

## ADOLESCENCE AND PSYCHIC WORK: PSYCHOANALYTIC CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT SUICIDE IN SOME SONGS

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**ABSTRACT.** The present article conducted a psychoanalytic investigation about adolescence and suicide through a theoretical elaboration and the examination of some Brazilian songs that present this theme. Based on the psychoanalytic approach to adolescence, the Freudian conception of psychic work is emphasized. This is necessary in the operation of subjective update that makes possible the adolescent passage and has similarities with the process of mourning. This point of convergence is the support of the approach that we propose between adolescence, suicide and their fictional narratives, including the songs. We understand the scope and limits of these sublimated forms of discourse with which many adolescents identify. On the one hand, the songs can constitute narratives that give a treatment to the anguish that emerges with the onset of puberty, enabling singular constructions through the word. On the other hand, the immersion of the subject in a discourse on death can intensify the anguish and cause identifications welded by a deadly joy, precipitating the act.

**Keywords:** Adolescence; psychic work; suicide.

## ADOLESCÊNCIA E TRABALHO PSÍQUICO: CONSIDERAÇÕES PSICANALÍTICAS SOBRE O SUICÍDIO EM ALGUMAS CANÇÕES

**RESUMO.** O presente artigo realiza uma investigação psicanalítica sobre adolescência e suicídio por meio de uma elaboração teórica e do exame de algumas canções brasileiras que apresentam essa temática. Com base na abordagem psicanalítica da adolescência, ressalta-se a concepção freudiana de trabalho psíquico. Este é necessário na operação de atualização subjetiva que viabiliza a passagem adolescente e tem semelhanças com o processo de elaboração do luto. Esse ponto de convergência é o suporte da aproximação que propomos entre adolescência, suicídio e suas narrativas ficcionais, entre elas as canções. Entendemos o alcance e os limites dessas formas sublimadas de discurso com as quais muitos adolescentes se identificam. De um lado, as canções podem constituir narrativas que dão um tratamento à angústia que irrompe com o despertar pubertário, possibilitando construções singulares por meio da palavra. De outro, a imersão do sujeito num

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discurso sobre a morte pode intensificar a angústia e ocasionar identificações soldadas por um gozo mortífero, precipitando o ato.

**Palavras-chave:** Adolescência; trabalho psíquico; suicídio.

## ADOLESCENCIA Y TRABAJO PSÍQUICO: CONSIDERACIONES PSICOANALÍTICAS SOBRE EL SUICIDIO EN ALGUNAS CANCIONES

**RESUMEN.** En el presente artículo se realiza una investigación psicoanalítica sobre adolescencia y suicidio por medio de una elaboración teórica y del examen de algunas canciones brasileñas que presentan esa temática. Con base en el abordaje psicoanalítico de la adolescencia, se resalta la concepción freudiana de trabajo psíquico. Este es necesario en la operación de actualización subjetiva que viabiliza el paso adolescente y tiene semejanzas con el proceso de elaboración del luto. Este punto de convergencia es el soporte del acercamiento que proponemos entre la adolescencia, el suicidio y sus narrativas ficcionales, entre ellas las canciones. Entendemos el alcance y los límites de esas formas sublimadas de discurso con las que muchos adolescentes se identifican. De un lado, las canciones pueden constituir narrativas que dan un tratamiento a la angustia que irrumpe con el despertar de la pubertad, posibilitando construcciones singulares por medio de la palabra. De otro lado, la inmersión del sujeto en un discurso sobre la muerte puede intensificar la angustia y ocasionar identificaciones soldadas por un goce mortífero, precipitando el acto.

**Palabras clave:** Adolescencia; trabajo psíquico; el suicidio.

### Introduction

A mapping of the Brazilian violent mortality (Waiselfisz, 2014) shows that between 1980 and 2012, suicide rates among juveniles grew by 62.5%, increasing the rate from the turn of the century. According to the World Health Organization data collected in this study, compared to 90 other countries, Brazil has relatively low rates of suicide, both in the total population and among the young. Therefore, there is no suicidal culture as in other countries. It is noteworthy, however, that Brazil occupies the 63<sup>rd</sup> position in the ranking of countries according to the percentages of suicide of the total population, while in relation to the young population, it is in the 60<sup>th</sup> position. According to Waiselfisz (2014), the significant elevation of these rates at around 17 or 18 years of age, with indices well above the national average, is surprising around five suicides per 100 thousand inhabitants.

