

Modes of communication and reading practices of slaves in the 19th century

Modos de comunicação e práticas de leitura dos escravos do século XIX

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Abstract: *The article shows some modes of communication of Brazilian slaves of the nineteenth century, emphasizing, above all, the reading and writing practices of these fundamental social actors in the history of Brazil. Divided into two parts, it initially seeks to show the oral skills of everyday life, to sequentially, from primary source research, describe their skills around writing and reading. It thus reveals part of the world of communication and oral practices, reading and writing of Brazilian slaves in the nineteenth century.*

Keywords: *orality; reading; writing; slaves; nineteenth century.*

Resumo: *O artigo mostra alguns modos de comunicação dos escravos brasileiros do século XIX, dando ênfase, sobretudo, às práticas de leitura e de escrita desses atores sociais fundamentais da história do Brasil. Dividido em duas partes, procura inicialmente mostrar as habilidades orais cotidianas para, na sequência, a partir da pesquisa em fontes primárias, descrever as suas habilidades em torno da escrita e da leitura. Revela, assim, um pouco do mundo da comunicação e das práticas orais, de leitura e de escrita dos escravos brasileiros no século XIX.*

Palavras-chave: *oralidade; leitura; escrita; escravos; século XIX.*

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The silence we produce regarding the acts of men that lived before us and that had in us an image of a possible future comes from many reasons. In this article, whose objective is to show to the modes of communication and reading and writing practices of Brazilian slaves in the 19th century, the path begins by the noise, deemed as deafening, that these men and women made around public spaces in many Brazilian cities.

Echoes that, from the past, travel until the present show the many modes of communication of those who formed, on the 1800's, the biggest parcel of the Brazilian population, but who had their modes of communication, which included not only the possibility of reading and writing, but the capacity of handling written codes, for so long relegated to a deafening silence, however oxymoronic this expression might seem.

What is the reason for disregarding the modes of communication of the majority of the Brazilian population from the 1800's? We could list numerous reasons, but it is necessary to call attention to issues that are synthetized into three words: remains, testimonies and value.

If the memory is the most important gate to access the past, the testimony is the living proof of the reliability of the past. Yet, we have to consider that not only the processes located in the past can be considered historical: Historical is everything that, from the past, traveled until the present.

The testimonies, which allow the reinterpretation of the past, are from multiple orders: Documentary texts located in archives that keep the memory of a certain place in time; multiple textualities that were produced in a world that now we call past; remainders of a lasting material culture; images that insist on remaining in different supports; live memory of those who were inscribed in the past and that attest their existence by the oral testimony.

We also have to consider that the past is only accessible through the trails and remainders that, as an action of communication of men located in these past times, traveled until the present. Different trails, but

they need to be indicatively read so that the message they contain, often times sparsely and imprecisely, be interpreted.

Finally, it is important to talk about the issue of the value of knowledge. As Agnes Heller (1993) emphasizes, knowledge has a proper value in each place in time: There always were something that could not be know, knowledge known as unholy, things that no mortal should know. Some of these knowledges only arise when we reach a certain degree of historical conscience. This seems to be the process which neglected, for over a century, the reading and writing cultural practices from slaves in the 19th century.

The fact we emphasize reading and writing practices from slaves does not mean that the so-called "orality competences" are not recognized. Quite to the contrary. For that reason, before going into the territory of reading and writing practices from the slaves, it is interesting to show two sceneries in which the modes of communication are highlighted once again: the first one we call orality competences and the second one we call indications of a literate order.

Orality competences

Among the many orality competences, we highlight communication techniques that made memory be a fundamental place for the repetition of immemorial narratives. Near the fire, after a tiring day of work, men and women could gather to tell stories, and, through them, remember a land that constituted, especially for the elderly, a type of paradise lost. But they could simply talk loud and clear. Storytelling was the first of the competences in the orality world.

