

# **Cultural-affective bonds in field-research: Towards a semiotic- constructivist understanding of circus daily life**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is about the inherent tensions in the self-other relationships that emerge from approximations and estrangements imposed by field research situations. This matter is discussed in terms of the affective bonds between researcher and participants, and in relation to the personal involvement of the researcher with the object of study. The investigation is based on the dialogical perspective of the semiotic-cultural constructivism, incorporating recent reflections concerning the notion of perspective and dialogical multiplication. We forwarded the development of a research project concerning meaning construction on the topic of daily life in the circus. The interest in this subject arose from previous personal experience of the first author of this study. We sought to a) identify descriptive elements of everyday life in the circus b) the moments of tension that emerge in the self-other relationships and c) the dialogical position that emerge at the process of meaning construction. To this paper, we selected an analysis of a content registered in the field notebook about their first meeting that took place during the process of information gathering, preliminary to the research planned procedure. The selected report allowed us to reflect on the intersubjective and intrasubjective tensions we may encounter as we speak to others from different dialogical perspectives.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Although cultural psychologists are often committed to their own cultural background, the multiple subtle ways such commitment interferes with his/her knowledge construction process remain unreflective. This paper deals with a fundamental question to theoretical and methodological research in the dialogical cultural psychology: the inherent tensions in the self-other relationships emerging from approximations and estrangements imposed by field research situations. We will discuss this issue, both in terms of the affective bonds between the researcher and the participants, and in relation to the personal involvement of the researcher with the object of study.

Between 2012 and 2013, we forwarded the development of a Master's research project at the Institute of Psychology of the University of São Paulo, Brazil. This research concerned meaning constructions on the topic of daily life in the circus, looking especially into the self-perspective of inhabitants of a particular circus in Brazil.

The interest in such topic had arisen from previous personal experience of the first author of this paper, who worked and accompanied three different circuses in Mexico at the eighties, for a period of four years. It was a challenging experience, among other things, because the daily life of circuses inhabitants is singular: living in trailers, traveling in caravans, constantly moving from city to city for the presentations. Years after leaving the circus life and the profession of circus performer, the first author of this paper decided to major in psychology. Nevertheless, the former experience was affectively meaningful and remained with her during the new formation period, because experiencing the circus universe was personally transformative since it provided her with a perspective of a new way of living, a new mindset towards family, work and the circus. Moreover, it presented to her new aspects of living in a group, which modified her own way of living and the way in which she related to the world.

Consequently, the circus led the researcher towards psychology, in order to comprehend human relationships in peculiar sociocultural fields, as well as elaborate some gaps in the intercultural boundaries, aiming at analyzing the uneasiness and meaning constructions that emerge out of life trajectories that penetrate different cultural contexts.

Semiotic-cultural constructivism in psychology (cf. Simão 2005, 2010) led the ex-circus-performer-now-psychologist to go back to the circus as a researcher, in order to understand the contemporaneous circus everyday life from this novel position. This approach guides the psychological investigation to focus the genesis of the research processes, to observe the limits in the articulation of theory and method, and regards the researcher as an important part of the investigative process, instead preconizing the impartiality in the process of knowledge construction.

Considering the understanding of the human being in its uniqueness regarding the cultural context in which we are immersed, and based on what was reported by the research's participants, three things were investigated a) descriptive elements of their everyday life, b) the moments of tension in the self-other relations and c) dialogical positions that emerged in the process of meaning construction.

We supposed that such focus of investigation demanded a strategy of participatory research, involving the action research methodology (cf. Spink, 1976, 2003), and ethnography (cf. Oliveira, 1998; Andrade, Morato and Schmidt, 2007). These methodological references emphasize the active role of the researcher and of the participant in the scientific enterprise. Therefore, the stream of events that become object for psychological analysis (cf. Guimarães, 2010a) is understood as a dynamic, open-ended system (cf. Valsiner, 1998, 2001, 2007). As Moura and Hernandez (2012)

emphasize, the attention of the researcher needs to be focused on the experience and on the finding of semiotic tracks of the process in course.

### **Dialogical Cultural Psychology and the Construction of the Researcher Position**

Dialogical approach to cultural psychology asserts that knowledge is mediated by the position of the subject in the face of an object. In social and scientific fields, multiple positions can emerge in the face of a singular object. Therefore, knowledge is a dynamic and transitory feature linked to the historical-cultural fields and transformed during the dialogical process of meaning negotiation between the Alter and the Ego (cf. Marková, 2006). The researcher, as a knowledge constructor, actively assumes a position that allows him or her to present a psychological perspective towards the investigated topic. Researcher, object of investigation and knowledge construction are interdependent, so it is necessary to take into account the scientific-semiotic-cultural process that leads to the emergence of novelties in the psychological framework.