In addition to these numerical data, there is a dimension that is not objective but rather difficult to name because it concerns malaise in culture. As part of this diffuse and unfathomable dimension that encompasses the forms of human suffering in a particular social context, the theme of suicide in adolescence eventually wins the scene through fictional narratives of great media repercussion that incite debate around the problem and bring increasing numbers. In the last decades, several works - musical, cinematographic, literary, television, etc.<sup>3</sup> - are presented as attempts to narrate something unspeakable,

<sup>3</sup> Examples of works dealing with suicide in adolescence or youth that have had repercussions in recent decades include, among many others, the film 'Garota, interrompida' (2000), by James Mangold, the book *As vantagens de ser invisível*

insofar as both suicide and the anguish that causes it are elements of the real. These narratives are, therefore, modes of symbolic treatment of subjects of great delicacy and pungency in the adolescent universe. As such, they may or may not succeed in this task of treating the impossible of symbolizing and often of enduring. For many subjects, such narratives are valuable as means of expression that mirror their dilemmas and anguishes, functioning as an identification reference and allowing a certain re-signification and production of meanings. In turn, for certain subjects, these narratives do not reach these treatment effects, but end up increasing the anguish and contributing to forms of identification to a self-destructive discourse and to fixation in a deadly joy that can lead to the worst. In this sense, there is a whole discussion about the pertinence of evoking this theme in fiction, since it is necessary to consider the possibility of a proliferation of suicide outbreaks caused by the diffusion of the act in the media, the so-called 'Werther effect'<sup>4</sup>, which certainly gains a whole resizing in the age of the internet.

In view of this, Psychoanalysis positions itself in a prudent way, neither condemning categorically the artistic narratives about suicide, nor feeding a naive interpretation that takes them as harmless or beneficial to all subjects. To advance in this debate, it must be recognized that the scope and effects of a fictional work on a subject can only be considered from a case-by-case perspective without generalizations.

Given the rarefaction of the symbolic references built in childhood, in adolescence the subject needs to seek answers of its own and make new bonds. New identity groups gain the stage, which is noticeable in the diverse adolescent communities usually formed by ties of identity, whether around an aesthetic, a musical taste, a political activism, etc. In all the different elements that link these groups, music and songs occupy a prominent place. On the one hand, the rhythms and melodies, the tones and harmonies, the various timbres, and finally, the strength of the musical aesthetic expression in its various genres swings affections and movements the adolescent bodies that pulsate and dance to the chords. On the other hand, the words, verses, lyrics that guide the songs permeate the imaginary of the adolescents, in a proliferation of senses, arriving at the possibility of resignification and symbolic encounters. Thus, songs are privileged elements in the adolescent universe and often have an important function as narratives capable of generating meaning in moments of total loss of meaning.

We propose to approach the function of these musical narratives for some subjects from a brief theoretical review on adolescence with the orientation of psychoanalysis. In this way, the Freudian conception of psychic work is emphasized. This is necessary in the operation of subjective update that makes possible the adolescent passage and has similarities with the process of mourning. This point of convergence is the support of the approximation that we make between adolescence, suicide and its fictional narratives, among them the songs. We then resort to some Brazilian songs about this theme that have a great impact on groups of adolescents and are representative of the historical clipping of the Waiselfisz mapping, that is, from the 1980s to 2010: the poetic compositions of Russo,

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(1999), by Stephen Chbosky, along with the 2012 eponymous film, based on the book, written and directed by the same writer, the film 'As melhores coisas do mundo' (2010) by Laís Bodanzky, the documentary 'Elena' (2012) by Petra Chaves, and the '13 reasons why' (2017) television series, based on the book *Thirteen reasons why* (2007), by Jay Asher, adapted by Brian Yorke for Netflix streaming provider. As a classic example of fictional narrative on adolescent suffering, including suicide, we quoted the play 'O despertar da primavera' (1891), by Frank Wedekind commented by Freud, Lacan, and contemporary psychoanalysts.

<sup>4</sup> In allusion to the character of the literary work *Os sofrimentos do jovem Werther* (Goethe, 1774), who commits suicide with a shot due to a loving disappointment. The great repercussion of the book would have led to an outbreak of youth suicides using the same method in several places (Waiselfisz, 2014).

Villa-Lobos and Bonfá, 'Clarisse' (1997) and 'Pais e filhos' (1989), as well as the song 'Amianto' by Navarro, Ramos, Vaz, Ramos, & Paula (2014).

## A psychoanalytic approach to adolescence

In 'contributions to a discussion on suicide', Freud (1996a) positions himself in the debate over the large number of suicides of secondary school students of his day. In response to an overly simple explanation for such a serious phenomenon, which has assigned the school the role of impelling its students to self-extermination, it addresses the problem in its complexity, stating that for these students, school takes the place of the traumas with which other adolescents face in other areas of life. From this point of view, the school is one of the fundamental places in which the adolescent goes to otherness. Together with the family and peer groups, the school institution is one of the most important figures of the Other in the transition from that time to the life of a subject. Thus, the Freudian indications to the secondary school of his time can be taken more comprehensively, as recommendations to all those who are located in this alteritary place for an adolescent. For Freud, in addition to not pushing suicide, the school should give the youngster the desire to live, by offering him/her support at a time of life in which the bonds with the parents are loosened and the references built in childhood dissipate. Signaling the delicacy of this phase, he says that the school "[...] must never forget that it has to deal with immature individuals who cannot be denied the right to delay at certain stages of development and even in some rather disagreeable ones" (1996a, p. 244).