Black folks like gathering at nightfall around the fire, smoking, lecturing and gesticulating, in a big fuss. The tarimbas², each one measuring 2.5 to 3 feet of width are separated from one another by a wooden division with 3 feet of height, having a blanket or a mat to cover the entrance to the side of the corridor. The senzalas³ stay open at 10 PM, having until this time,

2 Tarimba is the place where slaves used to sleep.

3 Senzalas are the slave camps in colonial Brazil.

a mixed conviviality there. With a signal made by a bell, men and women leave, each to their own lodging, and the guard locks them in, opening again the next morning, one hour before the beginning of the daily labor (TSCHUDI, 1980, p. 56, our italic markings).

But the senzala was not the only place where this murmur of voices was present. Many regions were gathering points of slaves that, between one task and another, made echo their presence by oral modes of communication. As, for example, the fountains. The time to look for water was also the moment of updating people's lives, of knowing what was happening in town, when the main theme was the new contingency of new-comers from Africa. In 1828, reverend Robert Walsh described the howl of men and women around the fountain on the street of the Ditch (nowadays called rua Uruguaiana, at Downtown Rio de Janeiro).

Once, I was looking this extraordinary scene through the windows of Saint Anthony's Covent when, suddenly, all the square was a buzz. Men threw their cans, women spilled water everywhere and the police used the whip; everyone fought, screamed and laughed in great confusion. (WALSH, 1985, p. 211, our italic markings).

Around the fountain, used to gather libambos, prisoner slaves condemned to carry water to the public institutions. Chained by the neck during the day, they used to go to these places deemed by the high concentration of people walking. There was the place where the libambos made contact with different people, gathering information and taking it to the prison, becoming 'prison windows'" (ARAÚJO, 2008, p. 93).

The modes of communication between imprisoned slaves point to a pact with information which was absent as possibility for many. For solidarity, they transform in modes of communication for those who could not see the daylight. In this case, their bodies and the technology of the voice were the possibility of others to come in contact with the news of the world. There were men who widened the horizon of vision (by information) to others, being constituted as windows, that, from the prison, would open towards the world that existed outside.

Another orality competence was musical. They improvised sounds and followings, making their hands privileged instruments for percussion, and executed songs to be published, i. e., directed for an audience that could be or not participating directly on the circle of songs and dances.

The communication orally created was always oriented for the other, assuming an audience, an external audience from the one who speaks and they are perceived as somebody that, even if they are outside from the action of execution of sonorous communicational acts, are partners of the dialogic scene that was established. Facing the audience and their reactions, the actors of oral communication could change the intensity of the following, the dance gestures and even the verses of the songs. A shared composition was always created.

One would say that after the labor of the day, the loudest pleasures produce the same effect as rest would give to the slave. At night, it is rare to find slaves gathered that would not be excited by songs and dances; one would hardly believe that they performed, during the day, the harshest labor, and we cannot persuade ourselves in believing that there are slaves in front of our eyes. (RUGENDAS, 1972, p. 147, our italic markings).

In the body movements after the work of the day, it is interesting to notice the way how they executed these dances. Excited, they would establish a dialog capable of inviting others to join the same narrative. The rhythmic clap of hands was the communication that the show of music and body would begin. The percussion was directed by an “extra” that would have the role of master of ceremonies, with the participation of others that would follow the singing with manual and bodily sounds. The repetition of the chorus attests the presence of dialogue in oral communication.

The usual dance of the slave is the batuque. *Only a few black people gather and soon you can hear the rhythmic clapping of hands; it is the sign of the calling and the invitation for the dance.* The batuque is directed by an “extra”; it consists on certain body movements that may look overly expressive; mainly the thighs that shake, while the dancer snaps the tongue

and the fingers, following a monotone singing, the others create a circle around him and repeat the chorus (RUGENDAS, 1972, p. 147, our italic markings).

