



Actor-Subjects, their Voice, and their Relationship with the Mother Figure

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ABSTRACT – Actor-Subjects, their Voice, and their Relationship with the Mother Figure – This paper aims to investigate, employing Foucault’s archaeological approach, notions of subjectivity in which actors become subjects of their own musical practice, particularly of their vocal expression. The empirical materials are narratives and interviews with professionals from the performing arts, who execute the soundtracks of their live performances vocally and through the use of musical instruments. In this paper we analyze the predominant presence of the voice of the mother figure in the memories of actors-musicians.

Keywords: **Voice. Mother. Theater. Narratives of the Self. Foucault.**

RÉSUMÉ – Le Sujet-Acteur, sa Voix et la Relation avec la Figure de la Mère – L’article porte sur les processus de subjectivation à travers lesquels les acteurs deviennent les sujets de leur pratique musicale et, plus particulièrement, vocale. Les auteurs s’inspirent par la perspective archéologique de Foucault et utilisent, comme matériaux empiriques, des récits et des interviews de professionnels des arts de la scène qui se servent de la voix et de la musique en direct dans leurs spectacles. Cet article analyse particulièrement, la présence prédominante des constituants de la voix maternelle comme étant une composante dominante de la mémoire musicale des acteurs musiciens.

Mots-clés: **Voix. Mère. Théâtre. Narratives de Soi. Foucault.**

RESUMO – O Sujeito-Ator, sua Voz e a Relação com a Figura Materna – O artigo trata dos modos de subjetivação pelos quais atores tornam-se sujeitos de sua prática musical, mais especificamente vocal, com inspiração na perspectiva arqueológica foucaultiana. Os materiais empíricos consistem em narrativas e entrevistas de profissionais das artes cênicas, que executam vocal e instrumentalmente trilhas sonoras de seus espetáculos ao vivo. Neste texto, em particular, analisamos a presença preponderante da voz da figura materna, na memória de atores-músicos.

Palavras-chave: **Voz. Mãe. Teatro. Narrativas de Si. Foucault.**

In this text about the actor's memories with regard to the presence of musicality and of the maternal voice in their lives, we discuss one of the main topics of research in the Masters thesis entitled *O Sujeito-Ator e a Música na Constituição de Si: uma perspectiva narrativo-biográfica* (The Actor-Subject and the Music in the Constitution of the Self: a Narrative-Biographical Perspective), presented in 2014¹. The empirical material of the research comprises narratives of professionals from the performing arts who execute live vocal and instrumental soundtracks of their performances. The interviewed actors narrated episodes of their histories, selected to allow them to speak about the modes of constitution of the self through music. Several themes deserved special attention in the thesis: childhood, adolescence, school, entering adult life, music within the actor's craft, and the presence of different media in this formation.

The subjects of the research were actors who were part of the *Oigalê Cooperativa de Artistas Teatrais*² (Oigalê Cooperative of Theatre Artists), a group existing since 1999 in Porto Alegre/RS (Brazil). Research data included recordings of a group interview with seven new actors of the group, and recordings of two sets of individual interviews with two actors of Oigalê (who also took part in the collective interview). The collective interview occurred between the individual interviews – all made during the second semester of 2013, with approximate overall duration of two hours (four individual interviews and one group interview). In the interviews, the actors underlined the ethical and professional foundation of their participation in that cooperative: the continuous preparation work; intense study and research; the preoccupation with making a public culture, not emanating from public authorities but from the population, showing aspects of the culture of the extreme south of Brazil (the state of Rio Grande do Sul), seeking, as did Guimarães Rosa and Leon Tolstoy, to sing their place, their village: in other words, to be singular without stopping to be plural.

From a theoretical point of view, the research is grounded in studies of the narrative research [basically, in the contributions of Jerome Bruner (2000; 2002)] and in the reflections by Michel Foucault on discourse, knowledge and subject (especially those found in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Hermeneutics of the*

Subject). Based on narrative interviews with professionals from the performing arts, the research proposed, in a Foucauldian style, to multiply the data, understanding that no discourses take place in isolation: they intercept, collide, intertwine and merge. Thus, the concept of discourse in Michel Foucault is the main inspiration for the analysis of the data discussed in this text, in which we try to bring into discussion one of the topics of the larger research, concerning the memories of actors-subjects about their musical formation and the uses of the voice; the focus lies on recalling experiences with the mother figure, with respect to the constitution of the self within their artistic performances.

Silence is Always Pregnant with Sounds

Based on the data from the interviews, we tried to exercise as researchers what might be called a *polyphonic look*, basically taking into account the relation with time and space that demarcate the *said*: we always deal here with enunciations specific to each situation. The discourse, therefore, is not understood here as the speech of the subjects, nor would it be the expression or interpretation of something said or of what one would wanted to have said – since, supposedly, nothing is *hidden*. It is, therefore,

[...] an arduous but stimulating task of considering in the analysis of discourses at least these four great forces: the radically historic insertion of ‘things said’, the inescapable situation of the discourse as practice, the materiality of statements; and, last but not least, the struggle in and for the constitution of subjects – subjects of given truths or discourses (Fischer, 2013, p. 2, our translation).

