

“Where there is no sin, no forgiveness”: Evocations of voice in memory and culture

“Onde não há pecado nem perdão”:
Evocações da voz na memória e na cultura

“Donde no hay pecado ni perdón”:
Evocaciones de la voz en la memoria
y en la cultura

*Ricardo Santhiago**

Abstract

Introduction: The starting point for this communication is the idea that vocal production consists not only of an anatomical and physiological phenomenon, but also of a psychological and social one – dimensions which have been comprised by the Speech-Language Studies. **Objective:** The article aims to present and discuss three possible links between these dimensions: the visions about the voice engendered and circulated through Brazilian popular songs; the place occupied by the voice within the oral history practice and the specialized literature on this research method; the personal narratives by a variety of individuals about the presence and meaning of the voice in their lives. **Methods:** The work has collected several songs that approach the human voice as a theme, as well as testimonies recorded in an experimental project at the undergraduate level. They were interpreted in accordance with the principles of hermeneutics in an essay text. **Conclusion:** Both the Brazilian popular music and the testimonies given by persons who use the voice intensely demonstrate enormous variety and complexity in understanding the role of voice in the life of individuals.

Keywords: Voice; Singing; Music; Memory.

Resumo

Introdução: O ponto de partida desta comunicação é a ideia de que a produção vocal não consiste apenas em um fenômeno anatômico e fisiológico, mas também psicológico e social, dimensões para as

*Universidade Federal de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

Authors' contributions:
RS - general work outline

Correspondence address: Ricardo Santhiago ricardo.santhiago@unifesp.br

Received: 27/06/2017

Accepted: 18/06/2018

quais os estudos fonoaudiológicos têm atentado. **Objetivo:** O texto visa apresentar e discutir três entrelaces possíveis entre essas dimensões: as interpretações sobre a voz construídas e veiculadas no cancionero da música popular brasileira; o papel da voz na prática da história oral e na literatura especializada sobre este método de pesquisa; as narrações de uma variedade de sujeitos sobre a presença e o significado da voz em suas vidas. **Método:** Foram levantadas canções que tratam da temática da voz e coligidos depoimentos em um projeto experimental em nível de graduação, interpretados em conformidade com princípios da hermenêutica em um texto de caráter ensaístico. **Conclusão:** Tanto o cancionero popular brasileiro quanto os depoimentos de sujeitos que utilizam a voz de maneira intensa demonstram enorme variedade e complexidade nas formas de compreender o papel assumido pela voz na vida dos indivíduos.

Palavras-chave: Voz; Canto; Música; Memória.

Resumen

Introducción: El punto de partida de esta comunicación es la idea de que la producción vocal no consiste sólo en un fenómeno anatómico y fisiológico, sino también psicológico y social, dimensiones para las cuales los estudios fonoaudiológicos han atentado. **Objetivo:** El texto visa presentar y discutir tres entrelazamientos posibles entre esas dimensiones: las interpretaciones sobre la voz construidas y transmitidas en el cancionero de la música popular brasileña; el papel de la voz en la práctica de la historia oral y en la literatura especializada sobre este método de investigación; las narraciones personales de una variedad de sujetos sobre la presencia y el significado de la voz en sus vidas. **Método:** Se levantaron canciones que tratan de la temática de la voz y se recogieron testimonios grabados en un proyecto experimental a nivel de graduación, interpretados de acuerdo con principios de la hermenéutica en un texto de carácter ensayístico. **Conclusión:** Tanto el cancionero popular brasileño como los testimonios de sujetos que utilizan la voz de manera intensa demuestran enorme variedad y complejidad en las formas de comprender el papel asumido por la voz en la vida de los individuos.

Palabras claves: Voz; Canto; Música; Memoria.

Introduction

The amount, diversity, and complexity of approaches on the human voice that one finds nowadays owe much to the Speech, Language and Hearing Science scholarship. Resisting the temptation to evaluate certain aspects and characteristics of the human voice in an isolated way, these studies have demonstrated the feasibility and the fruitfulness of adopting a perspective that, without denying the properly organic aspects related to the vocal production, takes into account its psychological and social dimensions.^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7} Yet there are still numerous paths to explore that social dimension – or, better said, the social interweaving of the physical and psychological qualities of the voice. Individual perceptions on the voice they produce and the voices they hear, for instance, are socially mediated and negotiated. They are directly related to the values these individuals draw from their experiences within a given culture.

As someone devoted to the study of cultural and communicative memory^{8,9}, I develop in this article some reflections on the sociocultural dimensions of the voice, through three interconnected itineraries, which are presented in the subsequent section. First, I examine the Brazilian popular music as a kind of reservoir for the collective memory; as a vehicle capable of building, accumulating and maintaining a cultural memory; as a support that activates shared visions, representations and behaviors – including on the human voice. Secondly, I discuss the role the voice plays within the reflective practice and within the reflections on the practice (i.e., the scholarly literature) of oral history, a research method based on the collection of oral testimonies. Finally, I present an initial report of a recently completed educational experience: a collective work in which students of the Speech, Language and Hearing undergraduate course of Unicamp have carried out during the course Research Methods II, where they mobilized oral history to investigate the subjective and social meanings of voice.