By the possibilities of the technologic device of speech – the mouth – they would transmit the code of a illiterate culture whose competence would also be brought by the capacity of transmitting senses and communication. The singing was followed by rhythms that came from the body and the mouth and others understood the sounds emitted, repeating the chorus, that was memorized because of the frequency which the musical dialogic act was executed.

In the scene described by Rugendas, the way the body participated in the acts of communication is highlighted. Following the rhythm with the hands or inviting people to dance with the movement of the thighs, the enunciated speech was expanded with body gestures. The body was place of storage of a cultural information that could be reused.

Song was also a part of the labor world. The *vissungos*, African songs, worked not only to rhythmize activities, but could also become ways of establishing encrypted communication. The repetition of the chorus of certain verses could be used, for example, as a signal to warn others about the slave driver coming. The sound defined, thus, the rhythm of work, communicating something that could not be told directly and turned the spare time into something shared. The enslaved life was organized in a particular way around complex oral practices of a communication that made music as a way of survival.

If, by around 1660, there was a population of approximately 3.850 souls, amongst them 3.000 were indigenous, 750 portuguese and only 100 black people (ABREU, 1987), in 1799, the city already had 43.376 inhabitants, from which, 34.6% were slaves (KARASCH, 2000, p. 109). And this number would not cease to rise on the following decades. In 1849, there were approximately 80 thousand slaves and the city, during the three previous decades, would shelter the biggest slave population of the continent. In the 40-year period between the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family (1808) and the end of slave traffic, in 1850, more

than 1.4 million slaves were introduced in Brazil, i. e. , around 40% of Africans that came in three centuries of history of Brazil (MARCÍLIO, 1999).

We gradually observe, from remainders of the past, a new order of communication arising: The literate order. Despite the lack of substantial modifications in the practices of most of the population that made the cities dive into a deafening noise of the streets, where people used to sell everything and where there are images of the human buzz, we have to consider that the slaves also become characters of this scene of communication practices. As a lasting register of the second decade of the 1800's, we see a gradual construction of the literate and reading sphere that would result in an exponential expansion of magazines throughout almost all the provinces of the country starting in 1821. And, within this reading and writing population, there were also the slaves.

Out of the paintings of Debret and Rugendas, we see arising readings in public spaces, print letters marking different shipments or fixed as signs on doors of bars and barbershops. We also see the movement of students shaking their writings in the party of Santo Aleixo, saint patron of pupils. We also see a white girl going to school with a slave carrying her school supplies. We see the movement inside the residences when, in a painting of a home, slaves are around the floor beside a woman who sews and a child reading the first letters of the ABC. But we see, overall, in the cities and in the fields, newspapers, maps, books, a diversity of printed material taking up the spaces.

In the image of Rugendas Praia Rodrigues perto do Rio de Janeiro,⁴ two white men, apparently scientists, are followed by two slaves. The first one is standing up in front of the slaves while the second one is ahead, crouching on the floor looking at a book. By the format, we can assume it was a map or a scientific textbook. The most important element is that the print, in that wild and inhospitable environment, was a source of information about the world that would open their eyes.

4 Available at: <https://bdib.bn.gov.br//acervo/handle/123456789/19898>.

Thinking about the image of the man kneeling on the floor, we can observe that he goes through the pages of a big book looking for something while the other man waits the end of his gesture. Perhaps he was looking for the exact location where he wanted to go or compared species found with the naked eye with those that were registered in the book.

In the second image, also from Rugendas, Matosinhos,⁵ a group of travelers pass through a road between the mountains of São João Del Rey. One handles an oxcart while the others follow by horse and one on foot, pulling his donkey full of products. In the opposite direction, when crossing by the latter, a man takes off his hat. By foot, following him, a slave, also full of products, stops so he could turn the pages of a big print that is on the man's hand. Expanding the drawing, we see that the black man is pointing at an image. Perhaps it is a map and he is indicating a location.

