

Paper prepared to K-Seminar (Feb 12, 2014).

First, I would like to say that Livia Simão, Jaan Valsiner and I are organizing a book on the notion of temporality; I'm supposed to have a chapter within one of the book sessions. Therefore, I need to develop further this paper that I had already started some time ago. Suggestions, commentaries, critics are welcome and will be helpful in order to complete my task!

**Thanks,
Danilo**

Temporality and semiotic-cultural constructions in life trajectories

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The Conferences on Psychology uttered by Vygotski between March and April of 1932 at the Pedagogic Institute of Leningrado, were published in a posthumous book "The development of psychical superior functions" on 1960 (Moscow). They brought up some of his research results organized as an academic course. His fifth conference focused on "Imagination and its development during the childhood". At the end of the conference, where Vygotski usually expresses his own perspective on the discussed topic, he asserted:

"Together with the images created during the process of immediate cognition of reality, the individual creates images, which are recognized as a production belonging to the sphere of imagination. The high level thinking development creates images that we cannot find prepared in the surroundings. It makes comprehensible the complex relation between the activities of the realist thinking and the imagination in their superior configurations, in all developmental stages. Each step addressing a more deep penetration at reality allows the child to simultaneously release, until certain degree, from his previously more primitive knowledge of reality.

Every deeper penetration in reality demands a freer attitude of the consciousness to the elements of this reality, a detachment from the external apparent aspect of the reality immediately given in primary perception, the possibility of more complex processes, in relation to it the cognition of reality is enriched and more elaborated" (Vygotski, 2001, pp. 438).

Bringing into focus the dialogical relation of perception and imagination in the developmental process of knowledge construction, I will discuss two theoretical and methodological frameworks to understand the psychological experience of temporality, one that

come from anthropology and emphasizes the cyclical nature of temporality, and other, from cultural psychology that emphasizes the irreversibility of time. My aim is to find a way to integrate both, linear and cyclical conceptions, taking into account that temporality refers to a cultural-personal way of giving meanings to the transformations/development of symbolic constructions in the course of life. I'll start from an illustration taken from an analysis of a Kaxinawa¹ myth on the origins of time.

The origins of time, a Kaxinawa myth translated by Capistrano de Abreu (1941), edited and discussed by Els Lagrou (2007):

[At the primordial times] all beings lived in the root of the sky, each group or house protecting its own cave (Abreu, 1941: 436). The qualities that constitute the basic rhythms in the ground, sky and in the aquatic worlds were in these separated caves, protected by primordial beings, and there was not a predetermined rhythm in their use by their owners. There was a cave that was protecting the warm; other hosting the cold; other which contained the dawning and a fourth cave that was housing the darkness.

The darkness did not grow there, the weather did not get cold, and there was not sun. My people lived well and had many houses. One of the houses of my people was close to the hole of the morning, other house close to the hole of darkness, other group lived next to the hole of the sun and the last house was near the hole of the cold. Nevertheless, when someone got angry, he/she opened the hole of cold, and the other reacted opening the hole of sun, other would open the hole of night and someone else the hole of dawning" (Abreu, 1941: 436-437)

In sum, the vicissitudes of social agreements determined the time and the rhythm of day and night alternation. The narrative relates a situation of a shaman (*mukaya*) who decided to open the hole of night, and the sudden darkness of the sky surprised all people during their quotidian activities. They had to spend the night where the darkness aroused: if they were swimming in the river to fish they had to try finding the river border without seeing anything; if they were carrying water to their house, had to stop in the way; if they were in the forest for any reason, had to stay where they were.

The chaos produced by the shaman (*mukaya*) by opening the hole of night provoked the owner of this hole to convene a meeting with the owners of the others qualities. They agreed to

¹ Kaxinawa is the ethnonym of a people from the Amazon rainforest in the regions among the east Peru, Acre State and the South of Amazon Stat (Brazil). Their native language belongs to the linguistic family, Pano, that is the native language of diverse peoples from Amazon (Sharanawa, Mastanawa, Yaminawa, among others nawa).(info: Socioambiental Institute)

introduce a regular rhythm in the succession of the light by the darkness, and then the order was introduced in the world. Once the rhythmic alternation was working, the effects and the qualities were also mixed up. Before [in the ancient times], when each quality were housed separately in the root of the sky, darkness signified impossibility to see anything, the sun light signified blinding light, the warm burns and the cold was frosty. The myth ends with the following utterance: "If they didn't do like that, we had to sleep with the fall sun" (Abreu, 1941: 441) (Lagrou, 2007, pp. 256-257).

