

# PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS BETWEEN VIOLENCE, FIGHT AND GAME: PHENOMENOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS IN THE PRACTICE OF CAPOEIRA

*AS FRONTEIRAS PSICOLÓGICAS ENTRE VIOLÊNCIA, LUTA E BRINCADEIRA: AS  
TRANSIÇÕES FENOMENOLÓGICAS NA PRÁTICA DA CAPOEIRA*

*FRONTERAS PSICOLÓGICAS ENTRE JUEGO, LUCHA Y LA VIOLENCIA: LAS  
TRANSICIONES FENOMENOLÓGICAS EN LA PRÁCTICA DE LA CAPOEIRA*

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## Keywords

Capoeira.  
Phenomenology.  
Fights.  
Games.

**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to understand experiences of Capoeira practitioners in the psychological transit between game, fight and quarrels, based on their own accounts. The methodological framework used was the phenomenological archeology of cultures. Three categories essentially describe how game, fight and quarrels really happen in Capoeira: the joy of playing; the game of complicity, and the denial of game. Moreover, the essential elements of transitions appear in two groups: game of prudences and tough game – emotionally guided by the dynamics between slowdown and combative intensification. Combative intensification is found to result either in violence or in the development of the fighting spirit, providing existential conditions for capoeira practitioners' self-control.

## Palavras-chave

Capoeira.  
Fenomenologia.  
Lutas.  
Brincadeiras.  
Jogos.

**Resumo:** Por meio de relatos de capoeiristas entrevistados, visou-se compreender como se dão as experiências vividas nesta prática corporal no trânsito psicológico entre brincadeira, luta e briga. A arqueologia fenomenológica das culturas foi o referencial metodológico utilizado. Três categorias descrevem essencialmente como brincadeira, luta e briga ocorrem propriamente na capoeira: alegria de jogar; jogo da complicidade; a negação do jogo. Já os elementos essenciais das transições aparecem em duas categorias: jogo de prudências e jogo duro – orientadas afetivamente pela dinâmica entre abrandamento e intensificação combativa. Confere-se que a intensificação combativa pode tanto acarretar em violência como ocasionar o cultivo do espírito de luta, possibilitando condições existenciais para o autocontrole dos capoeiristas.

## Palabras clave

Capoeira.  
Fenomenología.  
Luchas.  
Juegos.

**Resumen:** A través de relatos de capoeiristas entrevistados, buscamos comprender cómo transcurren las experiencias vividas en esta práctica corporal en el tránsito psicológico entre juego, lucha y pelea. La arqueología fenomenológica de las culturas fue el referente metodológico utilizado. Tres categorías describen esencialmente cómo ocurren el juego, la lucha y la pelea en la capoeira: alegría de jugar; juego de la complicidad; la negación del juego. A su vez, los elementos esenciales de las transiciones aparecen en dos categorías –juego de prudencias; juego duro– orientadas afectivamente por la dinámica entre suavización e intensificación combativa. Se constata que la intensificación combativa puede tanto derivar en violencia como ocasionar el cultivo del espíritu de lucha, posibilitando condiciones existenciais para el autocontrol de los capoeiristas.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Capoeira is a multifaceted body practice both with regard to creative ability for performing movements and in its form of expression that includes dancing, fighting, music and play (VALÉRIO; BARREIRA, 2012). That art, already rooted in and known as an element of Brazilian culture, appears increasingly attractive, thus expanding its audience of practitioners. Nowadays, capoeira has a worldwide reach and is becoming a cultural practice under a process of internationalization, adding and receiving new meanings.

According to Hébert (2011), fighting sports usually promote virtues such as trust, self-esteem and self-control, and they can be useful and manipulated in different situations of psychosocial care. In the same vein, Reis (2010) understands that capoeira develops quality social coexistence and well-being that allows for respect and consideration in personal relationships. Interest in the education and formation of people in fighting sports and martial arts is confirmed by literature (BERTAZZOLI; ALVES; AMARAL, 2008; TRUSZ; NUNES, 2007; BARREIRA, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; VALÉRIO; BARREIRA, 2012). After these initial remarks, questions arise in the line pointed out by Barreira (2013b): Does the practice of capoeira always correspond exclusively to virtuous actions? What about the fact that, as a fight, capoeira is close to violence and may even blend with it?