Simão (2010) argues that theoretical and methodological framework of the semiotic-cultural constructivism emerged in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century out of propositions from Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, George Mead, Pierre Janet, Jean Piaget. Contemporarily, the cultural psychologies of Ernst Boesch, Jaan Valsiner and the dialogical conceptions of Marková and Rommetveit granted a broader understanding of the personal-cultural symbolic development in articulation with their precursory ideas.

Ernst Boesch, a pioneer of the European cultural psychology, emphasizes that through symbolic actions, people construct personal meanings in articulation with the meanings constructed by the others, emerging from the interaction of objective and subjective references with the symbolic cultural field of action (Simão, 2002).

Methodologically, it implies highlighting the options and the historicity of changes in the course of investigation. The researcher works to understand the changes concerning the development of his relationship with the participants, as well as to interpret the themes that emerge in the course of the research (cf. Boesch, 1991; Valsiner, 1998; Guimarães and Simão, 2007, Guimarães, 2011). The hermeneutic option of the semiotic-cultural constructivism in psychology follows this path of investigation (Simão, 2005; 2010; Valsiner, 2007).

The investigative framework of semiotic-cultural constructivism in psychology elects the disquieting experience as the cornerstone to the comprehension of I-other-world relationships:

*By disquieting experience, I mean experience that hurts our expectancies, prodding the subject cognitively as well as affectively to feel, think and act. The affected person may be the actor who lives the experience itself, or another person who co-experiences the actor's disquiet through verbal dialogue or joint silence. The co-experiencer is,*

therefore, displaced from his/her own previous position as is the interlocutor (Simão, 2003, *italics in the original*).

In this paper, the perspectives of researcher and participants on the circus are regarded considering the contrast between different life trajectories, which can lead to ruptures of expectancies in the dialogue, demanding the reconstruction of personal semiotic-cultural meanings. That is, disquieting gives the researcher and the participants the opportunity to transform themselves in order to reduce the tension that emerged in the interaction, leading to the reconstruction of the cultural field semiotically organized along with others and the world of things.

### **Planning the Field Research: Circus as a Field of Cultural Symbolic Actions**

The investigation departed from the dialogical perspective of the semiotic-cultural constructivism, incorporating some recent reflections on the notion of field research. The notion of 'field' adopted here does not refer to a place outside the laboratory where the researcher goes to collect data. The 'field' is not a physically determined place but, as Kurt Lewin asserted, it is "the totality of psychological facts that are not real in itself, but are real because they produce effects" (Spink, 2003, p. 21).

From this, some visits to the territory were planned in our investigative project in order to focalize the daily life of the circus and the personal meanings that could emerge from ordinary situations. After that, six adult circus artists came forward to participate in interviews with the researcher. Two of them were female and four were male. The interviews were guided by a script of semi-structured questions. After each audio-recorded interview, the participants were asked to take photos, within the circus, of things or places considered personally meaningful. They were free to choose the number of photos to be taken. We used this photographic mediation in order to understand the meaning of the picture through the eyes of its author (Neiva-Silva and Koller, 2002), that is, the images represent an opportunity to understand how each participant sees his/her own universe. Finally, after they had taken the photos, we asked the participants to make some personal comments about the image they had chosen to focus on.

From the analysis of the empirical data, we observed enchantment of the participants in relation to the circus and its itinerant lifestyle. In this common field of meanings, members share aspects related to family as well as carry out professional, social and interpersonal relationships. In the narratives, concerns related to the future of the circus emerged, mainly due the legal removal of animals from the arena in some Brazilian cities, which caused a significant drop in ticket sales; a fact which indicates that at this time the circus is experiencing a period of cultural changes, since its presentations have always been linked to the presentation of animals. Some participants share the view that there is estrangement from the surrounding society

regarding the circus business and those who dedicate their lives to it, emphasizing the tenuous relationship between the public and private sectors in this universe.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As a result of the field accomplishment, we recorded six interviews, more than 3 hours of data, and a total of 24 photos were taken by the interviewees. All data was collected with the permission of all participants through a Statement of Consent which was prepared in accordance with the standards of the National Committee of Ethics in Research (CONEP/BRAZIL).

In addition to all audio-recorded data the researcher kept a field notebook, which was an important device to the investigation and contained her impressions about the experience. Much to our surprise, the field notebook precisely provided the empirical data that allowed us to understand a crucial moment of the investigation: we found in the preliminary visits the key that led us to understand the construction of a shared setting to the investigative path.

In this direction, we intend to promote a reflection on aspects of a dialogue between the researcher and one of the members of the circus, through the analysis of their first meeting that occurred during the process of information gathering. At this preliminary moment, the researcher chatted with some circus members. We decided to present an analysis of the following field work written report, instead of some of the audio-recorded data, because we considered that this account offers a clear image of the cultural commitment of the researcher and participants of the dialogue during knowledge construction.

### **The Situation of the Meeting**

This meeting took place in the circus, in the second of three visits for the preliminary investigation. Since she did not know anyone from that circus company or anyone who worked there, the main reason for these visits was to come forward and report, according to research guidelines, to someone who was responsible for the institution seeking a possible authorization for doing research in that space<sup>1</sup>, and also to make a first contact with the members of the circus in order to invite them to participate in the study.