Why have we decided to take as the focus of our analysis the *mother* subject and its relations with music, and more specifically with the musical voice? First reason: when conducting narrative interviews with actors, this figure emerged in most reports (although not in all of them) as strongly related to musicality, especially to the voice; and, respecting the chronology of the interviews, that was the enunciation immediately made by some of the subjects of the research in the first individual conversation and also in the collective one. Second reason: it is constituted as a recurrent narrative dimension that sometimes appears when subjects attempt to reach back to their earliest memories, generally associated to vocal expression, to singing,

which are the material necessary to the aesthetic production in theatre. We do not try here to *discover* a seminal, immaculate place, a single source, but a *place* in memory that seeks an identification, a *before that*, as singularly touched upon by one of the actresses (Sarah)³ already in the first interview.

*Sarah: Right [pause]... As we have talked before, I think no one can talk about their musical history without talking about the mother. Even if it's just to name the songs the mother listened to, or sang, or didn't listen to.*⁴

During the interviews, the *mother* dimension represented for Sarah the possibility of a different understanding of herself, lingering as she did on the narratives of the mother-effect in her formation. Already at the beginning, she associates this figure to her musical constitution, and includes therein also what she *did not listen to*. She spoke about the silence. For Sarah, her mother's musical silence constituted her, as we shall see during the analyses. Usually, in our daily lives, when we talk about music, what stands out is the sound and not the silence. The singularity of this fact announces another of our fundamental reasons (the third one) to have elected this dimension as the starting point of the analysis of the narratives: to start from a provocation about the very meaning of music as the art of combining sounds pleasurable to the ear – a sense to which we are so accustomed that it becomes to us *naturalized*. Checking any dictionary⁵ will show that they reiterate the definition of music as a set or combination of sounds. The earliest experience with music would always take place through sound, never through silence.

One can, therefore, ask: how could Sarah name the mother figure as the *before*, or as a potent beginning, of her musical formation, if in it there is what could *not* be heard? Could we think under the perspective that silence can also be sound, as already understood by John Cage? “Not one sound fears the silence that extinguishes it. And no silence exists that is not pregnant with sound” (Cage, 1985 apud Souza, 2006, p. 78).

Wisnik makes a provocation about the relation between *sound* and *noise* as a conversation in which there is absolutely no opposition. They are presences coexisting in nature. The sensations we have when hearing regular sounds and irregular sounds are cultural and historic constructs in which

[...] there is no absolute measure for the degree of stability and instability of the sound, which is always product and interpretation of cultures (a permanent selection of the materials aiming at the establishment of an economy of sound and noise infuses the history of music: certain intervals, certain rhythms, certain timbres adopted here can be refused elsewhere or, previously forbidden, they can later become fundamental) (Wisnik, 2005, p. 31, our translation).

Therefore, the concept of music with which we are dealing here is decidedly not restricted to that of music organized in harmonic sounds. If we admit silence – this silence “pregnant with sound” to which Cage poetically refers –, we also admit the noises present in the silence. We authorize the idea of a sound event, of random sound, of that which was not provoked and which, at the same time, is implicit as licit sound practice. We include regular and irregular sounds in this sound melting pot that encompasses modal, tonal and post-tonal musical production. We integrate the sonority designed by the 20th century music to that of the great masters of the Renaissance, Baroque, Classic or Romantic periods, without neglecting the multiplicity of the possible musical production of each age or historic context, and understanding that it is not reasonable to overlook any other possibility.

The concept of music permeates musical practice, or rather, *it is* the practice itself. Seen in such way, musicality, inherent to the production of the subject, is the practice possible for its time, immersed in power relations. The concepts of music and, consequently, of musicality are in constant interaction in the discourse of the musical field. They collide, complete each other, intercross, and can be simultaneous in the same historic moment. They represent possible positions occupied by the subject in given situations and moments within the musical discourse. Therefore, we understand discourse as practice, as what is said and also what is not said (even because *not saying* constitutes equally a discursive fact).

Sarah prompts us to think about one of the possible beginnings, under the dubious aspect between what is present there as formation, even in absence:

Sarah: Where did it start, isn't it? From what I did and didn't hear. And, yes, most of the time my father wasn't at home, my mother was a housewife and kept the radio on all day listening to the news. So I don't have memories of music, of her singing or something like that.

The Look of the Other and the Work upon Oneself

The memory fixed in the absence of music leads us to a question that emerged almost 20 minutes into the conversation with actress Sarah. We are drawn to ask ourselves why Sarah says that *talking about music is going back to talking about the mother*. Why does she make this connection if, according to her memory, the mother did not sing, did not interact musically? This question remained open for a long time, and was later resumed in the dialogue between the actress and the researcher:

Researcher: When you started to talk, Sarah... I don't want to interrupt you, to interrupt your thought, but when you started to talk you said: 'talking about music is going back to talk about the mother... isn't it?'

Sarah: Yes, that's already our whole life...

Researcher: The mother is our life... Why do you link music and mother, if you say that your mother didn't sing?

Sarah: That's... a good question... [...] it's perhaps... Or because of the absence, that she didn't have music, that I have a musical difficulty, isn't it? I don't know how to call it. Once you said that it's a difficulty of listening. Gee! From that day I started to think about this and to look... To put this into my life, to see. At some moment I have this in my life, this thing that I can't listen to the tuning, that I cannot reproduce it, or whatever it is.

Sarah resignifies the contribution of her mother, relating it to her present musical condition, including the existence of a musical difficulty for which the actress cannot find a name. At the same time, Sarah seeks confirmation from her interlocutor in the research, a subject who in reality merges with the role of educator; she wants to know about what she considers to be *difficult*: “[...] I have a musical difficulty, isn't it?” When declaring her problems to listen as one of the causes of her lack of tune, Sarah makes clear the *status* of the subject that speaks:

Sarah: [...] Once you said that it's a difficulty of listening. Gee! From that day I started to think about this and to look... To put this into my life, to see.