It does not matter if Debret and Rugendas really saw these scenes, if the garments were that exact ones, if the gesture that each one of these characters did were accurately fixed by the traveler artists or even if there was a critical sense when they intentionally produced distortions on the drawings. What matters is to perceive that, when they register in different paintings images of notebooks, books, written sheets, novels, maps and scientific textbooks glued to these subjects bodies, they were showing a new communicational order that started to exist. The handwritten printed letters would add to the oral modes of communication, widening the technologic possibilities of the world of communication.

The experience shared even by those who still did not know how to handle the written literate code, as the slaves, when they lived in a world which the letters assumed, yet very partially, the place of speech, implicated a participation of everyone in this world. Even without knowing how to decipher the communicational code, slaves in the scene of Praia do Rodrigues took knowledge of the new artifact and saw in it a

5 Available at: <http://bdlb.bn.br/acervo/handle/123456789/423038>.

possibility of looking for something. The world of senses and expectations in the practices around the print was flowing.

Maybe that is why, in the following painting, in the process of communication, the slave becomes an active character in the composition. He is not waiting for the gesture of reading of the literate character anymore: Now he is the one who, facing the print, points and touches the book, indicating the possibility of being the decipherer of that code.

Thus, the slaves who wait the deciphering of the text in the Praia do Rodrigues to complete their tasks formulate an impression about the gesture that was produced in the relation of the probable scientist with the text materially fixed in the big book. In that print there was something that would allow the following step; in it they looked for something that could be deciphered.

And, finally, it is disclosed. When pointing with the finger the image that is fixed in the print – would it be a map? –, the slave of the following scene not only recognizes the materiality, but he is capable to establish an abstract thought, relating the image to a place, a code, a direction.

We observe that the expansion of the world of print allows that many groups make contact with these materials and in multiple forms, introducing them directly or indirectly to the communicational processes they perform. Despite it was not the dominant way of communication, the written and/or printed letters assume a symbolic place in the cities' streets and the imagination of those who are capable (or not) to decipher those codes.

The world of printed letters and the ways of reading also get spread into the society start, thus, to be a part of the daily life of the slaves, that are now presented as immerse in communication practices that let them see reading and writing ways. The world in which we are going to go over now.

Modes of communication and slaves

Like men of their time, surrounded by an atmosphere in which the printed letters would start to occupy central place, the slaves of the 19th

century were also reading in multiple natures: readers by knowing effectively how to read and write, being immersed in codes of writing and reading; readers by listening to the texts, the ones which directly read for them or the ones which were spread through the houses of their owners; readers, at last, by knowing the meaning of the printed letters and by following the images of their faces and bodies displayed frequently in the newspapers that were circulating at the countryside and the cities.

Many, however, even without knowing how to handle the written codes, were literate: They knew how to count; they were capable of doing carpentry and masonry, to which it was indispensable to know numeric codes; they could be salespeople; printers; finally, they did multiple professions in which the lettered codes were fundamental.

But even those who didn't know the printed letters knew its importance. After all, what would conceive their freedom was a paper full of inscriptions: the emancipation letter would grant freedom by writing. Therefore, the maximum aspiration of all was inscribed in a simple piece of paper which was added letters: Literacy would equal freedom.

Through the remainders that the past let inscribed in the present, we can recreate the relationship slaves had with the world of reading (and printing) on the 19th century. From the announcements newspapers published, texts emerged looking for those who would rebel and run away. In these, the marks of their bodies and their many aptitudes were described to facilitate their recognition: among them, it appeared the fact "to know how to read and write".

Ran away on April 1st, the below signed, the slave named Pio, with the following signals: mulato, straight black hair, medium height, slightly overweight, thin nose, has a sign of burning on his back and good teeth; knows how to read and write and works a little as a tailor (GAZETA DE CAMPINAS, April 28th, 1872, p. 4, our italic markings).