This study of fighting in capoeira was based on the descriptions of three different ways to fight whose phenomenological characteristics have already been investigated (BARREIRA, 2010, 2013b): the combat game, fight and altercation. Altercation with physical attack happens as a process of objectification of the other, with prevalence of hostility and violent force as its motives. Fighting takes place as a combat with mutual willingness that seeks to restrict the opponent's movements by using body resources that are not essentially hostile. As for the combat game, there is a playful motivational aspect where movements do not follow a specific sense of dispute; they follow grace and fun (BARREIRA, 2010, 2013b). Although combat may also take the form of a duel, this was not addressed in this study.

Due to its constitution as dance and fight, but also to the fact that it is subject to the prevalence of hostility experiences that eventually become altercations, those three phenomena are related to capoeira. Contemplating the possible values that capoeira practitioners might mobilize in their practice, it is important to understand the meaning and the consequence used to combat. Therefore, this study aimed to identify and understand, through practitioners' accounts, their experiences in the psychological transition between game, fight and altercation.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Application of classical phenomenology to cultural objects – according to a phenomenological archeology of cultures (ALES BELLO, 1998; BARREIRA, 2013a) – is the perspective adopted in this work. The approach to its object, therefore, deliberately dispenses with previously established concepts. Exclusion of the circuit of preconceptions is intended to allow for the emergence of the phenomenon itself, weaving its outlines, which reveals the object from the perspective of intentional consciousness. Focusing on the experience of the subject of culture, in the case of capoeira, direct apprehension of the phenomenon in its lived thickness does project a theory on the object and does not use the object to corroborate a previous theory. Phenomenological practice has nothing to say or to advance about capoeira in theoretical terms. On

the contrary, by listening to its experience, it wants to show its own meaning by explaining what emerges, under the limits in which it emerges.

Previous phenomenological analysis of body combat experience (BARREIRA, 2010, 2013b) allows for anticipation of experiential boundaries that differentiate combat-based phenomena called duel, fight, altercation and combat game. This anticipation, however, is not equivalent to starting from these categories in order to grasp phenomena; it amounts to meeting the actual experiences as they are lived in capoeira, regardless of their denomination and categorical representation. Our focus is just on apprehending the last three experiences – anticipated by the meanings of fight, altercation and play to be fulfilled by practitioners' experiences – and how passages between them take place within the combat experience. Therefore, previous reasons or those that are foreign to the very course of playing were excluded, such as previous rivalries and honor issues that engender duel. Since it is a phenomenological research in psychology or phenomenological psychology, interviews followed the reference proposed by Ranieri and Barreira (2010) and Barreira and Ranieri (2013).

### 3 METHODOLOGICAL DECISIONS

We used phenomenological interview to access the experiences of combat between capoeira practitioners. Ranieri and Barreira (2010) and Barreira and Ranieri (2013) outline the scientific and methodological criteria of interviews under this perspective, from their epistemic foundation in the phenomenon of empathy to analysis of accounts.

The intentional sample included ten people who had been practicing capoeira for five to 30 years and took part in groups at gyms and social projects in different cities in the state of São Paulo. However, to describe actual or desired experiences, that diversification among subjects proved irrelevant since the intended phenomenological reduction does not address the ways situations are approached, but the essential elements that make up phenomena and passages between them. The number of interviews was limited based on saturation, i. e. when there was systematic repetition of meanings expressed in accounts. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for later phenomenological reduction and intentional crossing in order to explain the meaning of what is experienced by practitioners at the time of combat.

Respondent's Identities were replaced by pseudonyms in order to avoid identification. The interviews were conducted after the signing of a free and informed consent form, according to ethical requirements for this type of research.

The semi-structured interview followed the script below, directing each respondent to contact and express his own experiences:

When you are practicing capoeira, how do you experience the fight?

What is the experience of playing capoeira like for you?

Have you ever been in a situation where you and/or your opponent got out of control?