Here, we are faced with a scene in which the educator (or teacher) emerges as the subject who occupies a privileged place in the power relations and who, therefore, is in position to legitimize a given truth discourse. Sarah, in her turn, occupies a place of subject objectivated by the discourse of the teacher, who knows more,

studied for that and, therefore, can answer her questions about the position of the subject whose voice and singing would not be *in tune*. Perhaps this enunciation by the teacher might have been directed at a different person; nonetheless, Sarah invokes it, makes use of it and clearly shows to be objectivated by that *saying*.

When discussing the formation of enunciative modalities, Foucault brings some questions that interest us now. One of them regards the status of the subject of the utterance. He questions:

[...] who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language (*langage*)? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true? What is the status of the individuals who – alone – have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridical a defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer such a discourse? This status of doctor involves criteria of competence and knowledge; institutions, systems, pedagogic norms; legal conditions that give the right – though not without laying down certain limitations – to practice and to extend one’s knowledge (Foucault, 2013, p. 61).

The angle of Foucault’s discourse above is targeted at the medical discourse of the 19th century, and related to the possibilities of emergence of that same discourse. It deals with the relations with other areas of knowledge, with subjects insubordination or otherwise, with the power relations involved and the places in which such discourses appear, sometimes intertwined in the modification of a given practice.

Such angle is then related to the idea of the “dispersion of the subject”:

Thus conceived, discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined. It is a space of exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is deployed (Foucault, 2013, p. 66).

Still within the context of Sarah’s last enunciation, we can say that her condition as subject is not established just in that specific objectivation of the teacher’s discourse; a specific mode of subjectivation occurs there. The decision to look in her life for the meaning of the act of listening, to *put that* into her life, demonstrates

a personal investigation, a turning onto herself, a studying of herself provoked by the teacher's discourse, which – we reiterate – perhaps was not targeted at her, but which is available to her and can have an effect in her life under specific conditions.

We can then talk about *useful knowledge* in terms of a hermeneutics of the subject. We understand with Foucault in his *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* that what we must know can only take place through “[...] the subject's relations with everything around him. What we must know, or rather the way in which we must know, is a mode in which what is given as truth is read immediately and directly as precept” (Foucault, 2011, p. 211). Some knowledges are necessary, useful; we do not mean by that that others are unnecessary or useless: what makes a knowledge useful is the way in which that knowledge produces effects in our lives, in our ways of acting, in our *êthos* (Foucault, 2011).

Sarah's concern with her difficulty in listening leads us to seek in Barthes further ideas about the act of listening (Barthes, 1986; 1990); in an essay with this title, the author describes the act of hearing as a physiological phenomenon, and that of listening as a psychological action, thus establishing a difference between the two. The author also describes three forms of listening; the first form would be the *objective* listening, referred to indexes of audition, a capacity shared with animals, and that can be observed when we guess who is coming from the sound of their steps, or when we perceive certain noises as an alert; the second would be a listening of *deciphering*, in which signs that we hear and decipher are at play. To the author, here begins the differentiation between man and animal. The third form of listening would be related to the creation of an *intersubjective space*, not necessarily linked to predetermined signs: in this case, what matters is not *what* is said, but *who* speaks, amidst a “transference game” (Barthes, 1986, p. 243, our translation).

The act of listening related to tuning, to which Sarah refers, is directed at musical learning, but is also a theme approached with a different emphasis as practice of the self by the Greeks in antiquity, which can help us to understand this marriage between voice and ear. For the ancient Greeks, listening and speaking are complex practices. They constitute true forms of art. In this sense, listening is manifested in its ambiguous aspect. Plutarch divides listening into two roles: the first, *pathétikós*, presents the passive aspect of

hearing. More than any other of the senses, hearing is at the mercy of the exterior world, exposed to what is said and to what happens in the surroundings. One of the most important illustrations of this passive aspect of hearing is the episode in which Ulysses, a hero that seeks to have full command of himself, needs to be chained to the mast of his ship in order to resist to the bewitching song of the mermaids. The second role attributed by Plutarch to hearing is that of *logikós*. While being the most passive of all the senses, hearing is also the sense through which we can retain the *lógos*, the knowledge, the rationally articulated language. Competence and experience are needed in acquiring this skill. Separating the *pathétikós* from the *logikós* is an objective necessary to achieve the ascesis of listening. Three means are listed to accomplish this separation: silence (against garrulity), the individual's attitude towards his own body, and the work of attention proper (Foucault, 2011, p. 295-313).

One sees the direct link between speech and hearing, between what is heard and what is said or, in the case of Sarah's concern, between what is heard and what is sung. We can think, with the help of ancient Greek philosophers, about a pedagogy of the musical work for the actor's voice in which the perception and the ear are connected by a constant and invisible thread to the vocal production: the voice. In order to sing *well* (understood here as the act of vocally emitting sounds and silences with greater control or, as necessary, in a plastic and multiple form), a *tekhné* is necessary: in short, one needs art. Epictetus, cited by Foucault, tells us that hearing requires *empeiria*, a skill acquired through competence and experience. It also requires *tribé* – application: constant and assiduous practice. *Tekhné*, the art, apart from requiring competence (acquired through experience) and constant application, also implies a “[...] knowledge of what the body is in its very reality” (Foucault, 2011, p. 302).

