

DOSSIER “Human development, drama and perezhivania:  
Vygotsky and the question of the psychology of the actor’s creation”<sup>1 2</sup>

## **The creative work as duplicated experience of the actor in himself and in the character: the (aest)ethical perezhivanie<sup>3 4 5 6</sup>**

*O trabalho criador como vivência duplicada do ator em si e na  
personagem: a perejivanie (est)ética*

*El trabajo creativo como experiencia duplicada del actor en sí mismo y  
en el personaje: la perejivanie (está)ética*

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## Abstract

The article delves into the relationship between emotion and imagination (emotional bonding) in the actor's duplicated experience in creative artistic work. Based on the concept of *perezhivanie* in Vygotsky, Stanislavski and Vakhtangov, we focus on the empirical work done with a theater company that articulates social critique to the actors' personal experiences, through video and field diary records, as well as self-confrontations. Analyzing the creative process, we emphasize that: the feelings experienced, felt-thought in images by the actress, affect her subjectivity and the construction of the character; the reliving of the actress is the foundation for creation - a sphere in which ethics and aesthetics are (con)merge in the (est)ethical *perezhivanie*. Such elements are important to the understanding of artistic experience and aesthetic education.

**Keywords:** *perezhivanie*; emotion; imagination; theatre; creation

## Resumo

*O artigo aprofunda a relação entre emoção e imaginação (enlace emocional) na vivência duplicada do ator no trabalho artístico criador. Com base no conceito de perezhivanie em Vigotski, Stanislavski e Vakhtangov, enfoca-se o trabalho empírico realizado com uma companhia teatral que articula crítica social às experiências pessoais dos atores, por meio de registros em vídeo e diário de campo, bem como de autoconfrontações. Analisando o processo criador, ressalta-se que: o sentimento vivenciado, sentido-pensado em imagens pela atriz, afeta sua subjetividade e a construção da personagem; a revivência da atriz é alicerce para a criação - esfera em que ética e estética se (con)fundem na perezhivanie (est)ética. Tais elementos são importantes à compreensão da experiência artística e à educação estética.*

**Palavras-chave:** *perezhivanie*; emoção; imaginação; teatro; criação

## Resumen

*El artículo profundiza en la relación entre la emoción y la imaginación (vínculo emocional) en la experiencia duplicada del actor en el trabajo creativo artístico. Partiendo del concepto de perezhivanie de Vygotski, Stanislavski y Vakhtangov, nos centramos en el trabajo empírico realizado con una compañía teatral que articula la crítica social a las experiencias personales de los actores, a través de registros de vídeo y diarios de campo, así como de autoconfrontaciones. Analizando el proceso creativo destacamos que: el sentimiento vivenciado, sentido-pensado en imágenes por la actriz, afecta a su subjetividad y a la construcción del personaje; el revivir de la actriz es el fundamento de la creación - ámbito en el que la ética y la estética se (con)funden en la perezhivanie (est)ética. Estos elementos son importantes para entender la experiencia artística y la educación estética.*

**Palabras clave:** *perezhivanie*; emoción; imaginación; teatro; creación

## Presentation

This article seeks to contribute to the questions raised in Vygotsky's work about the relationship between imagination and emotion in the actor's creative work. The focus is on the duplicated experience of the actor and in the creation of the character: the ethical and aesthetic *perezhivanie* or, as we will develop throughout the argument, the “*perezhivanie* of the real or reality.”

*Perezhivanie*, a word from the Russian vocabulary, is used by many authors with different approaches. In Vygotsky's work, the term was used at different times when discussing human development and art. Varshava and Vigotski (1931, p.128, cited by Veresov, 2016, p.130) defined *perezhivanie* as “direct psychological experience” (directly affects the psychic constitution of the subject - drama). Although it is an essential concept in the Vygotskian perspective, it was, for a long time, ignored in the development of the theory (Daniels, 2010). More recently, the *perezhivanie* concept has become the object of analysis in national and international literature, raising controversy about its meaning in the context of Vygotsky's work and the difficulty of its translation.

In English-language scientific literature, the concept has been translated as “emotional experience” by many authors and reviewers of Vygotsky's work (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1996). However, after several difficulties in translating this term, some scientific works published in English have chosen to leave the term *perezhivanie* untranslated (Ferholt, 2009; Fleer, González Rey & Veresov 2017; Veresov, 2016). In Brazil, it was translated as *vivência*, as proposed by Toassa and Souza (2010) and reiterated by other authors such as Prestes and Tunes (2011).

In the text “The Problem of the Environment in Pedology,” Vigotski (2018) states that the *perezhivanie* is:

*A unity in which, in an indivisible way, the environment is represented, on the one hand, what is experienced – the experience is always related to something that is outside the person – and, on the other hand, how I experience it. ... we always deal with an indivisible unity of the particularities of the personality and the particularities of the situation that is represented in the experience [emphasis in the original].*  
(p. 78)

Thus, for him, there is: “a unity of elements of the environment and elements of the personality.”