Description

"Where there is no sin, no forgiveness"

What is voice? Let us let musicologist and musical acoustics scholar Johan Sundberg answer this question, as he indeed seeks to do (being sure to emphasize the erratic nature of his material) in the first chapter of his book *Ciência da voz: Fatos sobre a voz na fala e no canto* [The Science of the Singing Voice]. Such word, in his work, designates

sounds generated by the voice organ, including the vibrating vocal folds, or to be more precise, by means of an air stream from the lungs, modified first by the vibrating vocal folds, and then by the rest of the larynx, and the pharynx, the mouth and sometimes the nasal cavities.¹⁰

Let us ask the same question to the composer Caetano Veloso:

My voice, my life
My secret and my revelation
My hidden light
My compass and my disorientation
If love enslaves
But it is the only liberation
My voice is accurate
Life is no less mine than the song
For being happy, for suffering
For waiting, I sing
To be happy, to suffer
To wait, I sing
My love, trust in me
It might grow up like this for us
A flower, without limit
It's only because I bring life here in my voice.¹¹

The voice – as those who specialize in human communication know – is concrete, tangible. Phonation is an anatomical and physiological process widely known and comprehensively described, so much that it can be taught. The respiratory system, the vocal folds and the resonance cavities interact in coordination with the central nervous system and the peripheral nervous system, responsible for regulating the phonetic function and integrating it, for example, to auditory control. But the voice is also spell, immateriality, perplexity, lack of control, safe harbor, medicine; it is a land "where there is no sin, no forgiveness," as the same Caetano Veloso wrote in *Alguém cantando*.¹² It is, indeed,

"this familiar-stranger, present in our narratives, thoughts, self-criticisms and delusions."

We turn to physicists, musicologists, otolaryngologists, speech therapists, to understand its material side – even knowing, of course, that most of them do not deny the emotional components involved in vocal production. To understand its resonance (and here I purposefully employ an ambiguous word), we can turn to the subjects who produce it and use it. Among them, there are those who have it as an integral activity of their crafts: actors, lyrical and popular singers, performers, oral poets and vocal poets... And the song makers, who decal from the speech the material they sing, as Luiz Tatit taught: "As long as there are beings who speak, there will be songwriters converting their lines into songs." And they do so as "people attuned to modernity, sensitive to human affairs, to interpersonal relations and with great peniness to merge facts from different universes of experience into a single discourse: the song."¹³

Just as individual stories, songs also have the power of incarnating, in lyrical-musical creations of 3-4 minutes, therefore even more synthetic – broad social phenomena, cultural patterns, worldviews, etc. Among the many experiences and realities condensed into songs are the crafts and instruments of singers, composers, musicians, and songwriters: they offer a whole metalanguage on their arts and crafts. Some of these songs help us to unravel the subjective and collective elaborations on the voice.

Tatit himself – a songwriter, as well as a linguist and a semiologist – has more than once dealt with the fascination the voice arises, its overwhelming potential: "Everyone wants to see the sinus / they abandon plans / saying that they return / but they return later / before that, they want to be sure / that they will see the two / the sinus of the voice"¹⁴, he registered in 1997 in *Os seios da voz*, echoing the same social commotion described in his composition for the Group Rumor, *Delírio, meu!*, in 1984.¹⁵ In that song, the character addresses an interlocutor apparently oblivious to the powerful effects that his voice causes on the listeners. Seeking to convince him of the social trance caused by his voice, the first character sings: "What a delirium! Delirium! / You can clearly perceive that they are all delirious / To say the least / And when you prepare your keen head / My God! Everyone invades the stage." In its original recording, the song is performed by Ná Ozzetti, who in 2000 won the award for Best





Performer of the Brazilian Music Festival of Rede Globo, performing another creation by Luiz Tatit (now in partnership with Fábio Tagliaferri) about the same theme: “And those / who dreamed, suffered, cried / could make / with a single voice / an entire concert // It might not be / a mega show / a festival / with crowds / but who cried / already has in his voice / a concert”.¹⁶

Songs like these are testimonies of the importance of the voice within our culture: they, after all, organize and express the elements of the culture they form, the culture within which they are constituted. Through songs, we map the vast territory that the voices occupy in the culture – and we recognize ourselves as bearers and multipliers of these senses. The voice that cannot deceive: “I lie, but my voice does not lie / My voice sounds exactly / From where, inside the soul of a person’s body / The word I is produced” (Caetano Veloso, *Drama*)¹⁷. The voice as a consolation, as a comfort: “Keep my voice in my heart / I guarantee it will be better / If you listen to me!” (Ton Saga, *Guarde minha voz*)¹⁸. The voice ad its own life: “There are songs and there are moments (...) / In which the voice is an instrument / That I cannot control”. (Milton Nascimento and Fernando Brandt, *Canções e momentos*)¹⁹. The voice and its bodily limit: “It should be forbidden / Such a bad longing / For such a good person / To speak, to scream, to complain / If our voice does not echo” (Itamar Assumpção and Alice Ruiz, *Devia ser proibido*).²⁰ The voice as a solidarity commitment: “To embrace your brother and kiss your little girl in the street / Is that what your arm, your lip, and your voice are made for” (Belchior, *Como nossos pais*).²¹ The voice as an inheritance and as a burden of responsibility: “My voice comes from the cries of black slaves / Comes from people afflicted with revolution / From the moan of hunger that rages through the Northeast / It is the robe of the echo of the first sound” (Élio Camalle, *Eco*)²². The voice as an instrument of dignification of responsibility: “That is why this voice, this voice – so great” (Roberto Carlos, *Força estranha*). Not to mention the religious power of the voice, described in dozens or probably hundreds of Catholic or Protestant songs.