Our interviewee Sarah clearly keeps the focus on the vocal question that emerges when she says: “I can't listen to the tuning”. Vocal tuning, or lack of it, is a ghost that haunts self-image, self-esteem. Failure to sing *well* or in tune is associated (discursively and subjectively) to the status of someone who was not born apt. Singing, and singing in tune, as a physiological action, would be related to requisites of a formation that would come from a far-off place, difficult to recall, out of the reach of memory. We might think that the mother, as the earliest memory, could be connected to this

physiological action, making reasonable the relation between absence of maternal musical intervention and lack of tuning or difficulty in *listening to the tuning*.

The Goddess Memory, Mother of Arts

When we think about the interactions in the sense of memory-perception-tuning, we recall Silvia Sobreira in her book *Desafinação Vocal* (Vocal Lack of Tuning, in a loose translation) (Sobreira, 2003), in which she includes the musical environment as a topic within the segment related to memory. Thus, the family surroundings in childhood would be one of the aspects responsible for the musical memory that the child will later have. The author mentions Shelton, who conducted a comparative study with children in their families, evincing some of the aspects favorable to musicality, such as: singing with relatives, especially the mother and siblings; listening to music frequently; having parents able to sing and to learn new songs; being stimulated to autonomy in musical hearing (such as in the choice of songs to record); being exposed from an early age to a multiplicity of styles and musical genres. Although this study lacks effective proof, other researchers share in its ideas, concluding that “children regarded as less musical” have parents who “[...] in general neither sing nor play any kind of musical instrument” (Sobreira, 2003, p. 65-66, our translation). In these cases, music is not an integral part of the inner family life, serving just as a mere complement to other activities.

It is interesting to observe that this author understands the sound environment as *memory*, with respect to the complexity of vocal tuning. Curiously, in Hesiod’s *Theogony* the goddess Memory⁶ is the mother of two muses (in Greek *mousiké tekhné*, muse’s art), one of which is Kalliopē⁷ (beautiful-voiced). In this context, in which we articulate voice (music) and memory, we feel justified in connecting *memory* to the field of oral culture, linked to the art of *voice*, to transmission of knowledge through voice, and also to presence. Apart from that, we underline the importance given to this knowledge, especially in the academic environment, in which many studies are constructed methodologically from oral history and (auto)biography, as we have done in the present investigation.

The *listening to the tuning* – Sarah’s statement in which she relates her vocal production with the possible absence of maternal singing, also invites the reflection made by Janete El Haouli on the mother-son relationship and about the elaboration of one’s own existence, of being in the world. On a question primarily psychoanalytical, that author sites Didier Anzieu’s book *The Skin Ego*, in which he says:

Before the breastfeeding mother’s look and smile can transmit to the child an image of himself that is visually perceptible to him and that he interiorizes to reinforce his self (*soi*) and sketch his ego, the melodic bath (the mother’s voice, her songs, the music she allows him to listen to) puts at his disposal a first sound mirror that he uses initially through his cries (which the maternal voice soothes in response) and finally through his phonemic articulation games (Anzieu, 1989, apud El Haouli, 2002, p. 66, our translation).

Stimulated by Anzieu, El Haouli elaborates musical production from the sound mirror between mother and child. Such production would take place previous to Lacan’s “mirror stage”, according to which the sense of vision would be emphasized; it is also previous to the stage studied by Winnicott, in which the mother’s face would be the first mirror, as a face reflected and constitutive of the individual (El Haouli, 2002, p. 66, our translation).

Some researchers in the area of music (Tafuri, 2008; Sloboda, 1985; Hargreaves, 1986; Bayer, 2005) investigate the mother-child relationship as closely linked to the formation of musicality. Tafuri, for example, develops a project with children between the ages of zero and three in which she attempts to answer the following questions: are we born musical or do we become musical? What does it mean to be musical? Using the author’s words, “[...] there are good reasons to think that we all have a genetic endowment sufficient for ‘good’ musical development, and that the differences found are actually due to the influence of countless other factors” (Tafuri, 2008, p. 122, our translation). We understand that our body has mechanisms that stimulate musical learning, and that we are all equipped for musical learning to happen; however, we are not alone, we are also constituted by the complexity around us. Various factors of social, economic, political, and family origin impact directly on what we can be.

Singing in tune and knowing how to listen constitute ingredients of one and the same *food*: for Sarah, entering the territory of singing

includes the territory of listening. Pursuing this analysis, we go back to the third kind of listening proposed by Barthes: the psychoanalytic listening, which is understood as an intersubjective space that can seem to be antagonistic to the Greek idea of separating passive listening (*pathétikós*) from knowledge listening (*logikós*). Barthes puts forward a new listening, creative, global, unabashed, non-exclusive; in short, fully inclusive:

[...] a poietic listening ('raw', as Barthes wants it) does not aim at imprisoning sounds in a hierarchizing manner, as in an insipid object of cold analysis. We find that it requires a fruition that caters for the specificities of the sounds, to the materiality of a voice that emanates from a living body, not only extracting verbal and intelligible signification, but attentive to the continuum of voice sound nuances (El Houili, 2002, p. 40, our translation).

The act of *listening to the tuning* would consist in relying on the subjectivity of the voice as matrix for the listening. Perhaps our interviewee Sarah refers to this poietic knowledge of listening. A listening that admits the body of the other, apart from one's own body. A listening that accepts one's own voice as focus; in this way, the concept of tuning is thought of without disregard for specific cultural patterns in each time and place. The tuning systems vary "according to cultures and ages" and, therefore, "[...] we can say that tuning is a cultural issue" (Sobreira, 2003, p. 26, our translation).