In the lost and found ad, we can see that, beside body marks, some due to common punishments of the captive world, Pio knew how to read and write, knowing the profession of tailoring, for which was indispensable to have the ability to handle codes of the world of literacy. Other

ads show, sometimes, the craftiness present on their speeches when they used to say they were free, even though they were not. Some knew how to recite verses and many carried papers next to their body.

To say to belong in a world that is not effectively yours: To consider oneself free, to say they were free, it was not a lie, it as a credible possibility due to their cognitive abilities. How could someone be a slave if they knew how to read and write, spoke well and in an articulate manner, kept many papers on their pockets and liked reciting verses?

Ran out of the city of Itapetininga the slave named Luiz, 22 year-old man, medium height and overweight, big feet, tousled hair, lively and small eyes, has some teeth missing in front of his head, knows how to read and write regularly, is well spoken and articulate, laughs a lot and always has papers on his pockets, likes to recite verses, is a mason and a footman and usually says he is freed, walks barefoot. He is from Macaé, Rio De Janeiro (CORREIO PAULISTANO, August 18th. 1877 in SCHWARCZ, 1987, p. 141-142, our italic markings).

Even though Luiz has the most visible code of slavery – walking barefoot, since it was forbidden for slaves to use any kind of shoe - he had many codes from the world of literacy: Besides knowing how to read and write regularly (perhaps he used to read all the time, with regularity, or he read with the aptitude of literate people, that is, with velocity and correction?), he liked to recite verses. Moreover, he was well-spoken and very articulate, which denotes once again the ability he had with words.

If some carried papers next to their bodies, others were able to handle machinery that were fundamental for the technologic world of cities in the 19th century.

Slave – Ran from Bierrenbach & Brothers, at Campinas, on September 2nd of this year, the mulato Rodolpho, 24 years old, medium to short stature, heavy body, speaks well, firm step [...] *He is very active and intelligent, born in Campos (RJ), hatter teacher, but knows how to sew in a sewing machine, had worked in a steam machine in practice. Knows how to read* (CORREIO PAULISTANO, September 11th, 1877 in SCHWARCZ, 1987, p. 142, our italic markings).

Rodolpho, as young as Luiz, could be identified by his firm step. Beyond that, he was well-spoken, being “very active and intelligent”. Knew how to read and was a “hatter teacher”. What each one of these words indicates about the conceptual world of Rodolpho?

The mulato knew how to handle machinery, technologic novelties from the 19th century: The steam machine and the sewing machine, which made him much more than a mere hatter. Making hats is not something simple, but he was more than that: He was the one who taught the craft to others with less conceptual ability. Moreover, the fact that he is “intelligent” is one of the highlighted characteristics to make his identification possible.

The reading and writing capability of slaves, at times, were even more evident. Written testimonies that lasted in time can clearly indicate the mastery of this ability. The case of the mason Claro Antonio dos Santos, described by Maria Cristina Cortez Wissenbach (2002), shows the dimension of involvement of slaves with writing.

The slave Teodora, when passing in front of a house that was being floored by Claro, casually sees that he, in a moment of rest, writes in the back of the residence; then, she asks him, in exchange of six pennies, to write letters to her husband and child. In total, Claro writes seven letters to her.

The first indicates the meaning the slave had in that practice of communication: By writing, perhaps she could discover her husband's location, since she vaguely felt where he could be. Writing, beyond being a dialogue between her and her husband, as if they were creating a conversation, was also the possibility to establish a communicational connection beyond restricted spaces.

But it was more. The letter served to tell histories, to perform memory labor, to emphasize beliefs, to reaffirm promises. Everything in writing that only could be deciphered if it was read, again, out loud. The codes of the orality migrated to the world of writing, creating a communicational universe of mixtures between oral practices and literate universes.