From the myth of time to the mythological moment: myth as a narrative of change

In an interview to Didier Eribon, published in 1988, Lévi-Stauss answered a question concerning the utility of the myth saying that "it serves to explain why things were transformed in what they are and why they cannot be different now" (p. 180). [...] The myth works using images and events, which are rustic objects, presenting the phenomena in a contrastive and compact way, but reflecting basic conditions of the exercise of thinking" (p. 183) At the same time, "the mythical thinking when confronting a particular problem, set it in parallel with others, using diverse simultaneous codes" (pp. 179-180).

From this point of view, myths are symbolic constructions that articulates cognition of reality and imagination in a complex way, as one among others types of high level thinking development.

The mythological narrative does not present chronological correspondences of past events in history. It is a narrative that talks about a moment that is neither past nor future, but expresses the process of transformation between different relational configurations among beings in the cosmos. For Amerindians, this process is accessible with the development of some skills and under specific conditions. Dreams and inebriation, for instance, allows the shaman to access the mythical flow considered to be the background of the usual, socially shared experience of the world.

Myths are constantly reaffirmed in social meetings of each community, constructing "a pattern of intelligibility that allows the articulation of the world, society and history understandings, which are hidden in the thresholds of consciousness" (Lévi-Strauss, 1988, p. 182). It guides social symbolic practices, providing values for personal actions of who belongs to a particular cultural field.

The recursion of mythological speeches, social values and practices associated to them constrains the ways we psychologically feel and think the reality:

“(...) human practices, while repeating thousand millions of times, become fixed in the consciousness as logical pictures. These pictures have the rigidity of a prejudice, its axiomatic aspect, precisely, is only due their thousand millions repetitions” (Lenin apud Vygotski, 1934/2001).

Temporality and recursive relations with the others and the environment

Culture cultivates psychological systems through the construction of intersubjective and interobjective articulations that are ‘sedimented’ in personal bodies and consciousness. These articulations involve the sharing of a social order, which implies mutual regulation of activities in the environment: "temporality inheres in the pattern of dwelling activities" (Ingold, 2000, p. 190). The anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that temporality is not chronology neither history, that is, it "is not a regular system of dated time intervals" neither "a series of events that can be dated in time according to their occurrence in one or another chronological interval" (p. 194). It is related to the reciprocity of activities in which "people, in the performance of their tasks, *also attend to one another*" (p. 196).

These activities are coordinated according to periodical recurrences in different spheres of life. For instance, in some families we would find patterns of personal meetings in breakfast, lunch or dinner; in some jobs the patterns of regulated activities between workers, targets expected to be reached diary, weekly, monthly and annually. Time is not just cyclical in terms of intersubjective and interobjective regulation of activities. The cyclical regulation is a property of organic systems as the human body, which needs to regulate its cycles of wakefulness and sleep, hunger, thirst and their satisfaction etc.

All these cyclical demands of the personal body and social tasks needs to find a "rhythmic harmonization of mutual attention" (Ingold, 2000, p. 199) in order to keep working. Nevertheless, "there is no reason why the domain of interactivity should be confined to the movements of human beings" (p. 199). Our perception of passage of time is also connected to our perception of the landscape as a whole. We can attend to animals and plants as well as people.

Additionally, "the rhythms of human activities resonates not only with those of other living things but also with a whole host of other rhythmic phenomena - the cycles of day and night and of seasons, the winds, the tides, and so on" (p. 200). From the solar cycle to the cesium atoms, the temporal dimension bestows in the cyclical resonance of elements in the environment. Therefore, the cyclical approach also inheres the western experience of time (not only the Kaxinawa experience), although in a very specific way. A great evidence is found in our scientific conception according to which a second is the duration of 9,192,631,770 cycles of microwave light absorbed or emitted by the hyperfine transition of cesium-133 atoms in their ground state undisturbed by external fields.

Cyclical temporality and the irreversibility of time

As far our experience of time is connected to the cyclical resonance of elements belonging to the environment, time and temporality are also perceived as irreversible and linear—continuously moving from the past to the future. The notion of irreversibility of time has been largely discussed by Valsiner, emphasizing the singularity of events in developmental trajectories (cf. 1994) and the perceptual synthesis of the present through semiotic stabilization "out of basic flux of experiencing" (Valsiner 2002, p. 50).

Through semiotic mediation, the present is constructed as an adaptive illusion of stability, the past and the future become reflexive in the consciousness. Valsiner's notion on irreversibility of time is grounded in the Bergson's notion of duration.