We could dwell on the exploration of each of these meanings of the voice, since there would be no shortage of raw material and possibilities of illation. But if we want to confirm the strength of the song as a kind of reserve of social memory, a

faithful depository of collective subjectivity, it is enough to turn to everything that has already been said about the primordial voice, the maternal voice, which, within human development, represents much more than a mere auditory stimulus. “Since I was born the voice of the woman / It embraces, it makes me happy, it makes me cry / It shakes my hair, it makes me want to dance / It holds me up / It teaches me how to love (...) / I want to listen for all my life / A woman singing to me,” wrote Sueli Costa and Abel Silva, in *Voz de mulher*.²⁴ Do these verses condense the essentials? Or would we prefer the statement that singer-songwriter Ceumar made to her mother:

She was the first voice
 Since the first time
 When sound was made
 She never tweaked
 Never missed the tone
 She would happily sing.
 Each verse says much more
 When it comes framed
 By her voice.
 And I learned it very well.
 I always try to echo
 The first voice
 The most beautiful voice
 The voice of the sea
 From my mother²⁵

And so, we would follow, understanding that the timbre, the intonation, the level, the rhythm, the intensity of the voice, help shape the relationships that are formed around it, from beginning to end of life. In the song *O filho que eu quero ter*, by Toquinho and Vinício de Moraes, the musician and the poet expresses the desire that, at the time of their death, they can receive the son’s kiss, feel his hand sealing their eyes, and “listen to his voice to me in a wave of goodbye”²⁶. The voice is presence and absence, meeting and farewell.

Voice in oral history

However rich these testimonies about the meanings of the voice (and there would be many others in music, literature, drama...) may be, we rely on the voluntarism of the artists responsible for creating them and providing us access to them. We can, however, enable other devices if we are to penetrate the social and subjective meanings of the sounds our bodies produce.





Oral history is one of these devices: it consists of a research practice built up around a technique (the interview), but it could be better characterized by the prolonged and committed activity of attention and listening. It is the domain of memory and language. It brings together a set of tools designed to stimulate, record, evaluate and disseminate personal narratives characterized by artificiality (these narratives do not exist "by nature," but rather depend on the wilful intervention of a researcher to take shape, even when referring to previous narratives), by dialogicity (oral histories are always intersubjective, while they are fruits of the encounter between two people, their identity traits, their capacity for empathy), by spontaneity (the interviews are a result of unique, unpredictable and unrepeatable confrontations, built *in presentia*).

For oral history, voice is a central player: it allows a subject to come out of himself, to expand the limits of his body, to penetrate the other. That is what voice, with all its potency, can do: a voice of affection, a voice that affects. That is no longer a voice used merely for the fulfillment of daily tasks, but a voice dignified on a memorable occasion. The oral history interview is an intersubjective encounter, and it is also an intercorporeal encounter: the encounter of a body that speaks with a body that listens. And we are alert to the fact that narrators, in their rememorative efforts, put their whole bodies at the service of communication, making their bodies their instrument of confrontation: against marginality, against forgetting, against silencing.

Yes, we are aware of this – an evidence confirmed by the fantastic prominence of the concept of 'performance' in the scholarly literature over the last two decades (a concept which is, for instance, chosen by Lynn Abrams²⁷ as one of the foundations of oral history theory) – but we do not necessarily know what to do, then. First, scholarly literature often suggests that the body and voice are disconnected entities – when, as Paula Carrara wrote, in the context of reflections on the role of body, voice and listening in the activity of the actor, "the [Body] is engaged in vocal production not as aesthetic choice but as physiological reality. Phonation is a result of the resounding of the bones, of the action of the muscles, of the participation of the lungs. The [Voice] of each person results of a sum of movements, memories and learning registered on one's skin."²⁸

Second, because, while we acknowledge the constitutive role of the body (and the voice) in the results of the interactions we promote with our interviewees, we only do it cosmetically. When introducing our subjects and describing the research backstage, we value the role of voice and body. Later, however, when we are *reading* our interviews, the voice tends to be reduced to a mere conduct: when *analyzing* and taking advantage of oral histories, what really matters is semantics, confirming the argument of the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero, who states that, in the tradition of Western thought, the voice is considered only as the "acoustic vestment to the mental work of the concept".²⁹

As Cavarero puts it, this is a perspective instigated by the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, who subordinates – at best – the acoustic dimension of words to their semantic dimension; if the vocal expression is devoid of meaning, says Cavarero, it is immediately devoid of any value in the eyes of metaphysical thinkers. For her, however, "the voice is a sound, not a word"; "the scope of the voice is constitutively broader than that of the word: it surpasses it." And although the word constitutes its "essential destiny," says Cavarero, "there is a fundamental prejudice, which is the tendency to absolutize it, so that, when it is out of the word domain, the voice becomes an insignificant remnant."

