

# THE EMPTINESS OF THE DISCOURSE IN *L'ATTENTE L'OUBLI*: LABIRINTHS THAT MIGHT LEAD TO THE “COMMUNICATION”

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■ **ABSTRACT:** This paper aims at observing the progression of the dialogues in *L'attente l'oubli*, a novella written by Maurice Blanchot. The characters in *L'attente l'oubli* are closed in an ever-changing identity and the book shows, through their anguish, the circular routes around which our thoughts revolve, inhibiting us to live the moment where otherness may occur, mainly in a dialogue. The pointlessness of this experience can be attested by the extent to which fantasies, memories and obsessions may develop into “phantoms” that block the individual’s access to “the other”. This paper is informed by an article from Jean-Luc Nancy’s book *La pensée dérobée*, which will be of fundamental importance to the process of understanding what “communication” might really be.

■ **KEYWORDS:** Communication. Otherness. Interstice. Emptiness. Thought. Impossibility. Outside.

This paper has, as its main objective, the observation on the progression of the dialogues in *L'attente l'oubli*, a novel written by Maurice Blanchot. This text brought me about a few inquietudes that appeared under a pungent shape reflecting an inner suffering. This uneasiness will be solved at least partially by an article signed by Jean-Luc Nancy and inserted in his book *La pensée dérobée*, which will be of a fundamental importance to understand what the process of “communication”<sup>2</sup> that Blanchot wanted to silently investigate in his novel really was.

*L'attente l'oubli* presents a non-linear narrative in which the author writes in a fragmented way and offers us an interesting investigation as well as a demonstration of how a fragmentary scripture may not only define styles, but also make possible a work of self reflection to the reader. In the case of the book now being studied, the fragments that come one after the other, dialogue after dialogue, reach the

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<sup>2</sup> O termo “comunicação” é frequentemente encontrado na obra crítica de Georges Bataille e Jean-Luc Nancy com a acepção de um termo oposto ao significado de “discurso”. Em suma, “comunicação” para estes autores franceses é tudo que não esteja submetido ao processo hegeliano da “dialética” a qual focaliza sua atenção na luta dos opostos. Já a “comunicação” visa a aceitação do que é oposto e diferente. É na esteira desta visão de Bataille e Nancy que desenvolvo este texto.

power of multiplying the ways by which an answer within the narrative may be obtained “[...] as a junction of different options of decisions that can have different significations [...]”, as said by Blanchot (1971, p.113). It is evident to the reader that the author has no interest, whatsoever, of showing these fragments as if he would be elaborating a Hollywood’s type of novel’s plot. The intention of the author is to be out of any context.

The narrative presents a female voice which is neither heard, nor understood, and demonstrates some fragility. On the other hand, the narrator/character exhibiting a more powerful voice also seems to demonstrate some insecurity, fear and a kind of moral instability, provided that his questions always seem to culminate in a supplication. It seems as if he had the necessity to hear from the other voice the sound of the vitality, because, despite of an apparent desistance, his great desire, as a matter of fact, is – on our way of seeing it –, to think along the feminine character, a happening that can be noticed between the lines of the text, and would give him pleasure.

We observe that the amount of the words that the characters of *L’attente l’oubli* used to mention in a debate or argument were originated from the arsenal of knowledge stored in their minds. It becomes clear to understand that even if a larger quantity of terms were produced by the characters’ organs of speech it could not solve the problem of the “understanding” that intrigues the narrator/character, who would like to be in a relation where this “understanding” with the feminine character would occur through a moment where it would be possible to perceive a new saying, that would come from an instance of “a yet virgin self” – and this, in Blanchot’s terminology, shall be considered as the “dehors”, i.e., the emptiness.

The individuals in *L’attente l’oubli* are closed in a wavering identity and the text shows, through the anguish of its characters, the circular routes in which our thoughts find themselves, inhibiting us to live the moment where alterity may occur. The experience, to which a man shall arrive, is pointless due to the fact that the limits of the understanding, the fantasies, the memories and the obsessions cultivated happen to develop as phantoms that block the access to “the other”.