Delari Junior and Passos (2009) analyze that, in Vygotsky’s writings, the term is translated as “emotion,” “living,” “experience,” or even by constructions in which the noun gives way to the verb “to live.” The authors note that the noun *perezhivanie* is composed of two parts: the first is formed by the prefix *pere* [непe], which indicates an orientation of action through something, performing an action once more or in another way, and overcoming suffering. They draw attention to the procedural aspect of the term, which is conferred by the prefix, similar to trans- in Portuguese. The second part, the root *zhivanie* [живание], is from the archaic verb *zhivat*, which means “to live.”

Aware of these difficulties, we took as a starting point the concept of *perezhivanie* as elaborated by Vygotski (2018). However, when we limit the focus of this article to the actor’s creative work, we are faced with the question of how the actor’s experience re-elaborates and gives the experience itself a new meaning. Therefore, when referring to this duplicated experience of the actor (reliving) and when taking into account Vygotsky’s dialogues with Stanislavski and Vakhtangov – who use *perezhivanie* in their works – we chose also to use *perezhivanie*, attributing to this term the specificities found in the works of playwrights.

We start with an interpretative sketch of the following works by Vygotsky: *The Psychology of Art* (1925/1999); *The Aesthetic Education* (1926/2001); *Imagination and Creativity in Childhood* (1930/2009) and the translated text in this dossier entitled: “On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor’s Creative Work.” We intend to build bridges with the work of the playwright K. Stanislavski and, more specifically, the director and pedagogue E. Vakhtangov, both mentioned in Vygotsky’s text, to contribute to the densification of the context of the production of dramatic art in interface with the questions of psychology that have inspired education and, more specifically, aesthetic education.

The questioning theme of this text can be summarized as follows: What is the relationship between imagination and emotion – the emotional bond – in the actor’s character creation process? Let us stick to the clue left by Vygotski (1932):

The actor's emotions experience what F. Paulhan well defined as a "happy transformation of feelings." They become understandable only when inserted into a broader socio-psychological system of which they are part. In this sense, one cannot separate the character of the actor's scenic experience, taken in its formal aspect, from the concrete content, which is composed of the content of the scenic image, the relationship and interest in this image, the socio-historical meaning and the function that the actor's experience plays in that specific case. (Vigotski, 2023)

Our intention is not to give a definitive answer to the debate but to open doors to thinking, within the scope of Vygotskian theory, the actor's role as central to understanding aspects of the social constitution of the subject and its repercussions in psychology and education.

Our proposal to update the debate is based on data analysis constructed in the context of empirical investigation<sup>7</sup> of a theater company in São Paulo. The research, based on video recordings of situations experienced by the company's actresses when creating scenes and composing characters, problematizes the intriguing and inter-constitutive relationships between *perezhivanie* in life and *perezhivanie* in art based on a conceptual analysis of the relationships between imagination and emotion.

## Emotion and imagination as the basis for the actor's creative work

Emotion and imagination have been studied within the scope of Vygotsky's elaborations on the Higher Psychological Functions, the inter-functional dynamic system, and the dramatic process of constitution of the subject (Magiolino & Smolka, 2013; Magiolino, 2014; Sawaia & Magiolino, 2016; Sawaia, Magiolino & Silva, 2020; Silva, 2006; Silva & Magiolino, 2018; Smolka & Magiolino, 2009). We have defended the premise of intertwining emotion and imagination that will lead Vygotsky (1930/2009) to the statement that the production of images mobilizes emotions and functions as a kind of dynamo that generates affective states (and vice versa).

Around 1925, in *The Psychology of Art*, Vygotsky worked on his thesis on the relationship between imagination, emotion, and art. In his *Manuscript of 1929*, even though he does not explicitly refer to this relationship, Vygotsky hints at promising developments about the

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<sup>7</sup> FAPESP supported the post-doctoral research between 2011 and 2012. In the work carried out with the theater company, meetings took place, on average, three days a week. The general composition of the video-recorded material recorded in a field diary forms a database.

implications of this problem when arguing about the notion of drama, in Politzer, linked to the formation of personality with two other themes dear to psychology: the problem of freedom and human creation within a historical determinism, as we have previously discussed (Sawaia, Silva & Magiolino, 2022). However, in the works collected in the book *Imagination and Creativity in Childhood* (1930/2009) – years later – the author more clearly develops the link between imagination and emotion, considering the creation processes. In this work, Vygotsky puts into perspective the explanatory laws of the relationship between imagination and reality, highlighting the emotional link.

The first law, presented by the author, deals with the idea that imagination is formed by elements directly or indirectly experienced by each person. The more complex the experience of the person who imagines, the more material is available for combinations and re-elaborations of what has been experienced. The second law, in turn, provides a counterpoint to the first by explaining that experience is also based on fantasy: what I can imagine based on someone else's experience. In the third law, elaborated by Vygotsky, we find the emotional factor more evidently. The idea of emotional connection suggests that every feeling is felt in images that form a particular state of mind. However, the very evocation of images also breaks down different feelings and emotions. In other words, emotions influence the process of fantasy combinations and are influenced by them (Vigotski, 1930/2009).

These considerations allow us to see that the imagination is mobilized by emotions, by the internal logic of feelings in their most intimate aspect. This is what Vigotski (1930/2009), supported by Ribot, will call the law of the emotional representation of reality (or the law of the reality of feelings).