Cavarero seeks to implode metaphysical hegemony from within the philosophical field (such as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, equally averse to the metaphysical tradition and Cartesianism that rules out the body and the senses). Other thinkers have pierced it from the outside. For example, in performance studies, as did the Swiss polymath Paul Zumthor, an author of important works of literary criticism, history and linguistics which holds the medieval period as a platform of observation. Died in 1995, having written works such as *A Letra e a Voz* [The Letter and the Voice], *Introdução à Poesia Oral* [Introduction to Oral Poetry], *Performance, Recepção e Leitura* [Performance, Reception, and Reading], and *Escritura e Nomadismo* [Writing and Nomadism], Zumthor reminds us that "the voice has qualities like tone, timbre, which have symbolic values"³⁰. His disciple and disseminator, Jerusa Pires Ferreira, condensates the core of what Zumthor says about the power of the voice:

Even so, it is worth repeating: this "sensitization"





seems to have a consequence mainly before the interview, but not in its analytical use, even if the characteristic listening of oral history exists only in function of the existence of the voice. And here is a parenthesis: interviews with deaf individuals and mute subjects have been carried out within this methodological circumscription – and have face the living voice, the presence of the person who tells his story, his poem or his song is accompanying a whole body energy, and it is still more than that: it is the conjunction of the senses and of a wholeness that goes from the fragments to the entirety, from the strongest intonations to the weakest ones, from the exhaustive saying to silence, which is so meaningful. Attention must also be paid to the hidden knowledge, the information of what is said, both to those who are initiates, who are part of the same group, or the others, the suspicions that are highlighted, and finally, the whole expression of who says. That is the responsibility one has, when it faces another person.³¹

In any event, it is worth repeating: this sensitive acting seems to happen uniquely before the interview, but not in its *analysis*, even if the specific way of listening of oral history exists only in function of the voice's existence. And here we should add: interviews with deaf subjects and mute subjects have been carried out within this method's domain – and have provided many insights extensible to the practice of oral history as a whole, since they scrutinize procedures and principles often taken for granted, such as the role of interpretation in the transcription and editing of personal reports, and the very role of the body in the narrative self-constitution. These subjects – those who use other expressive means than the voice – nevertheless represent a relatively small portion of those who have been summoned to offer their testimonies to oral history practitioners. Yet, even though those who narrate using their speech apparatus are the most frequent narrators in our field, the defining presence of the voice has usually been considered more as a presupposition than a problem.

When it appears as a *problem*, it is not as a *research problem*, but as an actual *obstacle*. It is worth explaining that orality has been a temporary means for oral history accounts. Since its institutional origin (in the late 1940s at Columbia University, when tapes were too expensive to be used with a single interviewee, having a second life after being transcribed, thus making only a trace of the spoken voice available) until the digital revolution,

transcripts were the virtually exclusive means of presenting narrated stories.³² And it is precisely in this sense that the voice becomes an obstacle: How to express the inflections of speech? Is there a specific way of transposing the whisper, the irony, into the text? What are the expressive resources, within the scope of writing, able to express the intonation of the voice, its rhythm, its breaks?

It is fundamentally then that we pay attention to the voice: when we feel its vocal power neutralized by writing. We bring to our field the same concern found in the ethnopoetics of Ruth Finnegan³³ or in the ethnography of the speech of Dennis Tedlock³⁴ or Richard Bauman³⁵. Finally, we remember the voice as an impediment when we are forced to do what the elegant Roland Barthes called the “toilet of the deceased” in the text that opens *The Grain of the Voice*, a collection of his own interviews: “We embalm our word like a mummy”, Barthes writes, “to make it eternal.”³⁶ In this process, the “theatricality” of the voice, its “tactics” and its “innocence”, the “expletives of thought”, and all “those pieces of language (...) which the linguist would surely bind to a of the great functions of language, the factual or interpellation function.” For Barthes,

What is lost in the transcription is purely and simply the body – at least this external (contingent) body that, in a situation of dialogue, sends to another body, as fragile (or frightened) as it is, empty intellectual messages whose only function is, in a sense, to *grasp* the other (even in the prostitutive sense of the term) and keep it in its partner state.

I could not but say that we have, yet, passed away from the voice even though it is one of the most used metaphors to describe the task of oral history practitioners: I am talking about the suggestion that one of the functions of this method would be to “give voice” to the silenced, the marginalized, the forgotten, a perspective that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, shaping the previous hegemonic view of oral history as an archival tool and without a role in the present.³⁷ The idea that the researcher “gives voice” to somebody else has been sufficiently (and, in my view, rightly) criticized, above all because we recognize and value the agency of subjects in life and in the life story self-narration. Still, it has become so pervasive that the very fact that it has become a cliché is a good reason to fight it. Some colleagues, annoyed by the need to repeat the



problems involved in the idea of "giving voice," opt – at least behind the scenes – for a more malicious response: "We do not 'give voice' to anyone. The one who 'gives voice' is a speech pathologist."

The voice and the pedagogy of oral history

Finally, let me make a few comments on a collective project conducted in the first semester of 2017 within the course Research Methods II, within the Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences course at Unicamp. Traditionally, the second module of the course presents methods and techniques which deepen the qualitative approach. That opened space for me to privilege investigative activities related to narrative research, particularly oral history. Needless to say, I consider oral history a valuable research method, capable of providing access to human material that otherwise would not only not be accessible but would not even exist: the oral history information is produced, it does not preexist.