The Mother-Instrument in the Recalling of Affections

When we asked Sarah about the duality of her references to her mother as a possible genesis of a given musical knowledge and, at the same time, about the absence of this knowledge, she could not answer clearly at that precise moment; she waited for the interview to end, and then (when the recorder was turned off) asked to record the following:

Sarah: My mother was like, sick. She had always been sick. [...] But since I was born she prepared me for her death. Every now and then she was in hospital and things like that. And there was something I did: when I got home, when she was lying down, sometimes on the sofa or on her bed, regardless of the hour... Oh! I remember very well, the rooms had sliding doors, I would open the door and look to see if she was breathing... Mom is alive! Do you understand? Every time, when I got home and she was lying, I observed her... I had to see her breathing. I don't know

why, but I've connected all this now, just like that, the beating that we hear when... And this thing of mine of checking if my mother was alive through her breathing, it associated me with heartbeats...

Sarah observes her mother as a musical instrument. The heart beating, the breathing are sounds made by this mother-instrument. The care and the affection envelope Sarah's act of listening to her mother in an attentive dedication to silence filled with sounds, through the respiration movement, through life signs and heart beating. The relation between the presence of sounds and the presence of life is given in Sarah's attentive and loving look. It seems to us that she understands the connection with her mother as a musical relation of listening and caring, in which the absence of movement is the absence of sound, linked to life and to death. This understanding that took place in the act of her speech: "I don't know why, but I've connected all this now, just like that [...]" talks about the conception of music as movement.

Jacyan Oliveira, seeking to better elaborate the concept of musicality, cites Michel Brenet, to whom music (in a definition attributed to St Augustin) would be "the art of moving well" (Brenet apud Oliveira, 2008, p. 26, our translation). Music is related to movement, to breathing, to heart beating and, therefore, to life. The presence of sound is the very presence of life. There is a myth among the Arecuná⁸ Indians – cited by Wisnik in his book *O Som e o Sentido* (The Sound and the Sense) – that illustrates beautifully the link between sound and life. In this narrative, the natives tell the story of a multicolored water serpent, as a rainbow in the water (let us recall here Boitatá, the fire snake that protects the fields in Rio Grande do Sul), who is killed by the animals and, in this act of sacrifice, gives to them its shades of color: "According to the color of the fragment received by each of the animals they acquire their particular sounds and the color of their fur or of their plumage" (Wisnik, 2005, p. 36, our translation).

By following, listening, and seeing daily the breathing and heartbeat of her mother, Sarah leads us to an inevitable comparison between her mother and a musical instrument whose internal mechanism is linked to the bellows, to air – nourishment of life. Sarah understands the difficulty of singing in tune, of the perception of vocal tuning, as something associated to her mother, who was always sick. The comparison with a musical instrument whose mechanism

is a bellows, as a bagpipe, a bandoneon or an accordion (instrument that Sarah learned in her profession as an actress and that today she teaches to her colleagues), leads us to look into Barthes again, when he describes the mystic relation of the art of singing, so often proclaimed by voice teachers, and the mastery of good air management. To him,

Breathing is the *pneuma*, it is the soul that inflames or breaks, and every art directly linked to breathing can be an art secretly mystic (of a mysticism lowered to the level of a microgroove of mass). The lungs, foolish organ (the softness of cats!), inflate but are incapable of erection: it is in the throat, space where the phonic metal acquires consistency and sharpens itself, it is in the mask that explodes the significant, making emerge not the soul, but delight (Barthes, 1990, p. 240, our translation).

The air exhaled by the mother in her breathing is the warm breath of life, of affection, that Sarah elaborates when she recalls moments of closeness:

Sarah: *My mother was affectionate, she caressed my head... So there was this thing of lying down... I would come and lay on the sofa with my head in her lap... So I somehow listened to her heartbeat... And she kept her nails a bit long, and she caressed my head... It was so good... So good... There's this thing of heartbeat, you know, of the heart.*

The affection and cosiness are related to the organ of the heart in its pulsing. The presence of the body in its warmth and pulsing presupposes the interaction of the voice in a body that sounds and that, with vibration, caresses or repels those listening. This is what Barthes says when he points to the “grain of the voice”:

The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice that sings, in the hand that writes, in the limb that plays. If I capture the ‘grain’ of a song and attribute to it a theoretical value (it is the assumption of the text in the work), I will have to remake my criterion of evaluation, criterion undoubtedly individual, since I decided to listen to my relation with the body of that person who sings or plays, and this relation is erotic, but not ‘subjective’ (it is not the psychological ‘subject’ that plays in me; the pleasure that he expects will not fortify him – express him – but, on the contrary, lose him) (Barthes, 1990, p. 244, our translation).

The inscription of voice in the terrain of presence, presence of the body or of the physical phenomenon of the sound, in sound waves that reverberate in the cavities of flesh and bone, as the sound object, or of the person emitting or receiving, establishes a physical relation of pleasure, a relation mediated by the non-subjective body. It is a

sound wave that reverberates in the organism and brings pleasure, eroticizes. This concept is supported by the studies of Gumbrecht⁹, especially when the author speaks about presence, referring “[...] primarily, [to] this very feeling of being the embodiment of something [...]” (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 167, our translation). The voice shared in this way can be what Gumbrecht calls “production of presence”, and operates as one of the “[...] types of events and processes in which the impact of objects ‘present’ upon human bodies is initiated or intensified. All objects available in ‘presence’ will be called the ‘things of the world’” (Gumbrecht, 2010, p. 13, our translation).

