Borders of Poetic Self Construction: Dialogues between Cultural Psychology and Performing Arts
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This article aims to discuss notions and processes related to Performing Arts, regarding the creative work of the actor. The boundaries between reality and imagination, present in the artistic phenomenon, guided our focus on the construction of meaning out of the intrasubjective flow, observing how imagination and perception are creatively articulated in the personal reading of reality. The acting experience can promote reformulations and redefinitions in a person's relationship with themselves and in their forms of social and cultural interactions. The theoretical support was sustained on a dialogue between precursory propositions of Lev Semanovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), whose contemporary developments bring us closer to a semiotic-cultural constructivist psychology. We argue that human action is structured by symbolic images of aesthetic synthesis that emerge throughout time and that result from the elaboration of their experiences in the world. This study addresses how the various layers that constitute the self (intrapersonal alterities) are in dialogue; we argue that the space of aesthetic construction of reality is precisely the border between these layers.

> *"[...] that without breaking character, they can control their attitude and analyze its different parts. [...] The actor lives, laughs and cries on the scene, but at the same time they do not stop observing their laughter and tears. Precisely this double function, this balance between life and performance, is art."*(Stanislavski, 1997, p. 322).

In the Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process, Stanislavski recognized that actors are experts in "unfolding" themselves, because they are trained to enlarge their self-control. The balance between life and performance is inherent to the practice of those who work with the theater. When creating a character, the artist is faced with internal borders, that is, within the limits of their profession they are invited to create an internal other from their sensibility and imagination. The exact place in which such intrapersonal otherness is born is the fine line that separates the real from the imagined, the subject from the character, the creator from their creation. Therefore, it is common for the discussion concerning the possible mixture between the actor and the character to emerge in certain artistic processes. The borders that separate overlap the borders that unite them. From a reflection on the actor's work, this paper discusses the relevance of aesthetic apprehension in interactive processes and in the personal construction of

meaning. The notions of "distancing oneself" and the "magic-if" (imagination) will be focused in a proposed dialogue between ideas from the Russian playwright Constantin Stanislavski and the Russian psychologist Lev Semyonovitch Vygotsky, two references in their fields who were contemporaries and mutually fueled each other's research and theories. Vygotsky (1990), on one hand, argued that artistic expression is an intrinsic human need, a means to positively express emotions and feelings like anxiety, aggression, fear, anger, and anguish. Artistic activities can be elaborated to improve someone's possibility of knowing others and themselves, creating conditions for reflection on their own attitudes and change in social life. Stanislavski (1997, 2007), on the other hand, produced a performance system consisting of a series of procedures developed for the actor and actress in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth. The System, as it is called, is one of the main systematizations in the history of theater addressing the actor's practice. His legacy is present in the work of major contemporary scenic directors. Approaching selected ideas from these two classic authors in their fields of investigation from the theoretical framework of semiotic-cultural constructivist psychology, we propose some considerations on the articulation between multiple perceptions and imagination in the aesthetic organization of lived experiences.

THE IMAGINARY AND BORDERS WITHIN THE SELF

Stanislavski (1997, 2007) believed in the power of imaginary circumstances to help the actor in their emotional access to the *depths of the soul* of the character. In order to trigger unconscious pictures in the actor's mind, Stanislavski created a semiotic resource called the *Magic If*: assuming actors must face the imaginary creation as if it were true, they must put themselves in the situation of a real inner activity. This resource proposes the use of imagination as an operator to connect the actor to the *artistic form*, deviating from *reality* or, at least, from *quotidian reality*. Thus, such artistic phenomenon allows the investigation of the boundaries between the real and the imaginary as interdependent fluxes in the construction of new realities. Stanislavski suggested that actors should make themselves the following question: "What would I do if the creation of my imagination became real?" (Stanislavski, p. 97). Invited to consider this matter, the artist's work on stage multiplies their existential limits, opening possibilities for new artistic creation. Imagination is, therefore, an essential element in the creative process of the actor. Working with their emotional memory, the capacity of believing in the circumstances given by the scene is indispensable; it guides the construction of the internal justification for actions and helps explicit certain reminiscences that are articulated to feelings and sensations which have been experienced by the actor. Just as the visual memory is able to reconstruct images in the Self, the memory of emotions is a relevant device for the actor as well. Stanislavski believed that this kind of memory allows the re-appropriation of emotions previously experienced by the actor, as a psychological and corporeal resource. The memory of emotions is integrated with psychophysical aspects:

"It seemed to us we had discovered the "magic word" (...) it was enough to pronounce the word "if" for matters to solve themselves as if by magic. [...] The "if" is a lever for the artists; it moves us from reality to the only universe in which creation can take

place. [...] The secret of the power of the "if" lies in the fact that it does not speak of the real deed, of what is, but of what can be ... "If it happened" [...] Therefore, to give rise to the authentic truth and reproduce it on the scene, one must move a kind of inner lever and transfer oneself to the plane of imaginary life. Then you create your own fiction similar to reality. [...] The truth in life is what we call the truth that does not really exist, but that could exist." (Stanislavski, 1997, pp.62-65).

The dynamic boundary between the actor and the character makes the intrasubjective multiplicity of a person evident, showing that unknown others are also residing within us. The creative game is, then, a process of multiplication of the Self. The search for something that is absent, in this sense, also appears in the borders of the Self and its interdependent situation in the world, that is, between the activity of the Self controlling the creative process and its powerlessness in relation to what emerges unexpectedly in the creative process, in its relation with others and the world. There is a border between what the Self already knows and what surprises it, rupturing previous expectations. The construction of the scene fragments the psychophysical unity of the acts that are performed in life spontaneously, its logic and coherence, as they have a reason, a foundation. To deal with fictitious situations in circumstances given by the author and the "magical if", spontaneity tends to become false, conventional. Therefore, each actor must create the proper logic and coherence for their performance on the scene, considering the necessity of each action to accomplish each goal. Thus, imagination can be considered an important element for achieving a specific body condition, articulating the physical and the mental in an emotion that forms a totality, including its implementation on the actor's body.

The assumptions raised by Stanislavski are also the principles of the work proposed in the Theatrical Research Center / CPT[1], coordinated by Brazilian director Antunes Filho. Antunes Filho belongs to the first generation of modern Brazilian Theater directors. He achieved international recognition in 1978, with the theatrical adaptation of the literary rhapsody *Macunaíma*, by Mário de Andrade (1928). Antunes Filho presented the spectacle in about 20 countries, always receiving qualified praise critics and applause from the audience. During the process of adaptation and creation of *Macunaíma*, Antunes Filho began to systematize a series of technical resources for the actor, that he continued building during the next 25 years. Body and voice exercises were elaborated based on the study of ancient theater schools, seeking to adapt classic techniques to the cultural and environmental reality of the Brazilian actor.

Discussing the border between the actor and the character, Antunes Filho (2010) introduced the notion of "distancing oneself" in the dynamic aesthetic perception as part of the artistic phenomenon. He focused on the "dual identity" experienced by the actor when constructing the scene. They should observe their creation from an external position, always keeping their distance from the character. This proposal developed in CPT addresses the existence of a "space"

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[1] The Theatrical Research Centre, coordinated by Antunes Filho, is contemporarily considered the core of theatrical research in Latin America.

between the actor's Self and the creation (their character). There is then the need to understand the meaningful layers in the friction of the existing, present or absent, multiplicity within the Self, which takes shape due to the imaginary construction in the scenic universe.

"It is exactly this attitude of a skilled player that prevents the actor from being "taken and blinded", allowing them to "handle well their puppet" (the character, or the audience). Moreover, it is only at this high level of thinking that the actor may positively deviate from the audience whilst retaining full and wide vision of the whole set, of its unity. They see everything and dominate everything, the audience, the other, the environment and themselves ".(Milaré, 2010, p.64).

The actor's experience necessarily articulates embodied affects in the reconfiguration of the environment, defined as an emergent reality that is interdependently built by the multiplicity of someone's Self and the multiplicity of the selves of the others that are embodied out of the actor's affective body. The actor needs to study the interdependence of the multiple Borders, experiencing the remoteness of his/her selves in the scene. This study allows the establishment of an artistic reality, in which the actor participates in the imaginative creation. Antunes Filho (2010) insists that the capacity of distancing oneself is relevant for believing in other realities, "when withdrawn, the actor has other realities within himself" (Milaré, 1994, p.72).