Despite the brevity of this work, Freud deals with essential points for an approach to adolescence and suicide. The defense of the right of each subject to follow this stage in time, in a proper way, indicates if it is a psychic work of particular gravity, with significant expenditures of affective investment. And this arduous work of elaboration can paralyze or even fail, occasioning moments of subjective hesitation in which the act of suicide in its radicality can take shape. A decision for life must necessarily be guided by the one who occupies the place of the Other, as a beacon capable of indicating the path of desire in a moment of emptying of references and subjective drift. To better understand the specificities of this stage of life to which Freud alludes in this text, we will present a brief psychoanalytic panorama of adolescence.

For psychoanalysis, age does not affect a subject in a chronological way, as a given objective linked to the factual reality, since the temporality of the unconscious is not governed by a chronology. Still, adolescence is of great clinical and theoretical interest to this field of knowledge, not as an objective period, but as a subjective time. Although it is expressly stated only in rare occasions in Freud's work, adolescence is present as an important background in some clinical cases, and above all in the conception of puberty, this is a central notion for this author.

Although distinct, 'puberty' and 'adolescence' are radically connected. The first concerns the real that is triggered by the sexual maturation that manifests in the body for all the subjects that reach the end of childhood. Puberty thus refers to a universal organic fact that is independent of culture. Adolescence, in turn, is a symbolic operation to treat the real of puberty. It is a symptomatic response to this real (Stevens, 2004), which will set the tone and progress of the transition toward adulthood and otherness, as a singular way of repositioning itself in the social bond when the condition of child no longer guarantees this position. Therefore, contrary to puberty, adolescence is neither universal nor timeless, since it depends on the alteritary dimension and is linked to the cultural productions and forms of

expression of a social context. Being inseparable from the social experience and ways of life of a culture, this stage signals the specificities of the discourse of an era, as well as the *pathos* and deterioration of the social bond.

Although it is a symptom of puberty (Stevens, 2004), adolescence is not necessarily pathological. However, because it occupies a symptomatic place in discourses since modernity, as an effect of what is not normalized despite the severity of the norms of modern society, it is through the *pathos* that it is presented to Freud. The psychic suffering manifested in adolescence, deeply linked to the malaise in the culture and the reconfigurations of sexuality that occur at that stage, reveals itself to the inventor of psychoanalysis as soon as the starting point of his screening of the etiology of the neuroses and contributes decisively for his understanding of the traumatic constitution of subjectivity.

In 'Três ensaios sobre a teoria da sexualidade' (1996b), Freud devotes the third essay to the transformations of puberty. In order to understand the importance of this contribution, condensed in the hypothesis of the "[...] encounter of the object [...]" (p. 290) in puberty, it is necessary to isolate the organic factor exalted by the author in this work - a sequela of the scientific ideal that pervades his theoretical production in that moment - and extract from this elaboration what it brings, even though between the lines, as a corollary: that in puberty the currents that make up the child sexual life will hardly find a full convergence, so that the presumed and expected conclusion of the sexual development only occurs within an ideal horizon, of unlikely reach, in a vanishing point.

Freud (1996b) proposes the stages of sexual development - phases defined by the relationship of the subject to specific objects. He takes puberty as a decisive stage, since it is in this period that the second time of the Oedipus complex occurs, when the subject is confronted with the encounter of the object. It is, in his view, a stage of biological maturation, at which point sexual development culminates. In this context, the "[...] phases of the development of sexual organization [...]" (p. 186) are proposed: oral phase, anal-sadistic phase, latency period and puberty - and, later, the phallic phase.

In puberty, the drastic changes that affect the body trigger a series of transformations in the psychic and drive sphere. According to Freud (1996b), the sexual drive begins to serve the reproductive function and "[...] consumes in the psychic side the encounter of the object for which the path had been prepared from the earliest childhood" (p. 210). This would be an update of the first object with which the baby is facing: the maternal breast. The author recalls that the breast is an object outside the body that, with autoeroticism, gives way to the child's own body in its search for satisfaction. With the pubertal awakening, once again the subject turns to an object outside the body, which leads the psychoanalyst to affirm that "[...] the encounter of the object is actually a re-encounter" (p. 210).

From the Lacanian guideline, we take the 'encounter of the object' at puberty as an event of the real in the body, inserted in a logical temporality, that is, guided by a subjective time, in the proper course of a subject. Lacan (2005) locates at the logical moment of puberty the "maturation of object a" (p. 282)<sup>5</sup>. That is, the encounter with the object at puberty is an encounter with the lack in the real of the body.