Another dimension of the relationship between imagination and emotion, still within the scope of the third law, concerns what Vigotski (1930/2009) calls “common emotional sign.” The essence of this law consists in the fact that impressions or images that exert a similar emotional influence on us tend to come together, despite there being no relationship of similarity or explicit contiguity between them, composing a common emotional sign.

Vigotski (1930/2009) also focuses on the intricate relationships between reality, imagination, and emotions when contemplating the full circle of creative activity through crystallized imagination (fourth law). He calls us to think about imagination as one of the keys to understanding the historical and, at the same time, the unique character of human

inventiveness. After all, if imagination does not exist outside of reality, where are the explanatory bases for the products of imagination?

For Vygotsky, the product of creation, whether technical, scientific, or artistic, is the result of complex elaborations of the psyche, which were transformed and transmuted over time. Each creation is dialectically the contradictory synthesis of subjective invention intertwined with the often imperceptible threads of history that “when incarnated, return to reality, but already with a new active force that modifies it. This is the complete circle of the creative activity of imagination” (Vigotski, 1930/2009, p. 30).

Vygotsky takes up the problem of creation in his text: “On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor’s Creative Work” (1932). Here, he demonstrates the specificity of the actor’s work, breaking with the empiricist tendencies and psychotechnical research in force at the time. In both trends, he finds a superficiality in treating the issue that focuses on shallow generalizations of the actor’s experience based on what is observed in rehearsals and during the show. For him, psychotechnical research, for example, equated the actor’s profession with others, ignoring the psychophysiological conditions that involved it. Everything was restricted to general tests that added nothing to understanding the complexity of the actor’s job.

In his discussions on scientific psychology, Vigotski (2023) considers actor psychology part of general psychology, arguing that it needed to stop being abstract and gain concreteness. What does that mean? If before the focus was on the immutable nature of theater, now its historical character must be recovered. Thus, the actor’s psychology is a concrete psychology problem, which Vygotsky had already clearly defined in his text entitled *Manuscript of 1929* (Vigotski, 1929/2000). After all, the “abstract contradictions of different systems equally supported by factual data, come to be explained as a living, concrete and historical contradiction of different forms of the actor’s creative work, which change from one era to another and from one theater to another” (Vigotski, 2023).

Placing the actor’s problem within the scope of Concrete Psychology deserves our attention. Vigotski (1929/2000) argues in favor of a humanized psychology, which understands experiences based on objective life conditions. After all: “*What is man? For Hegel, he is a logical subject. For Pavlov, it is a soma, an organism. For us, man is a social person: an aggregate of social relations, embodied in an individual (psychological functions, constructed by the social structure)* [emphasis in the original].” (p. 33). This guiding principle allows Vygotsky to argue against the creative artificiality

of the actor proposed by Diderot (1769/1979) in his *The Comedian's Paradox*, approaching, at the same time, Stanislavski's acting methods, which consisted of leading the actor to bring internal justification of the action to be developed or a truth of the feelings on stage emerges. For Vygotsky, however, it is only possible to understand the creative work of the actor from another interpretative system, which is ideological and historical and transforms the aesthetic forms of theater and its content: "The psychology of the actor is a historical category, of class, and not biological" (Vigotski, 2023). Here, for him, the way would open up to confront the paradox, which would make an essential contribution to the understanding of emotions not only in the field of actor psychology but in the field of general psychology. Better yet, the actor's psychology would serve as an explanatory basis for understanding general psychology.

## **Stanislavski and Vakhtangov: contributions to the concept of (aest)ethical *perezhivanie***

To discuss the arguments raised previously, we revisit Vygotsky's statements about two icons of Russian theater (Moscow Art Theater, MAT) at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: a) K. Stanislavski (1863-1938) – one of the greatest playwrights of history of modern theater; and b) E. Vakhtangov (1883-1922), student of Stanislavski, considered for his stylistic pioneering and deep understanding of the System, a reference in symbolist theater.

Much has already been written about K. Stanislavski. He is, without a doubt, one of the most significant references in modern theater, and his work was responsible for the creation of dramatic art studios throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, still widespread around the world today. He is internationally recognized for having created the only system for preparing actors for acting, whose objective was: "creating the inner world of people who act on the stage and transmit the idea of this world through artistic form" (Stanislávski, 1986, p. 323). His method is based on the experiences (*perezhivania*) of the actors to reach the truth of scenic emotions. The work on emotions is the nodal point of the System, requiring discipline and introspection from the actors in such a radical way that they must forget the audience to reach the reality of emotions. Here, the role of imagination is central, as in the System, it is impossible to develop the correct inner feelings and emotions without the active work of the imagination (Capucci & Silva, 2018).

