler and psychoanalysis, in order to elaborate the idea of the uncanny as a political category.

The uncanny as a political category

In a Lacanian retelling, what Freud (1919/2010) describes as the experience of the uncanny seems to be the real autonomy that an other gains against our symbolic organizations and imaginary expectations in such a way that the self does not seem to coincide with oneself for an instant, entering the scene the estrangement of the self. This duality of the subject's self promotes the effect of discontinuity, fragmentation, shattering of the self-image, a subjective split, something in the subject that is not the self as a narrative form. This means that in situations of disturbing strangeness, the subject's ego suddenly encounters a fissure, a hiatus, an ontological crack in his own being. Something, therefore, threatens the fixity of identity of the self, sustained at every moment by a libidinal force of self-preservation. This constant effort refers not so much to the preservation of a biological entity, but to the conservation, at any cost, of a self-image, of a certain narrative about oneself, which is invested libidinally by the subject. This, in turn, depends on an entire history of identifications and contingencies experienced by each one, generating a series of presumably identitary defenses that the self assumes.

In this case, since the self represents a defense against the drive, we are dealing here with the fact that the self invests radically the narcissistic conservation of its identitarian image, something that the drive - and therefore, the anxiety - comes to challenge. This is because the uncanny, as an announcer of anxiety, points to the distressing character of being before something with traits of "indeterminacy and absence of object" (Freud, 1926/2014, p. 114), that is, an object we do not know how to name, the object *a*. Which means anxiety before a danger that we do not know, that we do not have conscious access, a danger that comes from the drive. Understanding the drive as that demonic force of indeterminacy that inhabits every subject, as a subject of the unconscious marked by language, we sustain that the experience of the uncanny will refer us precisely to this opaque field of the sexuality, in the psychoanalytic sense. This is because in Western culture, it seems plausible to say that subjects whose *semblants* defy the grammar of recognition of heterosexual hegemony embody this element of the uncanny to some of the subjects whose selves try to organize themselves within binary norms. Because of this harrowing vacillation, some of the subjects with *semblants* produced within hegemony tend to attach the uncanny to the abject, at the same time recalling and reiterating the response through

violence to deal with the appearance of the disquieting, unaware of the *Unheimliche* who also inhabits them.

After all, sexuality, for psychoanalysis, anguishes not only those who are "outside" the norms, but also those who, at the level of the *semblants*, seem to meet the parameters of certain heterosexual hegemony. Violence arises only as one of the possible ways of dealing with this element of the uncanny, which in fact appears as the background of the human, beyond all norms. Thus, through an interpellation of this uncanny object, we will try to bring contributions to the understanding of gender mechanisms, in the path pioneered by Butler, to the extent that the appearance of objects that challenge traditional identity grammars such as transvestites and transgender people, defy the fictional line of hegemonic heterosexuality. The problem that results from the meeting of the hegemonic with those objects that challenge it is in the defense that we understand as the most common in cases, for example, of homophobia and transphobia: violence.

Thus, identitary hesitation produces a projective defense: "No, there is nothing different, strange, dysmorphic, traumatic, alteritary, etc. in me; it is all in the other, it is only in the object: in the homosexual, the prostitute, the transvestite, the trans people, in everything that challenges my traditional (and normative) grammar of recognition; I am restricted to the subject of my own statement, which I possess as my own". The anxiety of being in the presence of these uncanny subjects seems to break with the narcissistic conservation of the self-image that some of the subjects produced within hegemony fail to sustain. As a consequence, to deal with this harrowing drive hazard, indeterminacy is converted into fear, which creates a facilitating pathway for violence, both physical and/or verbal.