### 4 ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Respondents' experiences were examined and crossed to identify five categories that amount to practitioners' experiences. The first three categories show the meaning of each com-

bat phenomenon in the specificity of capoeira. The other two categories express the transition between its borders. In the specificity of capoeira, play, fight and altercation are identified respectively as: the Joy of Playing, the Complicity Play, and The Denial of Play. The Prudence Play of and The Tough Play indicate and show the transition between those combat phenomena.

#### 4.1 The Joy of Playing

Equivalent to playing fight, this experience is marked by relaxing moments when practitioners care less about the effectiveness of the techniques and combat exchanging a moment of greater surrendering. As explained in one respondent's account:

You get a little more relaxed [...] even a little nonchalant, too [...] you defend yourself in a way that is a little more vulnerable, sometimes with a somewhat more vulnerable stroke. [...] You move just for the sake of moving. (Master Spring)

In the accounts, the play emerged more often, especially in the game between more experienced practitioners and beginners. Here, adults play more with children and this can be understood based on the technical and physical differences between the parties where the adult feel "freer" to make moves in front of a child. The excerpt below explains that logic:

We relax when we're playing with kids, right? When we see that there is no problem [...] There is no risk of taking a counterstroke [...] because the child has no power to bring you down, right? ... So we can play more relaxed, you know, we can have fun. (Little Joe)

We also see the possibility of play in a combat involving youth and adults. However, unlike what happens when playing with a child, physical and possibly technical conditions are more similar in this situation, making fighters more cautious in their movements rather than opening themselves so much to possible counterattacks. This caution may be an impediment to the progress of play, as shown by the excerpt below:

Now in this matter of adolescents and youth, it's become a little hard to have lots of fun at the [capoeira] circle. You don't know what they're thinking [...] then you have to be smarter when it involves adults. (Master Birdie)

Therefore, that is yet another element for confrontation, besides physical condition, which sets the very relaxed tone of the Joy of Playing, confidence and playful complicity, almost casually among practitioners.

#### 4.2 The Complicity Play

In capoeira, fighting is characterized by its contextual universe that consists of elements such as instruments, music, rhythm, camaraderie among fighters, respect, continuity of the fight, and awareness of limits.

When capoeira practitioners are fighting, they follow the rhythm and intention induced by music. The songs preserve the meaning used in the fight, indicating that the fight should be sometimes tougher, sometimes calmer. The excerpt below illustrates this condition:

The berimbau [musical instrument used in capoeira] is what drives the circle! [...] You have to play to the rhythm [...] it's loitering that is a game, involvement of that

kind, you have to get in the rhythm and do it, and if the berimbau asks for tough play, you'll play tough. (Master Cricket)

The fight is “surrounded” by identification with the other as a person. The opponent is seen as another being, worthy of respect, which is why we must be constantly aware of the limits of our fighting companion, trying to keep the complicity of combat. As identified in these excerpts:

So all the time I look at the other person who is with me at the circle as another capoeirista; not as my enemy. (Old Hand)

[...]

Capoeira has strokes that you will hit, it's a contact game, but as long as you respect your opponent, you can control your stroke. (Bamboo)

Challenge is also a key element in capoeira fighting, appearing specifically as a way to “test” where capoeiristas put their skills to test by playing with their opponents. Under these conditions, combatants seek to hinder others' game in a mutual and deliberate challenge. As explained in the excerpt: “Hitting or falling, getting up, the game continues naturally [...] He didn't hit me out of malice, it was to... challenge one another in camaraderie” (Master Cat's Eye).

One of the most striking differences to other combat practices is that in capoeira, completion is not an aim; it does not intend to end confrontation as soon as possible. Its goal remains focused on the fluidity of the game, on continuity. As explained in this excerpt:

You see that he plays a cleaner game, a game that doesn't really try to... show you anything or give you a kick just to end the game; there's a person there and you feel you want to do this exchange of experience, right? ... and it's a real person who continues it. (Master Tiger)

Therefore, capoeira is a game of actions and reactions between a constant awareness of body actions and meanings employed in the movements. Such condition is unveiled in this excerpt: “[...] Capoeira is a game of questions and answers. If the guy asks you, you have to know how to answer, right? Man, and when you ask him, he'll also have to dodge it” (Little Joe).