Vigotski (2023) comments on the mistakes made by the approaches of the time regarding the problem of creating the actor, which reduced Stanislavski's System to theatrical practice dissociated from the temporal and historical demands that contemporary theater itself evoked. In *Theater and Revolution*, Vigotski (1919/2015) states: "Each era has its Hamlet. The work itself is just a possibility that the viewer, the reader, realizes with their creative work" (p. 204). The inner technique of Stanislavsky's feelings must serve stylistic tasks typical of a period when the content dictates the theatrical form. The relationship (and not reductionism) between the truth of feelings (as a guiding premise of the actor's work) and the content of feelings in other means of theatrical expression is a requirement E. Vakhtangov better understood, as we will see below.

E. Vakhtangov is an actor, director, and pedagogue of modern Russian theater little known in the Brazilian artistic scene. He is considered one of the greatest connoisseurs of the Stanislavski System, a faithful and rigorous disciple. He died at the age of 39 at the height of his career, when he premiered (without being able to see the final rehearsal) *Turandot, Princess of China*, by Carlo Gozzi (in 1922), recognized as one of the most outstanding performances of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He participated as a teacher and pedagogue in founding several studios in Russia (pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary). He was a central character in developing the activities of the Moscow Art Theater, MAT (admitted to the group in 1909).

Vakhtangov was not only one of the greatest connoisseurs of the Stanislavski System but one of those responsible for its reformulation. In search of his signature and a resumption of theatricality, Vakhtangov, throughout his career, expanded the understanding of the System by breaking with a certain psychologism of the actor that hovered in criticism of Stanislavski, despite being refuted by the playwright.

Valuing aesthetic elements was already something persevered by Russian theater. Still, Vakhtangov recovers the pantomimes of *Commedia dell'Arte* through the mannerisms of puppets and marionettes in search of theatricality and becomes radical in the way of understanding the role of the audience (the fourth creator), often ignored by the Stanislavski System.

To achieve this objective, Vakhtangov relies on improvisational experiments to replace the work, inviting the audience to participate in the play. The improvisational spectacle was already something that Gorki had signaled to Stanislavski, but MAT did not incorporate it.

Vakhtangov takes the tip and pedagogically deepens improvisation, aesthetically exploring the relationships between art and life. The director was looking for a different theater, in the tension between realism and naturalism, which could be presented in public squares. Professional theater approached the popular theater, which was already something different from what was proposed by MAT. Still along these lines, while the *experiences* of the System were not abandoned, the excessive role attributed to imagination, in Stanislavski, should be taken with caution. The actor's creative process should not lose sight of the actual components of the play: the scenography, lighting, makeup, etc. Silva (2008) comments:

Vakhtangov's research is based on the observation of the death of the *theater of the dead*, insistently proclaimed, and about the reaffirmed rejection of naturalism within the practice of mechanical becoming of the Art Theater. This must replace a fantastic realism, a realism of the imagination, founded no longer on imitation and referential illusion but on significant construction, in which the founding intuition of a necessary and radical rupture between the truth of life and that of the theater is affirmed. (p. 33)

In this context, Vakhtangov (2000) begins to formulate the convention theater, developing contemporary theatrical games that articulate the spirit of the time. The form is inscribed in contemporary times, but this does not mean that theater must reflect an era. It is not, therefore, a "patriotic phraseological banality" (p. 346-347, our translation); the focus is on building, without the pamphleteer ingredients, the revolutionary theater. A theater that claims its theatricality in its time with its pedagogy. A theater that highlights everything surrounding it: entrances and exits, applause, music, etc. Vakhtangov sought to convey on stage not only the content of the play but also his contemporary relationship with it and its irony, creating new content for the play: "The time has come to bring the theater from the theater (Vakhtangov, 2000, p. 348, our translation)".

Vigotski (2015) also advocated for a theater that responded to contemporary demands prompted by the revolutionary process. He criticized that the Russian scene had merely broadened the theatrical movement, yet without aesthetic and dramaturgical depth; "the changes were purely external" (p. 196). His defense was for a theater of his time.

After all:

Each time has its own theater... Artists of all arts are people of their time. Their creations are necessarily marked by the sign of contemporary times; they are closely linked to it. The artist always creates something new, something that did not exist before them; they do not repeat or reproduce the old. (p. 203)

Therefore, it was necessary to develop a new theatricality, as “new wine should not be put into an old wineskin” (p. 203). The search for this new theatricality was E. Vakhtangov’s mission.

Strongly marked by Russian symbolism and expressionism, the pedagogue and director Vakhtangov sought an emphasis on the creation of gestures in the character’s composition, with the actor’s body and awareness of his performance. The actor is on stage and must avoid a *theater of fugitives*, more oriented to his internal psychological processes – as occurs in Stanislavski’s exercises to achieve scenic truth – than to the aesthetic effects produced in the relationship with the public, for example. Regarding this, Vigotski (2023) points out that Stanislavski’s inner technique (psychological naturalism) served utterly different - and even opposite - stylistic tasks in Vakhtangov’s work.

In Vakhtangov (2000), emotion is radicalized in the relationship between theatrical staging and the conservation of the substance of concrete life situations amidst the dilemmas and paradoxes of the historical time.