"(...) For Bergson, duration is not merely the succession of one lived-through instant replacing another, but "...continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances" (Bergson, 1911a, p. 7)" (Valsiner, 1994, p. 31).

And in the Bergsonian emphasis of semiotic mediation of human consciousness:

"Consciousness separates the flow into units, by way of symbols—and perceives the reality only through the symbol (Bergson, 1910, p. 128). [...]. Language performs a dual function: on the one hand, it generates self-reflexive stability in the face of duration (thus eliminating the real "flow" of irreversible personal experience by translating it into symbols reflecting stability)" (Valsiner, 1994, p. 31).

Confronting the notion of irreversibility of time with that of cyclical experience of time we discussed before, we would think about the viability of articulation between these conceptions,

how it can be systematized, in the path of achieving a broader conception of temporality, able to conciliate different cultural conceptions of time. I would argue that a way to find a possible integration between cyclical and irreversible time can be found through an exploration on the relation between the singularity of developmental events and the cyclical repeatability of developmental processes:

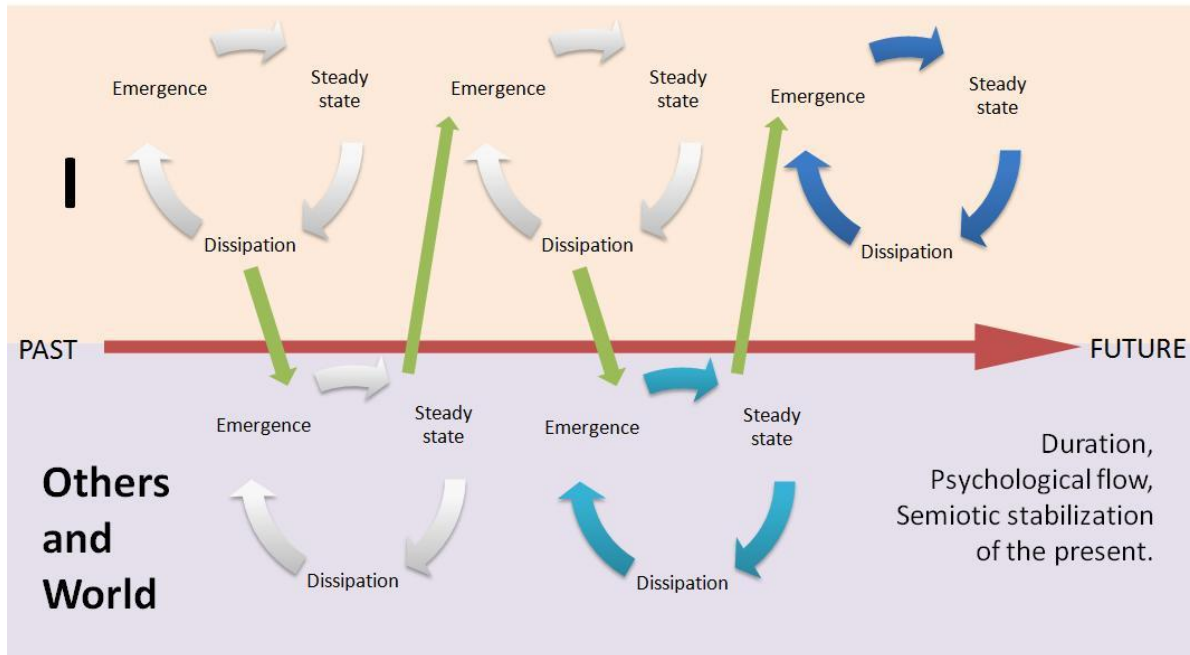
If the irreversibility of duration is taken seriously, each unity of analysis may be constructed by way of three sequentially distinguishable processual sub-units: *emergence, steady state and dissipation*. Adjacent units would have temporally overlapping sub-units (e.g., the dissipation phase of one unit is the same as the emergence phase of the next). Furthermore, it may be in principle impossible to determine the exact beginning "point" of an emergence phase (or the end "point" of the dissipation phase). The three-part units can be strictly definable by their middle ("steady state") part, but the relevant material from the perspective of developmental psychology is not in that definable part of the unit of analysis. The "steady state" may merely serve as a basis for detection of a developmental process that has arrived as such "steady state". The focus of analysis needs to be on the fuzzy sub-parts of the unit, and on the transition from one unit (that dissipates) to the next (that emerges) (Valsiner, 1994, p. 37).