The changes that affect the body at puberty consist of disturbances difficult to be assimilated by the subject, who is facing the incidence of the real, impossible to symbolize. Thus, there is no chronological continuity in development, but rather a jump, a rupture in the

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<sup>5</sup> The object 'a' is a logical operator formalized by Lacan (2005) as the void that remains of the operation of subjective constitution. With the subject's entry into language, something is left out, remaining as an element of the real that will operate as the cause of desire. As the point of condensation of the lack, it propels the metonymic search of the desire for an object that fills it. It is a void of signifier, being the residual point of subjectivity.

physical plane, which has incisive consequences on the body image and on the symbolic representation of the body: in the place of the infantile body, the subject comes to have another body, endowed with features and capable of *performances* never experienced before. This foreign territory that is the body of the adolescent suffers the most intense hormonal, libidinal and aesthetic disturbances and has to be with a pulsional circuit that already circulates around a genital plus-de-jour. Moved by the drive, the subject then faces the possibility of a new act: the sexual.

For Freud (1996b), there is an organic factor at stake, of hereditary order, that is preponderant in all the events that characterize this phase. From the orientation of Lacan, it is possible to resize this conception of organism, with its genetic predispositions, and to summon the notion of body as inseparable from jouissance and language. The organic body is there - it is not about refusing the role of biology - but it only concerns the problem of sexuality as a body of jouissance, touched by language. In this way, we refer to the organic factor that Freud emphasizes to the real of the body, in the Lacanian sense, as that which is not inscribed in language, the inconceivable dimension of what concerns the human, real organism that comes as a repetition (Lacan, 1985). What Freud exacerbates in his analysis of puberty can thus be read as the realization of something of the body that is outside language - which was not embraced by the signifier, which did not undergo eroticization - and which does not cease to return, as disturbing event, with the awakening that the libido promotes at that moment in the life of a subject. In this perspective, instead of the ideal of normal sexual development, susceptible to disturbances capable of deviating from its predetermined course, sexuality is conceived as the disturbance itself, unrelated to normality, insofar as it is the effect of the encounter between the body and the signifier.

This subversive and antinaturalist conception of sexuality is fundamental to the understanding of adolescence. Freud (1996b) already recognizes the improbability of the conjunction in the sexual development between the tender current and the sensual current, that is, the difficulty of the passage from the oedipal investment - the infantile love by the parental object - to the choice of a new sexual object in the contingency of the love encounter in adolescence. Thus, as much as this author tries to establish a chronological temporality guided by organic evolution, a temporal succession activated by the "[...] drives motions [...]" (p. 227) that directs sexuality to an outcome consistent with maturity, this does not materialize. There is no linearity, so biological programming is not what governs sexuality.

Cottet (1988) analyzes the intrinsic tensions to puberty that this Freudian work flies. He points out the impossible condition of the syntheses which Freud expects for puberty and demarcates the difficulty of an adjustment of genital desire over the object of love, since the prototype of this relation - the pregenital tenderness, which brings together the sexual drives and the current affection over the same objects - is definitely barred by repression. With puberty, "[...] times have changed, genitality disturbs this beautiful harmony, because it is not susceptible to the same transformations. [...]. It is clear that not all sexual is susceptible to a negotiation whose demand of the Other would be the key" (p. 103-104). That is, for Cottet, the transformations of drives - sublimation and target changes in general - observed in childhood do not work the same way in puberty. Still on the unfeasibility of encounter of the different currents of infantile sexuality, he reiterates that the object of tenderness, the parental pair, was condemned as a sexual object long ago, which started the latency period. Consequently, the pubertal impulse updates a prohibition: to enjoy sexually the object of love - jouissance which, in its children's version, did not count on the genital plus-de-jour required at puberty.

According to Cottet (1988), for psychoanalysis there is, strictly speaking, no genital drive, because the drive cannot be satisfied without the support of fantasy. And it is in the pre-genital sexuality that the adolescent fantasy is fed, maintaining in a veiled way the partial, fragmented and dispersed jouissance of autoerotism. In this way, fantasy is responsible for implying in puberty a forbidden jouissance - correlated to the demands of a Superego already established in latency -, contributing to the 'no place' that characterizes adolescent sexuality in its awakening: a subject that is in a position of junction/disjunction in relation to its body, of perplexity in the face of the incongruity between the fantasized body and the experienced body, and whose task is, among many others, to take possession of that body and to be guilty. All this intricate circuit of incongruities and mismatches reinforces the perception of puberty as a moment especially subjected to failure, subjective hesitation and derangement, unlike a conclusive time of synthesis.

The essence of these contradictions can already be apprehended in the *Três ensaios*, a work that allows us to assimilate the idea that at puberty something can fail. In other words, there is no organic determinism that guarantees that the subject goes through all phases of development within a certain regularity and reaches a conclusive point. This denotes the epistemological stalemate in which Freud (1996b) finds himself, since his own theory of development leads to a paradox, a tunnel with no definite output. At the same time as he traces in puberty "[...] the changes that lead the sexual life to its definitive normal configuration [...]", with the rise of the "[...] primacy of the genital zone [...]", the author makes it clear that this "[...] normality" (p. 196) refers to a horizon of difficult reach, since:

[...] is assured only by the exact convergence of the two currents directed to the sexual object and the sexual goal: that of tenderness and sensuality. The first of these carries within it what remains from the primitive infantile efflorescence of sexuality. It is like crossing a tunnel pierced from both ends (p. 196).