I then attempt a form that I will gladly call theatrical realism. The scenic game is based on attention to the real, organic, in which the actors behave and the actual experience (*nastoiáschee perezživânie*) according to the Art Theater method, which means what Konstantin Sergeyevitch brought me. However, the means of expressing this attention and this experience, I look for within current life, within our days. (p. 319, our translation)

In the relationship established between the emotion created for the role and the real emotion of the actor - who plays the character, there was, according to Vigotski (2023, first concerned Stanislavski’s position on involuntary feeling and the impossibility of its direct evocation, by command. Commenting on the work of the Russian director, Vigotski (2023) stated:

Only indirectly, by creating a complex system of ideas, conceptions, and images, in the composition of which a particular emotion is included, can we arouse the feeling we need and thus give the specific psychological coloring to the system as a whole and its external expression. However, says Stanislavski: “These feelings are absolutely not those that the actor experiences in life.” These expressions go through a process of artistic formalization and, therefore, are different from real emotions.

The second aspect highlighted by Vygotsky rescues the ideas defended by Vakhtangov and resides in the fact that the actor’s paradox moves to the field of Concrete Psychology, a concrete and historically changeable psychological explanation. “We have a series of historical paradoxes of actors from certain environments and times before us. The actor’s paradox becomes research into the historical development of human emotion and its concrete expression in the different stages of social life” (Vigotski, 2023). Vygotsky, then, highlights that “emotions are not an exception concerning other manifestations of our psychic life.” Like other psychic functions, they are not limited to the biological dimension of the psyche.

In concrete life, states Vigotski (2023), feelings develop, emotions become more complex. The initial organic-based relationships decompose and create new relationships with other elements of psychic life. Other higher-order systems emerge. Specific, interdependent laws structure new psychic inter-functional relationships. Thus:

Studying the order and relationship of affections is the main task of scientific psychology since the solution to the actor’s paradox is not emotions taken in their isolated form but the relationships that unite them to more complex psychological systems. This solution, as can already be foreseen, will lead the researcher to a position of fundamental significance for all actor psychology: the actor’s experiences, their emotions, are presented not as a function of their personal psychic life but as a phenomenon that has meaning and objective and social meaning, which serves as a transitional stage from psychology to ideology. (Vigotski, 2023)

In this excerpt, Vygotsky draws attention to the fact that emotions are connected to other psychological systems. Furthermore, they are not understood as a personal phenomenon but as a social one with sense and meaning, marked by ideology. Thus, the actor’s creative process involves a duplicated experience in the construction of the character, implying the creative reliving of subjective emotions but taking them within the historical resources that the imaginative activity possesses and cultivates towards a trans-experience. This occurs because, as

Vigotski (1930/2009) highlights in his studies already discussed, the crystallized imagination dialectically shapes the imagination and (trans)forms the emotions.

## Theater as a locus of reliving

It is necessary to go beyond the limits of the actor's immediate experience to explain it. Unfortunately, this authentic and remarkable paradox of all psychology has not yet been appropriated by many currents. To explain and understand experience, one has to go beyond one's limits, forget about it for a minute, and abstract it. The same is true of the psychology of the actor. If the actor's experience were a closed whole, a world that exists in itself, it would be necessary to look for the rules that guide it exclusively in its sphere, in analyzing its composition, and in the detailed description of its relief. However, if the actor's experience is distinguished from everyday experiences by being part of an entirely different system, then its explanation must be found in the laws of construction of the latter. (Vigotski, 2023)

It is an actress's duplicated experience in staging and creating a character in the rehearsal room, which we take here as a locus of inquiry and investigation. The actress is part of a theater company in São Paulo, composed of four professional actresses, a director, and a playwright. The company had theoretical and artistic guidance organized by a visual artist and the researcher who participated in the rehearsals and proposed videos and texts for study and theoretical discussion.

The theme of the company's artistic research involved, in that context, the issue of urban isolation in the metropolis. The production and staging of the show focused on two characters: Laís, a dentist who had a compulsion to pull teeth and isolated herself in her apartment, and Sophia, enslaved in a women's trafficking network and imprisoned in one of the countless vertical brothels that populated the metropolis.

The company's artistic research process included investigating social issues, surveys of reports, and interviews with people who experienced the characters' issues. Among the countless stories of women collected by the group who isolated themselves or were forcibly isolated in the metropolis, some were refugees, those who lived on the streets, and those who developed obsessive-compulsive disorders or panic syndromes. One piece of news, in particular, served as a trigger for the creation: a woman's body was found floating in one of the city's most significant avenues after a major flood. In the play, when looking out the apartment window,

the dentist comes across the body of the enslaved and prostituted woman floating in the middle of the avenue.

The play was staged within an artistic installation, set up by the actresses on stage under the eyes of the public, invited to compose the space at the end of the show. Under such a view, every day, banal objects were being given new meanings: a kitchen chair was transformed into an instrument of torture and a gas bed/chamber. Guided by the artist, the group started with a moving scenography, reconstructed on stage, inspired by the universe of plastic arts, seeking to develop a contemporary aesthetic conception. In the research and creation process, the group organized urban artistic installations in a proposal to intervene plastically in the city of São Paulo, seeking interaction between theater and contemporary visual arts. In one of them, the group went to the Elevado Presidente João Goulart – the infamous Minhocão –, an elevated expressway built at the time of the dictatorship, to relieve traffic in the central region of the city, which allows cars to pass right by. in front of the windows of the buildings. The actresses knocked on the doors of people who lived there to talk and ask for objects they no longer used, which they wanted to eliminate. People, the vast majority of whom were lonely, opened their doors and donated various things, including a sofa, used to form an artistic installation under the viaduct.