From this assertion is possible to observe that the process of "emergence, steady state and dissipation" is assumed to be cyclically repeated over the irreversible time. It has some theoretical and methodological implications to the psychological understanding of the experience of temporality:

- 1) the process of "emergence, steady state and dissipation" is cyclically repeated over the irreversible time;
- 2) ...nevertheless, when a cycle is finished, it do not returns to the same starting point (recursive principle)...
- 3) The cycle is intercepted by the irreversible time and backs recursively, producing novelties over the sedimented past...
- 4) Taking into consideration that temporality is related to the reciprocity of activities, in which "people, in the performance of their tasks, *also attend to one another*" (Ingold) and that "one of the main sources of transformation in human development is through the subject's quest for I-Other sharing (Guimarães and Simão, 2007), then...
- 5) WE HAVE A...rhythmic harmonization of mutual attention in irreversible time, IN WHICH I, others and world affect their mutual living cycles, dislocating each other starting points: From this articulation, irreversibility of time becomes an outcome of the meetings between the reciprocal cyclical emergences of other beings in the world.

The following schema is a synthesis of the topics 1-5:

...rhythmic harmonization of mutual attention in irreversible time:



Semiotic-cultural constructions as an outcome of rhythmic harmonization of mutual attention in irreversible time

Amerindian ethnology is plenty of descriptions concerning a large number of mistakes and misunderstandings involving meetings between different populations. Some of the most remarking cases concern the plurality of names which each group receive from the foreigners. These names hark back to efforts of the stranger in order to identify a people, to understand them in their specificity as an integrated whole. Sztutman (2005) asserts that the names Portuguese Jesuits used to label their Amerindian allies (against French invasion of South American lands during the fifteen century) “vary from a chronic to the other and few could be known about the people criteria of division” (p. 137). On the other hand, implications of external labeling and its unavoidable mistakes were developed in diverse myths, such as in the following excerpt regarding the meeting with white people:

The first time that the Whiteman saw an Indian he was undressed and playing with a bat. (...) The Whiteman asked to the Indian who he was and he, as didn't understood the Portuguese, answered in his language: I'm killing (playing with) a bat. We call bat *kaxi*. Hence, the Whiteman gave the name: "you and your people are Kaxinawa (*kaxi-nawa*)" (Lindemberg Monte, 1984, apud Lagrou, 2007, p. 182).

Concerning this Kaxinawa excerpt, the ethnologist Lagrou (2007) maintains that if there was not a problem of communication the foreigner would have called his interlocutor *huni kuin* (truly human), that is the way as who speaks Pano call themselves. Therefore, the 'communicative problem' implies perceptive mistakes that consist in not perceiving the truly humanity of otherness. In sum, the ethnonym that identifies a group of persons as a people comes from the outside (from the stranger) and is the result of a misperception of the other.

The perspective of who are not familiar with something usually does not allow the person to construct a neutral designation. The possibility of self-distancing from the immediate exteriority, as a characteristic of human consciousness allows the contemplative reflexivity. Personal reflexivity considered from the perspective of the Vygotskian excerpt that opened this paper, articulates personal perceptions and imaginations, addressing semiotic affective-cognitive constructions from singular experiences. Therefore, the designation of something or someone is made from apprehensible characteristics constrained by the cultural background that the person (knower) have ontogenetically internalized. These apprehended characteristics can be considered as vestiges of the alterity.

The philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (cf. 1993), gives an important contribution to the understanding of the process involved in alterity relationships. According to him, the alterity of the other cannot be immediately apprehended, but it is mediated by vestiges. Vestiges are any perceived, comprehensible, aspect related to the communicative experience. Nevertheless, taking into account the alterity of the other implies to regard its foreign dimension as a fundamental aspect of the relation: because the "other" is always bonded to peoples and worlds that were not equally experienced by the "I". Therefore, Lévinas stress the *ipseity* of the I as a particular aspect for the elaboration of the experience in mediated world:

The world of perception expresses a face: the things affect us as *belonging* to otherness. [...] Things, as merely things, have their first independence because they are not mine, because I'm in relation with humans from whom they come. Hence, the relation of the I with the totality is a relation with human beings I recognize the face (Lévinas, 2004, p. 39).

From this perspective, one's action will always regard an object that already has its cultural history made by multiple others. This makes the object also active, as it would never offer itself as *tabula rasa* for the symbolic action of a “just arrived subject” (Simão, 2010; Guimarães and Simão, in the press). Cultural objects—i.e. a song, a book, a painting, industrial things etc.—are relatively independent/alienated from who produced them. They are constructed in the ground of a seductive effort of an agency addressing the other. The duality creation-and-alienation is always relevant in the communicative process. Cultural expressions, meanings and artifacts are, in this sense, vestiges and products of subjective elaborations of experiences (Berger and Luckmann, 1974). The subjectivity of the other, nevertheless, is never fully accessible or comprehensible through the fragmentary expression or artifact presentation. A person has to deal with some devices for attracting one's attention and logically articulating feelings in a powerful shape. To communicate implies an intervention in the world.