The analyzed dialogue with the circus performer, named here as CM (Member of the Circus), is the result of the researcher's memories from the meeting that took place between them, which is shown in the manner the researcher wrote in her field diary in the same day, after the meeting with CM. Therefore, since it is not a transcript of the interview, it should not be understood as a fragment or a recording. We decided to present the field note as a dialogue because it was the manner in which the researcher

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<sup>1</sup> The circus administrator accepted the research after being informed about the objectives and methodological procedures.

spontaneously registered this moment. Besides, it allows the reader to be in touch with the intensity of the intersubjective involvement between the participants in the meeting, without the textual mediation of a third person narrator (although we consider that an active narrator is always present, implicitly or explicitly).

It was predictable that her coming back to the circus as a researcher would put her in touch with her previous experiences as an artist. Consequently, the researcher expected to find an agreeable and familiar place, which was confirmed in her first visit to the circus. Despite being aware that the approach to the circus territory would be a negotiated process — which is usually the case in fieldwork that includes communitarian visits — the researcher created the expectancy of being welcomed by all of the circus members. Then a disquieting experience emerged, which could be observed in the following dialogue.

***Excerpt from the field notebook of Suara Bastos<sup>2</sup>:***

<sup>01</sup> S. - *Good evening!*

<sup>02</sup> CM. - *We here at the circus do not like to give interviews! We are all illiterate.*

At this point the lady in the ticket booth said aloud:

<sup>03</sup> TL. - *Not all of us! Speak for yourself, because I'm not illiterate.*

<sup>04</sup> S. - *Ah, but my aim is not only to do an interview, I would also like to get to know you. I've worked in the circus and I love it. My research is just to talk a little bit about the history of the circus.*

Although he remained serious, she asked:

<sup>05</sup> S. - *Do many people come here to do interviews?*

<sup>06</sup> CM. - *Pfff, people come here all the time. Just the other day some folks came from the UG.*

<sup>07</sup> S. - *And what was their work about, do you know?*

<sup>08</sup> CM. - *I do not.*

<sup>09</sup> S. - *Sorry, what's your name?*

<sup>10</sup> CM. - *A.*

<sup>11</sup> S. - *A. Nice to meet you A., I'm Suara. As I said, I've worked and lived in the circus before and I like it a lot. The aim of my research is to show people the circus as it really is, from the artists' point of view. I would like to show people how great it is and that it's not what most people think it is.*

<sup>12</sup> CM. - *It's true, they think we're a bunch of illiterates who do not shower.*

<sup>13</sup> S. - *I know that and that's the reason I'm here. I am a student at the University of São Paulo, and the topic of my dissertation is the circus. I would like to contribute to demystify this idea about circus artists.*

<sup>14</sup> CM. *You're from USP? Oh, I know USP. I had an accident once and they took me to the hospital there and I was very well cared-for. The hospital is very good.*

<sup>15</sup> S. - *What happened?*

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<sup>2</sup> This encounter with a member of the circus occurred in a casual way. As the researcher approached the circus entry she noticed the presence of a guy who was talking to the lady in the ticket booth. As he seemed to be quite relaxed she greeted "Good evening". Then the following dialogue started, where S is the Researcher; CM, the member of the circus, and TL, the ticket booth lady.

- 16 - CM. – *I had something in my eye, but they took me there and I was promptly attended. Today I am fine.*
- 17 S. – *I'm glad, USP is really very cool.*
- 18 CM. - *I think that after this we're going to a place near there.*
- 19 S. - *Really? That's cool. The other day I saw a circus right in front of it. I think it was C.S.*
- 20 CM - *Yeah... but we can't stay in those grounds.*
- 21 S. - *How so?*
- 22 CM. - *They only rent it to outsiders. It is absurd.*
- 23 S. - *You are absolutely right, I agree with you. For this reason I believe that my job is important. I'd like to help change the image that people have of the circus, because I know from my experience that most people are unaware of what the routine and daily life in the circus are really like, and for this reason they have a misconception of it.*
- 24 CM. - *I understand, and a master's degree has a much broader scope, doesn't it?*
- 25 S. – *With no doubt, that's why I am here. But I will only speak to those who are interested in participating in the research, participation is not mandatory. In addition, neither participant nor the Circus will be identified.*
- 26 CM. - *Ah!*
- 27 S. – *Have you been here long?*
- 28 CM. - *My whole life.*
- 29 S. - *What is your role here?*
- 30 CM. - *I do everything, but most of the time I'm the driver. There used to be two of us, now it's just me. I'm the one who drives the sound car.*
- 31 S. - *Oh, so you do the advertising? I hear you drive through my street.*
- 32 CM. - *You live near here?*
- 33 S. - *On the street parallel to this one, we are very close.*
- 34 CM. - *Oh, I know where that is. I know quite a lot here.*
- 35 S. – *Do you have friendships outside the circus?*
- 36 CM. - *We always do, but usually we do not relate much with outsiders.*
- 37 S. - *Why not?*
- 38 CM. - *I don't know, they don't want much contact with us.*
- 39 S. - *And do you want contact with them?*
- 40 CM. - *Yeah... there's also that. I think it's a bit of both.*
- 41 S. – *How do you call people who are not from the circus, I mean, the ones who do not live in the circus?*
- 42 CM. – *I don't know... I don't know, they are from other society.*