The danger associated to the drive, which is signaled by anxiety, triggers an experience of helplessness – *psychic* helplessness, says Freud, not biological – an experience that is nevertheless traumatic (Freud, 1926/2014, p. 115). This composes a privileged sign for anxiety: "I am expecting for a situation of helplessness" (p. 116), expectation of something to come. This causes the subject to recall a type of trauma already experienced, which will be anticipated and treated as if it had already arrived, so as to keep it away while it is still time. Anxiety, then, is seen by Freud (1926/2014) as an original reaction to helplessness in trauma. The ego tries to actively resume a trauma passively lived, reproducing it "in the hope of being able to direct its course" (p. 116). The real danger represented by the drive - to blur the symbolic coordinates and to dissolve the imaginary accounts that guide the self of a subject - is converted into violence. When the drive is lived in its most radical form of indeterminacy, it erodes all the determined, fixed, and finite identities. But when the subject's self fails to deal with anxiety through the symbolic path, this character of indeterminacy is converted into aggression and violence. If indeterminacy concerns the most pulsional aspect of the drive, as Safatle (2012) points out, then it is only secondarily that the death drive is channeled as violence and destructiveness toward the other.

Primarily, the death drive is not a drive for destruction and aggression; such a view is sustained only if anchored on a Hobbesian side of Freud, present in works such as "Civilization and its discontents", a text in which the other seems to be an intrusive object that threatens my physical integrity through violence, this way, I should defend myself along the same path. This almost natural violence should be restrained by civilizing work. However, along with Safatle (2016), we note that in other moments of the Freudian work, there are alternative ways to read the death drive, which pass less through destructiveness than through negativity.

Such form of reading is based on the notion of psychic helplessness as an inhuman background present in each subject, haunted by an alteritary sexuality that does not assume narratable forms by the self and the image of a whole person. This uncanny, demonic, contingent, unsecured, and especially distressing element is something that our current modes of life still struggle to conceal. This happens when fear is considered a central political affection (Safatle, 2016, p. 48). The problem is that this status given to fear reinforces a facilitating route to violence and neglects the essence of the Freudian discovery, which we believe to be the affirmation of the psychic helplessness as constitutive of the subject in language and in relation to the other.

After all, indeterminacy is seen only as a risk to be fought aggressively when it is not likely to be lived productively, as a result of a normatively heterosexual way of life. This makes the appearance of the object-uncanny be seen as an intrusive threat from outside, making us unaware that there is an

intimate uncanny in all of us, who forsakes us and removes our own identities from us (Butler, 2005/2015b). This produces a suffering from excessive determinations that act by fixing identifications that should be defended at all costs. This defense is put in hesitation with the appearance of an abject-uncanny that takes a subject with the structured self within the norm to "a fragilization of the ordered images of the world and of oneself" (Safatle, 2012, p. 152), freeing him from narcissistic illusions of the self.

Thus, if helplessness is the original psychic condition before the drive, which recruits anxiety as its reaction, then anxiety is the sign of the danger that the drive embodies for the self. Therefore, the experience of the uncanny becomes a mark of the approach of anxiety: the encounter with the subjective division, with the indeterminacy that haunts us as the opaque face of the inhuman in us. However, this indeterminacy is still a traumatic experience: undoing its edges, its imaginary limits, to allow it to break its own body, to allow it to abandon "its present a form so that it may sometimes be recomposed in an unexpected way" (Safatle, 2016, p.36).

For this reason, the death drive only appears as violence when indeterminacy is experienced as unproductive. Taking into account the vector of violence motivated by sexual differences, this points to the inability of our life forms to deal with the anxiety of the indeterminate. We, therefore, emphasize the necessity of thinking about the construction of ways of life that may allow a libidinal circulation with less suffering from determinacy, producing subjects that deal better with the experiences of indeterminacy, transforming them from unproductive to productive. This might weaken the path of violence when dealing with the drive.

A circuit of conversions: between negativity and destructiveness

In our work, we use the notion of "sexual differences" to encompass the articulations between sexual *semblants*, sexual orientations and gender identities whose conjunction does not seem adequate to the identity fiction of heterosexual hegemony, thus falling into uncanniness and abjection. Although sex in psychoanalysis is traumatic for everyone, the sexual and contingent character of the psychic constitution makes sexual differences especially traumatic for some of the subjects structured within hegemony. Because of this traumatic character, the encounter with the uncanny-abject is distressing; in our Western forms of life, the production of violence is an unproductive strategy to deal with this element of indeterminacy that denounces the fictions of heterosexual hegemony. Such a circuit can best be understood if we use the category of "productive experiences of indeterminacy" (Safatle, 2012). We believe that this notion allows a deeper understanding of the libidinal dynamics of violence motivated by sexual differences, allowing us to think of the circuits of affections involved in situations of homophobia, transphobia, queerphobia and so on.