DISTANCING ONESELF, IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY

In the creative process, imagination and realistic thinking are intertwined and work together. Distancing oneself from a certain reality undertaken by personal imagination enables an imaginative-cognitive integration in the construction of the scene and the construction of the self: "for the imagination the direction of consciousness is important. This consists in distancing oneself from reality in a relatively autonomous activity of consciousness which differs itself from the immediate cognition of reality" (Vygotsky, 1934/2001, p. 437). Imagination and reality are intertwined, because imagination uses elements from the lived experience for its creation: "It would be a miracle if imagination could create something out of nothing (...)" (Vygotsky 1990, p.16). Even if we would imagine oneself fully distanced from the real experience, that would on one hand allow creating something absolutely new, it probably implies, at the same time, losing co-participation in the reality shared with the others. Therefore, the fine measure of artistic creation depends on the simultaneous emergence of something that is absent in the lived experience and the presence of something renewed. It is a sort of game where an inclusive border is privileged; the border that connects the movement of distancing oneself from reality and the presence in the current situation is the propellant engine of the creative process. Without his/her body experiences, the actor becomes inexpressive. The creative elaboration of the experience is, then, an imaginative-cognitive process. The actors need to put themselves in a state of *wakefulness* in which the creation can be held and shaped, gaining an appearance to the sensible world. "It's just at this high level of thinking [...] They see everything and dominate everything, the audience, the other, the

environment, and themselves" (Milaré, 2010, p.91). The actor needs to create a crystallized fantasy, connecting imagination and reality in a novel, creative way, addressing the full and concrete truth, because every new discovery is a crystallized imagination.

Imagination and creative activity are processes that are present in daily life connected to the perception of reality, as a fuel for the human-constructed world. It is a sort of device that one uses to get in touch with the surrounding reality in order to know it, that is, give it a meaningful shape. "All objects of daily life, not excluding the most simple and common, are something like a crystallized fantasy" (Vygotsky 1990, p.10). Therefore, it is not a special capacity belonging only to artists.

"In the life that surrounds us every day there are all the necessary premises for creating, and all that exceeds the scope of routine, enclosing even a minimal particle of novelty, stems from the creative process of human beings". (Vygotsky, 1990, p.11).

In the imaginative process the embodied personal memories are also subject to reformulations, thus re-signifying reality and creating new settings. The person and the world are then concretely altered due to the imaginative process, which, in turn, creates new meanings, new realities. "In this sense, absolutely everything around us has been created by the hand of man. The whole world of culture, unlike the world of nature, is a product of imagination" (Vygotsky 1990, p.10). The game to which the actor is invited in the artistic context demonstrates analogously and simultaneously the experience of common daily life; every person composes new characters and interacts with those created by others along their life trajectories.

"Imagination becomes a function of foremost importance in human behavior and development. It becomes a means of broadening the experience of the man who, being able to imagine what he has not seen, can conceive what he did not experience personally and directly based on others' stories and descriptions. He is not enclosed in the narrow circle of his own experience, but may distance himself from his own limits by assimilating, with help from imagination, other's historical or social experiences." (Vygotsky, 1990, p.20).

Imagination is, therefore, a device for humans to exceed their own limits. New constructions and new knowledge are, then, made possible. Imagination enables personal and social expansion, as an essential activity to survival and development. In this sense, the fiction constructed through the imaginative psychological function is the fixation of a transitional product of the psychic experimentation in the space-temporal flux of the mind. The product of imagination can be changed at any time, asserting that our experience of the world is not a finished form, but a process: "Man's creative activity makes him a being aimed towards the future, a being that contributes to create and transform their present." (Vygotsky 1990, p.9). Nevertheless, the transformation of the present, as the transformation of the actor in the creation of a new reality, is superimposed, to some extent, to the already crystallized reality and the self of the actor. There is a subtext that represents the multiple possibilities a single phenomenon (in this case, a text) has of unfolding itself and acquiring new multiple meanings in relation to who

interprets it. During the creative process the affective body can follow many paths that are activated along the way, as doors that become open showing surprising alternatives to the already known solutions. These doors can be considered as borders that are internally revealed to the subject that has embodied diffuse affective memories of past experiences.

"The creative activity of the imagination is in direct relationship with the richness and diversity of the experience accumulated by man, because this experience provides the material with which he erects the buildings of fantasy. The richer the human experience, the greater the material confronting that imagination." (Vygotsky 1990, p. 17).