In this way, although Freud associates with puberty a moment of completion of sexual development, he expresses his pessimism about the possibility of completion, as attested by the metaphor of the tunnel pierced from both ends. In Freudian engineering, as they open the way to supposedly adult sexuality, two distinct currents pierce different passages, starting from disparate places and in divergent directions, and will only intersect at random if their paths are found in the underground opacity, by pure contingency. Freud thus expresses the difficulty of confluence of sensual and tenderness currents, which would consist of, if it were to occur, a conclusion of sexual development. In this sense, there is no full convergence of the partial drives in a genital drive in the service of reproduction. From this it follows that human sexuality remains childish, since this desired convergence, which would be necessary for adult sexuality, only occurs in infinity, at the point of escape of the children drive currents. From this reflection, we infer that this Freudian engineering already allows to delineate, in its way, that is, in the mapping of those unrealizable convergences in puberty, the impossibility of sexual intercourse, the thesis of Lacan (1985) (Viola, 2016).

Thus, we come to an understanding of the encounter of the object at puberty as an event of the real in the body at that moment, since the lack of sexual intercourse becomes an unavoidable question for one who has to deal with the traumatic dimension of sexuality. Pubertal maturation runs into a logical impossibility: when the subject finally has organic resources for the sexual act, there is an insuperable void, of a logical order, since there is no sexual relation, but a radical dissymmetry between the partners.

With the pubertal awakening, the void by which the subject is constituted imposes itself in an unprecedented way due to a conjunction of factors: the organic real makes the

adolescent body a body bound by the libido, and the outcome of the child references leaves the subject in a momentary vacuum, a drift which will only come out if he/she finds a compass that suits him/her by establishing new bonds. This has compelling implications for some adolescents. Taken by the unpreparedness of the real as a mourning work of lost childhood and its symbolic and affective references, some subjects at this time have the dimension of loss amplified to an unbearable degree. In this sense, it seems fundamental to us to retake the Freudian formulations on the work of mourning.

### **The task of adolescence and the work of mourning**

The treatment of the *jouissance* that overflows in adolescence requires a unique psychic work that each adolescent will have to perform in its crossing towards the adult life, and this does not happen without the alteritary dimension. Freud (2015) relates the psychic work of adolescence to the painful task of separating the family. Adolescence is the passage from the family reference, as a support of the subject in childhood, to the wider social group. In this passage, it is necessary a separation from parental authority for other bonds to be established. The importance of this task for Freud (2015) is made explicit in the following passage:

Disengage from parental authority is one of the most necessary and painful achievements of the growing individual. It is absolutely necessary for him/her to do so, and we can assume that this has been achieved, to some extent, by everyone who has become normal. In fact, the progress of society is based on this opposition between the two generations. On the other hand, there is a class of neurotics whose condition, we perceive, was determined by failure in this task (p. 420).

The experience outside the restricted family nucleus leads the child to realize that parents are not infallible and omnipotent. According to Freud, the child “[...] knows other parents, compares them with its parents, and can thus doubt the unique and incomparable nature that it attributes to them” (2015, p. 420). The separation from the parental pair begins then with the installation of a doubt that leads, little by little, to the certainty of the fallible and faulty nature of the parents. There is thus a first expansion of the parental Other to the social Other. Later, the inconsistency of the Other becomes a central and irrevocable issue for the subject who reaches adolescence, a time of life in which there is a difficult dilemma: addressing the Other, seeking a symbolic reinscription, a place as an adult, already aware of its inconsistency.

The inconsistency of the Other and the presentification of the void in adolescence contribute to the delicacy and instability of that subject's time, so susceptible to subjective hesitation and performance. In these moments of failure of psychic work, the exhaustion of the possibilities of a symbolic treatment of anguish can give way to the suicidal act - attempted or consummated -, which has disconcerting prevalence in adolescence, as indicated by the numerical data presented at the beginning of this article.

To understand this prevalence with the theoretical contribution of psychoanalysis, we start from the Freudian conception of identification as the most primordial form of affective attachment to an object. We have resorted to the elaboration of Freud (2010) on the identification in the work of mourning and its deviation in the melancholic process. We are not concerned here with melancholy as a clinical diagnosis. What we take from this theorization concerns the melancholic mechanism as a failure in mourning work, this being

the psychic task of dealing with loss, with lack, or, in Lacanian terms, with the presentification of object 'a'.