We already know that the apparition of the uncanny stirs anxiety in the subject's self, which is then deprived of its identifications by an object that twists the hegemonic identity protocols. This vacillation is due to the harrowing presence of the *a*, which should be veiled, but showed up, pointing to the indeterminacy and helplessness that remain as the inhuman background in us: the presence of sexuality. However, our hegemonic forms of life structured by a heterosexual binary matrix make this experience be precipitously lived as unproductive indeterminacy. Because of this, the uncanny is transfigured into the abject. This means that there is a facilitated path for culture to make this unproductive experience of indeterminacy be very quickly converted into an unproductive experience of determinacy. This happens when the uncanny, who has the potential to deprive subjects from their own egoic identifications, is located as the abject, as this monstrous, terrible, inhuman element, which would be presumably excluded from the norm, but is rather its own constitutive exterior as it is produced in relation to the norm itself.

Still, this reasoning carries a silent tension: the approach of the abject and the indeterminate by means of the category of the uncanny has some subtleties. Abjection is the external constitutive of the norm itself, whereas indeterminacy points beyond the current norm, in the sense of stressing its limits. Therefore, an approximation between the uncanny and the abject must go one step further. One way to escape this deadlock is to say that the abject is the way our hegemonic forms of life have found to conceal what is undetermined in the drive, trying to determine it as the abject. Thus, it is the conversion

of an (un)productive experience of indeterminacy into unproductive experience of determinacy. We can now raise the following hypothesis: indeterminacy reappears as the abject. The abject is a failed attempt to determine the indeterminate of the drive, an element that is deeply distressing.

Thus, this form of defense takes place in a manner similar to the constitution of the phobia: by choosing a phobic object, I locate the anxiety of indeterminacy which would otherwise be excessively traumatic due to its inapprehensible nature. One possible defensive strategy is that subjects produced within hegemony protect themselves from the non-identical, from the inhuman in themselves with the projection of the uncanny into abjection. With this, they can try to create rigid boundaries between inside and outside, between the self and the others, borders that cannot sustain themselves with such impermeability, as attested by psychoanalysis.

Likewise, the indeterminacy that is experienced as unproductive - due to the strong demands of identitarian coherence that fall on the subjects - is soon converted into an unproductive experience of determinacy, in which the uncanny is translated as the abject. When, in certain circumstances, a subject with a *semblant* produced within hegemony encounters the uncanny, the *queer*, this experience of identitarian hesitation usually triggers a translation circuit of determinacy that presents itself as unproductive, because of its link with violence and denial of the own helplessness, the inhuman itself. It is worth remembering Butler's (1993) description of the abject's functioning, which carries a threat of dissolution of the subject's self, constituting inhabitable zones that a subject fantasizes as threatening its own integrity: "I would rather die than do or be that!" (p. 243). This points to our inability to live experiences of anxiety in a productive way, something that the category of the uncanny can circumvent by foreshadowing new ways of life.

Thus the experience of the *Unheimliche* seems to point to the constitutive ambiguity of identities, the potentially abject character of every body, something that disturbs the identity predicates, the self-images, the self-reports. The fact that the uncanny signals a disruption in the self can lead the way to this mode of recognition beyond current figures of the human, which Safatle (2016) called "antipredicative recognition". Such recognition is not only based on positive attributes, stable predicates of an identity narrated by someone, dependent on a current figure of the human. It is much more important to recognize that there are points of negativity and opacity that reside within all of us, points that make it impossible for the subject to exhaust himself in his own statements.

