



Brazilian *Cantoria* and Slam: poetics of performance

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ABSTRACT – Brazilian *Cantoria*¹ and Slam: poetics of performance – This article proposes to compare two oral poetic genres, *cantoria* and *slam*, from the perspective of performance art, exploring their similarities and differences. Based on performance art studies and reference works on the two genres, thought of as a poetics that constitutes itself as a technique, it is proposed to consider the body's use as a technical object (Mauss, 2003). The importance of the improvisation in *cantoria* and the unprecedented feature of *slam* are emphasized, while the aim is to highlight the scenic character of the two poetic acts marked by speed and forcefulness in the game. The text points out as a result the verification of this analogy between the two genres based on the scenic character of their performance.

Keywords: **Slam. Cantoria. Performance. Comparative literature. Body.**

RÉSUMÉ – Cantoria Brésilienne et Slam: poétiques de la performance – Cet article propose de comparer deux genres poétiques oraux, la cantoria et le *slam*, du point de vue de la performance, en explorant leurs similitudes et différences. À partir d'études de la performance et d'ouvrages de référence sur les deux genres, pensés comme une poétique qui se constitue comme technique, l'intention est de considérer l'engagement du corps comme un objet technique (Mauss, 2003). L'importance de l'improvisation dans la cantoria et le caractère inédit des textes de *slam* sont soulignés, tout en essayant de mettre en valeur le caractère scénique des deux actes poétiques marqués par la rapidité et la force du jeu. Le texte montre comme résultat la vérification de cette analogie entre les deux genres en fonction du caractère scénique de leur performance.

Mots-clés: **Slam. Cantoria. Performance. Littérature comparée. Corps.**

RESUMO – Cantoria Brasileira e Slam: poéticas da performance – Este artigo propõe comparar dois gêneros poéticos orais, a cantoria e o *slam*, sob a ótica da performance, explorando suas semelhanças e diferenças. Com base em estudos da performance e em obras de referência sobre os dois gêneros, pensados como uma poética que se constitui como técnica, propõe-se considerar o empenho do corpo como objeto técnico (Mauss, 2003). Ressalta-se a relevância da improvisação na cantoria e o ineditismo da autoria no *slam*, ao passo que se procura realçar o caráter cênico dos dois atos poéticos marcados pela velocidade e a contundência no jogo. O texto aponta como resultado a constatação dessa analogia entre os dois gêneros baseada no caráter cênico da sua performance.

Palavras-chave: **Slam. Cantoria. Performance. Literatura Comparada. Corpo.**

This article builds on research done in our Master's degree program in Compared Literature at the Federal University of Ceará and aims to explore the performative content of two contemporaneous oral poetic genres: *cantoria* and slam. The research was based on theoretical assumptions related to performance² and scholarly works foregrounding the analyzed genres, consisting partially of embodied praxis and partially of bibliographical research. The project consisted of three parts, the first dealing with the space of each genre, the second with its textual context, and the third with performance. In this last part, one of the relevant factors is the formulation of a particular position, movement, gestures, facial expression, vocal modulation, among other relevant aspects for understanding something that sounds like a kind of staging and follows the transmission of the poetic work. The goal of this paper's reflection is to identify these performance traits of the two aforementioned genres to support an analogy between them based on their scenic character.

Brazilian *cantoria* and the phenomenon of slam, particularly as it has been developed in France, are oral poetic forms that give primacy to performance. The scenic character of these forms is evident, due to the way in which the actual performances, as well as the ways in which they engage audiences interactively, the expressiveness, the forcefulness of the expression forms and the contingency of the game take place. *Cantoria*, rooted in Brazilian culture, excels in improvisation; slam, a relative novelty in Brazil, does not require improvisation, but demands authorial innovation. In both cases, the transmission of poetics as a technique and the commitment of the body as a technical object (Mauss, 2003) become evident in a socially constituted process in which presence and audience interaction generate aesthetic pleasure.