According to Freud, grief requires a psychic work that involves the progressive withdrawal of the libido from the lost object. He stresses the need for time for this task, which "[...] is accomplished little by little" (2010, p. 174), with great demand for time and energy of investment while the existence of the lost object is prolonged in the psyche. In the pathological forms of melancholy, on the other hand, there is a similar psychic work, but there are elements that are not found in mourning. Freud demonstrates that melancholy inner work consumes the self, resulting in inhibition and an "[...] extraordinary downgrading of self-esteem [...]" (p. 175), characterized by "[...] painful self-deprecation" (p. 177). While in mourning the subject elaborates a loss relative to the object, in melancholy, it is a loss in the self. The libido withdrawn from the lost object moves to the self, serving to establish an identification of the self with the lost object. "Thus, the shadow of the object fell on the Self, and from then on it could be judged by a special instance as an object, the object abandoned" (p. 181).

In this "[...] regressive retraction of the libido [...]" (p. 183), which corresponds to "[...] a direct toxic impoverishment of the libido of the Self [...]" (p.186), the loss of the object becomes a loss of the self, at the same time as the Self becomes the object of its own criticism and hostility. Freud explains the act of suicide by this ambivalence inherent in the melancholic disposition. For him, the Self can kill itself by the return of the object investment, "[...] when it is capable of directing against itself the hostility which concerns an object, and which constitutes the original reaction of the Self to objects of the external world" (p. 185).

This theorization about the work of mourning and melancholy is of fundamental importance for our examination of adolescence and its possible operative failures. We can consider that adolescence is also a psychic work in the mold of mourning, insofar as the adolescent subject has to elaborate a loss. Just as in mourning, this operation also requires time and energy for the elaboration of several losses: from the identifications of childhood, from the body of the child, from the place of the family, from the reference of the parental pair, among many others. Moreover, the need for 'support' and 'protection' and the right to time to take time in the elaboration of difficulties, an essential element in the work of mourning, is precisely what Freud (1996a, p. 243-244) emphasizes in his reflection on the suicide of adolescents.

Puberty puts the subject before an object that is an emptiness, in the face of the lack - ultimately, the lack of meaning, the constitutive non-knowing in the face of sex. In view of this, we can reflect on the faults that occur in the adolescent passage from the idea of an identification to the object *a*, to the emptiness that is made present at that moment, that can lead to a passage to the act, even to the most radical of all, the suicide.

## **The narratives of suicide in Brazilian songs**

A frequent departure from the impasses of adolescence is the horizontal identification of peer groups, which can sometimes act as the stage for the psychic work needed at that time. This function is well pointed out by Winnicott (1980) in his definition of the social groups of adolescents as a transitional space between the family and the wider community. In this sense, identification with a group is especially important at this moment of transition. Frequently, belonging to these groups is conditional on the sharing of certain experiences, certain marks, or common jouissance. In this context, the exchange of musical narratives and the linking of bodies through music are of great importance, which leads us to some

songs that approach the subject of suicide in youth and find great repercussion and resonance in the groups of adolescents. We are interested here to reflect on the scope of these narratives for certain subjects who find themselves in limit-situations of failure in the psychic work of adolescence.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Legião Urbana was a Brazilian band that received the title of youth spokesman for its special ability to express the anguish and impasses of this phase of life, having contributed in pop culture to the reflection on the contemporary youth and its complex and conflictual relationship with otherness. We can mention some movements of dialogue between the psychoanalytic theory and the songs of Legião Urbana, like Teixeira and Moreira (2017) and Santos (2017). Following this dialogue, we highlight two songs that explicitly deal with the subject of suicide in adolescence or youth: 'Clarisse' (1997) and 'Pais e Filhos' (1989).

'Clarisse' (Russo et al., 1997), a controversial song in its time, does not tell the death of the protagonist, but mentions that 'one of her friends is gone'. It describes the teenager's flirtation with her own destruction and her feeling about "[...] the strange essence of what is death [...]": "[...] lying in the corner, her ankles bleed [...] when she cuts herself, she forgets that it is impossible to have from life calm and strength". 'Pais e filhos' (Villa Lobos, Russo, & Bonfá, 1989), in turn, explicitly exposes the subject of death by means of narrated suicide: "[...] she threw herself from the window of the fifth floor, nothing is easy to understand".

In these songs, it is thematized the impossibility of entanglement with life, either by the inexorable condition of death or by the paradoxical pursuit of becoming a bond by rupture. In general, they are attempts to reflect on how death goes through lives and how, at times, to become entangled with life is no longer possible. In the lyrics of the songs and their intonations, mention is made of the sadness arising from the inevitable finitude, so that certain affections are incorporated: "[...] the feelings associated with them seem to revive in the voice and interpretation of the one who sings" (Tatit, 2014, p. 375). Thus, the songs show human affections and complexities pertinent to the condition of subject, not always said, but that find in the musical works a socially shareable destiny.