For the elaboration of rich personal experiences, opportunity must be given for the constituents of our affective body, our singular ways of operating our worldviews and actively choosing to establish relationships,—to reverberate in a unique rhythmic pattern of creation. Such rhythmic pattern of creation is relevant in the articulation of the multiple selves a person has internalized. These selves are not necessarily apprehensible in everyday experience, but they are subjacent as a field of tensions that guide the choices made in the creative path of human life.

UNFOLDING A DIALOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE POETIC STATE: THE BORDER BETWEEN THE ACTOR AND THE CHARACTER

Boesch (1997) defines cultural psychology as the one "[...] concerned with the complex set of cultural conditions which form the human ''biotope'', which shape us in subtle, multiple ways, but which we also actively shape to minor or major degrees [...]" (p. 430). The shape of the human *biotope* depends on the affective body, as an important constraint of the multiple trajectories of the situated Self immersed in a world co-created with others. Affective memory and knowledge are both inscribed in the body. Through conviviality, people construct the possibility of sharing understanding about the environment. Sharing experiences, food, smells, and mutual touching, as cultural practices, therefore, controls the boundaries and shapes of the human subjective body, allowing the construction of semiotic stabilities in an intensely changeable environment; Alterities are also built in this process, associated to differences in convivial experiences.

Taking into consideration the centrality of the affective body to Vygotsky and Stanislavski, we propose that the study of the relationship between the actor and the character, or rather, between the various individual selves in the poetic construction of the Self, must start from the comprehension of the perceptive and imaginative Borders within the affective body of the person. In other words, the body, as a psychophysical unity, is marked by memories from meaningful experiences in life and is capable of housing several identities and realities. Each of these identity-realities housed in the affective body brings a field for symbolic actions (Boesch, 1991), as a subtext that constrains the transit between the actor and the character. Such constraints emerge in the imaginative-perceptive situation, reformulating and redefining what is being considered real, that is, a perspective to the personal action. It configures an underlying setting for what later becomes

visible to the external viewer/observer of the scene. Thus, approaching a scene implies the apprehension of a layer that is theoretically common to everybody, i.e., the text in the dramaturgy. However, what the actor needs to share is the result of a process that artistically reframed the text that is supposed to be shared. In the scene, *the actor communicates the subtext*, as an opportunity for a transitory experimentation of becoming another. The subtext is something that is not explicitly written in the dramatic text. It emerges from the text analysis as the work of the actor. The subtext defines the motivational state of the character and the gap between what is said, from the dramatic text, and what is made explicit in the scene, which can contradict or intensify what the character is doing/saying. Therefore, an intrapersonal layer emerges from the introjection of a text, which is always polysemic:

"The most substantial part of the subtext is in its implicit ideas [...] that transmit the line of logic and coherence (of the character) in a clear and defined way. [...] The words are part [...] of the external embodiment of the inner essence of a character [...]. The subtext is everything the actor sets as the thought (and motivation) of the character before, after, and during the text speech." (Stanislavski, 1997, pp. 175-176).

Figure 01 shows the dynamic relationship of the body that articulates the concrete experience as a person perceives and their imagination, in the construction of an aesthetic configuration of the world. Such dynamics result in the crystallization of what we call reality from a psychological point of view.
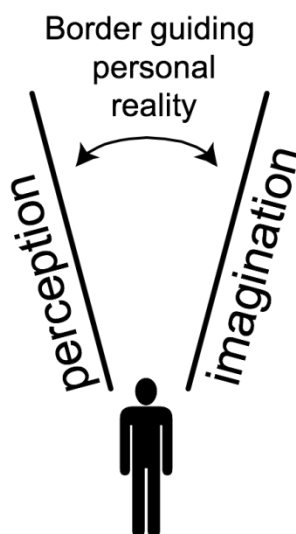

Figure 1: Body, imagination and perception in the process of cognition of reality.

Besides, as we have discussed, an affective body is potentially capable of housing many selves and, consequently, many realities as subtexts of the actions taken by the person in connection with the others. The dialogic process that articulates perceptions and imagination is, then, multiplied in the body. This process creates a field of tensions involving the separation and mirroring between dimensions of the Self of the actor and the Self of the character. The tensional borders of the Selves

within an affective body can promote disruptions in the crystallized present and open the doors to personal and collective transformations, guiding the emergence of new configurations as aesthetic realities of a person and cultural field.