Slam³ is a poetic form that emerged in the 1980s in Chicago, USA, going on to develop significantly in France over the following decade and from there spreading to other countries, such as Brazil. *Cantoria*⁴, also known as *repente*, is a Brazilian traditional art form that continues to move audiences throughout the country. The two oral genres resonate with the notion of poetic performance, as conceptualized by Paul Zumthor (1993; 2007), and have a number of similarities in terms of expression. It is worth mentioning the difference between *cantoria*, which takes place in festivals, and the so-called *pé-de-parede*, in which proximity with the audience is

much more important. While at festivals artists usually perform onstage using a microphone, in *cantoria de pé-de-parede*,

Usually, the *cantoria* singers sit on chairs against the wall; hence the name *cantoria de pé-de-parede*. In front of both artists there is the audience. Between the singers and the audience, delimiting the space of the creators and of the receivers, a small stool is placed and, on this, a tray on which the audience deposit the payment of the verses (Ayala, 1988, p. 25).

Slam, a poetic text produced for the purpose of recitation, despite occurring in large tournaments, takes place mainly in presentations to small audiences of listeners in spaces that hold few people, such as restaurants, bars or places specifically designed for this practice. Recurrently, some of the poems recited at these meetings are recorded on discs and sold alongside music albums. In Brazil, this poetic form is relatively recent, and its practice is still mainly concentrated in sporadic and institutionalized cultural events rather than in restaurants or spontaneous occasions, as verified in France.

During a presentation of a slam poet, a property similar to Brazilian *cantoria* is noticed, something that might allow the association of its practice to *cantoria* singers. This paper is dedicated to the exploration of this property, considering that formation of a scenic space, uniqueness and at times improvisation mark its performance content, according to the performance concept coined by Paul Zumthor (1993, p. 19, emphasis added by the author) in his book *The letter and its voice: The medieval 'literature': "When communication and reception [of the poetic work] (as well as, exceptionally, production) coincide in time, we have a performance situation"*.

From an anthropological point of view, we have in this definition mainly two relevant elements to highlight. The first is the fact that this conception of performance is related to the transmission of a poetic work, but also to the transmission of a technique more or less codified in its social context. According to Marcel Mauss (2003, p. 407), "There is no technique and there is no transmission if there is no tradition. This is how men are distinguished above all from animals: by the transmission of their techniques and most likely by their oral transmission". In this case, we observe a difference between *cantoria* and slam with regard to the codification of each form in the poetic tradition, with *cantoria* having a much older heritage and techniques, especially in terms of metric pattern, more internalized in individuals involved in the performative context, that is, in *repentistas* (*repente*

artists) and also in the audience, who are well versed in the norms and react positively or negatively depending on the performance of the poet. The tradition in *cantoria* suddenly established a strongly marked standardization, with well-defined metric standards, among which, we can cite as examples, as listed by Tavares Júnior (2001, p. 4): “Gemedeira”, “Décima”, “Dez Pés de Quatro”, “Mourão Voltado”, “Brasil Caboclo”, “Mourão Você Cai”, “Dez de Queixo Caído”, “Rojão Pernambucano”; and “Martelos” “Alagano” and “Miudinho”, “Galope a Beira Mar”, “Eu quero um Boi Amarrado do Pé da Cajarana”, among others.

As for slam, it is observed that the norms are more related to presentation rules than to the poems’ metric, and are generally less well-known by the audience, who include in their assessment other elements disconnected from norms of versification. In addition, part of the practitioners themselves, often dealing with lay people eventually invited to the production, do not master or have any experience of versification, as Martine Kunz (2016, p. 91) points out:

In the case of slam, the jury is not professional, its evaluation is more subjective. The evaluation criteria are not fixed, given the great diversity of forms and themes presented. The unpredictable texts slam like doors in the wind, and perhaps the essential is this, this fast surprise, and not the results of the competition.