## **Disquieting Experience and Knowledge Construction**

Being immediately challenged by CM in a rude manner evinced the restlessness and strangeness caused by the arrival of an alien who was immediately fitted into a previously conceived category. CM expressed a *preconception* about an academic research. We are using the notion of preconception in the Gadamerian sense (Gadamer, 1985; Simão 2005; 2010), according to which

[...] each person entering a dialogue will unavoidably bring his/her presuppositions with him/her (cf. Taylor, 2002); the issue, then, is not to get rid of our own presuppositions, but to take into account that the other will have his/her own, which will probably enter into some disagreement with ours (Guimarães, 2011, p. 146).

Such situation led CM to refuse the researcher approach by means of using a social representation as a symbolic resource<sup>3</sup> to keep him away from what was supposed to be her interest. By saying "*we are all illiterate*", he is professing his belief that being such means that there is nothing he could possibly contribute to the research, reaffirming that the researcher does not belong to his universe and how far they are from each other. To the researcher, this was a distressing and unexpected moment because even though she tried to get closer as a former circus performer she was immediately identified and received as an academic.

At this point, a gap emerged between the situation itself and the researcher's expectations on how she would be treated. The dialogue evinced a tension that emerged from rupture of expectation that she had for the initial contact. Apparently, this led her to keep talking (or not) with him in a process of affective-cognitive reconstructions that demanded a reorganization of meaning – something that possibly also occurred with CM at that moment. When the ticket booth lady intervened and disagreed with CM by saying "*Not all of us! Speak for yourself, because I'm not*", she indicates that he should speak only for himself and not for all circus workers. So the lady's intervention as a member of the community not only denotes the intrinsic diversity in the cultural field in question, where a variety of "availableness" for the meeting with the "other" co-exist, but also creates a plan for intersubjective sharing, reducing the difference between the participants of the dialogue. Researcher and CM were considered as owners of a same knowledge and social condition provided by literacy because of the active intervention of the ticket booth, questioning the distancing process carried out by CM. Her attitude brought more comfort to the researcher because by then she feared being ostracized by the lady too.

So she glimpsed the possibility to carry on the dialogue with CM through a different approach, since the desire for some kind of sharing of meanings requires adjustments of the different positions of the interlocutors in the dialogue (Rommetveit, 1994, Guimarães, 2010a). Looking for a way to overcome the situation, and also looking for a closer approach, the researcher decided to justify her presence to CM saying that her aim was not only to do an interview, but that she would also like to get to know them and explained that she had worked in the circus and liked it a lot.

By portraying herself as one of them, or rather, as someone who also is (or was) a part of the circus, she minimized the resistance and tension that had been established before. She places herself as someone who knows the context in which he lives and which comprises somewhat with what he feels. Although he remained serious, the researcher changed the focus of the dialogue, displacing the anxious aspect of the

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<sup>3</sup> The notions of social representation and symbolic resources are being used here to refer to a dynamic meaningful semiotic device used to organize the disquieting experience and to enable a shared background for the continuity of the communicative process (cf. Moscovici, 2003; Marková, 2006; Zittoun, 2006).



meeting to another situation by asking him if there were many people going to the circus to conduct research. He answered affirmatively.

The researcher aimed to know if there would have been any previous unpleasantness or dissatisfaction with this practice and those who practice it. She reasoned that perhaps too many people had already sought the circus to conduct research and that this had somehow displeased CM; or worse still, maybe he had had personal issues with some other researcher. When she asked him what people usually researched about, he told her he did not know, once again making no effort to hide his discomfort with her presence and making it clear that he would not participate in the investigation.

As he did not show any interest in continuing to talk about the topic, the researcher tried to show him her bond with the circus and her goals with the research, reinforcing the fact that she had worked in the circus earlier in life and emphasizing that her intentions were to clarify a little bit more what is the circus and the circus life as a way to demystify possible misconceptions that could exist in the opinion of people who do not belong to this universe. CM agrees with her point, finally allowing some sharing of plans to take place between them.

Next, the researcher mentioned the institution in which she studies and do research. CM not only knew the institution but he had had a good experience there. He had been well attended at the University Hospital when he had suffered an accident at the circus. A process of greater trust towards her and her intentions began.