Establishing a dialogue between song lyrics and psychoanalysis is a great challenge, especially because of the infinite possibilities of interpretations, but it is anchored on the assumption that "[...] both [psychoanalysis and songs] closely follow the complexity of the human condition in their desires, their passions, their stumbling and their outcomes, trying to get closer to the unconscious, in its enigmatic, strange, obscure and even impossible side to understand" (Saliba, 2013, p. 77).

The character of 'Clarisse' and the girl who 'throws herself from the window of the fifth floor' are adolescents who, after childhood, walk a path towards the adult universe. Clarisse, either 'locked in her room', or 'locked in the bathroom', oscillates between pain and 'her records, her books and her tiredness', trying to be 'strong every morning'. At age 14, she feels misunderstood, 'feels the strange essence of what death is', is subjected to antidepressants and tranquilizers and has to deal with the death of a friend. 'Clarisse' not only tells the story of a teenager who demands help, but is also sung in a funeral tone, with a rather morbid rhythm, emphasizing that the lyrical self feels 'tired, vilified, misunderstood and discarded':

Lack of hope and the torment  
Of knowing that nothing is fair and little is right  
That we're destroying the future  
And that wickedness is always around here  
The violence and injustice that exists

Against all girls and women  
 A world where truth is the reverse  
 And joy no longer has an address

For Clarisse, the world is threatening, unjust and uncertain. The only sentence the narrative repeats is 'Clarisse is locked'. Whether in the bedroom or in the bathroom, try to distance herself from this hopeless world. The repetition of the verb to lock in suggests that Clarisse herself locks up, although it allows one to think whether it is not the very adversities of the world that isolate her, leaving her in a passive position that does not allow movements or reactions:

I'm a bird  
 They lock me in the cage  
 And they expect me to sing like before  
 I'm a bird  
 They lock me in the cage

The keynote of 'Clarisse', especially when says that 'they expect me to sing like before' and soon after discovering a 'world where truth is the reverse and joy no longer has address', refers us to the work of mourning necessary in the adolescence, in which the presentification of the fault imposes itself and the subject has to deal with the separation from the family and the fading of the references of the childhood.

Unlike 'Clarisse', in 'Pais e filhos', the adolescent is not named, although the question of name is recurrent in the song: 'My son will have the name of a saint. I want the most beautiful name'. The not named adolescent who now points to the finitude of the living leads to reflection on other modes of life continuity. The name inserts the subject in the symbolic order, enabling it to achieve a meaning and direction, even if symptomatic, about the essence of the character. In the case of 'Clarisse', the name, whose meaning is related to 'bright', 'luminous', 'illustrious', ironically names an anguished and erased teenager, characterized by lack of movement, passivity in front of the psychic work that adolescence demands. Clarisse has:

dreams that are sad and inert  
 like an immobile hourglass  
 does not move, does not move,  
 does not work.

Another topic of acute gravity and prevalence in adolescence also addressed in this song is the act of cutting itself off. Clarisse 'makes marks on her body with her little knife'. It is difficult to predict the extent to which self-punishment through cutting, as Clarisse does, will in fact pass into the act of suicide. In any case, the narrative in the first-person singular indicates an attempt to take the word, signaling the possibility of elaborating the anguish, although it overflows in some moments, taking the girl to the act of cutting herself.

These two songs then suggest distinct subjective responses on the part of the characters. If in 'Clarisse' we can still glimpse an attempt to elaborate, the adolescent of 'Pais e Filhos', reduced to a 'drop of water', to a 'grain of sand', no longer resorts to the word and throws herself out of the window.

On 'Pais e Filhos', Renato Russo points out that "[...] this song is about suicide. It is very, very serious [...] It is about a girl who has problems with her parents, she threw herself from the fifth-floor window, and there is no tomorrow" (Russo apud Assad, 2000, p. 190). This song highlights parental figures and the psychic work of affective separation from these instances: "You tell me that your parents do not understand/But you do not understand your parents/You blame your parents for everything [...]". The search for the understanding of the

parents concomitantly with the movement of estrangement from them, in one of the major ambivalences characteristic of adolescence, the attempt to give consistency to the parental Other.

Even presenting different subjective responses on the part of their characters, 'Clarisse' and 'Pais e Filhos' have in common the theme of self-destruction. The psyche of the adolescent, in an attempt to respond to the excessive *jouissance* imposed by puberty, may resort to the act as a last resort in the face of excessive anguish. The subject can perform an act of violence sometimes directed at itself, sometimes at the other. Whether it is through actions directed at the other, whether by calling one's own body, with cuts or with death, one can see in these cases an impossibility of symbolic treatment of the real that presents itself.