My husband Mr. Luis

I really want you to be healthy and I wish you send someone to tell me where are you living. The man who bought me was a very rich man from Campinas, the man is called Marciano, I made a promise in Congo, you don't remember the promise I made you, you don't remember that your father sold you to remember the promise that you warn me in the night I was sleeping. Queen has a companion of making promises and not keeping it, and now she is lost in evil and because of that she has no saints and because of that you see that the queen is the biggest in the world and she is lost in evil and can't save herself because Saint Benedict has lost her in the sea and can't save her and because of that I am careful with saints, I hope to still accomplish that even if I have grey hair... (AESP, A Justiça versus Claro e Pedro, escravos do cônego Fidélis Alves Sigmaringa de Moraes, 1868-1872 in WISSENBAACH, 2002, p. 114-115).⁶

Newspapers, often times, also reproduce scenes of slaves who read. The *Revista Ilustrada*, for example, in the edition of October 15th, 1887, shows an image that reveals the mixture of communicational modes and the reading capability that many of the slaves who lived in cities or in the countryside had. In the drawing, 10 slaves form a circle around one slave who has an edition of the newspaper *O Paiz* in his hands. In an attitude of reading, standing up, surrounded by others, this slave is reading the first page of the newspaper. In the handwritten description, an explanation: “a farmer also made a discovery that left him surprised! A slave read in the plantation for his partners to hear an abolitionist speech to them from *Conselheiro Dantas*”. The other slaves who compose the circle, seven men, two women and a child, listen to it stupefied. They lean on their hoes and make (we can presume) the most absolute silence. They

6 “Meu Marido Snr° Luis

Muito heide estimar que esta va achar você esteije com saude que meu desejo voce me mande contar para hande você esta morando. Quem me arematou foi um moçó muito rico de campinas o homem chama Marciano quina eu fis uma pomeça em congo você não esta lembrado da pomeça que você que eu fis você não esta lembrado que você pai vendeu você para se lembra da pomeça que me avisou de noite eu estava dormindo. Rainha tem companheiro de fase pomeça e não compir e agora ella esta persa no mal e porição facillital com santos e porição você veja que a rainha e maior do mundo e esta persa no mal e não pode se salvar porque São Bendicto perdeu ella no mar não pode se çalvar e porição eu não facilito com santos eu espero hinda compir ainda que esteja com cabelos bracos... (AESP, A Justiça versus Claro e Pedro, escravos do cônego Fidélis Alves Sigmaringa de Moraes, 1868-1872 in WISSENBAACH, 2002, p. 114-115).”

listen carefully to the words that, in a printed world, invade the oral world (BARBOSA, 2010).

The scene shows, once again, the practice of reading of the slaves in the 19th century and the possibility of them being, in fact, newspaper readers. Readers of first instance as the one who is in the center of the circle, in a reading directed to the ears listening. Readers of second instance as the 10 others that, waiting, listen closely the printed words that echo as voice. And readers of third instance for those who, near or far from there, knew that there was, in the plantation, slaves reading news and the type of information received through these readings.

In this communicational world characterized by mixtures, there is a triple economy of writing. In the text of the letter written by Cosme to the slave Teodora, the oral modes prevail in shapes ably composed as writing. In the text read by the anonymous slave, the printed modes are transmuted into words that, in the shape of sound, invade the oral/literate universe of those who listen to the speech of conselheiro Dantas. And, finally, the description that completes the illustration of *Revista Ilustrada* indicates, through handwriting, the dominant way of writing that, also read, transforms into sounds that spread into the environment.

Many others also write

The indications about the ability to write of the slaves are not summarized to the letters that Claro wrote for Teodora. In the archives, other letters written by slaves in the 19th century remained. This is the case of the letter of the slave Arnaldo Rigão destined to his slaveholder, Antonio Coelho, from April 6th, 1862.