In recent years, however, it has become increasingly clear to me the procedural value of oral history: it makes a difference in the world not only by the products it generates, but by the research activity itself. As Valéria Magalhães and I argued in the book *História oral na sala de aula*³⁸ [Oral History in the Classroom], oral history favors the development of curiosity and investigative ability, the awareness of differences (of generation, social origin, gender, culture, etc.), the reevaluation of what qualifies as legitimate subjects of scholarly (historical, sociological, etc.) studies, the exercise of attention and listening. Therefore, I believe that doing oral history does not necessarily make us better researchers (after all, there are many and many legitimate and fruitful research resources available), but it certainly makes us better human beings.

Even with regard to the skills most closely connected scholarly research, I consider oral history a particularly appropriate pedagogical tool, since it is a kind of "convergence method": to make good oral history interviews, one needs to make good bibliographic and/or documentary research, one needs to know how to insert him/herself and show trustworthiness to social groups and communities, one needs to observe both the familiar and the unfamiliar and be able to distinguish among them. While doing all this, we are subject to the control not only of our peers, but to the control of

our own narrators, who watch over the integrity of their words – albeit in varying degrees.

In 2016, the first time I taught the Research Methods II course, I proposed to the students that we developed as final work a dossier of oral histories with alumni from the first Speech, Hearing, and Language BA's. Extremely lively and committed, the students created a set of almost 50 hours recorded, which does make a difference: the research inserted reports of unsuspected episodes in the historical record of an institution, allowed to infer how professional identity also develops from narrative practices, brought to the students a sense of belonging and of historical continuity, deconstructed the vision they themselves carried about the idea of professional achievement, for example. They found that a standardized questionnaire, for example, might well point out that a given interviewee feels he/she attained "professionally achievement," and that the same interviewee earns a minimum salary range – but that only an oral history interview could show that what is at stake, in this apparent (and uncomfortable) contradiction, is precisely the sense of "professional achievement." Reading the stories collected by the students was enriching, from many points of view. I had a lot of fun, as well – for example, when an interviewee said, seriously, that she had to think hard before narrating her story, "because," she said, "I'm already thirty, people." And the interviewers returned, in an equally grave tone: "Yes, it's a lot of history."

In 2017, I proposed to the students another theme, accepted by them with equal enthusiasm: the "heterogeneous uses of the voice." It was an invitation for them to explore not the anatomical and physiological processes that account for the vocal production process – but the subjective, social, and cultural dimensions of the voice and the multiple contexts in which it occurs. The first challenge was to think about the subjects whose personal or professional identities are signaled, at least in part, by their voices. Although the students have looked for the "usual suspects" – actors, singers, telemarketing agents, teachers, who are often sought after in voice studies – we map out a larger territory frequented by a real estate broker, a stewardess, a choreographer, a pastor, a priest, a salesman, a bartender, a bus driver, a social movement activist and a student activist. And what do the voices of these people mean to themselves? What do they provide and what do they veto? What





degree of power do they attribute to their voices? How can the “owners” of the voice control it? How aware are they of the fact that the voice expresses their identity traits?

After the selection of subjects, the first steps of the research were somewhat frustrating. As much as we had discussed the proposal, the students demonstrated a very great difficulty in extrapolating the narrower issue of the voice in its physical and instrumental dimension. They could not understand it as part of a person’s wholeness, let alone of a social body. Let me note that the first version of the interview guidelines they elaborated included questions such as: *How many glasses of water do you drink per day? What are your eating habits? Do you do any type of vocal warm-up? Is your work environment noisy? After intense use of voice, do you feel any discomfort? Do you usually deal with hoarseness? Have you ever contacted a professional to report vocal problems?* These are extremely relevant issues, no doubt, but in another sort of investigation. Even the questions that could stimulate a reflexive process were very elusive, they opened a limited space for a narrative of experience capable of passing conventional evaluations: *Do you think your work has had any negative effect on your voice? What is the importance of orality in your work? If you had a problem with your voice, would it prevent your current activities?*

How can we break these barriers if we do not even know when they are built? In the second year of their undergraduate course, without any research experience, these students took for granted that these would be the *right* questions to ask. In the same way, they imagined that there would also be *right* answers, and that the interviews might not be necessary, because they would only reveal banality and triviality. It took some time for us to understand together, for example, that not all respondents could *complain* about a situation of hoarseness: to be hoarse after spending a Carnival holiday in Salvador could be, for a young man of 17 years, the confirmation that his money was well invested; to be hoarse after shouting “Fora Temer!”, “Diretas Já!” in a rally or public act, could represent the certainty of accomplishment. “I will sing until the voice runs out” – is not it what a famous Portuguese fado, by Fontes Rocha and José Luís Gordo, says?³⁹

But expectations also come from respondents: we know that an oral history interview is an *account of action* and a *residue of action*⁴⁰; it documents

both the narrated past and the present of the narration. And the interviews are full of examples that demonstrate this second feature, which registers the production conditions of the source, remembering that the narratory of an oral text also informs that text. “Please don’t get angry,” one interviewee said shortly after telling her interviewer – a speech therapist, let’s remember – that she smoked and drank. Interviews document the relationships that precede them: “Your voice – it is calm, it is clear, it is gentle. And I’m not sure if it’s because you’re my daughter and today it’s Mother’s Day [laughs], but I like your voice a lot.” The interviews document the future that is ahead: “Do not forget to always have the humility, to always look forward (...) Once you have been trained (...) do dedicate some time, one day a year, one day per month, one day a week, one hour, to the people who need it most.” The interview is also – as Ecléa Bosi taught us – an exchange of advices.⁴¹

The voice is a source of satisfaction: “I like my voice; I wouldn’t change a thing about it.” It is a source of dissatisfaction: “I hate my voice; I think I have a child’s voice. Please burn this record! Burn after listening!” It is a source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction simultaneously: “I’d say [my voice] is a beautiful voice, a passionate voice! But singing – it’s a disaster!”