### 4.3 Denial of play

This corresponds to altercation in capoeira. It is an experience that includes disrespect, without apprehension of the other as a person, with combatants seeking to annul each other at all costs, without complicity. The altercation seeks the opportunity to end the combat by inflicting physical and moral defeat on the opponent. As can be seen below:

Altercation, in turn, is when one wants to hurt the other, you know, one wants to hurt the other, there is no respect anymore. (Master Cat's Eye)

But what many really try is to destroy, right? ... and then the circle stops and if it doesn't, the masters will go and organize it, and they separate them and do not let them play. (Old Hand)

In erasing the limits of the fight, there is an intention to hurt, hurt each other and destroy the play. Thus, practitioners leave what would be the context of capoeira and often even use techniques foreign to it, making moves from other martial arts or any kind of stroke, only to reach their opponents. That can be seen in the accounts:

From the moment that one wants to hurt the other, it's no longer shared, right? ... Then it becomes aggression, it becomes altercation, it's out of capoeira's context [...] They start grabbing hair, and that is no longer capoeira. (Master Cat's Eye)  
Then you see many fighters, many good ones who, at the circle, use movements from other fights. (Old Hand)

Therefore, the fight appears as a lack of control escaping the intentional horizon of what would be the capoeira fight, leaving aside the whole universe of "capoeiragem". It no longer seeks to follow the rhythm of the music, there is no longer a "commander of the circle", the berimbau. Fighters' motivational horizon is limited to reducing the opponent to that hostile time in order to cancel him in a denial of the game.

#### 4.4 The prudence game

It corresponds to the transition between play and fight. It intensifies caution, that is, during confrontation, practitioners remain cautious. Sometimes they use looser and more carefree movements corresponding to the game, sometimes they increase their defensive zeal and intensify attack moves according to interbody exchange. The border of those two phenomena happens in this oscillation between a looser and a more "formal" game. As noted in the excerpt:

If you notice that the guy uses malice and will want to get to a certain point that he might want in this game, if he cites a moment of... whatever! Violence in a fall; then no, you have to put your game too, right? And to refute what he's doing. [...] You will get into the guy's game and he'll enter yours, right? But then everything has a limit, when this game has come to a certain point, it goes back to normal game, a closed game. (Master Cricket)

This report clearly shows that it is possible to sustain the game experience, in this case, by taking a stance before one's opponent, contributing to the fluidity of a looser game. But over the course of combat, there is a limit in which the transition from play to fight starts. That limit seems to be marked by a technically more demanding combat, closing the openings of the game that made it looser and at the same time making practitioners more vulnerable to any attack. Prudence play starts when practitioners feel that greater caution is required.

The excerpt below shows the practitioner's perception of his opponent, understanding the way in which the combat must follow:

If we start with a more open way or I do a 'star', [...] then you are opening your body to the guy, like this: 'I don't want confrontation'. [...] You'll make a move that is not intended to hit him and he'll realize it, 'Hey! The guy's has no malice'. And the other way around. Then a fun game takes place! Now if you try to trick him, the guy turns around to give a 'heel blow' on your mouth, he already tricks you! You could not pick it up; it's a sign that I can no longer do it; the guy no longer wants to play. (Master Cat's Eye)

In this report it is noted that the perception of increased risk-taking in fighting leads to the transition between play and fight. If the opponent presents a more incisive attitude, with more precise attacks and defenses, then risk increases. The transition is equivalent to going from play to fight, and the main difference is a contest that sets a growing challenge.

## 4.5 The Tough Play

The boundary between fight and altercation is a process that oscillates between increase or restraint in intensity and aggressiveness in combat. The more aggressive and uncontrolled the combat is, the more it tends to approach altercation, a clearly hostile combat. Against that background, the confrontation that occurs, even though aggressively, without hostility and with greater control, would tend inward, to the borders of the fight. The transition spans precisely the limits that curtail the phenomena of altercation and fight.