My Sir Antonio Coelho

Rio, April 6th, 1862

Your slave will be satisfied to hear that you found those lines with perfect health. My lord, for the love of your children, I'll ask that you'll be kind and patient with your slave Arnaldo, because my Lord knows well the way I was raised and today I see myself whipped every time not because I am

bad because I walk when asked, I walk, not run and even so I don't satisfy my lords because of that I ask my lord to be patience sending someone to look for my mom to ask her the money she has that I can get the rest, and I hope to God I could come there to thank the good that your lord is doing, and I ask the blessing of your lord's mother, your lord do not forget your slave respect Arnaldo Rigão (LETTER written by slave Arnaldo Rigão in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1862 in OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 212).⁷

The letter, whose main objective was that the slaveholder would look for Arnaldo's mother to ask for money – certainly to buy his emancipation – has all the elements of literacy of the slave. After a beginning in which it reproduces the dominant way of the start of the letters, with a sentence indicating the desire to find the recipient in perfect health and that served to introduce the central subject, Arnaldo does not talk initially about the intention of his letter. He reminds his owner of his obedience, asks him for patience and tries to briefly describe the punishments he was suffering. With the craftiness of a speech filled with written letters, he refers about his owner's mother with respect, making him remember the way how he was raised. All these arguments allow him to ask his owner to look for Arnaldo's mother.

In the expression of his feelings, he wishes that God thank the good that his owner might do and also asks for the blessing his owner's mother. Lastly, he asks that the owner do not forget "his slave" and reminds him of all the respect he has about "his owner", after all he still was "his slave".

7 Mês Senhor Antônio Coelho

Rio 6 de abril de 1862

Será satisfação para sêo escravo se estas linhas o encontrar com perfeita saúde. Mês Senhor pelo amor de vossos filhos lhe vou rogar que pela bondade de mês Senhor tenha paciência com o sêo escravo Arnaldo pois mês Senhor sabe bem a maneira que fui criado e hoje me vejo chicoteado todos os momentos não por faltas de minha parte pois quando ando em mandado não ando corro e assim mesmo não satisfaço aos mês senhores' por isso peço a mês senhor que tenha paciência em mandar procurar minha mai para pedir-lhe o dinheiro que ella tenha que eu cá arranjo o resto, e espero em Dêos ainda hir ahí para agradecer o bem que mês senhor me faça, e peço mais a bencão de Senhora mai de mês Senhor não s esqueça de Sêo Escravo muito Respeito Arnaldo Rigão (CARTA escrita pelo escravo Arnaldo Rigão na cidade do Rio de Janeiro em 1862 in OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 212).

The letter also indicates certain proximity that Arnaldo deemed to have in relation to his owner, but reveal, over all, the traces of orality present in the written form in which the text was composed. On the other hand, we can also see the codes of epistolary writing both on the opening of the letter and on its closing, when Arnaldo ends the letter talking about the respect he has for his owner.

The act to writing goes way beyond writing a thought under the written form. It also refers to a set of historic phenomena that presupposes three dimensions. The first one is the operation performed by the hand when tracing characters with the help of an instrument (in this case, quill on paper), assuming an interaction of communication that exceeds the gift and is directed towards an assumed future and also is capable of reaching other spaces. The second dimension refers to a set of (biologic, psychologic, sociologic, etc.) conditions and circumstances that are inherent to the own operation of writing. And the third dimension refers to the result of the operation. Each one of these elements is redefined at an always historical moment (ZUMTHOR, 2009, p. 101).

Initially, the words inscribed into a surface are those pronounced out loud, referring to another feasible verbal surface than a written surface. Only gradually the writing is converted into composition, with a type of speech which the feeling of someone effectively speaking out loud is absent (ONG, 1987, p. 34).

In the compositions written by slaves, we can notice, in all the examples, the strong bonds of the written words with the orality, which makes, for example, a single word in the same composition to have different written forms according to the melody of speech in a certain moment. We can also notice that, in writing, the rhythm of reading and repetitions of the spoken text, in which the logic of composition is directly related to a bigger velocity of pauses of thought.