All the narrative conducts us to the conclusion that Blanchot’s characters are longing to give a better sense to their words. Nevertheless, they demonstrate dispersion in their dialogues and let it evident that their conversations have no space for the different. For this reason I ask myself if the characters in *L’attente l’oubli* are feeling what they think, and speaking what they think they feel. It is an obvious remark because It is not difficult to notice in *L’attente l’oubli* the existence of an explicit unfruitful atmosphere exhaling what is null, since what they say results in nothing. We should ask to ourselves if this filth situation we have noticed in the characters’ life happens in our daily lives. I say to myself that Blanchot probably would love to feel the interest of the readers in formulating questions like

these upon *L'attente l'oubli*. So much so that here I go...questioning: What to do in order to change this perspective? The dialogues in *L'attente l'oubli* show that there is a part of us that is apart from a new way of thinking that we should come to elaborate sooner or later. Nevertheless, it is evident in a few dialogues that despite the difficulty there is a perception that something new can be established within these secular habits, even if momentarily. Let us take a look at the citation below:

*Leurs paroles ne s'égalent pas encore, même si elles disent ce qui les rapporte également l'une à l'autre. Comme si elles cherchaient les niveaux ou, parole égales, elles laisseraient s'établir entre elles l'égalité silencieuse, celle qui se fait jour à la fin. Parole de sable, rumeur de vent. – Est-ce que cela arrive? – Non, cela n'arrive pas. – Quelque chose vient cependant. (BLANCHOT, 1962, p.114-115).*

This way we can understand that the word – which is repeated in the interior of the characters of *L'attente l'oubli* –, seems to fulfill their inter spaces, multiplying themselves in an unlimited discontinuity of words, not reaching “communication”, corresponding only to the speeches or monologues. The characters of Blanchot's book could not reach a “communication” (like desired by the narrator/character), due to the fact that there were no free flow of new thoughts. To be exposed to the emptiness of the thoughts is the path to the spiral movement, to the “happening” – and it did not matter if it was disastrous or wonderful but, instead of this perspective, an exiguity of the human being's old habits was necessary.

*– Je ne désire pas le savoir. Je désire que vous me le disiez pour n'avoir pas à le savoir.*

*– Non, non, pas cela.*

*Il savait, et il lui semblait qu'elle savait, qu'il y avait quelque part ici comme un vide. S'il s'interrogeait, avec cette patience qui réussissait à écarter sans violence les notions étrangères, il n'hésitait pas à conclure que le vide se trouvait à un endroit qu'il aurait pu situer, s'il avait été capable d'y appliquer plus sérieusement son esprit [...]*

*(BLANCHOT, 1962, p.25).*

During the development of the narrative occurs a movement of opposite powers, almost like a “coming and going” or – if we recall Blake –, the good and the bad holding hands; a movement that can be observed through the agitation of the words, the repetition of the words, and even through the rhythm of the refrain “*Est-ce que cela arrive?*”, “*Est-ce que cela arrive?*”, “*Non, non, n'arrive pas...*”, repeating itself synchronically along the pages of the text, also representing the ephemeral on the possibility of the happening of the “nous”. “*Agitation de parole nullement confuse, – et quand elle se tait elle ne se tait pas: je pouvais m'en*

*distinguer, seulement l'entendre tout en m'entendant en elle, immense parole qui disait toujours 'Nous'.*" (BLANCHOT, 1957, p.112).

Just as an illustration, in the notes of the book *Le dernier homme*, another signature of Blanchot – published in 1957 –, it is possible to notice that the characters question one another among themselves “what does one represent to the other”, or “what does one looks for in the other”, coming to the conclusion that they are looking for the “nous” that should hold them together, but knowing that this possibility does not occur most of the time because one gets lost from the other. “*Ce 'nous' qui nous tient ensemble et où nous ne sommes ni l'un ni l'autre*” (BLANCHOT, 1957, p.46), as said by Blanchot in *Le dernier homme*, will bring us to conclude that no one lives effectively of this “nous” and, even when being “there”, a question may happen such as “where am I, where is the other?”