That is one of the psychological meanings of the notion of dialogical multiplication (cf. Guimarães, 2011; 2013; Bastos and Guimarães, 2014) in the poetic situation involving the actor and his/her character. Figure 02 synthesizes the borders that emerge in the affective body of the actor in scene. The actor-character's distancing creates a gap that the actor needs to creatively fulfill with a singular shape that can be considered art. Nevertheless, this kind of elaboration is accessible in daily experiences, fostering aesthetic, dynamic, and potentially innovative insights
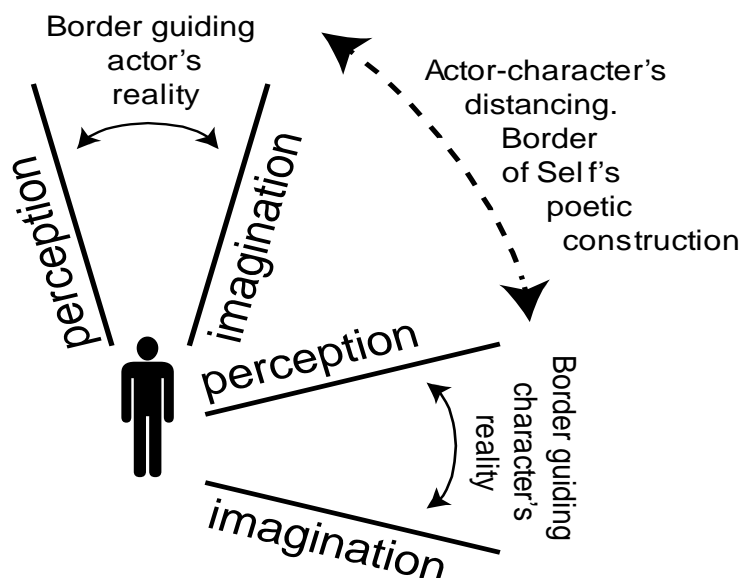

Figure 2: Body, imagination and perceptions in the poetics between actor and character.

In the theatrical work, the internal borders of the person's affective body are methodically explored in the rehearsals, attempting to break through the limits of the already crystallized affective body and allow other ways of being (Pelbart, 2008). The poetic experience, as a potential for any human being, emerges as a border 'between' perceptions and imaginations, implied in distinct Self-experiences.

THE AESTHETIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE REALITY

The psychological processes described in this paper attempted to discuss a profound device for self-knowledge and self-construction. We argue that the mechanisms for the activation of the poetic experience can be explored through the articulation of the studies in the field of contemporary cultural psychology, bringing selected propositions by Vygotsky and Stanislavski in order to create subsidies for the practical development of personal poetics.

The notions of the *Magic If* and *distancing oneself*, from the Stanislavski theater studies, and the notions of *distancing oneself* and *imagination,* from Vygotsky, were used to describe some mechanisms implied in the Borders of intrapersonal

alterities. The observation of the actor-character border allowed us to understand some nuances of psychological processes involving the construction of aesthetic shapes in the artistic context, but also the construction of aesthetic shapes in life trajectories, independently of the participation in institutionalized artistic contexts[2]. To develop this idea, we will articulate now, some precursory reflections from the phenomenological sociology and developmental psychology with contemporary cultural psychology.

Processes involved in the aesthetic construction of reality have been historically studied in psychology, although there is still much to advance in order to understand how aesthetic synthesis works in the dialogical articulation of human perception and imagination. From a phenomenological approach to sociocultural studies, Beger and Luckman (1967) call the attention to how the Natural Attitude in relation to reality is constructed, sustained or transformed in society. They are concerned in understanding the process during which a system of knowledge is socially settled as 'reality'. These authors have continued the tradition of the Austrian social scientist Alfred Schutz (cf. Schutz and Luckmann, 1973), who considered that the foundation of human sciences should be grounded in an accurate description of the life-world (Lebenswelt). The methodological option for such description avoids the explanation of human phenomena in terms of universal causal laws, but focuses on the constructive process in which subjective meanings become objectively recognizable, how human activity builds the world of things that we consider real. These propositions can be articulated to the notions of cultural relativism and/or relationalism as ontological postures in the horizon of the conception that there are many possible worlds-realities within a same society and among diverse cultures. Some of these worlds-realities are explored in the theater 'as-if' they would exist, and scenes are constructed in order to guide the public in the exploration of this realized fiction. Other studies concerning the ontological routes of distinct cultures (Descola, 2008) are showing that the realities of other cultures are grounded in distinct cosmological basis and hardly accessible from a certain perspective. Each person lives in the reality of his/her cultural tradition, because the personal subjective body is socially constructed to grasp the world in a certain way.