As a representative of the narratives about suicide in youth in the decade of 2010, we chose the song 'Asbestos' (Navarro et al., 2014), from the well-known Brazilian band Supercombo, of great repercussion among adolescents on the Internet, reaching millions of views on YouTube. Its lyrics is like this:

Girl, get off the balcony.  
You're too young to play dying.  
Tell me what is going on, what did life do this time?  
Come on down  
Let me take you to a coffee, to talk.  
Hear you  
And try to convince you  
That life is like mother  
Who makes dinner and obliges children to eat vegetables  
Because she knows it's good  
And death is like father  
Who beats mother and steals children's pleasure to play  
Like there's no tomorrow  
Girl, do not look down.  
It's very high there.  
For you to throw yourself  
I'll listen to you  
And try to convince you  
(We're programmed to fall)  
That life is like mother  
Who makes dinner and obliges children to eat vegetables  
Because she knows it's good  
And death is like father  
Who beats mother and steals children's pleasure to play  
Like there's no tomorrow  
But, okay, we're not always at the best  
Boy, no one is made of iron.  
We are programmed to fall

Despite the temporal and generational difference in relation to the songs of the Legião Urbana, it is noted that the elements that cross the anguish of adolescents are also evoked in this narrative directed to the YouTube generation. The emphasis is on the fall of bodies, 'programmed to fall', which we can associate with the presentiment of the lack and the mourning of lost objects. The relationship with the parents is also approached in an acidic

way, signaling the affective ambivalence that takes an unbearable dimension at that moment.

These narrative forms have in common the ability to sing the pungent anguish of adolescence, outlining the deadly way out of suicide by word. As a novelty, the contemporary song finds a possibility of unprecedented dissemination among its listeners. The official video of 'Asbestos' on YouTube, for example, has today more than 19 million views. At a time when adolescents are highly concerned about suicide, such as we recently witnessed with the phenomenon of the 'Blue Whale'<sup>6</sup> suicide game, largely reverberated in 2017, the reach of tens of millions of listeners by a song which speaks of the suicide of a young woman is no small thing.

## Final considerations

The psychic work that the adolescent passage requires is not done without the Other. The young person must establish new affective ties at this time when the symbolic references of childhood lose much of their efficacy, no longer operating as an ideal and losing their authority. Identifying to a horizontal group of pairs often functions in this vacuum and can have interesting effects on the construction of their own outputs, which are unique to each subject but do not lose their dimension of linkage to a collective. The different forms of artistic expression occupy an essential place in the functioning of these identifications. With the reading of some songs that have as their central theme suicide in adolescence, we perceive the power of certain narratives as instruments of help in this process of establishing an identification loop and elaboration of several losses that constitutes the process of subjective updating necessary for the adolescent.

The narratives operate precisely because of their ability to transmit shared experiences, which pass through the bodies of the subjects involved, contributing to the production and multiplication of new senses. According to Gurski and Pereira (2016), "[...] narrative, by circulating the word, stories and their versions, enables the production of polysemy, which makes the senses more flexible and creates conditions for the production of enunciations" (p. 438). Thus, the narrative form of the song can be an instrument of great value in the psychic work of adolescence, operating as a symbolic supplement in the mooring of the paired groups and in the composition of statements.

If in adolescence, the subject tends to come across moments of subjective hesitation in which the emptiness of meaning is present and the loss of the object imposes itself as irreparable, the sharing of narratives that mirror this limit-experience can act as an opening to polysemy, allowing the displacement of the subject from a fixation at a point of lack of meaning, through a bond with other subjects who experience the same dilemmas. Besides the words narrated, there is still the sound dimension of the song. Music, with its rhythm, its timbres, harmonies and tones, intensely affects the body. Young people make an unparalleled use of this aesthetic experience in bodies, usually in a shared way, in dance and other pleasurable encounters that listening to music causes. Thus, identification through the songs can give a treatment to the anguish, when making edge, to gird up the excessive drive that goes out of the body, avoiding the passage to the act.

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<sup>6</sup> The game "Blue Whale" was a phenomenon spread worldwide by social networks among children and adolescents in 2017, and is supposed to be linked to an increase in the number of suicides in these age groups. This is a series of 50 challenges whose ultimate goal is the player's suicide (Berdinelli & Martín, 2017).

However, we know the limits of this effectiveness. Suicidal narratives often have an extremely harmful effect, failing as an edge and potentiating anguish. In these cases, identification does not promote bond with the group, but rather with deadly jouissance, and can lead to the worst, as we see happen in several recent phenomena around stories about death shared by adolescents, such as the infamous episode with worldwide repercussions of the 'Blue Whale'. In the same way, suicide songs can also echo pain in a damaging way on certain subjects in limit-situations. Considering the singular of each case, we consider that the structural particularities of a subject and the contingencies present in each life history will be determining factors in the scope or limitations of musical narratives in adolescence. In this sense, in addition to "[...] loving people as if there were no tomorrow [...]", we must consider the possibility that such a tomorrow will be so frightening for a significant part of the subjects, especially adolescents, who, as stated by Calligaris (2000), by looking for a mirror to contemplate a future reference, teenagers will often come across only their own image.

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Received: Apr. 03, 2018  
Approved: Aug. 14, 2018

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