The characters of *L'attente l'oubli* represent the loosening to the signification and show – through the trial of organizing the unfinished sentences –, that from sentence to sentence, in a sub-repetitious moment, may occur a breach capable of insinuating a glimpse of transcendence that [I notice] may be the moment of the “happening” or the moment of the “nous”. Blanchot has always suggested in an ineffable form, that all of us are absorbed by the interior of the things and he used to state that people let the beautiful “emptiness” of what is out of this thinking habit to go away unnoticed. It is easily observed in a few fragments of *L'attente l'oubli* that the “dehors” in Blanchot’s way of viewing things, appears in a distance or breach where the air penetrates narrowly and painfully in the restrained space of the narrative, although this “hiatus of plenitude” that happens in emptiness of the individual” is sensed in a brief instant and then immediately closed.

*Il ne put s'empêcher, tandis qu'il réunissait les feuillets - et maintenant elle se surveillait d'un regard curieux - de se sentir lié à elle par cet échec. Il ne comprenait pas bien pourquoi. Il l'avait comme touché à travers le vide, il l'avait vue in instant. Quand? Tout à l'heure. Il avait vu qui elle était. Cela ne l'encourageait pas, cela mettrait plutôt le point final a tout.* (BLANCHOT, 1962, p.9-10).

In spite of the narrator/character of *L'attente l'oubli* be looking for his answers in the “tu” or the “je”, it is interesting to return once more to *Le dernier homme*, where Blanchot had already said that “the target of the search is not in the ‘tu’, nor in the ‘je’, but in any direction towards the sea.” (BLANCHOT, 1962. p.56). The French writer had already recognized by then that the bases of this search were established outside the individual. The Infinity for the French writer was impossible to nominate and would not exist in a dialectical order.

Blanchot’s book leads the reader to contact his inner walls, induces him to perceive how his communication with himself and the other is, and makes him ask

about his compromise with the other and with himself. A question is launched: – is it possible that our language would be invested of an action capable to produce the communication we want, i.e., communication with what is not identical to us or to our knowledge?

To visualize the experience of the “*nous*” became our main objective during the first glance at *L'attente l'oubli*. Therefore, we were led to read a text signed by Jean-Luc Nancy called “*Répondre du Sens*”<sup>3</sup>, where the author clears our mind stating that the act of communicating is possible. Nancy teaches us his formula of how to be in touch with the other. This process the French author calls the “re-sending”, which occurs with the stimulation of the “sense” – the author says that it can never be found by itself, but in an “être-en-commun”, which means this “re-sending”.

It is fundamental to make clear that for Nancy the concept of “feeling what is being felt” is linked to the notion of “what can be shared”; and it is a “*pouvoir comprendre*”, extremely necessary for the transition “one to another”, different from the relation “one and other”. To the French writer we **cannot** be held only by – a “*je*” or a “*tu*”–, for they alone cannot hear the senses that are produced by themselves. As observed in the characters of *L'attente l'oubli*, the act of staying in a passive attitude waiting until the other does or says anything is of no effect as well, because it is a solitary act. It is necessary to the individual to become understood, and this is what Nancy’s text indicates. “*Répondre du Sens*” does not speak about “*je*” and “*tu*” as losers on the possibility of the “*nous*”. On the other hand, the text points out to what the author calls “the feeling which is being felt”, or on Bataille’s terminology “the community of the equals”. It is necessary to be understood that the one who is willing to communicate needs to enlarge, or to amplify himself, attitudes that allow Nancy’s proposal to come true. In this favorable mood there is the possibility of the “*mise en sympathie*”, or the relation of voice to voice, in accordance to Nancy, where the sense can resound, and a sharing moment be possible to happen, as we can observe in the quotation below: “*Les sens est lui-même formé et défini par l’espacement interne de son renvoi et tout d’abord de l’envoi par lequel il se destine et il se désire lui-même comme une réponse à son propre envoi.*”(NANCY, 2001, p.172).