Once she was able to make affective-cognitive adjustments relevant to this dialogue, she also allowed CM to make a similar movement, which can be seen when he expresses his knowledge of some aspects from the researcher's environment. The researcher was put in a position where she had to cross her boundaries allowing an intersubjective sharing with the other to happen.

*[...] The counter-argument from the asymmetric other connotes the relative positions of the interlocutors at that moment because it points to the actor's limits of symbolic action while challenging their implementation. (Simão 2004, p. 35).*

By continuing to talk to CM, the researcher realizes that, contrary to what he intended to demonstrate, he is a guy who expresses himself very well and has some knowledge about the academic life. It first happens when he makes it clear that he recognizes how a survey as a Masters dissertation may be relevant to the circus world, and then when he seems angry about the valuation of international circuses over national ones.

The comment that outsiders imagine that everyone in the circus is illiterate and does not bathe can be used to justify his resistance to talk to the researcher as well as the failure to relate to people from this "other society". This fact placed by CM highlights the tensions that arise from differences between the positions "I" and "other". He has an idea of how "outsiders" see the circus, he also assumes they do not want much

contact with the circus; but when enabling this detachment, i.e., by not allowing contact with this "other society," there is no way to make sure if his suspicions are well founded or not. Instead, this attitude deprives outsiders of knowing, at least slightly, how in fact the "reality" of the circus and of those who live there is.

We could say that this was the crucial point for the research, since it allowed the knowledge constructions that came about. Noticing the dialogue, the ticket lady not only became available to take part in the research, but also encouraged other participants to do the same, which significantly contributed to the theme of the investigation.

Even though CM specifically was not so willing to be interviewed and did not participate, he was kind and gentle with the researcher in the following occasions they have met. From the beginning to the end of the investigative process he remained in the position of non-cooperation. Cooperation requires not only coordination of interpretative strategies that depend on both the speaker and the listener, but rather depends on the intention to cooperate.

*[...] speakers and listeners are not mere participants, thus in the process of conversation, they act as active agents that depend on their own inferences as interactive guides of conduct to judge what is interaction. (Gumperz, 1995, p. 104).*

We considered that if CM and the researcher had lived longer together, it would have been possible to establish a greater approximation between them, which would have possibly changed CM's opinion in relation to his participation in the investigation, given that he maintained himself close the entire time and was receptive to the researcher's presence in her later visits. On the other hand, the existent gaps are inherent to the investigative process, which does not reach for a total apprehension of the phenomena in study, but to construct the knowledge through possible openings in the relationships with the participants.

We noticed that in the I-other relation, more precisely in the dialogue between the researcher and the potential participant, initial agreements could be made available over the course of interaction, under the risk of rupture. Although temporary, these agreements allow dialogue to happen. This is possible because each participant of a dialogue believes that some kind of intersubjective sharing is possible in the course of interaction (Rommetveit, 1994, Guimarães and Simão, 2007).

The analyzed field research notes concerning the experience of the researcher allowed us to explore some general characteristics of the dialogue, addressing the necessary constitution of an affective common field for meaning construction. In the presented case, the affective common field was grounded in previous experiences, and addressed the attachments of the researcher and the participant in relation to the circus.

## **Affective Attachment in Field Research**

The selected report allowed us to reflect on the possibilities and limits we may encounter as we speak to others. In any dialogue people open up and then close themselves, not completely but provisionally, in accordance with the limits and restrictions imposed by themselves and the other. Affectivity has a prime role in this process, because the cognitive, sign-mediated forms of knowledge are affective in their nature (cf. Josephs, 2000; Valsiner, 2007).

For Valsiner, the relationship I-other-world is primarily affectionate. The primary and physiological affection strikes from the semiotic signification of feelings and emotions. When we signify the affections, subjective and reflective cultural-semiotic characteristics enter the picture (Valsiner, 2012). The primary affections would, therefore, be referred as a kind of cloudy field that would catalyse the proximities and distances in the relationships with others and with the world, from which possible intersubjective sharing would unfold.

We feel in a certain way with regard to somebody or something or ourselves. Feeling is 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. This process can lead either to the transformation or to the maintenance of our present relationship to the world and to ourselves. [Josephs, 2000 p. 815].

During the dialogue, the symbolic elaboration of the participant acts recursively on the affective field of the researcher, who is disquieted (i.e. ruptured in his/her expectancies). It demands a reorganization of the affective field through the creation of a new understanding of what is happening in the situation, leading the participants to be affected and to elaborate it symbolically (cf. Guimarães, 2010a). In this sense, a field research is also an intervention over the studied reality.

According to Josephs “feeling is an experience rooted in the person as a whole. For Stern, feeling is related to the course of personal activity in time, that is, feeling is related to the present, the past and the future” (2010 p. 822).

Upon returning to the circus, the researcher came across intense and contradictory feelings. Being back to that world made her face memories from her past as a circus artist; at the same time, she had to deal with emotions that were rising at that moment in time, such as the tension she faced in her meeting with C.M., which contributed to her having higher expectations regarding the future of the investigation.