The intersubjective sharing demands efforts for perspectives adjustments in which the each person involved places a symbolic object (artifacts, utterances, melodies etc.) to the other. Therefore, the independence of the object embraces different degrees of relativity. Anyway, one's expression or object mostly remains opened to multiple meanings. Feelings have an important role to the active elaboration and understanding of the communicative expressions.

Josephs (2000) argues that there is not a clear separation between feelings and cognition. Instead, cognition is understood as the possibility of feelings becoming distinguished from an originally affective relationship between the I and the world. In this sense, feelings are both interior and exterior, or, better saying:

[...] feeling is a mode of relating to one's external or internal world (...) a dynamic process located in the feeling person, sometimes salient, powerful and overwhelming, sometimes hidden in the background; sometimes fuzzy and not easy—or even impossible—to verbalize, sometimes clearly framed and categorized within the language of feeling and emotion” (p. 815).

As a dynamic mediation of the person-world relationship, feelings leave their traces in any human cultural production. Discussing some Dissanayake findings, Johansen (2010) claims that the persuasiveness and emotional impact of poetic language—melody and rhythm, patterns and repetitions, hyperboles, elaborations and simplifications—has its origins in the extremely affective talk between mothers and their babies.

Figure 2, below, is a systematization of the I-otherness relationships as implying the emergence of cultural expressions/objects. It presupposes that the symbolic object is a result of creative symbolic elaboration of feelings, addressing the production of affective-cognitive

impacts in the public. The symbolic elaboration of the listener acts recursively on the affective field of the speaker, who can be disquieted (i.e. ruptured in his/her expectancies). It demands a reorganization of the affective field through the creation of a new objective structure, leading the other/listener/speaker to a novel affective-cognitive experience.

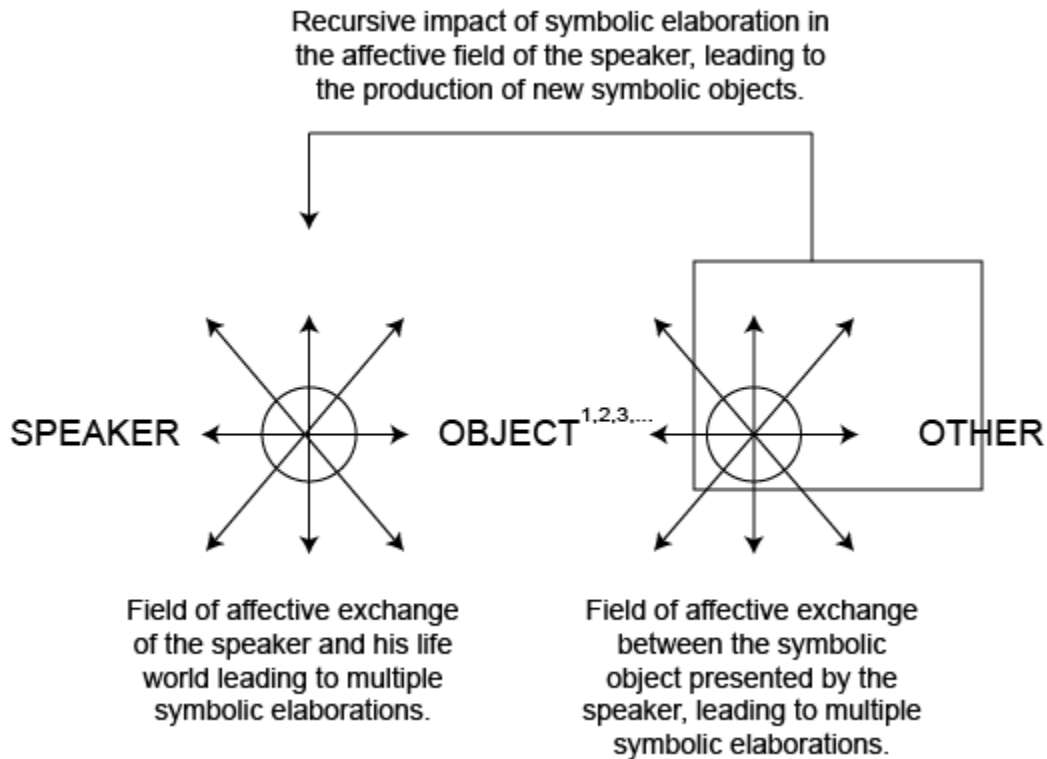


Fig. 2: Intersubjective flow of feelings leading to symbolic elaborations and construction of cultural expressions/artifacts/utterances.