In capoeira, that transition emerges as what can be called “tougher play”, where movements are faster and more dangerous, practitioners are more attentive, more closed to the game, more aggressive, nearly escaping the context of capoeira. The account highlights this condition:

It was a tougher game, each one... the master says that one tested the other, you know... Each one was tested, but they left, they exited capoeira a little. The guys were there and they cut it, they respected the berimbau, respected the master who was there for the play, they greeted each other and it's OK. (Master Cat's Eye)

The transition in question may also take place through oscillation between control and lack of control marked by trust and its loss during combat and even by combatants' lack of technical skills. Confidence and control seem to be linked to the relationship the practitioner establishes with his skills in capoeira when facing some tense situation. That is, if he feels confident with his movement possibilities in the fight, he will probably be more able to maintain control, performing capoeira movements and respecting its limits. On the other hand, a person who does not feel as confident with his or her skills tends to lose control more easily under pressure and might use resources that escape the universe of capoeira, getting frustrated and – taken by hostility accompanying frustration – eventually transitioning to altercation. The following excerpt shows that:

You will... [...] for me, risk leaving the capoeira universe [...] good practitioners who use movements of other fights in the circle. [...] I encourage people, students, fighters who train with me to use only capoeira to explore capoeira; for example, if I feel some lack with someone in a game I try to look for something in capoeira. (Old Hand)

When combat escalates, a practitioner may not feel safe with capoeira resources and he might use techniques that are foreign to it. Those are unprecedented means, unexpected in the context of capoeira and therefore the equivalence of technical conditions within which capoeira dispute arises is somewhat lost. This loss of equivalence of possibilities of action between players imposes a differentiating factor in the fight that is foreign to capoeira. It is a step which risks going toward altercation, since it tends to frustrate the other's game by a means that can be considered treacherous, disloyal and deserving retribution.

That process of transition from the experience of fighting to altercation is crossed by escalation of combat. As noted in the account below, when capoeiristas are playing, they notice changes in complicity of the body challenge and act accordingly:

And then he thought ... like, that I was disrespecting him and then he also changed the characteristic of his game. So blood rushed too and we lost control... and the characteristic of his game changed and I also kind of felt under pressure, you know... and I also changed the characteristic of my game [...]. Where there was

a clearer objective, movements were more punctual, more incisive... That's how it was, no one got hurt, it was only a few kicks here and there, but nothing much... (Master Spring)

This excerpt shows the transition time. Externally, it is not always possible to know precisely if combatants are experiencing fight or altercation, since intensification starts without leaving the context of capoeira. Therefore, if actions are still objectively those of a fight, thus sustaining capoeira and the control of its techniques, we can learn subjectively that escalation corresponded to loss of respect and control more typical of altercation than fight.

“Tough play” is characterized above all as a game with doses of escalation and softness, transiting through the borders of combative subjectivity. It may objectively lean towards objectification of the altercation or stay as respect employed in fight actions.

## 5 DISCUSSION

In line with Valério and Barreira (2012), combat in capoeira was found to be structured by complicity and body agreement. Variation, or loss of body agreement and complicity, corresponds to a tendency to change the ways of combating. This modification appears as a process of intensity oscillation, occasionally leading to transitions between play, fight and altercation.

But how should we understand the issue of intensity and its perception in the combative experience? Certainly, when it operates in the transition between different combative phenomena, it is not just physical escalation. This must be stated because capoeira practitioners – and fighters in general – do not see it that way. That is, the subject of combat does not see escalation as merely physical, as one aspect of the experience, but as a totality of pressure, as dynamic intensity in the combat exchange. Therefore, it is conceived as a comprehensive unit that takes over and defines the experience under development. It is a direct experience, it is perception that is not mediated by a return on itself, i. e., it is not reflexive, it does not involve the need to realize what one experiences and, as a result, to make a rational deliberation for action. The experience in question is first of all affective, happening and taking over its subject, as a pre-reflective experience, defining itself eminently as a body experience. Depending on the quality of the affections they take over and fulfill the subjects of combat, we witness a fight, a duel, a play or a fight (BARREIRA, 2013a).