Through the help of this article signed by Nancy the hesitations we noticed were alive in the characters from *L'attente l'oubli*, they may be minimized by the French author’s point of view, for in “*Répondre du Sens*”, the “*nous*” is enclosed not in the solitary relation of “*je*” and “*tu*”, where there is no contact at all, but in a

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<sup>3</sup> In this text Nancy (2001, p.42) analyzes the “community”, observing that the thinking is “masqueraded”, or even “dissimulated”, inhibiting the “to be among the equals”; a thinking about community that was dreamt so much by George Bataille.

perspective of exchanging singularities, where “je” plus “tu” lose their senses and their differences will be the strength able to share.

*En ce sens, nous ne sommes jamais, chacun l'un (et) à cote de l'autre, que des point singuliers le long d'un envoi general que le sens fait de lui-même vers lui-même et qui commence et qui se perd très en deça et très au delà de nous, dans la totalité indéfiniment ouverte du monde. Mais en même temps, ces points singuliers que nous sommes (ou le plusieurs points singuliers qui s'égrènent sous chaque identité individuelle ou collective), sont eux-mêmes la structure nécessairement discrète ou discontinue de l'espacement general au sein duquel le sens peut résonner, c'est à dire se répondre. (NANCY, 2001, p.172-173).*

“Répondre du Sens” comes to demonstrate that where *singularités* and *différences* are found, there may occur proximity. Nancy considers that these possibilities are obvious because of the exaltation of the “*vouloir dire*” and the “*vouloir comprendre*”, the passport of the possibility of the “sending” and “re-sending”, questions and answers, i.e., the capability and accessibility to what we may call a sincere interest referring to the other, not only mere curiosity. Sensibility is activated. This is the moment of “communication”, i.e., time for the perception of a “creative harmony” of possibilities that are beneath and beyond the inactive and closed “je” and “tu”.

*Il lui faudrait s'entendre et pour s'entendre il lui faudrait s'être appelé et pour s'appeler il lui faudrait pouvoir résonner - et enfin pour résonner il lui faudrait en tout premier lieu, offrir en lui-même l'espace. L'intervalle ou l'espacement, l'ouverture qui est la condition de possibilité d'une résonance, puisque celle-ci demande un rapport de vibration à vibration [...] Mais la résonance telle qu'il faut l'entendre ici n'est pas seulement le rapport entre deux orders sonores distincts: elle forme tout d'abord la sonorité en elle-même. La sonorité se définit précisément par ceci que "en elle-même" elle est en espacement d'elle-même [...].*

(NANCY, 2001, p.172).

In *L'attente l'oubli* it is possible to see that the Humanity frequently goes on living in a circle, inside which people go back-and-forth without finding an opening door. Everyone insists on repeating the same things, circulating in a tasteless intermittence, since the practice of new movements, or to venture to think differently might cause pain, be tiresome and deviating. Therefore one refuses to change the route and make the option for what is already known. Nancy's text supplies us with elements that shake the logo-centric order of the thoughts, for the French author invites us, provokes us and induces the reader to perceive how to listen to the call, how to deviate himself and to listen the chant of the “*dehors*”. The lesson is to be the authority that is plenty of responsibility with “*tout autre*”.

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- **RESUMO:** *Este artigo tem como seu principal objetivo observar o progresso dos diálogos em L'attente l'oubli, novela escrita por Maurice Blanchot ícone literário, que atravessa com sua literatura questionadora todo o século XX. Este texto mencionado trouxe à tona algumas inquietudes que para mim surgiram de uma forma pungente apontando um certo incômodo interno. Os personagens em L'attente l'oubli estão fechados numa identidade bastante movediça, e o livro expõe através da angústia destes indivíduos as rotas circulares que os seres humanos em geral se encontram, ficando inibidos assim de viver o momento onde a manifestação do outro num diálogo, fato importante, seja renegada. Esta experiência na qual o homem chega é sem sentido, devido ao fato de que os limites do entendimento devido às vivências de fantasias, memória e obsessões cultivadas que terminam por instaurar fantasmas que bloqueiam o acesso ao "outro". Este artigo tem como foco de pesquisa e suporte um texto de Jean-Luc Nancy de seu livro *La pensée dérobée*, o qual será de fundamental importância para o processo de compreensão do que comunicação pode realmente ser.*
- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Comunicação. Outro. Vazio. Interstício. Pensamento. Impossibilidade. Fora.*

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