Sarah connects the listening of her mother’s heartbeat in a moment of tenderness with an intrauterine time of musical formation, located even before her birth, in which the beat, the rhythm, and the pulsation of her mother are present.

Sarah: [...] why did I start to talk about my mother, and everybody starts to talk about their mothers? There is heartbeat, I think, isn't it? Even if she didn't listen to music, we are there inside our mothers, listening to their heart... So that's the first one, isn't it? Now thinking about where my musical history started.

Studies in the field of music, especially with respect to the cognitive-musical aspect in the areas of neuroscience, developmental psychology, and psychobiology have amplified significantly our knowledge about intrauterine musical learning in the newborn and in early childhood. It is possible to say today that we are born with information from the period of gestation, that is, that we are not born *empty*. Beatriz Ilari studies the musical formation that takes place between birth and 10 years of age, seeking to understand how the cognitive-musical development is established. To the author, musical knowledge takes place by imitation, sociocultural immersion, and also “[...] is normally associated to several psychosocial functions such as communication, including emotion, between children and adults [...]” (Ilari, 2005, our translation). According to her, the sense of listening is completely formed and acquires function by the 32nd week of gestation, with the fetus immersed in the mother sounds, listening to everything: “We know today that the mother’s uterus is rather noisy, and that it contains constant low-frequency sounds added to cardiovascular, intestinal, and placental sounds” (Woodward apud Ilari, 2002, p. 84, our translation).

By making reference to these studies, we believe it appropriate to create some kind of tension about it, so as to avoid remaining at the comfortable level of cause and consequence, according to which by stimulating the fetus musically we can *develop* great musicians or, equivalently, simplify this relation based on the stimulus-response pair. Thinking about birth as the beginning of a work to be developed, and not as the Other, the novelty, “[...] the emergence of something in which we cannot recognize ourselves” (Larrosa; De Lara, 1998, p. 74, our translation), gives as a feeling of quiet and comfort – which definitely does not interest us here. Larrosa elaborates this theme through the lens of the philosophy of education, helping us to argue in favor of abandoning this state of the *consolation* of ideas:

An image of totalitarianism: the face of those who, when looking at a child, know beforehand what is coming and what must be done with her. The counter-image could result in an reversal of the direction of the look: the face of those who are capable of feeling upon themselves the enigmatic look of a child, of perceiving what in that look exists of disquiet towards all certainties and securities and who, despite that, remain attentive to this look and feel, responsible in the face of its mandate: you must open for me a space in the world so that I can find a place and elevate my voice! (Larrosa; De Lara, 1998, p. 79, our translation).

The (Feminine) Voice that Impregnates and Bares the Body

In Sarah’s second interview, she talks even more intensely about the sounds of her mother, having elaborated in the time between interviews (the space of a month) the story of how her musical formation took place, with a possible origin in her relationship with her mother. She tells about her understanding regarding the *sounds of life*, referring not just to organic sounds coming from her mother (as the heartbeat and breathing), but also to objects that her mother used and that kept a pulse, a rhythm, such as the sewing machine.

Sarah: [...] what I also thought... I had mentioned the other time... Ah, I began to talk about... My musical history with my mother, but my mother didn't listen to music, so what? I kept thinking why was that, and then I thought: no, it's got everything to do! And then I kept thinking about the sounds of life, like... [...] The sewing machine. It had a foot lever, you know? It was not like today, with a little motor. So it had a different pace, it had a brand, and I listened a lot to that foot lever.

Sarah recalls her mother concentrated, *quiet in her corner*, in this occupation that she calls this *feminine thing of threads*, in an

environment where the silence is only interrupted by the sound of the sewing machine driven by the foot lever and not by a motor. Placing herself in the role of the caretaker, Sarah speaks of this silent and feminine mother, who wanted to be a teacher and who, firmly and tenderly, affirmed the importance of seeing her daughters become independent.

Sarah: [...] it was me who looked after her. The church received donations of clothes and fabric. So she would come home with fabric to sew little children's clothes and take them back to the church. She made lots of children's little shirts and shorts. So, she liked to do things and to sew. [...] My mother wanted to be a teacher, but she studied only up to 4th grade. Well, that's life! She became a housewife, three children, but always telling my sister: 'study and work so that you won't depend on a man'. And she gave us strength and support and everything else for that! [...] But the sewing machine still exists, it is still in my sister's place, and my mother has this feminine thing of threads. She sewed, she did crochet, which I also didn't learn. I let it pass! So it's a very feminine thing of threads and of... Quiet in her corner...

When we asked what was Sarah's mother illness, she answered by narrating the episode of her mother's death and the way in which she helped her in a morning when only Sarah, her mother and an aunt were at home. It was the heart that stopped. The same heart that stopped the movement (very high blood pressure) and made her dizzy turned that mother silent and physically little active.

Sarah: Then everybody came: when everybody was around her, then she died. [...] It's too much rhythm. Being a mother is too... And if you are inside your mother, you feel her heart. Life accelerates, and if she gets anxious and starts beating, you also feel that. So there is no way...

For Sarah, the child inside the mother's uterus or in her lap can feel the changes of pace in a sick heart, with the blood pressure out-of-control and very high: accelerating or decelerating. Therefore, indicating the mother figure as a possible beginning of musical formation, reported not only by Sarah, but also by three other actors (Ian, Pablo and Ronaldo, who took part in a collective interview made for the larger research on which this text is based), does not seem to be a statement disconnected from the emergence of the historic moment, in which studies are focused on the knowledge about the fetus and early childhood. The memory of the presence or otherwise of maternal musical interaction during this stage of the actor's life seems to us to be a constitutive element of the musicality of subjects. Let us observe the testimony by Ian:

Ian: [...] but before that, my musical memory perhaps begins with my mother. I think the character that defines a lot of things in my personality traits is my mother. [...] so she was always very playful, very mischievous and of singing much.