Therefore, in that experience, which is not irrational, there is no primacy of or privilege to instrumental or analytical reasoning – which would place it in a reflective mode. In other words, during combat experience, the sense of confrontation is not primarily a means to arrive at something else, another purpose – which reduces the importance of instrumental reason. Nor does it happen through a cognitive process of decomposition of the physical and psychological-moral dimensions of experience – a finding that drives analytical reason away from the primary experience of combat. The reason of combat – and hence its corresponding rationality (BARREIRA, 2013a) – is defined on the ground of the intensity of the exchange of actions. This does not mean that intensity of the actions is isolated in itself, i. e., that it is defined exclusively by what is happening during combat. If the quality of combat is certainly defined in the mode of that intensity, motivations for the development of intensity must come from times strange to the combat itself, i. e., strange to what happens only between its beginning and its end. Still, those motivations would not be strange to intensity, appearing on it in order to qualify the way intensity

is presented. This would be the case of a duel/challenge – a combat between consenting opponents whose motivation is necessarily a matter of honor (BARREIRA, 2013a) – a combative possibility excluded from this investigation. Here, as well as in the case of altercation, we should examine the reasons for each event in order to understand its specific meaning. Different authors – Mello *et al.* (2010) and Radicchi, Falcão and Kunz (2011) – have pointed out the rivalry between capoeira practitioner groups as a reason for the episodes of violence prevailing in their social environment. Phenomenologically, it should be noted that, while the experience of increased intensity is essential to altercation, including occasional rivalry, rivalry between groups is not essential to it; it is rather one of its possible motives.

Another aspect that is key to understand how variation in the intensity of combat qualifies it is the fighter – the subject of combat. How does that subject experience combat? What are his conditions for confrontation?

These questions no longer focus on the reasons giving rise to different forms of combat – duel/challenge, altercation, play and fight. As these forms of combat (object) are primarily defined by the quality of pre-reflective intensity that constitutes them, the combat's protagonist (subject) is affected and mobilized by the same quality. It is worth mentioning, although it is beyond the scope of this work, phenomenologically, the affective vertex from which the objective and subjective poles emerge at the basis of any experience has relevant concepts, firstly in Edmund Husserl and secondly in Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Husserl, the philosopher who founded phenomenology, termed this living material dimension as hyletics, resorting to Greek terminology (BARREIRA, 2013b; ALES BELLO, 1998). "Brute being" is what Merleau-Ponty calls that dimension (ALES BELLO, 2008). Claiming these concepts helps to check how the objectivity of combat originates with the subjectivity of combatants' in its ontological structure. In this case, the universality of the forms of combat meets combatants' relativity, allowing for the understanding of their various cultural settings as well as the psychological variation in which different people live the experience of combative intensity. It is on the sphere of this psychological relativity of the fighting subject that the above questions find clues to be answered.

The combative relationship, both in capoeira and in other fights and martial arts, is necessarily a challenge aimed ultimately at restricting the opponent's mobility and avoid having one's mobility restricted, i. e. as a challenge where we seek to physically overcome the other (BARREIRA, 2013a). There is therefore intersubjective relativity that is typical of two combatants in confrontation, which plays a key role. In results, that can be seen when playing with children is considered the best condition to experience capoeira as a game. The differences between an experienced adult and a child learning capoeira would be abstracted in physical, technical and psychological levels, since it is clear who is most vulnerable, as well as the responsibility for preserving the playing conditions without violence is obviously with the adult. These differences set the general conditions for confrontation between any subjects and aspects crucial to their perception. The results reached by García (2008) allow extending this reading. The author shows how a fighter's gradual practical mastery allows him or her to progressively take the other into consideration, being cautious especially with lower-level practitioners. Newcomers, in turn, have less control at the time of combat. He writes:

[...] they are positioned at the ends: either there is too much care with the other, so there is almost no intensity [...] or there is almost no consideration, there is no identification (the individual is focused on his own fear), causing actions to be excessive intense. (GARCÍA, 2008, p. 219).