The second element that we emphasize is the understanding of the body as a technical object (Mauss, 2003) that is primordial to man, since, in the case of performance, this body has a central character. According to Mauss (2003, p. 407), “The body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more exactly, without speaking of an instrument: the first and most natural technical object, and at the same time a technical means, of man, is his body”. Thus, the orality of these poetic forms underlies a tendency, essential to humans, of expression and representation through poetic and scenic forms.

The coincidence between communication and reception of the poetic work, to which Zumthor refers, can be seen in the two genres now compared, in the first place with regard to their form of presentation. In *Vaqueiros e Cantadores*, published in 1939, Câmara Cascudo (2000 [1939], p. 162) defined *cantoria* as:

[...] the set of rules, styles and traditions that govern the *cantador* profession. There is the *cantador*, always playing instruments, and the *glosador*, poet-glosador, who can also be a *cantador* or just improvise. [...]

Supremacy is, of course, in the *cantadores*. They are professionals in a higher percentage. They live from fair to fair singing alone [...] Sometimes they encounter an antagonist, an official of the same profession [...], invite the people, arouse curiosity. At the appointed time, they start the *battle*.

First, it is worth mentioning that Cascudo relates the concept of singing to the idea of improvisation, so that this factor is considered indispensable. In addition, another term is relevant in its conceptualization: battle, which means the combat between *repentistas*, and whose meaning has been extended to the literature of leaflets, naming a whole thematic cycle that proposes to record memorable *cantorias*, some of them fictitious. Leonardo Mota (2002, p. 3) defines *cantadores* in a similar way: they are “[...] popular poets who perambulate in the hinterlands, singing their own and others’ verses”.

And several authors underline the importance of the improvised character in the concept of *cantoria*, making clear the “[...] association of the concept of *cantador* with the improvised content of his poetry, which is indispensable” (Souza, 2011, p. 3). For Sebastião Nunes Batista (1982, p. 1), “*Cantoria* is the challenge in verses between two *cantadores* of improvisation, to the sound of *viola*, *rabeca*, *pandeiro* and *ganzá*”. Elba Braga Ramalho (2000, p. 20) defines *cantadores* as “[...] poet-musicians of improvisation”, Maria Ignez Novais Ayala (1988, p. 17) refers to *cantoria* as “[...] an extraordinary event, never repeated, due to the specificity of the improvised poetry”. Mello and Santos (2016, p. 188-189) emphasize that “The agility in poetic creation is an extremely important attraction for maintaining the activity of the *repentistas* [...] what is most expected of a *repentista* is exactly the surprise factor, the transitory creativity”.

An element with a remarkable difference in relation to slam, memorized verses, previously prepared, are almost unanimously rejected in the context of *cantoria*. Called *balaio* or work (Ayala, 1988), the ready-made text “[...] is understood, in general, as a major flaw. [...] The audience must realize the difference between a ready-made *repente* and one that is produced on the spot. They may not clearly identify the difference, but the improvisation loses strength and monotony takes the *cantoria* by storm”

(Souza, 2011, p. 65). The *cantador* from Ceará Geraldo Amancio emphasizes in an interview the taste for this primacy of improvisation: “I am very fond of singing the moment. If I am singing here and a cat jumps over there, I may be talking about Saddam Hussein, but I will go back to the cat, to show that I'm singing off the top of my head” (apud Souza, 2011, p. 25). In this regard, according to Biancalana (2011, pp. 144-145), the performer's ability is closely linked to a mastery of circumstantial factors:

It is also essential to consider that the circumstantial factors and the individual factors of the moment, all added to the experience acquired throughout life, interfere in the quality of the presence of any performer. The circumstantial factors are affected by the place, the time, the culture, the unforeseen events, the social relationships, the contacts established during life and the opportunities exploited. The individual factors include the performer's health or emotional state, discipline, determination and, especially, sensitivity. However, it is clear that the ability to act on improvisation, be it at any level or form of application, supporting the scenic presence, is a clearly perceived element in performances.