With this inspiration from contemporary visual arts, crossing social issues and personal conflicts, in the rehearsal room, the company's work process took place in two central aspects: immersion and scene and character creation exercises. After the exercises, there was an observation circle in which participants commented on what/how they felt, thought, and imagined in the exercises performed.

The video recording of rehearsals, creative exercises, and conversation circles was made during the collective creation of the play, with transcription of the constructed material and subsequent analysis. In addition to these procedures, the empirical research relied on a methodological device that seeks to promote understanding of meaning effects that circulate in a work activity: simple and crossed self-confrontations<sup>8</sup> (Clot, 2010) carried out with the actresses and the director of the theater company.

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<sup>8</sup> The method was developed in France by linguist Daniel Faïta. It was later used by Yves Clot, in work psychology, with his Activity Clinic team at the National Conservatory of Arts and Crafts (CNAM) in Paris. The procedures are based on using the image of subjects in work activity to discuss it with a view to professional development and

In the work of preparation and constitution of the actor at the company, in the immersion exercises, the actresses learned to identify the spaces where the personal contents emerging from their memory that affect them reside, in which place in their bodies the emotions are inscribed. The process took place by (re)creating imaginatively a situation experienced by accessing the memory of the motor mechanisms that made up gestures, singing, speech, and emotions themselves. As the director said, it was about creating a “topography” of their emotions and sensations through a “physical entry into memory.” In this sense, such an exercise can be understood as an indirect method of approaching emotions that opens up possibilities of understanding them in a process of transformation and meaning related to systems and other psychological functions (Magiolino, 2014).

In the artistic and dramaturgical creation of the play, the group worked with a central line of investigation that guided the personal content that would be sought by the actresses in the immersion exercise. All the actresses performed the exercises to create all the characters, which would only be defined and assigned to each one later. For the character Laís (the dentist), for example, this line was: “I need to get this out of myself, but I can’t.” In this work, only Lorena’s exercises<sup>9</sup> in creating the character Laís will be taken as an object of discussion and reflection.

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individual and collective health, as well as the production of knowledge in the exercise of the profession. In self-confrontation (simple, carried out with the worker or cross-carried out between workers), the participant (or the researcher) shows the worker a scene of their activity recorded on video. When seeing themselves on stage, the worker discusses their work activity, lived experience, affections, and problems faced by the participant in search of a resolution, the transformation of the activity, and the increase of their power to act (Clot, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> In agreement with the research participants, we chose to assign a fictitious name to preserve their identity.

## The actress's duplicated experience: the (aest)ethical perezhivanie

In the immersion exercise on the character Laís, all the actresses have their eyes closed and move freely around the rehearsal room, immersed in their content. The director enters the stage and asks: *“What do you want to get out of you and can’t?”*

Lorena puts her hand to her chest and hits it repeatedly. Her face has an expression of pain. She cries and screams, *“Stay.”* Then, she takes a metallic object and points it at someone like a gun. She spends the entire exercise talking to this person, whom she seems to want to hurt and get revenge on, but she doesn't say who it is.

In the video-recorded and transcribed scene, Lorena slowly turns her arms around herself, puts her hands on her head, pulls her hair, and says, *“Get out of here.”* She lowers one of her hands to her chest, and the other remains against her belly. She hits her chest with solid beats, *“Stay... stay there, I think I need it...”* She places both hands on her chest, looks up, and says, *“Stay, you can stay.”* Silence. *“What would it be like if I didn't have that? What would be in its place? There would be nothing!”* She cries. *“Ah... but how I wish it would come out.”* With her eyes closed, she brings her hands to her chest and then slowly removes them, then rubs them. Then, she says, *“Ah, but I'm waiting for the day that I will lose control and that I will, yes, let it all out.”* She takes an object that serves as a dagger and points it at someone. Her expression changes. Changing her voice, she shouts, *“You don't know, but I no longer have ears for your lies. I pretend to listen.”* She covers her ears with both hands and continues, *“I smile at you because I am a well-mannered girl! I smile at you, because I have the minimum amount of respect, because my mother told me to! For me, I wouldn't have... because you don't deserve it!”*

Lorena's body on stage shows the experience of resentment: she pulls her hair, puts her hand on her stomach, hits her chest hard, falls silent, wanders around the stage, and cries. As she rubs her hands together and picks up the dagger, other affections emerge in her body. She changes her voice, screams, and covers her ears with both hands, elaborating, through words, in the imaginary situation, the lived experience: she assumes herself as a well-educated girl who smiles despite herself, expressing the pretense that she lives in respect to his mother, and (re)acts pointing the dagger at someone she doesn't name.