A dialogue with the work of Raúl Sanchez García strengthens the assertive understanding of aspects of the results presented here. The experienced capoeira practitioner or, in a general sense, the subject experienced in a combat practice, develops as a fighter as he “[...] gradually acquires certain mastery of (practical) knowledge, so that control over the activity increases and the level of danger and fear decreases” (GARCÍA, 2008, p. 219). Thus, with “tough play”, it becomes possible “[...] to carry out the activity with greater intensity, but without losing control” (GARCÍA, 2008, p. 219). But the “tough game” – expressive figure of the drama of a fight that can slide into violence – is defiantly balanced on a dangerous boundary as the subject tests limits and wants to expand the lines of what he is capable of, what he can combatively perform. While the experienced practitioner has more control conditions, being a master does not exempt him or her from the risk of losing it. García (2008, p. 226) would say that the risk of hostile conflict remains as an ideal if all possibility for deviation is closed.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The results show some meanings of the human experience of combating in capoeira. We observed that the psychological transition between play, fight and altercation manifests itself in a pre-reflexive way, as an inter-subjective experience mobilized by oscillations between softness and escalation. That is, at the time of confrontation, practitioners can experience the fight’s escalation and slowing down without first thinking intentionally in this process because capoeira takes place in a flow of positions and perceptions, actions and reactions between opponents, without the need for the scrutiny of reflection. Those are direct experiences impregnated in the situation, corresponding to what the “question-answer” of capoeira as a body fight would be. Especially, altercation experiences in the context of fighting practices, and capoeira in particular, may happen without deliberate intent to experience the phenomenon, but as events of the development of confrontation. However, recognizing this is not to say that there are no means of controlling the hostile takeover that marks altercation or that altercation cannot happen deliberately.

It was possible to unveil the subjectivity corresponding to capoeira in the encounter of its boundaries when there is emergence of experiences typical of altercation. Even though it was not the object of this investigation, between the lines the accounts allow us to state that more experienced practitioners can position themselves in ways that favor the permanence of the meaning of the game. Thus, the process of intensification of combat might lead to the boundaries that delineate it, showing practitioners the limits after which the meaning of capoeira tends towards distortion.

However, considering the experiences reported, it should also be noted that experiencing more intense combats, even those close to altercation, allows subjects to learn to recognize their own limits, dosing their presence in the fight, acquiring experience that enhances the conditions to balance the differences between control and lack of control – favoring the former – cultivating existential conditions for self-control. This can be an educational aspect of “tough play” that allows the development of combatants through first-person perception of the limits of capoeira, the opponent’s and, especially, one’s own. It is a question of realizing that the game that only stays in playful, indulgent softness cannot encourage changes and developments posed by the challenge of intensified fighting. Thus, in capoeira, fighting is a challenge to self-indulgence prevailing in play. Otherwise, that is, if there is only play, the expected result

may be practitioners' lack of preparation for a more intense confrontation, which makes them more likely to lose control. Converging with Barreira's (2013b) reflections, the fight is constant improvement and self-knowledge, enabling ethical action in combat and in the life world: trying to keep the motivational horizon of the fight is remaining at the heart of this experience; it is self-development as a fighter.

As fight, dance, play or a game driven by musicality, capoeira is multifaceted and therefore its experience is highly ambiguous. The distinctions made here, like Barreira's (2013b), follow the purpose of phenomenological reduction. Distinguishing these combative forms also enables us to grasp what is intentionally ambiguous in capoeira, in times when fight, play and altercation seem to live together, alternating and even overlapping. In the practical context, the capoeira teacher or master acts as a determinant axis for the balance of the combat experience, since he is required to recognize what prevails amid the ambiguities of confrontation and to intervene in the event of loss of the capoeira meaning as well as allow the fluidity of the fight when there is "tough play" in which its meaning is sustained, thus protecting experiences that can go from careless play to those that are close to fight, although without realizing it. However, the master always takes on the role of guardian of an atmosphere in which the prevailing experiences are not destined to lose sight of fighters as persons deserving respect and care, whose combative development must correspond, in turn, to the sensitive incorporation of duties that reciprocally emerge as a caring attitude toward others.

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