To the semiotic-cultural constructivism in psychology, the search for intersubjective sharing is one of the most important ways of changing in human development, which is understood by means of the cultural changes that are experienced and internalized

by the person (Guimarães, 2010b). Thus, the fragment which was analyzed made it possible for us to explore some characteristics of verbal interaction in which both met somehow inserted into a common field of meaning that was represented in this case by MC's circus and the researcher's circus, i.e., the verbal interaction established between them in a large scale was made possible and permitted, once the barriers imposed by CM and possibly also by the researcher were removed, at the same time as emphasizing the symbolic similarities they shared in some measure, namely being both circus artists.

Due to the lack of interest of CM in sharing his life experiences, it was necessary for the researcher to adopt a posture that could build a relation based on empathy and trust. To make this possible it was essential to show him the respectful attitude of the researcher towards both the circus members and the field of investigation, just as it was essential to show him how important his role was in the research.

The originally nebulous experience—meeting an unknown person under a new vivid circumstance—was filled with the common background of the researcher and the circus member. Her past experience as a circus artist facilitated her approach to people in that cultural field. The common background allowed CM to recognize in the researcher and himself a space where both were, to some extent, not simply equal or similar, but rather representatives of one part of a whole that brought them together.

Therefore, at that moment they were part of the “circus” and right then and there they could be, in different measures, circus artists.

### **Dialogical Multiplication and Field Research**

The dialogical conception of the minimal communicative situation conceives that the tension emerge when Alter and Ego negotiate meanings about a topic of discussion or an object of social representation (cf. Marková, 2006; Cornejo, 2008). Triadic pictures or metaphors are often used to account any dialogical process (Moscovici, 2003; Marková, 2006; Simão and Valsiner, 2007; Simão, 2012), granting the comprehension of differences and tensions around a specific topic or social representation (object). On the other hand, this article presents a discussion concerning a moment of the I-other interaction that is previous to the dialogue, a situation preliminary to the research, in which the involved persons are still unknown to each other, that is, the participants do not have a common object for a more meaningful negotiation. Although there is a gap between them, some approximation can be constructed through an intervention upon the affective-nebulous intersection provided by the meeting.

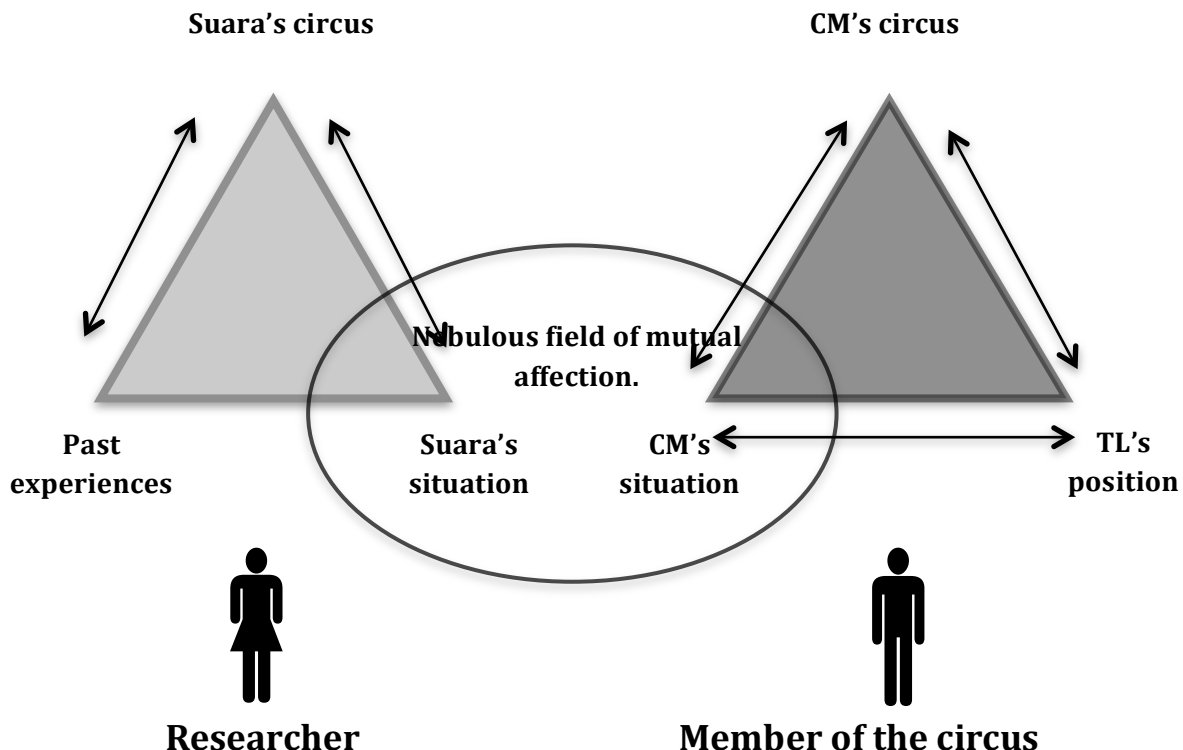
The notion of dialogical multiplication is a theoretical and methodological device that allows us to put into focus precisely the gaps between Self and other in interaction (cf. Guimarães, 2013). From this, we presuppose that there are different objects of reference in the discourse of a person engaged in the dialogue with otherness. These