In this enunciation, Ian establishes for himself personality traits he observes in his mother. Certain habits of his mother, related to musical interaction, are seen as equally his; being playful, being mischievous, and enjoying singing. He subsumes his own personality to that of his mother. Clearly, he says that his *musical memory* begins with his mother, who defines many of his personality traits, one of which is that of *singing much*. The mother appears once again related to the voice. Voice (in Portuguese) is a feminine noun that implants in Ian's statement its own corporeality: *being playful and very mischievous*.

Paul Zumthor speaks of the voice as an impregnation of the body, as its more direct identity, in which the body is objectivated. Even without visual recognition, it is possible to imagine the body whose voice resounds. Many times the voice deceives us, as often happens with radio broadcasters, for example; the actual body of the owner of the voice can be very differently from what we imagine from his voice:

Paradox of the voice. It constitutes an event in the sound world, in the same way that every bodily movement is from the visual and tactile world. Therefore it somehow escapes the complete sense observation: in the world of matter it presents a kind of mysterious incongruence. It is because it informs about the person through the body that produces it: better than from their look, from the expression of their faces, a person is 'betrayed' by their voice. Better than the look, than the face, the voice is sexualized, it constitutes (more than transmits) an erotic message (Zumthor apud El Haouli, 2002, p. 80).

The voice bares the body, and is a dissonant, conflicting element, at the same time *aggregating* and *aggressive*, a germinating force and eroticism. "Voice daughter of the mouth, sexual organ" (El Haouli, 2002, p. 80, our translation). Voice that is body, and is directly linked to the level of sexual hormones.

The *listening to my mother's voice* is, therefore, a statement revisited by the actors with which we interacted in this research. Mother and voice are also connected for Pablo.

Pablo: [...] I have no visual or memory reference, maybe I do, but it's not present to me my mother singing or my father singing. I don't have a reference of listening to my mother's voice. There was no little song that she would sing. I remember their records. My father enjoyed classical music; my mother was more of popular songs.

The parents' musical preferences in their individualities are a subject that brings to focus the different experiences with the media¹⁰. The fact of enjoying classical music, on the one hand, and popular music, on the other, is recalled through the image of the records. Records, radio, and TV are vehicles that bring the presence of music into the family circle; it is the memory of objects of musical manipulation. There is reference to the nonvisual sensory appeal of music and the family when Ronaldo recalls evenings without the TV and, for that reason, *different, fun* evenings, that *altered daily life*. There is the memory of a mother who brought such enjoyment, and whose taste was distant from the father's. A mother who listened to musical genres such as pop and rock, unlike the father, who enjoyed regional and country music. A mother with autonomy over her own listening and influential in the way the family gathered for music appreciation, someone who decided for changes in daily life and, as narrated by Ian, brings on the enjoyment. Let us now listen to Ronaldo:

Ronaldo: And trying to recall now like [...]. I keep thinking what would be my earliest memories of music, you know [...]. I remember that my mother would switch off the TV and put a record on. And that was something different that happened sometimes in the evening. It was fun because it changed the routine, because every night we had a TV on and everybody would watch it and so on, but every now and then she would switch it off and put a record on. She would listen to RPM, Renato Russo, which were very distant from my father, for example, who enjoyed regional music, Chitãozinho and Xororó, and more gaucho music, Teixeira, things like that.

By understanding the complexity with which the mother is announced as constitutive of the musicality in this actor, we are outlining a historic moment of feminine constitution, of her musical preferences and, why not, of her decisions over the technological apparatuses employed as vehicles of music in the family. A feminine production possible in a specific historic moment, with its social, cultural, economic and political characteristics.

What Ronaldo and Pablo say about the musical taste in their families points us to an investigation conducted by Ilari (2006) with 60 young people and adults (in the city of Campinas, São Paulo), whose focus lies on the interpersonal judgement based on preference and musical taste and its genres, seeking to identify the stereotypes associated in this field and how they can be present in the physical and affective attraction. The author concludes that “[...] although music did not seem to exert a direct effect upon interpersonal attraction and choice of partners, it seemed to have an indirect and generalized effect upon interpersonal relations” (Ilari, 2006, p. 197, our translation). We know that music performs specific functions in our lives, being used in several occasions and accompanying various kinds of actions, such as lulling children to sleep, dancing, telling stories, celebrating, among many others. It is part of the discourses that constitute us and, therefore, of practices related to preestablished social patterns of conduct according to which we classify and judge, objectivating and subjectivating the subjects.

To Conclude

The earliest memory of music in the life of a person emerges, in general, linked to the mother figure, where the *voice* appears as the medium of this interaction. Recalling the mother singing or not singing is a form of constitution and a recurring dictum among actors interviewed in our research. As Barthes says, “[...] every relation with a voice is perforce amorous, and therefore it is in the voice that the difference of music, its mandatory evaluation, affirmation, explode” (Barthes, 1986, p. 273, our translation).