The aesthetic theory of reality, from Baldwin (1915), addresses four sorts of relativity in relation to the meaning of reality:

1) the relativity of partial positions in relation to a whole;

2) the relativity of the developmental stage of the knower;

3) the relativity of the acceptance or rejection concerning a proposition (the correct or the erroneous);

4) the relativity of the ways in which someone objectively apprehends the environment.

Baldwin conclusions allow us to suppose that reality depends on all the contents of consciousness, so far as they are organized or capable of organization in aesthetic or artistic form. The individual consciousness is then the organ of reality. The whole of reality would be the entire experience of a consciousness capable of

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[2] Considering that the actor's life trajectories pass by both contexts, artistic and non-artistic.

grasping and contemplating it as an aesthetic whole. The whole is an organized experience, and this experience has the form of a self. If we ask for further descriptive determinations of reality, we fall at once into one or other of those partial points of view from which we lose the vision of the whole, and reach solely the apprehension of some special mode of existence or reality—actual, ideal, good, true, or other (Baldwin, 1915, p. 303). Finally, Baldwin rejects the pluralism of reality (physical, mental, moral, artistic, etc.) in favor of a constructive affectivism that unifies the relative diversity in the unity of the experience. The experience can achieve a full organization in the aesthetic synthesis. Aesthetic affective synthesis does not reject the principles of relative apprehension of reality (space, time, accountability or extra-psychic reference), but integrates the forms of apprehending the transubjective environment with the personal will, looking for reconciling rationalism and voluntarism. Therefore, aesthetic synthesis does not happen only in the artistic production or fruition. It is part of a constructivist meta-theory concerned with ontogenetic psychological processes, not reduced to its rational-cognitive aspect (Loredo and Sánchez, 2004). More recently, the cultural psychologist Ernst Boesch (1916-2014) has developed a symbolic action theory in cultural psychology grounded in a reconciliation between the objective-rational and subjective-functional apprehensions of the personal lived environment (Boesch, 1991, 1997). His theory asserts that the aims of human action are structured in symbolic images that emerge from a sort of aesthetic synthesis that regulates and organizes personal actions:

“*The problem on which I have been asked to contribute some thoughts will be considered within the framework of an action-theory approach to child development. The main action theorist in development psychology is certainly Piaget; it is he, too, who coined the term 'affective schema'. Being a Piagetian in my thinking, I shall mainly refer to his theoretical framework. Affectivity, however, was for Piaget of only peripheral interest. I shall, in the following, propose three amendments to his thinking: first, I shall question his assumption of a parallelism between cognitive and affective development; second, I want to show that affective development leads to specifically action-related structures, and third, that these structures should be seen less in the moral value system, as Piaget proposes, than in those general action regulators which I call 'fantasm', finding their optimal organization in the aesthetic system*”. (emphasis removed, Boesch, 1984, p. 173)

The symbolic action theory of Boesch is very complex to be fully explored in a short paper like the present one. Nevertheless, it is possible to notice his emphasis in the need to take into account the role of aesthetic processes in life, to understand how affectivity works in psychological systems of people in general, and not only in the artistic work. The paths already open by these phenomenological and constructivist thinkers could be deepened in order to construct a strong and consistent semiotic-cultural approach to the borders of intrapersonal alterities.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Psychology and Performing Arts have an intimate relationship. Each person owns the parameters of their internal borders that allow the creation of a singular poetics. Psychologists have borrowed from theater ideas for the development of psychotherapeutic approaches (cf. psychodrama), and have imported insightful notions for understanding psychological events (for example the notion of social role, role-playing, acting etc.). In Brazil, the theater has offered important tools for communitarian emancipation from social oppressions internalized in the psychic configurations of the persons and guiding their ways of acting, feeling, and thinking about lived experiences (Boal, 1975/2013). Theoretical and methodological advances at the interface between theater and cultural psychology can be constructed deepening the dialogue between the ideas of Stanislavski and Vygotsky in further research. Realizing that reality is constructed by the subjects through the development of an aesthetically oriented configuration, a poetics, we argue that the paths indicated by this paper collaborate to understanding psychological processes involving intrapersonal borders. That is, a dialogical multiplication within the affective body guiding the interpersonal construction of cultural realities.

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