symbolic objects are linked to the emergence of a common background that serves as reference for the dialogue—ie., the research; the artistic, the friendship or other setting for intersubjective sharing. Creative semiotic elaborations in face of the experience of nebulous others and world are can be observed in each Self that mutually affects the other in a nebulous immanent exchange.

By nebulosity I mean the affective pre-semiotic flow of experience in the boundary of the Self, other and world (cf. Valsiner, 2007). On the other hand, semiotic constrains are built and socially shared in order to overcome the disquieting (Simão, 2003) experience emerged from the nebulous field. These semiotic constructions are diversely constructed by different cultural manufacturing. Consequently, the multiplication of cultures entails a field of divergences concerning interobjective constructions of meanings among members that share specific cultural fields. Global society, for instance, evinces the existence of differently shared religiosity, languages, rituals, habits and maybe... psychologies!

A similar principle of dialogical multiplication can be derived to our reflection on the Self: the multiplication of symbolic objects at the core of cultural interchanges, rather than achieving an equivalent semiotic reference, addresses some limits for the integration between intrasubjective and intersubjective plans of Self experiences. Dissimilarities under same notions can be now focused under a dialogical approach: in Self-otherness relation, imaginative activities based on previous culturally constructed meanings take place in order to fill disquieting experiences (Guimarães, 2013, p. 223).

Therefore we propose that a double dialogical representation is more adequate to understand the lived fieldwork experience at this preliminary moment:



**Figure 1:** Dialogical multiplication as an illustration of I-other differences in the preliminary moment of field research.

The double dialogicality allows us to conceive the alterity of the participant at the moment in which I and other are constructing a common ground for the dialogue, at the same time conceiving the centrality of affectivity in this process: approximation, avoidance, rudeness and efforts for converging attitudes, play an arm wrestling in which the researcher and the participant may be able to continue to interact or decide to abandon the dialogue.

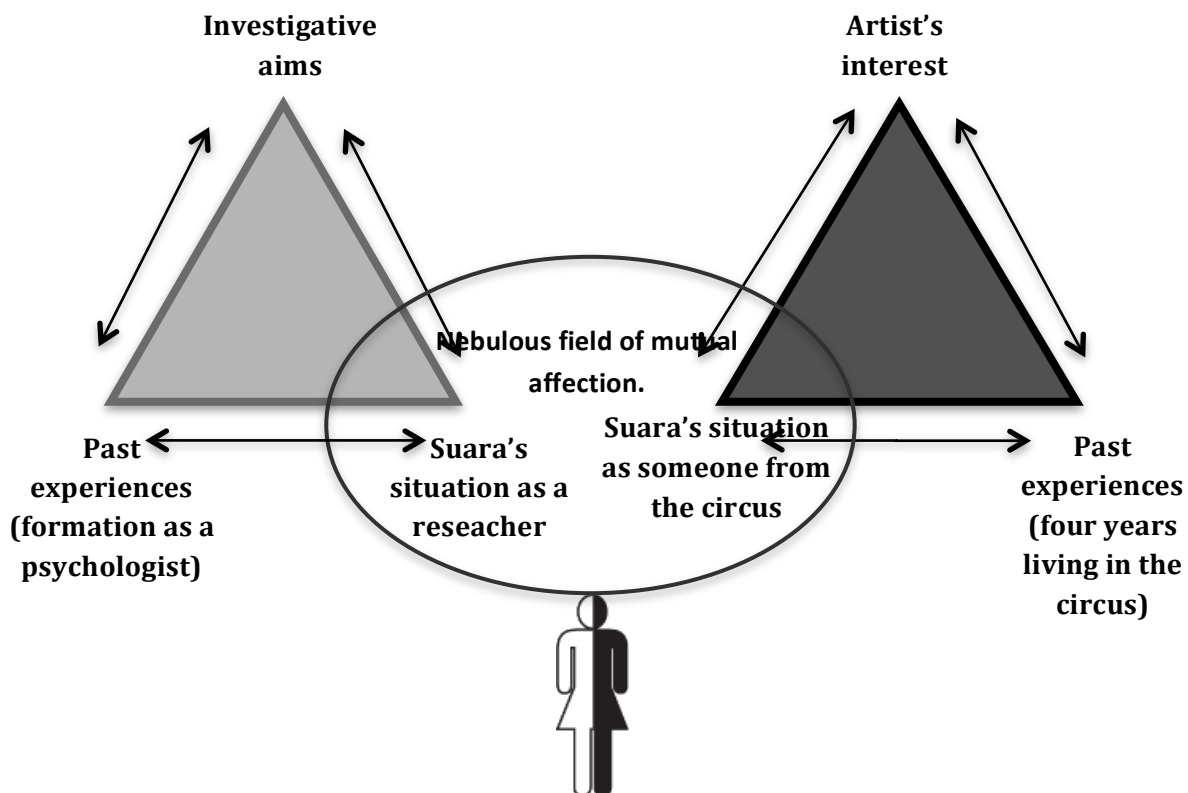
In the discussed situation, the potential participant CM kept his decision of not participating until the end of the research process, nevertheless, for the sake of the investigation his acceptance of the figure of the researcher created the necessary openness for future interviews. The interest of the researcher in the circus life and its previous experience was decisive. In fact, she manifested herself as someone acting in favor of circuses interests, affirming that she “would like to contribute to demystify this idea of circus artists” and “would like to show people how great it is and that it’s not like most of them think” (cf. p. 5 of this paper). On one hand, when the researcher verbalizes her personal opinion about the circus, she reassures her understanding of the process of investigation as an opportunity to publicize aspects of the circus life that usually are not well known. From ethical and analytical point of view, this attitude mean that she is aware that the scientific knowledge has a particular role in the broad cultural field, acting “over the socio-cultural reality as a whole, exchanging meanings, producing discourses and validating conceptions” (Guimarães, 2012). The scientific investigation has social implications, the researcher is unavoidable positioned and is co-responsible for the consequences of the knowledge constructed and published.