The voice is also compensatory. It reshapes a person, making it capable of affecting the body and the intellect of his/her listener. As one politician interviewed said:

when we arrive at a ceremony, when we arrive at an event – and we’re only 5’5 tall, we’re short, we’ve got a big head, a Maranhão head, you know? But when we put our voice in the microphone, when people give us permission to speak, people gets different. [here, the voice of the interviewee himself gets different, simulating a radio announcer voice] (...) So, my voice – it was, it is, and it will be essential for my life, for my development, right? I occasionally, on Mother’s Day, I pick up the sound car, and I thank, I congratulate the mothers, the fathers in their days, you know? In the community. The voice, it is essential.

Another interesting aspect concerns the form of the narratives: narrating is a creative exercise, and the words and structures mobilized by the interviewees are also creative – for example, to describe their own voices. They are concepts and formula-





tions that, as Heloísa Valente put, "are nothing more than metaphors, provisional supports to which the inability to name invisible things recourse to speak of what touches deeply and which is not seen."⁴² "My voice expresses a strong confidence," an interviewee said, "and this is crazy because I don't feel confident. And when I'm angry, I think I'm very aggressive (...) My voice gets very *concise* and very *pointy*, you know?" Another interviewee said: "Some days you seem to speak firmly, the voice seems to be fuller (...). Some days you look like you're *skating*." A third interviewee described her own voice as "a hoarse voice, a strong voice, a *toneless* voice." Another person said he likes to listen to his own pronunciation, but not his voice, which "is not good to hear, it is kind of *fiery*" (emphasis added).

And what would life be like without a voice? An interviewee said, "I start to breeze, to wonder which of our senses would be less harmless to lose. Not a sense – which of our parts to the world, like hearing, seeing, having a voice. And I don't become desperate; it's just a little weird to think about it, because I'm very verbal, I talk a lot, really. It would be very difficult." Another person mused: "It'd be terrible, you know? I think it's just like a bird that has a wing, but it can't fly – it's like being on the ground looking to the others. Of course, you must adapt to whatever happens in your life, and you must keep alive, but losing one's voice is terrible. God forgive me."

So, we come to God and to the sacred. In the interviews we find a fascinating account of a fortuitous episode: a temporary loss of voice, construed by the narrator as a kind of divine punishment. The religious dimension intensifies the power of the voice and this would be an entire separate study. This man, a driver, said:

I was in a [cult and] in this cult there were a lot of people, a lot of people. (...) God touched my heart that I should go and give a hug in the soundman, except that I was on this side and he was on the other side, so (...) [to get to him] I'd be disturbing it all. And God kept speaking and I got stubborn, stubborn with God. I insisted, I was not going to. Inside me, there was a word, inside me, "How could I go there? All these ministers [on the way]. I was speaking with myself, "Oh, arrange for one of these ministers go there and embrace him" (...) By the final prayer (...) the Pentecost came down (...) and one of the ministers, the minister that I should

go to, then he came, he took my hand, he put my hand on his throat. I don't know what was going on, because he didn't say, and God showed me what he had in his throat. But then, I don't know, eventually it was the moment for a prayer and I realized that my voice disappeared, stuck; it was not coming. I tried to speak, and the voice didn't come out, the voice – because, it was an experience that, I think – I don't know who else by that time had such a similar experience. I had this experience. Horrifying. My voice disappeared, I tried to speak but – no, I couldn't, nothing was coming. Then I said, "Okay, God. Then I go". I don't know how I got through. I passed, right? I don't know how. I went in, I went there, I gave a hug to the soundman, we did little jumps together, we gave some hallelujah there, and the voice came. (...) I gave a hug, God asked me to give a hug. He didn't ask me to say anything, just give a hug. And in this embrace we stomped there in the Spirit, it was so good. So that's why I say: voice is everything. (...) It was a few seconds without the voice, but I was in despair.

I wonder how recurrent the understanding of the voice as a currency for the relation of between religious women and men to God would be; it should be investigated. Ultimately, the very use of the voice as a *threat* or a *punishment* suggests the central place it occupies in the life of the subjects and in their structures of faith; the meaning of the voice is drawn precisely from the intermediary space that separates disobedience and adherence, failure and triumph of faith over individual desires. A woman, a Catholic singer who was interviewed, said:

that's what voice means to me: a gift from God, a gift from God, and a gift to be wisely used – do not exalt yourself, because when one exalts himself (...) One time, I fell into that bullshit of exalting myself, "Oh, what a voice!" I spoke to myself. Not that I was saying that to anyone else. But in my heart [I thought], "Oh, I sing much better, I sing (...) everything!" But then God said, "I'm going to make you lose your voice, I'll make you lose your voice, so you can get back to your place. Get off that leap, get down!" So, I was forced to come down. I lost my voice, you know? [It was] when I found a SLP therapist, and she found two calluses on my vocal cords.