Forgiveness

There is a long time I wish not to exist because life had annoyed however not existing not anymore because those who can live without having disgust keep living. Jaia Pombinha and all her family I'm very grateful for

that I ask for the love of god Forgiveness being that the third time I have attacked against my existence however who does not want to live should not take glass or poison because they are slow who has love for life admired me for not being afraid of my genius not making an arrangement for me because I don't think it's crazy this way of proceeding.

There is no time to waste!!!

Because I need to declare that it wasn't me, and I don't know who did that infamous role, and he thought I'm innocent, if I make this declaration is to free those who'll go to hell, these souls that will mislead their conscience!...

They will not be persuaded by what I did said: That I've committed this attack, for fearing what was being done; not for feeling better, there was nothing to fear: The reasons are others because the grave will be wise, not this infamous place and not this land of the alive (TEXT written by slave Timóteo in the city of Salvador in 1861 in OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 212-213).

In the text written by slave Timóteo in 1861, there is no explicit recipient, once the main purpose is to produce an everlasting goodbye. Knowing that the inscription in the shape of handwritten letters were capable of going beyond time, producing the perennial of composition, Timóteo starts his writing with a title that clearly synthesizes the purpose of his act. To ask forgiveness for the action he would do next.

To condense the purpose of the goodbye letter that was produced in a simple word reveal the index of literacy of the slave, who were capable of producing an interpretative synthesis of what would follow. Forgiveness was what he wished, even facing the act that would possibly end his life.

After that, he clearly exposes the reasons of his act: There is a long time he wished not to exist, because life was annoying to him. By not existing, he would not have any more disgust. After that, he expresses all his gratitude to "Jaia Pombinha and all her family". He, then, makes a surprising revelation: That was the third time he would try to commit suicide.

Weaving considerations about the way he could end his life, Timóteo says he does not think it is crazy to act that way and says: "There is no

time to waste!!!". Classifies his act and consider his innocence as an infamous role; to him, the land of the alive was an "infamous place". He feared his soul would burn in the fires of hell and seeks, thus, to justify his act.

The letter of farewell of Timóteo has all the indexes of complex literacy, since the arguments he makes show the mental formulations he was capable of doing. He goes tying the arguments into a textual network, producing a narrative with beginning, middle and ending at the same time he demonstrates to clearly know the senses present in a writing which he recognized the possibility of lasting in time.

Despite that, in his writings, there are orality indexes appearing throughout the text. Only reading one more time out loud, perhaps in the same way the text was produced, we can recover the wishes present in a composition whose last purpose is to last in meaning.

I would like to close this article with the transcription of a little excerpt of the testimony of the traveler Charles Ribeyrolles, that, in 1859, when seeing the senzalas present here, registered his impressions facing the hovels where "no one never speaks about the past - which is painful - nor the future - which is closed", he said. What caused more strangeness was the fact that, in all senzalas, little hovels, without windows and with one only opening (the little entrance), there was a permanent fire lit all the time. The fire, in the foreigner's point of view, would grime the ceiling and the walls, beyond making the unbearable heat even more unbearable. But the fire would never go out (and it could not go out). And he highlighted: "In the black people's cubicles, I have never seen a flower: that is because there isn't any hope or remembrances there".

The fire permanently lit was the way the slaves had to maintain their most complex form of communication. The fire symbolized the continuity of the group and their origins in a "ancestral founder". The fire allowed opening a window so that they would find a way of communication between the world of the dead and the world of the living, calunga.⁸

8 About this theme, see "Calunga: a comunicação dos vivos e dos mortos" (BARBOSA, 2016).

The joy that Ribeyrolles did not see - since, according to him, it would be synthesized by the flower - was not in the flower, but in the fire. The fire, as Robert Slenes well said (2011), was the flower. The possibility to establish the biggest communication of all: the communication with all the others that had lived before us and that are the ancestors.

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