By virtue of this other path of recognition, it seems possible to glimpse the assembly of other forms of life, other circuits of affection, that allow other libidinal assemblies and also open paths to turn into productive the unproductive experiences of indeterminacy that the subjects with the self produced within the hegemony present. Thus, we emphasize the importance of modes of life in which subjects are able to circulate with less suffering from determinacy, dealing better with the anxiety of the indeterminate. With this, it will be possible, perhaps, to minimize the use of violence as a response to that what challenges a normative and positive grammar of recognition.

This is because the current figures of the human, while producing norm and abjection from a matrix of compulsory heterosexuality, heterosexual hegemony, make the psychic constitution be so normatively traumatic, through the determination of identity, that the appearance of the indeterminate, in the form of the uncanny-familiar, can only be experienced unproductively as the abject. This conception allows us to rethink the statute of the death drive, as it lies between destruction and the negative, but in our forms of life it only seems to be lived as destructiveness. However, when the egoic identification of a subject hesitates, by meeting with an abject-uncanny, it does not have to be so quickly converted into fear; it is also possible to convert it into recognition of the helplessness that is at the bottom of the human figures. The experience of vacillation of identity is distressing, but this need not be directly reversed into fear, an eminent generator of violence (Safatle, 2016, p. 48). It is possible, following another path, to convert this hesitation into recognition of the helplessness, the background of opacity and contingency that lies behind the current figures of the human.

We can therefore think of two destinations of the anxiety generated by the encounter with the abject-uncanny, which unfolds in a vacillation of identity. On the one hand, the use of fear; on the other, recognition of helplessness. In our traditional circuits of affections, the anxiety of the indeterminate is very quickly converted into fear, placed in the abject, which functions as a facilitated route to violence. Thus, fear and violence present, in our view, an unproductive destination for the anxiety of identitarian

hesitation. Another possible destination is one in which the anxiety before the uncanny, the abject, makes it possible to recognize the psychic helplessness and opens the way to a subjective reconfiguration, a dissolution of the subject's self that allows a certain porosity to the lack of identity, even if it does not give up on identitarian contours altogether.

This discussion intends to found other figures of the human who recognize the negative bottom of opacity that resides in all of us, a possible path to avoid that violence become the hegemonic cultural answer; in order that the abject do not become the translation for the indeterminacy of the uncanny; and so that the limits between norm and abjection, that is, the human limits, may be reconfigured, reterritorialized. This is because, in our current hegemonic forms of life, the self, as a privileged human symptom, seems to have to sustain its self-image at any cost, doing it through a narcissistic libidinal investment that turns all vacillation of identity into suffering. The structuring of the self, which is a defense against the drive, the desire, the *a*, can be done in a more porous way towards the indeterminate.

Our ways of life try to ignore the subject of the unconscious, reducing the subject to the individual, to the person, to the self, generating strong suffering from determinacy, because of an excessively simple and reductionist view of what is desire and what is the subject. We follow, therefore, the proposals of Safatle (2016), which understands helplessness as a central political affection, from a perspective that is more attentive to negativity, opacity, the indeterminacy that inhabits us. Helplessness is finally seen as an essential human condition, pointing to its inhuman background, i.e., that which is not reduced to the current figures of the human, determined figures that claim to achieve unity, authenticity, identity, and autonomy.

Identity, between repression and production

So far we have discussed the ways in which we may regard determinacy as porous, giving room for its own hesitation. For "there is no complete determinacy, ... in the sense of determinations which would nullify the 'uncontrollable ambiguity of experience'" (Safatle, 2012, p. 300). There will always be, in every determinacy, an opaque background that erodes every attempt to exhaust, in an identity, in an account of oneself, the subject of the unconscious. This is something that Butler (1990/2015a) also says, in her own way, by ensuring that no identification is complete, only on an asymptotic plane. Similarly, for Safatle (2012), psychoanalysis is organized around the recognition that there is a suffering from determinacy, that is, a suffering from the overrestrictive character of identity demands that ground the current figures of the human, in that they still carry expectations of a rational subject, that would be restricted to the self, unified, conscious, independent, authentic, capable of being exhausted in its narratives of the self; something that makes us incapable of experiencing, in a productive way, "experiences of lack of identity and indeterminacy" (p. 6).