This ability corresponds not only to the pleasure generated in the audience, but also to a demand on their part: “Although they are not *cantadores*, many listeners know how to compose verses, they set the tone for the *glosas* to arise. These apologists are familiar with the *cantorias*' formulas and techniques and know how to evaluate an improvisation according to stable criteria, based on tradition” (Kunz, 2016, p. 91).

In slam, on the other hand, there is no requirement in relation to a previous preparation of the verses, “Its practice does not require improvisation. The poem can be produced earlier, and it is done, in most cases, in writing” (Souza, 2011, p. 82). Thus, the slam poet can even say his text helped by notes on a piece of paper, which often happens in tournaments in which participants are asked to produce verses on the spot, not having time to memorize them and not attempting to improvise.

Due to the relative novelty of slam, most of the concepts are gathered in documents from institutions that promote poetry tournaments. It would be difficult to conceptualize it in a determined, closed way, since the proposal is one of openness, of plurality of possibilities. However, some rules are recurrent in slam contests, both in France and in Brazil. A brief definition of slam can be found in a pedagogical DVD released by the French

government, which is accompanied by activities proposed for the use of videos in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language:

Le slam est un spectacle sous forme de rencontres de poésie. Créé par Marc Smith à Chicago dans les années 80, il a suscité rapidement un engouement médiatique qui lui a permis de se propager dans le monde entier. Il apporte un renouveau à la poésie orale et met en valeur l'art de la performance poétique. En France, le mouvement se développe depuis 1998. Les scènes fleurissent à Paris et se multiplient dans toute la France (França, 2007, p. 77)⁵.

Although it originated in the United States in the 1980s, arriving in France in the following decade, the practice has become very successful since the beginning of the 21st century, including through government investments to promote culture and education, since the genre started being used as a teaching tool, in school institutions, of French as a mother tongue and as a foreign language⁶. Its diffusion occurs especially among groups of young people from large urban centers, a factor that may be related to the proposal of fast and forceful expression, typical of the culture of the audience that attends these spaces. The international slam contest, promoted annually by the French-speaking channel TV5 Monde, and in Brazil by Alliance Française in partnership with the French Embassy, annually produces a small booklet designed to attract young people up to twenty-five years old, French language students in Alliance Française schools or Brazilian universities. The document provides a brief explanation of slam, defining it as an “Original written text that should be said a cappella. The text delivered by the slammer (man or woman) is a poetic performance that focuses solely on words and their rhythm” (Slam Productions, n.d., our translation)⁷. In addition to the presentation, the rules of the game are defined:

The slam submitted by the candidate cannot exceed three minutes. The participant will be able to recite his poetic creation on a musical background (optional) by refraining from playing an instrument during the performance. [...]

Slam is an art of the oral and scenic spectacle.

Born in the 1980s in Chicago, slam is focused on the verb. It is a type of popular expression scene in which some poets confront each other before a jury selected at random from the public⁸ (Slam Productions, n.d., our translation).

In Brazil we notice a strong institutional content that marked the beginning of the spread of slam. Today the practice is much more widespread and diversified across the country, whether through tournaments, bars or restaurants, while remaining concentrated in urban centers.

Cantoria, in turn, is a widespread art not only in the Northeast, but throughout Brazil, having an important status in the country's cultural history. The institutional character of certain events involving the genre occurs in a way that corresponds to a popular demand that is still important, but also to the declared intention to preserve its existence, given its cultural importance.

This poetic form rooted in Brazilian culture allows contact with a multi-faceted art: entertainment and aesthetic enjoyment of the audience are made possible by other factors that make up the performance of the *cantadores* and go beyond poetics, including musical and scenic skills that in themselves tend to represent dialogic arts, lying at the intersection of various artistic skills. These factors, in addition to representing an attraction for an attentive audience that knows the rules of the game, also denote a specific demand, a search of this audience for multiple artistic capacities, although it is not restricted to this. *Cantoria* is a rite and a festivity, and its powers must amuse, stimulate the audience that expects to be touched by the experience. This aspect leads us to note a peculiar strength in the forms of expression of *cantoria*, which makes it possible to equate it to slam.