The rhythmic dimension of this communicative process is also relevant because “the rhythms of human activities resonates not only with those of other living things but also with a whole host of other rhythmic phenomena - the cycles of day and night and of seasons, the winds, the tides, and so on” (Ingold, 2000, p. 200). The rhythm organized in a compositional setting is able to structure “(...) forms symbolic of human feeling” (Langer, 1953, p. 40). From ancient Greek philosophers to Lukàcs (cf. Johansen, 2010) music is strongly related to the “inwardness of humankind” (p. 185). From this, I would argue that the rhythmic experience in Self-other relationships, before the verbal interaction, is on the basis of the heterogenetic process that leads to the emergence of multiple perspectives in the cultural relationships. Temporality, in this sense, is an outcome of the intersubjective stream of mutual affection.

The self-temporality construction as an articulation between perception and imagination

Vygotski position's evinces that there is dialogism between perception and imagination in the process of cognition. Apprehending the reality, the individual is always in between the perceptive and imaginative process. This sort of dialogism allows an "enriched and more elaborated" cognition of reality, although perception and imagination is not supposed to be fused once for all. Imaginative tendencies remain co-regulating the perceptive process and vice-versa, addressing a "deep penetration" at reality. Personal reality is, therefore, the result of a construction in which the imaginary process is a constitutive part.

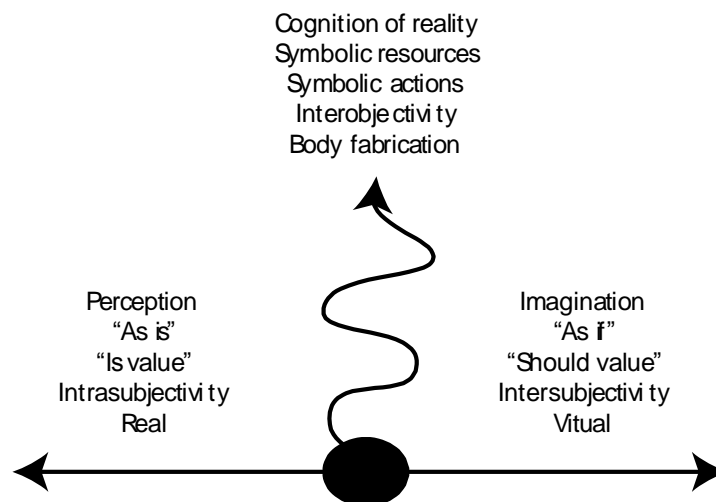


Figure 3: Field of tension between perception and imagination articulated in the cognition of reality and its semiotic resonances.

Figure 3 shows the articulation between perceptions and imaginations as a field of tensions in which semiotic elaborations take place. The triad imagination, perception and cognition of reality resonates with other conceptual triads found in cultural psychology, for instance: the dialogic opposition between 1) the possibilities (as-IF) and realizations (as-IS) in the life trajectories, leading to the emergence of symbolic resources that guides human futurity (Valsiner, 2007); 2) the situation as it is being lived (IS value) and the desired thing (SHOULD value) articulated in the potential for our symbolic actions in the world (Boesch E. E., 1991); 3) the personal (intrasubjective) elaboration of the experience and the social sharing

(intersubjective) experience of the lifeworld resulting in interobjective elaborations (Latour, 1996); and 4) the articulation of what is lived as concrete (real) and what is projected as a illusory (virtual) in a process that involves the configuration of the personal body (body fabrication) in a communicative process (Lima, 1996). In sum, all these triads lead us to conceive that reality, in a semiotic-cultural sense, is a plan of consistency constructed in the interval of openness between the person and the environment. Filling this interval, the semiotic-cultural process articulates cosmological values that give consistent basis for the interpretations of the experience.

Although cosmology is the basis for consistent interpretations of reality, they do not need rational proofs to be accepted (Lévi-Strauss & Eribon, 1990); (Boesch E. E., 1991). The acceptance of the cultural values usually occurs in the primary socialization of the child (Berger & Luckmann, 2003) thanks to its affective engagement with the caregivers that guides the child in the process of internalization of culturally meaningful perceptions and imaginations.