For another religious singer – a protestant – voice is also a gift, a present. It is not a threat – but still, she retains the same effort to move away from bad feelings:





After I converted, since I liked to sing, I started like this, I was enjoying the praises, the hymns. And then I saw the woman singing in the church, and I asked God to let me sing just like her – not that I was envy, of course, right? But I thought like this: ‘what a relief in my heart I’m getting today with this song, with that beautiful voice, you know?’ So, I can pass this on to people also, wherever I go, because she goes to one side and I go to the other. After a little while I began to sing and realized that God answered me in what I asked for.

A minister provides a view that is much more concrete: for him, the voice would not be a gift, but an inevitability. He understands it as a means of carrying out and dignifying the mission entrusted to him: “All the time in my profession, the voice is used. There is no one (...) a moment when I can, within my activity, say, ‘I won’t use my voice.’ There is no such a thing; it is not part of my universe. It’s different from other professions. In mine I don’t have that option.”

By recording and amplifying stories like these, students are not just trying a research method: as much as they have difficulty mobilizing complex debates and even establishing a long, empathic, and dense dialogue with their respondents, they are participating in the collective enterprise of science, expanding their own experiences and internalizing the idea that the voice is only realized fully when it meets the listening.

The expectation is that they become aware that the voices they listen to can unveil paths of life, not only because of their *content*: voices are themselves products of the ways and possibilities of life of the subjects. We could say that they are not transparent or opaque, but translucent. The muscles that *recount* are the same muscles that are counted; the neurobiological processes of memory and language that are the *object* of a narration are the same processes that *enable* this narration. In its physicality, voice is not only an *instrument*, but an *agent*. As Zumthor wrote, “knowledge is not only made *by the* body, but it is, as a matter of principle, knowledge *of the* body.”⁴³

To *remind* ourselves of this, we must be attentive not only to the content of the stories we listen to; we need to be imbued with the disposition to know what the historical-sociological perspective offers us, but also what performance studies, voice studies, speech-language studies teach us – in fact, of a truly multifocal knowledge. Or would

we imply that what Zumthor teaches us is so far away from Karl Bühler’s theory of speech, which, in the 1930s, advocated that any human emission has three functions: representation, expression, and appeal?⁴⁴ I expect that these projects will let the students know not only how to conduct an interview that uses the voice to tell their lives, but also to sensitize them to how this means of expression *results from* what they communicate.

Concluding remarks

I close this text out by re-approximating oral history and music. I discovered the oral history method by interviewing artists, especially singers – persons who used their voices to talk to me and who have voices as their primary working tool. In the stories they sing and in the stories they tell, they attest that voice is their passion, their destiny, their bread and butter. Hence the stories about the voice’s absence, which tends to be taboo, are really jarring. Take the case of Marina Lima, her public suffering and rehabilitation.⁴⁵ If we *are* our stories – as Paul John Eakin⁴⁶ proposes – then *aren’t* we our voices as well? Would we even exist, if we did not possess them?

With another singer, I had an intense collaboration: Alaíde Costa, precursor of bossa nova and one of the main interpreters of Brazilian popular music, now aged more than 80 years old and working at full pace. Her life story was the basis for my book *Solistas dissonantes: História (oral) de cantoras negras*,⁴⁷ which paved the way for me to write her biography – in fact, a narrated autobiography – called *Faria tudo de novo*⁴⁸. In this process, Alaíde and I met several times. I would ask her, recurrently, about a theme I knew to be a taboo: her relationship with her family. Alaíde found in her circle of relatives the pain that would haunt her for the rest of her life: that of being charged for pursuing a type of work in which she, supposedly, because of her racial condition, did not fit. She never had the support of her family members – except for an older brother. I wanted to discuss it because this experience was central to the broader discussion we were developing: the difficulty of a black women singer to assert herself in artistic and professional terms within a musical field viewed as sophisticated. Alaíde did not want to, she had a way to do it: whenever we got close to the subject, her voice would fail. She would cough. No sound



would come out of her mouth. It was as if she was saying, gently, "Even if I wanted to tell you about it – I cannot tell."

I believe this helps answering my own question: if we are our stories, then are not we our voices as well? In the case of Alaíde, as her voice failed, her painful personal history ceased to exist. It was not amenable to be listened, transmitted, recorded. Not to mention, in this case, that it was the most effective way of controlling one's own story. Paul Zumthor wrote: "by speaking anything, voice speaks itself"⁴⁹. And we would add: even without speaking anything, it speaks itself. It is the vehicle and the territory of doubt and certainty, of risk and salvation, of venom and medicine – that place, once again I quote Caetano Veloso, "where there is no sin, no forgiveness."