If we consider slam and *cantoria* in terms of their scenic content, we need to examine them from a perspective that addresses these diverse qualities. This approach allows privileging the constitutive elements of the formation, conservation and meaning of the work of art, which demonstrate more value than the physical object itself. In this sense, Paul Zumthor describes the attitude of the receiver of the poetic work by means of a written record as a process of continuous recovery of the elements of the work's formation, in order to retrieve its original living language, prior to its imprisonment on paper. This recovery of the original performance, silenced in the written text, is an essential procedure for receiving the poetic text when its form is oral.

This aspect is highlighted by Gilmar de Carvalho, who comments on the recording of *cantorias* performed by the *repentista* Neco Martins: mem-

orized by the audience, they were also bequeathed through writing, preserved in notebooks, books, records of apologists and relatives of the *cantadores* “[...] who knew they were before a fleeting material, which would have been lost had it not been for writing, [however,] the spectacle would never be captured in its essence: the voice, gestures and facial expression of the *repentistas* would be missing” (Carvalho, 2002, p. 24). Considering the premise that the reader needs, in contact with the transcribed work, to recover these elements, it is necessary to emphasize the relevance of such elements for the poetic text itself. The reader strives to recompose the work's scenography (Maingueneau, 2001). The search for a more permanent record of the oral text occurs through the perception of its ephemerality, although writing technologies are not able to do it in an ideal way. In addition, Gilmar de Carvalho warns that it is “[...] impossible to dissociate the transcription of the researchers' interferences, filling in gaps, correcting spelling and agreement and generating a different text from the original” (Carvalho, 2002, p. 24).

In this case, a possible technological way out would be, for example, video recording, considering that in this way most elements of the performance situation would be captured. However, even this technology proves to be insufficient: “[...] it is not yet possible to fully recover the complicity that is experienced in the coincident physical presence of performance” (Souza, 2011, p. 90). This factor leads us to question the existence of techniques that would be applicable only in the presence of the audience and that would escape our understanding. What seems to happen is that what changes the poet's countenance is precisely what generates the audience's delight. The speaker is an ordinary person who, during the performance, is covered by an aura that raises him to a spectacular sphere: his voice is projected in the distance, his movements are amplified, his body fills the whole scene. In *cantoria*, the restraint of these movements leaves the amplitude of presence to the voice and posture. Standing or sitting, the *repentistas* remain stationary, with movements limited to the touch of the *viola* and few gestures. The posture reflects the concentration on the improvised creation of the poem. According to Kunz (2016, p. 93-94),

The bodies of the *cantadores* are fixed, hieratic, totemic. Living statues, *cantadores* move little, subscribe to duration and mineralize. The faces are serious, the looks turned inward, in search of the next verses. [...] Sitting side by

side, face and body facing the audience, the *cantadores* bet on symmetry, the design of their bodies is similar. One is the echo of the other, they are acoustic bodies, like violas. [...] everything reminds us of the mystery of this volatile, playful, unpredictable word, but paradoxically tied to the net of a complex and coercive system of versification, which is also a memory art.

The audience experience, before these *repentistas*, a form of virtuality that is related to their own body memory. In an almost involuntary way, it is possible to foresee, in the scenic body that is presented, the projection of the spectators' own body. There is then a communication between the poet's body image and the body memory of the receiver of the poetic work, similar to what Zumthor (2007, p. 82) refers to as “[...] the unseen hanging from the perceived [...]”, defending that:

[...] the virtual is in the order of feeling, which becomes associated with meaning, and sometimes identifies with it [...] I perceive this object; but my perception is charged with something that I do not perceive in that moment, something that is inscribed in my body memory. The presentiment is not necessarily an image: it is imaginable, it has the possibility to produce an image. Anyway, the virtual frequents the real. Our perception of the real is frequented by virtual knowledge, resulting from the memorial accumulation of the body, I repeat it. In this way, the virtual emerges in every discourse. In the speech received as poetic, it invades everything. There, at the level of the reader, is one of the hallmarks of the ‘poetic’ (Zumthor, 2007, p. 82).