During self-confrontation, Lorena looked at the video about the immersion exercise. The researcher comments on the gesture of bringing a closed hand towards the chest and

striking it intensely. Lorena responds: “*It was a feeling as if this resentment were a stone (she brings her hand to her chest again) inside me, so fixed and strong that it is inside, you know?... So it’s a kind of thing, impossible to remove because it is already concrete.*” The researcher asks: “*Was it about trying to break the concrete stone in your chest?*”. She says: “*It wasn’t even about breaking, but it was almost confirming the strength it has, you know? The concreteness that this has.*”

Later, when asked about the meaning of the resentment, after a highly reflective silence, she says: “*Ab, here what I’m saying is if I didn’t have this [the resentment], I wouldn’t have anything... concerning that person.*” She concludes: “*It’s the only... it’s the only... it’s the only connection that exists... But I, thinking about it now, I think it is... if I didn’t have that I would... I would forgive ... I was going to let it go..., you know? And I don’t want that.*”

Lorena expresses in her body an imaginative and memorable experience of resentment. Resentment is the feeling that takes over the actress’ personality: “*I am a spiteful person.*” What would be put in place of the concrete stone if the resentment was overcome? Forgiveness, she says herself <sup>10</sup>.

In her comment about the immersion exercise, Lorena refers to the theme of what cannot be extracted from her. She already refers to the character to be created, a dentist who has the compulsion to extract teeth.

*I started with something in my body: “It doesn’t come out of here, nothing comes out of here, I don’t let it go out of here... I got it in my mouth: nothing comes out of here”. And then, I started touching my teeth. The idea of pulling it out started to come, but pulling it out because I couldn’t let it come out any other way; I couldn’t let it come out in the form of... word... an impulse of self-destruction, of self-mutilation when you keep something that you can’t, you can’t leave... you can’t talk, or you don’t have control over yourself regarding certain things you want to do... And then it seems like it’s for the body, and then it’s something where you really get hurt, where blood comes out.*

<sup>10</sup> In previous work, we analyzed the state of fluctuation of the soul (in Spinoza’s terms) experienced by Lorena in the clash of contradictory emotions - love for her mother and hatred for her father - in the crystallization of the feeling of resentment that marks her personality. Change is problematic because, in this case, it would also mean betraying her love for her mother. The resentment in Lorena’s life story, which crystallizes in her chest (in the form of a stone), is constantly renewed by the feeling of having been abandoned by her father but is also fueled by feelings of love and respect for her mother. In this sense, breaking the stone, putting forgiveness in its place, and stopping feeling angry with your father would mean, at the same time, betraying your mother. The resentment becomes a sad passion that weakens and imprisons Lorena. (Sawaia, Magiolino & Silva, 2020).

Lorena focuses on the experience of creating the character Laís. She explores the meanings of pulling out – the stone, the teeth – in herself and others:

*But then I started thinking, she does this to others, right? Because, at that moment, it seemed very obvious to me that she was doing things to herself. (She smiles). But she does it to others... And then the idea came to me that maybe she projects her things onto other people....*

And she conjectures:

*like: she would like to completely dishevel her hair, pull out teeth, hair, skin, rip herself apart... but she doesn't do that to herself. And then, I don't know, somehow she sees in the other person what she is repressing in herself, I don't know... and she does this to him, like: she takes something out of him that, in truth, she wanted to take away from her....*

In the scene creation exercise, focusing on the character Laís, the different possibilities of pulling out and not pulling out – stone and tooth – are (re)experienced. The exercise begins with warming up the body and intensely moving the actress around the stage in the rehearsal room. She enters into a dizzying process of experiencing the character. Lorena puts her hands to her mouth, to her stomach, and stays like that for a long time. At one point, she starts spinning around the stage, saying disjointed things about the character. Staggering on stage, she lets out a few moans. Her movements gradually become slower and less intense. She repeatedly says: “*Doctor, I'm getting stiff.*” She stops with her arms open and says, very calmly, as if she were talking to a doctor on the phone: “*There is upholstery on my skin.*” She describes the furniture, objects, and the space around her and says she cannot move. She asks for medicine. She says there is foam on her body and upholstery. “*I'm heavy... I can't get off the ground alone... My feet are fixed.*” She says the doctor can't come to the apartment but insists she needs help. “*I realized I can even move, but it's inside the structure... And there's upholstery that won't let it break.*”

Right after this exercise, in the observation circle, Lorena comments on the experience she had in creating the character Laís: “*And, then, it gave me the feeling of a need for isolation because I became so fragile, so fragile, so fragile... that ... I can't live in a world together with everyone else, like this.*” In the cross-self-confrontation, carried out later, Lorena also talks about the research the group did on topics such as fibromyalgia: “*Pain all the time, difficulty in movement; alone people start to get stiff... I thought I was alone; no one was going to arrive... The idea, an image of turning a piece of furniture; she (Laís) was no longer a human being...*”.