On the other hand, these utterances express how the researcher tried to reduce CM’s avoidance by showing that in fact she is not so distant or different from him, and more, she intends to contribute with the circus way of life. Actually, the original investigative aim—to understand the circus everyday life—is enlarged at this moment, revealing a tacit aim of the researcher as she is identified with the artist’s position. That is, the researcher revealed to be someone affectively and cognitively involved with the participants of the research: on the watch for the perception of the inconvenient aspects of her presence/investigation at that territory; trying to find in the resistances of the interlocutor some porosity that could connect them.

The dialogical multiplication was also a device to understand intrapsychological conflicts. Observing the researcher ambiguity between the psychological investigative position and artist’s identification, we can use another double-dialogical scheme as a

device to understand the intrapsychological tension in the process of knowledge construction in the field research.

Figure 2 shows the ambivalence of the researcher that emerged from her commitment with a defined cultural background. Although the researchers have planned the methodological procedures for the fieldwork, her past experiences intervene, creating unreflective, tacit, affective expectancies about what would be found in the territory, and about people that live there. The commitment with this cultural field guides the quest for knowledge construction to as far as the researcher is able to take herself as part of it. The intersubjective experience is then internalized as an intrasubjective tension between the construction of the investigative object and the non-scientific object of interest that permeates the socio-cultural field (i.e. the circus artist's interests).



## Researcher and Member of the circus

**Figure 2:** Dialogical multiplication as an illustration of I-I ambiguous positioning in field research.

### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Psychological research in cultural psychology cannot exclude the perspective of the researcher in the process of knowledge construction. On the contrary, theoretical and methodological issues emerge from the constructive activity of the researcher in his relation to the world and to others, and operate through the selectivity from the analyzed subject and data (cf. Bettoi & Simão, 2002; Boesch, 2007; Branco & Valsiner, 1997; Simão, 2007; Valsiner, 2001). The hermeneutic option of semiotic-cultural constructivism (Simão, 2005, 2010) is an alternative in contrast to the objectivist paradigm in science (Duran, 2004). The researcher has to account the genesis and the process of the investigative path, as it presupposes the affective involvement of the researcher observing the process in which the organization of the knowledge construction experience takes place.

At the same time, in this process, the researcher's perspective cannot get confused with the perspective of the investigated the research participants — it was discussed by William James as one of the main snares in which psychologists are used to collapse (James, 1890). As there is no transparency between the self and the other, we have to be aware of the limits of our interpretation of the psychological phenomena. These limits in the intersubjective sharing guides the emergence of an unavoidable, and sometimes uncomfortable, challenging and productive feeling in the researcher (cf. Simão, 2011), that pursues the reduction of the tensions in the self-other relationships. Therefore, it implies being able to recognize the heterogeneous symbolic trajectories that emerge from the affective meeting with the unknown, previous to the constitution of a common ground for the dialogue.

Following this path, the notion of dialogical multiplication is becoming a useful device for the description of meaning construction in interdisciplinary, interspecific, interethnic and intercultural dialogues (Guimarães, 2010b; 2011). It also has been used to understand the psychotherapeutic setting, the therapist-patient relationship and the intrapsychological conflicts that emerge in the patient (Guimarães, 2013). Now the investigative process in field research was taken into account, to identify the differences that emerge during the investigative process, bringing the focus to some implicit processes that take place in the quest for convergence in communication.

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