In this sense, the virtuality inherent in the poetic text depends on the performance update, whose experience makes it possible to apprehend information that is at an extrasensory level. It is clear, in this update, the importance of a performative posture in which the body goes back to performance as a form of ritualistic and interactive intervention.

Regarding *cantoria*, improvisation is fundamental to the composition of the poetic scene. In addition, Maria Ignez Novais Ayala (1988, p. 26) describes the *baiões de viola* stating that “[...] the sense of spectacle of *cantoria* becomes evident, especially in the declamation of *matuto* poems, usually dramatized”. The author goes on to mention other examples, such as anecdotes, which are dramatized in order to intensify their playful character. Thus, we observe in these interventions the tendency, on the part of the poet, to promote acting, a scenic expression, to add meanings to the performance, in addition to helping, through the formulation of images, memorization. The poetic text is perpetuated by memory: the audience that has

contact with the work proceeds with its conservation and its reiteration (Zumthor, 1993) through mnemonic mechanisms of mimicry. Thus,

To reproduce, to perpetuate a text is also to mimic the primary forms of its expression. This may explain why the hinterland man, when he tells an anecdote he knows (sometimes long, complex texts), or a battle that has marked him, takes on a different posture from the usual one, seems to also perpetuate the performance that touched him in the contact with the original text (Souza, 2011, p. 92).

We do not aim to argue that there is a theatrical performance by the *repentista* or the slam poet. The oral poet does not become an actor, his staging does not establish the same links with the scene as those of actual theater. His foundation is poetics, with the scenic character secondary to the work, more related to his form of transmission. What we try to consider in this form of transmission is the fact that his posture in the performance is different, as if the moment of the scene created a tension between the trivial and the sacred, a ritual that configures the body as a relevant element in the show. It is not just the *cantador* who promotes this kind of performative action. In an interview with the *cordelista* Rodolfo Coelho Cavalcante, Kunz (2001, p. 89) highlights this change in his posture while declaiming the poem:

Sometimes it was an introspective attitude to answer questions, other times the transfiguration was astonishing, he spoke as if he were chanting in front of a large audience: he laughed, cried, his voice contained by emotion, or made more acute or deafer. The pace was hurried and the articulation vigorous. The effort to respond gave way to the pleasure of saying. The streak of unruly hair, the lively gaze, the broad gesture seemed to participate in this performance.

A *bancada* poet, Cavalcante experiences again what he narrates each time he updates the story told. The representation goes beyond the simple commitment to understanding the narrative and acquires a dramatic tone, not being restricted to the aesthetic procedures of the written text and expressing a personal pleasure in relation to the text and traditional stories, a taste that he shares with the audience.

The direct contact of the popular poet with the audience allows him to constantly measure the quality of his work and the parts he likes most, by the reaction of laughter or applause, expressions of agreement or even bore-

dom. These reactions have a great influence on the poet's acting. This factor is important for the analysis of these productions, because “[...] it repositions the author, work and receiver in the literary system” (Souza, 2011, p. 93), inverting the “[...] form of friendship at distance” (Sloterdijk apud Carneiro, 2010, p. 14-15), which characterizes the relationship between writer and reader:

It is part of the rules of the written culture game that senders cannot predict their real receivers; nevertheless, authors embark on the adventure of putting their letters in the way of unidentified friends.

Slam, even if its improvisation is rare, also makes it possible to establish a favorable relationship with this type of adjustment of the work to the audience's preferences. Presenting for an audience that is in the same space makes it possible “[...] to manage verses and stanzas, memorized or annotated, according to the effect you intend to give to the situation” (Souza, 2011, p. 93).