Anthropological works are evincing the existence of different ontological routes in history and societies (Lima, 1996; Viveiros de Castro, 1996; Descola, 2005). It leads to the recognition of non-translatable dimensions between cultures and, consequently, to the incommunicability of self-experiences between incompatible semiotic grounds—i.e. as the access to otherness continuous dynamics of semiotic construction is never fully accessible. These anthropological findings are coherent, in some aspects, with the phenomenological methodological constraint of *Epoché*, that is, considering “[...] that any phenomenological description proper is to be performed from a *first person* point of view” (Beyer, 2011, n. p.) and, therefore, “[...] ‘bracketing’ the question of the existence of the natural world around us” (Smith, 2011, n. p.). This phenomenological constraint is convergent with some constructivist approaches, according to which the reality is a social construction (Berger and Luckmann, 1966/2003).

In sum, the good knowledge, is an elaboration that depends on the way children internalize their perception and elaborate it through the sphere of imagination. Perception and imagination constitute the double face of the consciousness related to its objects: when perceiving, the consciousness apprehends the object as exterior to itself; when imagining, the consciousness apprehends the object as independent of its external presence. During the ontogenesis, perception and imagination relate dialectically as such that much of our perceptive approach to the exteriority is developed by our imaginative internal elaborations and reciprocally. Besides, there is a fundamental relation between action and meditational means, the developing person articulates personal symbolic resources and actions, embraced by Self perceptive-imaginary apprehensions.

The notion of symbolic resource here adopted is based on Zittoun's elaborations according to which:

[...] the use of symbolic elements by an agent in order to achieve something in a particular social, cultural and temporal context constitutes that symbolic device as a resource that enables the agent to make a transition from one socio-cultural formation to another [...] (Zittoun, Gillespie, Invision, Psaltis, 2003, p. 416).

On the other hand, the notion of symbolic action was taken from Boesch's theory, according to which:

[...] an action will always be performed by an 'encultured' individual who profits from cultural opportunities or facilities and is limited by their constraints; at the same time, the actor will select and adapt cultural contents and thereby create the idiosyncratic meaning of the action [...] (Boesch, 2001, pp. 480-481).

Symbolic resources and symbolic actions, as mediations of Self relationships with the others and things, are expressions of psychological dialogicality. They act over the tension between personal aspirations and the concrete experience in the life world and reveal negotiable meanings between diverse viewpoints.

Both symbolic action orientation and symbolic resources are features of the cultural field (Boesch, 1991) in which trajectories of life (Valsiner, 2007b) take place. Thence, intersubjectivity is not only a process that happens among two or more persons in the world, but also in different levels of the intrasubjective dimension of the Self, i.e. in its internal dialogue. Hermans (1996) stressed that the others in private imaginary dialogues are derived from our relation with external others. The Self is, therefore, an intrasubjective space in which diverse positions are personally integrated, through semiotic elaboration of affective and nebulous experiences.