In the narratives of the subjects interviewed, as analyzed in this text, the visibility of the relation between memory-voice-mother requires the importance of electing it as *pars totalis* in the musical constitution of the participating actors. We were interested here in dealing with the mother figure as part of the manifestation of musicality in the actor, formative and constitutive of an extremely complex story. Therefore, it is not a question of looking for *one* origin of musical formation, naming for it the mother that is related to the voice-personality and to memory. That would be dangerous. It would be equivalent to thinking

[...] that beyond any apparent beginning, there is always a secret origin – so secret and so fundamental that it can never be quite grasped in itself. Thus one is led inevitably through the naivety of chronologies, towards an ever-receding point that is never itself present in any history; this point is merely its own void (Foucault, 2013, p. 25).

Our main interest in this article, in which we elected one of the topics of the larger research, was to seek the dispersion existing in the function that the mother occupies in the musical formation of actors based on what they brought as narratives of themselves. We tried to give a treatment of archaeological¹¹ inspiration to the enunciations in which the mother is related to musical formation. We have dealt here with the *presence of the mother* under different perspectives, which certainly do not emerge in isolation: we dealt with silence in its groups of sounds, generating a tension as to the concept of music; we thought about the element voice in its direct connection with the act of listening, with the hearing; we approached the concept of tuning as cultural and historic application. Likewise, we dealt with voice as corporeality and with the body as a sound instrument; with the consideration of birth not as an initial point in a development, but as a novelty, as the unexpected; with the relation that music can have with the life-movement and with the mother as the producer of life; with the consideration of the woman-mother figure as historic subject, constituted at a specific time as a possible woman, with her more distinctive peculiarities.

The dimensions analyzed in this investigation are permeated by the historic and cultural inscription that establishes limits and produces specific musical subjects. In the analysis of the actors' narratives, we found a musical constitution related to their earliest memories, a memory that refers to the mother, not to a unified *mother*, but a dispersed one – also in her silence, in the *absence* of sounds that can also produce specific musical subjects. The mother plays a role with respect to the sound mirror of the early childhood, linked to the element voice and listening. There is a relation between memory-voice-mother that brings about the problematization of the notion of tuning as a cultural and historic construct.

The descriptions and analysis made in this study suggest that every trajectory of musical constitution of an actor, including the inscription of the mother figure as central – which does not make it

unique – with respect to the vocal identity of actors, becomes part and inevitable condition of their working practice; the narratives and the operation with data have also indicated that the subjectivity inscribed in the appropriation of musical experience throughout life can be seen, in a Foucauldian way, as an element directly related to what previous philosophers have called *care of the self* and *practice of the self*.

The operations upon oneself, in the sense of a work of warping about oneself, are fundamental to allow the actor's craft to be more complete. In other words, to allow the actor to leave himself towards the *outside* and return *better*, transformed in ethical and aesthetic terms – since the modification of what one is implies necessarily a look and care with the world, with the other, with that which is of the order of the social and of the political. We humbly believe, therefore, that the investigation presented in this text has the power to invigorate and expand the discussions about the musicality of actors and, with that, to contribute to new works involving the production of the self and the constitution of subjectivities within the arts and education studies.

Notes

¹ Dissertation presented in 2014 to the Graduate Studies Program in Education of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). See: Rasslan, 2014.

² For more detailed information about the group, its trajectory, images, songs, cast and performances, see <<http://www.oigale.com.br>>.

³ To maintain anonymity, names have been changed.

⁴ We have decided to maintain the text of the interviews, incorporating the lack of grammatical rigor typical of colloquial oral language, without corrections, so as to preserve the feeling of an informal conversation during the reading.

⁵ Online dictionaries researched: *Michaelis*. Available on: <http://michaelis.uol.com.br/moderno/portugues/definicao/musica%20_1006078.html>. *Dicionário Informal*. Available on: <<http://www.dicionarioinformal.com.br/significado/musica/316/>>. *Dicio*. Available on: <<http://www.dicio.com.br/musica/>>. *Dicionário Web*. Available on: <<http://www.dicionarioweb.com.br/musica/>>. *Lexico*. Available on: <<http://www.lexico.pt/musica/>>.

⁶ “Fertilized by Zeus Father, who in the Hesiodic Pantheon incarnates supreme Justice and Sovereignty, Memory begets the Sung Words, which in Hesiod’s story are called Muses. Therefore, singing (the Muses) is born out of Memory (also in a psychological sense) and from the utmost exercise of Power (also in a political sense)” (Hesíodo, 1995, p. 11, our translation).

⁷ “[...] nine daughters sired by mighty Zeus: Clio and Euterpe and Thaleia and Melpomene and Terpsichore and Erato and Polyhymnia and Urania and Calliope, who is chief among them all”. “Proem: hymn to the Muses” (Hesíodo, 1995, p. 88, our translation).

⁸ This Arcuná myth from a tribe in northern Brazil and Guiana was collected by Koch-Grünberg and analyzed by Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss, 1964, p. 308-309).

⁹ In this article, we do not devote much space to Gumbrecht’s work, although we recognize the importance that it takes in the discussion of the concept of presence.

¹⁰ We shall deal elsewhere with media as a dimension to be explored in more detail.

¹¹ We understand by archaeological treatment what Judith Revel proposes in her book *Michel Foucault: conceitos essenciais*, namely: “[...] to describe not just the manner in which different local knowledges are determined based on the constitution of new objects that emerged at a given moment, but also how they relate to each other and outline the horizontal manner of a coherent epistemic configuration (Revel, 2005, p. 16, our translation).

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This unpublished text, translated by Jessé Rebello de Souza Junior and proofread by Ananyr Porto Fajardo, is also published in Portuguese in this issue.

Received 30 April 2015
Accepted 31 August 2015