Such consideration leads Safatle (2012) to claim that our "most terrifying suffering is the result of the repressive character of identity" (p. 230). We agree with this statement, but we believe we must go further. By emphasizing the repressive character we leave aside the suffering generated by the productive facet of identity: the production of violence, destructive drive discharges, the uncanny translated into the abject, through the production of lives that are not capable of being mourned, of being recognized and lived (Butler, 2009/2016). The categories of identity, when excessively and rigidly built, are what produce these types of violence. We can clearly see it in typical social fantasies in Brazil such as those that say that "a man with a man becomes a werewolf" and "a woman with a woman turns into an alligator". They put what escapes the normative in the field of the monstrous and the animalesque, which generates a high price, to be paid, hegemonically, by means of violence.

Thus, it seems interesting to think the possibility of a less rigid transit between determinacy and indeterminacy, so that subjects are led not to affirm an identity at any cost; instead, a vacillation of their narrative fiction should not necessarily be taken as a threat of complete subjective dissolution. This is what should be recognized when we say that the subject is not reduced to the self, to the individual, to the form of the person. Every subject, being parasitized by the subject of the unconscious, also bears the traces of the inhuman, a power that allows us to erode the normatively determined and currently realized forms of the human (Safatle, 2012, pp. 233-234). The inhuman reveals itself in us by the

indeterminacy of sexuality, situated beyond any norm, be it heterosexual, matrimonial, genital, instinctive, reproductive.

Hence, the identity struggle of freezing itself in a statement, such as "I am a male, I am this or that", proves to be superfluous, since the sense slips. Recognizing this allows us to produce less violent forms of life. For, beyond sexuated *semblants* and in the reverse of gender performances, the object persists as an opaque, enigmatic element, cause of desire, unperformable, that the drive tricks. Identity narratives present in statements such as "what real men like is women" or "women were born to get married/to become mother" turn unknown precisely that which operates in the underground of the *semblants* and performances: desire, which is vagabond, fugitive and inapprehensible.

Final considerations

At the end of this discussion, we may think that the strategy of conversion from the uncanny to the object is an attempt to establish rigid boundaries between the self and the others, boundaries that are not sustained in this way, because they present not-all-permeable pores. Psychoanalysis rightly testifies that there is an intimate confusion between the self and the other, between what is mine and what belongs to the other, pointing to the removal of identity that the otherness triggers in us. For this reason, we hold the political potential of the uncanny as an element of indeterminacy that carries with it an alterity, unspeakable and contingent fund of identity determinations. Something that can put us in motion in the direction of building different circuits of affections and that calls into question the narrative fictions of the self, pointing out the veiled presence of helplessness as the essential background of our psychic constitution.

It is a matter of recognizing, therefore, that the subject of the unconscious is less defined by the figure of an individual who possesses positive attributes than by bearing something "that resists the very process of predication" (Safatle, 2016, p. 246). In this sense, the subject is seen as a process of implication with what is indeterminate from the point of view of the current situation, and the uncanny can therefore point to the production of new forms of life. Thus, we believe that the processes of constitution of gendered subjects can still allow greater transit between determinacy and indeterminacy, without having to conceal at any cost the unperformable element in the drive, the subject in its most intimate desire, that is, the uncanny.

Finally, in addition to thinking about the repressive facets of identity, it seemed relevant to point out the productive spheres that identity determinations engender, by providing the facilitated channels for production of violence against the abject, stimulating situations of homophobia, transphobia, queerphobia etc. This happens by quickly converting the uncanny into the abject, a practice that produces lives that are not amenable to mourning, or to being recognized and lived, as opposed to normative hegemony. With this reflection, ontology between Butler and Safatle becomes a starting point for politics that, on the one hand, go beyond and cross the "categories of identity" (Butler, 2009/2016, p. 16) and, on the other hand (Safatle, 2016, p. 29), present movements that disarticulate the field of identities. It seems to us possible to think, from now on, the building of new forms of life that produce less violence and less suffering from determinacy.

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Received: May. 06, 2016

Approved: Aug. 01, 2017

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