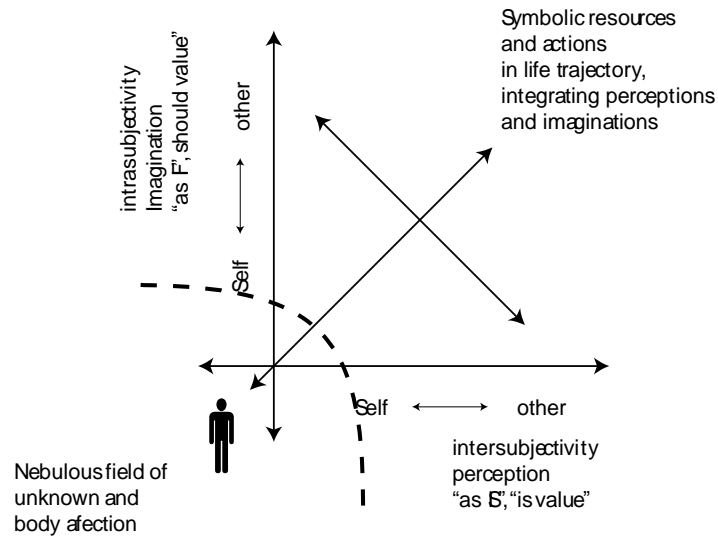


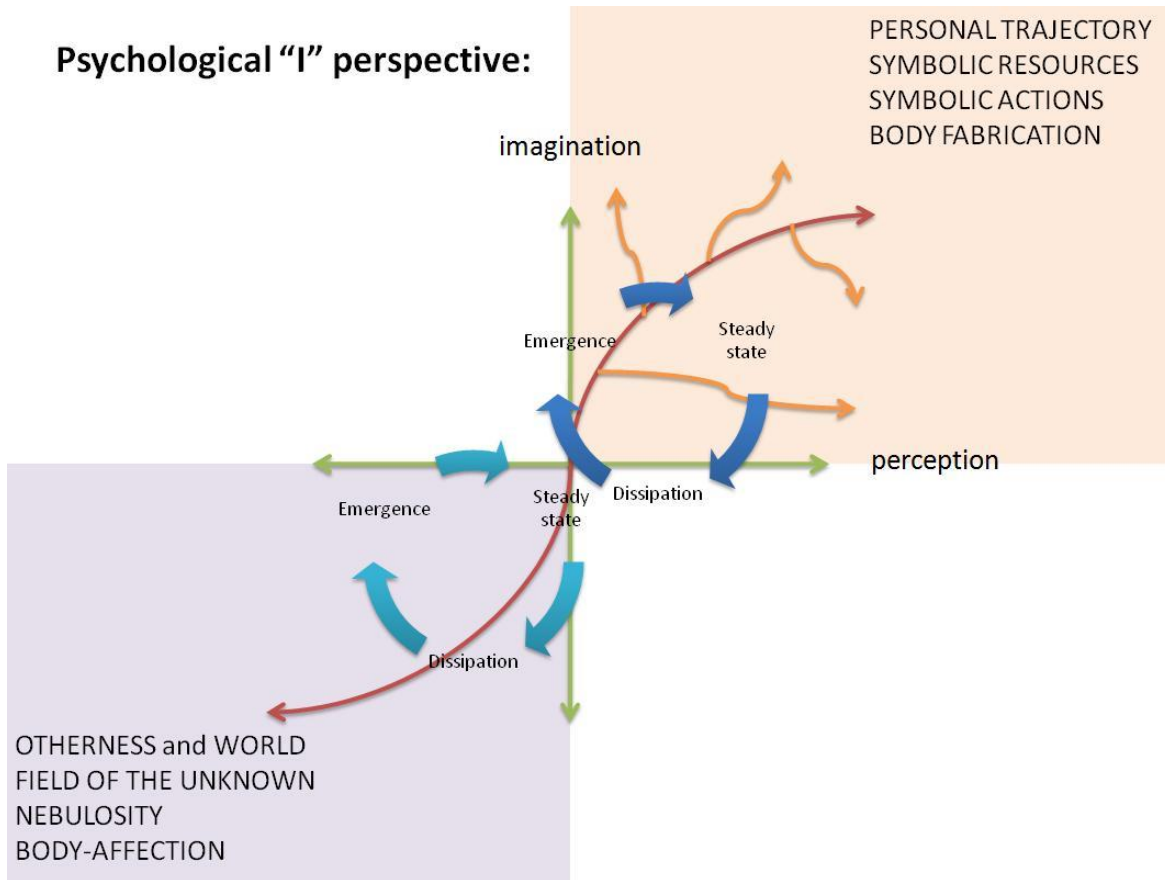
Figure 2: Self as a construction integrating embodied intersubjective (perceptive) and intrasubjective (imaginary) experiences.

As represented in Figure 2, symbolic actions and resources articulate perceptive experiences of the exteriority as it is, including intersubjectivity, with imaginary experiences of the intrasubjective psychological dimension, converting life trajectories into self-narratives of personal transformations in time, whereas elaborating nebulous, affective-cognitive experiences.

Time and mutual regulations between psychological cycles

This topic concerns some theoretical and methodological issues on the temporality of psychological symbolic transformations. I will bring again the categories of perception and imagination pointed out by Vygotski as two constructive and embraced spheres of consciousness that work together in thinking development. As Vygotski proposed “...its impossible to know correctly the reality without a certain content of imagination”. Therefore, I would propose that the process of emergence of symbolic elaborations in personal trajectories, happens through the adjustment of a cyclical personal process involving perception and imagination concerning the cyclical process that happens with the others in the world in a similar way.

Psychological "I" perspective:



Reciprocal adjustments happens in bidirectional ways and continuously along time, dislocating each other personal cycles of symbolic elaborations in the construction of a intersubjective space, that is, to use an expression of Rommetveit:

Reciprocal adjustments of perspectives is achieved by an "attunement to the attunement of the other" by which states of affairs are brought into joint focus of attention, made sense of, and talked about from a position temporarily adopted by both participants in the communication (Rommetveit, 1992).

The mutual affection between I and others, I and world, do not allow the cycle of emergence, steady state, and dissipation enclosed in a merely repetitive cycle. On the contrary, mutual adjustment guides personal changes in the symbolic trajectories, by dislocating the sedimented symbolic cycle that happened in the immediate past demanding the emergence of new symbolic resources and actions.

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