The central affection and resentment experienced by the actress in the immersion exercise in which she relives a personal experience crystallizes (in a Vygotskian sense) in an image: the concrete stone. This image generates, among others, a feeling of security in the actress – something that underpins her personality – and, dialectically, of imprisonment – something that prevents her from forgiving and changing. In the reliving of the character’s creation, multiple affections are outlined and condensed, which crystallize, in turn, in the image of a sofa – a “common emotional sign” (in Vygotskian terms) –, for (in)security, fixity, the immobility, the imprisonment: “*I realized I can even move, but it’s inside the structure... And there’s upholstery that won’t let it break.*”

The intricate relationship between imagination and emotion in lived experience, the complex relationship with memory, the word in the dramatic constitution of the psyche, as Vigotski (1929/2000) would say, is also made clear in the actress’s creation.

The feeling of resentment crystallized in the concrete stone that underpins her personality is the foundation for creating the character, who becomes a piece of furniture standing still, waiting for someone. However, these (aest)hetically created feelings-images are rooted in history and culture; they are soaked in meanings, impregnated with meanings that overflow from life in the metropolis: exclusion, illness, and urban isolation, which Lorena sculpts in her body in the form of a sofa. The (de)humanization of her character is explained through the suffering of loneliness in the overpopulated metropolis, in a system of reification and objectification of people – such as the capitalist system.

Imagination completes its cycle in creation: it crystallizes through (aest)hetical *perezhivanie*. In the actor’s *perezhivanie*, ethics and aesthetics are (con)fused. The elements between art and life interpenetrate in a dramatic, disharmonious, and, contradictorily, creative way.

## Some considerations

In a letter written to N. Nemirovitch-Dantchenko (April 8, 1922), Vakhtangov reveals that the idea of *perezhivanie*, proclaimed by Stanislavski, was insufficient to reach the notion of theatricality and the specificity of art in the actor’s work. The term *perezhivanie*, not at all appreciated by Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, was only some of it, as the actor needed something more. This additional something understood the meaning of the difference between *talking about emotion* on stage (*tchúvstvo*) and *feeling* (*tchúvstvovát*) (Vanthagov, 2000, p. 350, our translation).

The truth of affections, *perezhivanie*, rigorously defended by Stanislavski, was present in Vakhtangov's theater. Still, it needed to serve, according to him, the scenic aspects to the elements of genuine theatricality, to the (re)presentation of concrete life or what he will call real *perezhivanie* (*nastoiáschee perezhivânie*). The means of expressing the experience must be found within current life, which in theater is aesthetically elaborated. After all: "The feeling is the same in life and in the theater, but the means or processes by which we arouse it are themselves different" (Vakhtangov, 2000, p. 354, our translation).

In the introductory speech of *Dibbuk's* general essay, Vakhtangov (2000) comments: "We want to find an (emotionally dense) *theatrical performance* that, at the same time, preserves the substance of concrete life situations" (p. 349, our translation). On stage, the aspects that imply the relationship between imagination and reality are (re)composed in the dramatic process of constituting the psyche into concrete psychology, as Vygotsky would discuss in 1929 and 1930.

Vigotski (2023), when studying the actor's *perezhivanie*, understands the status that human emotions assume in their intimate relationship with the imagination: a complex process that emerges in the intricate weave with the other functions and psychological systems in a historical and cultural context. This occurs because the actor's emotions and feelings cannot be analyzed only from the point of view of individual experience but from their function in a given time and social class within the same panorama in which the aesthetic *perezhivanie* (of the actor and the spectator) takes place. The actor's feelings differ, in several aspects, from those experienced by the audience when appreciating the work of art, but they (dis)encounter and confront each other in the plot of the meaning of the cathartic experience. In catharsis, for example, complex intellectual and sensitive operations interact, in which imagination forms an inter-functional and dialectical unity with emotion. For Vigotski (1925/1999), the emotions provoked by art are not limited to a mere sum of psychophysiological reactions. They imply an intense restructuring of psychic dynamics, as they involve symbolic and, therefore, subjective processes that arise from the contradiction of feelings generated between content and form.

The actor's art is explained as a technique of working with and on emotions through imagination; it affects human beings through meaning, the very process of signification, and experiencing the multiplicity of meanings that emotions take on in history (personal-social) and culture. One of the elements that appear in the data description concerns the relationship

between the creative process and social and political issues. To create the play, the group surveyed reports and interviewed people who experienced isolation in the metropolis: refugees, homeless, etc. The relationship between the body, which floats in the flood, and the dentist (Laís), who looks at the body of the prostituted woman floating on the avenue, shows the tensions and ruptures between life, art, and theater, which involve the creative process. However, beyond that, they also reveal how the group's production is linked to the most paradoxical and profound issues of their time: illness, exclusion, and social isolation in metropolises. The important thing here is to highlight that each member of the theater company brings with them a particular reading of the reality to be relived and confronted. In this process, central to creation, they explore these lived experiences, pulling and weaving the threads that make up the play.

As Lorena demonstrates, the creation process is complex. While the actress's focus is on building the character, the path she takes is tortuous. The intensity of (re)experiences experienced by the actress, in the face of the character's creative process, reveals: 1. her immersion in working with the emotions of (her) life to then extract the character's strength (her truth) in art, as suggested in Stanislavski's System; and 2. her artistic intentionality. After all, Laís is not Lorena; Laís is the result of Lorena's creation. Here we glimpse the *perezhivanie* of *perezhivania*: (aest)ethical *perezhivanie*.

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