References

1. Souza P, Fabron, EMG, Viola I, Spink MJ, Ferreira, LP. Questões sobre expressividade oral no cinema. *Distúrbios da Comunicação*. 2015; 27(1); 115-8.
2. Meireles AR, Cavalcante FG. Qualidade de voz no estilo de canto heavy metal. *Per Musi*. 2015; 32: 197-218.
3. Santos SMM, Medeiros JSA, Gama ACC, Teixeira LC, Medeiros AM. Impacto da voz na comunicação social e emoção de professoras antes e após fonoterapia. *Rev. CEFAC*. 2016; 18(2): 470-80.
4. Pompeu ATS, Barreiro SM. Rua, que a nossa voz seja ouvida: uma contribuição fonoaudiológica sobre a voz no Rap nacional. *Música Popular em Revista*. 2016; 4(2): 105-16.
5. Dias CA. Voz cantada: perfil dos cantores e a inter-relação com a fonoaudiologia. Tese (Doutorado em Distúrbios da Comunicação) - Universidade Tuiuti do Paraná, Curitiba; 2016.
6. Cuervo L, Maffioletti LA. Sindô Lê Lê, Sindô Lá Lá, não podemos viver sem cantar! Identidade, educação e expressão através da voz. *Música na Educação Básica*. 2016; 7/8: 22-35.
7. Lopes MCS. A voz e o sagrado: cantos sobre poéticas da voz em contextos diversos. Dissertação (Mestrado em Linguística, Letras e Artes) - Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, Uberlândia; 2016.
8. Assmann A. Espaços da recordação: Formas e transformações da memória cultural. Campinas, SP: Editora da Unicamp; 2011.
9. Assmann J. Memória comunicativa e memória cultural. *História Oral*, v. 19, n. 1, p. 115-27, 2016.
10. Sundberg J. Ciência da voz: Fatos sobre a voz na fala e no canto. Trad.: G L Salomão. São Paulo: Edusp; 2015.
11. Veloso C. Minha voz, minha vida. In: Veloso C. Livro; 1997.
12. Veloso C. Alguém cantando. In: Veloso C. Bicho; 1977.
13. Tatit L. Todos entoam: Ensaios, conversas e canções. São Paulo: Publifolha; 2007.
14. Tatit L. Os seios da voz. In: Tatit L. Felicidade; 2001.
15. Tatit L. Delírio, meu! In: Grupo Rumo. Caprichoso; 1984.
16. Tatit L, Tagliaferri, F. Show. In: Ozzetti N. Show; 2001.
17. Veloso C. Drama. In: Bethânia M. Drama – Anjo exterminado; 1972.
18. Saga T. Guarde minha voz. In: Sá S. Vale Tudo; 1983.
19. Nascimento M, Brandt F. Canções e momentos. In: Nascimento M. Yauaretê; 1987.
20. Assumpção I, Ruiz A. Devia ser proibido. In: Assumpção I. Pretrobrás III; 2010.
22. Camalle E. Eco. In: Camalle E. Cria; 2004.
23. Carlos R. Força estranha. In: Carlos R. Roberto Carlos; 1978.
24. Costa S, Silva A. Voz de mulher. In: Costa A. Tudo que o tempo me deixou; 2005.
25. Ceumar. Mãe. In: Ceumar. Meu nome; 2009.
26. Toquinho, Moraes V. O filho que eu quero ter. In: Toquinho, Moraes V. Vinícius e Toquinho; 1975.
27. Abrams L. Oral History Theory. New York: Routledge; 2010.
28. Carrara P. Corpo Voz Escuta: Reflexões sobre a prática do ator. São Bernardo do Campo, SP: Lamparina Luminosa; 2016.
29. Cavarero A. Vozes plurais: Filosofia da expressão vocal. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG; 2011.
30. Zumthor P. A permanência da voz. Trad.: M I Rolim. O Correio da Unesco. 1985; 13(10).
31. Pires Ferreira J. Os desafios da voz viva. In: Von Simson ORM, editor. Os desafios contemporâneos da história oral. Campinas, SP: Centro de Memória Unicamp; 1997. p. 59-68.
32. Charlton TL, Myers LM, Sharpless R. History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press; 2017.
33. Finnegan R. Communicating: The Multiple Modes of Human Communicating. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2013.
34. Tedlock D. The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; 1983.
35. Bauman R. Verbal Art as Performance. *American Anthropologist*. 1975; 77(2): 290-311.
36. Barthes R. O grão da voz: Entrevistas, 1961-1980. Trad.: M Laranjeira. São Paulo: Martins Fontes; 2004.
37. Thompson P, Bornat J. The Voice of the Past: Oral History. 4th ed. New York: Oxford University Press; 2017.
38. Santhiago R, Magalhães VB. História oral na sala de aula. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica Editora; 2015.
39. Rocha F, Gordo JL. Até que a voz me doa. In: Fé M. 50 anos de carreira ao vivo no Coliseu; 2009.
40. Alberti V. Ouvir contar: Textos em história oral. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV; 2004.
41. Bosi E. O tempo vivo da memória: Ensaio de Psicologia Social. Cotia: Ateliê; 2003.
42. Valente HAD. As cores da voz-música. In: Santhiago R. Solistas dissonantes: História (oral) de cantoras negras. São Paulo: Letra e Voz; 2009. p. 275-6.
43. Zumthor P. Performance, recepção, leitura. São Paulo: Cosac Naify; 2007.



44. Behlau M, Ziemer R. Psicodinâmica vocal. In: Ferreira LP, editor. *Trabalhando a voz: Vários enfoques em Fonoaudiologia*, 4 ed. São Paulo: Summus; 1988. p. 71-88.
45. Sartori C. Segura de si e calejada das críticas, Marina Lima abraça uma nova fase e as mudanças no dom que por pouco não perdeu: a voz. *Rolling Stone*; 2016;3.
46. Eakin PJ. *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. New York: Cornell University Press; 2008.
47. Santhiago R. *Solistas dissonantes: História (oral) de cantoras negras*. São Paulo: Letra e Voz; 2009.
48. Santhiago R. Alaíde Costa: *Faria tudo de novo*. São Paulo: Imprensa Oficial; 2013.
49. Zumthor P. *Escritura e nomadismo: Entrevistas e ensaios*. São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial; 2001.