This discussion leads us to consider that the scenic character contained in these poetic performances is a relevant feature of the transmission process of the poetic work, while considering the importance of the relationship between the artistic object and performance, that is, the weight of the process in the constitution of the work, as stated by Jorge Glusberg (2009, p. 53):

What matters most in a performance is the work process, its sequence, its constitutive factors and its relationship with the artistic product: all of this merging into a final manifestation. [...] decoding movements, gestures, behaviors, distances, is to simultaneously place the viewer in the artist's own time.

Another factor to consider in this scenic game is the playful appeal, which combines with other elements relevant to the forms of oral poetry and which consist of a special appeal for attracting the audience, for example, competition and improvisation. The latter is an attraction already common in several cultures at different times, as reported by Segismundo Spina (2002, p. 38-39), who states that “[...] primitive singing was not only the result of ritual practices, but simultaneously of recreational activities (like the taste for competition and the instinctive pleasure of improvisation)”. This way, in addition to the songs connected with accompanying and alleviating repetitive work, those that constitute popular recreational activities are also considered. It is in this group that social-agonal singing is

inserted, in whose center improvisation is found, which is usually an attraction for the audience, proving to be a source of instinctive social pleasure for humans, which may explain its recurrence in various artistic fields.

Body art, for example, has the body as its medium, but a striking factor in its development is the fact that it proposes “[...] direct contact of the spectator with an unrepresented dramatic action” (Cohen, 2004, p. 16). The epiphenomenon in which this art is constituted becomes a relevant attraction, as observed in Jorge Glusberg's conceptualization (2009, p. 42-43):

The term body art, as well as the term happening, groups several internal trends, ranging from the schematism inherited from dance and theater to the exhibitionism of the Vienna Group. This new artistic expression made its public debut in 1969. [...] The common denominator of all these proposals was to defetishize the human body – eliminating all exaltation of the beauty to which it was elevated for centuries by literature, painting and sculpture – to bring it to its true function: that of a man's instrument, on which, in turn, man depends. In other words, body art is an activity whose objective is that of what we generally use as an instrument.

Considering this idea of the body's defetishization, another genre, prior to performance, has improvisation as an even more important element: happening, in which, “[...] what is more interesting is the process, the rite, the interaction, rather than the final aesthetic result. There is no critical superego. Value judgements have been abandoned; the context of the happening is that of the 60s, of counterculture, of the alternative society” (Cohen, 2004, p. 15).

According to Cohen, happening is the representative of improvisation in performing arts, prior⁹ to performance, and with an even greater proportion of improvisation. What characterized this transition between happening and performance was precisely the increase in planning and preparation, which implies a reduction in improvised content and contingency. This decrease in improvisation is linked to an increased concern with the process of the scenic act in relation to the whole, which also produced the previous projection of the results and purposes of each intervention in performance.

Based on this, we consider the term performance as the most appropriate to name the two genres we now place in parallel, since they, despite their different levels of improvisation, have a higher degree of planning and

codification of the placement on the scene than what is observed in happening. This planning does not reach the level of that observed in theater, for example, which consists of a combination of symbolic systems. In this sense, as pointed out by Dumas (2012, p. 154),

The scenic communication form in itself is polysemic, it exists due to the possibility and effectiveness of the conjunction and exploration of multiple symbolic systems. In the presentation of the costumes, in the speeches that are pronounced, in the represented text, in the insertion of music or other sound signals, in the scenography, we can identify typical elements of visual, gestural or sound communication.

Thus, the performance observed in *cantoria* and slam does not start from the same type of system, but from the poetic text. The formation of a scenic space in their performance leads these poets to use some of the typical elements of scenic communication.

It is necessary to reiterate that in slam there is the possibility of improvisation, although its occurrence is relatively rare. In rap, a musical genre that we consider analogous to slam, a lot of improvisation is practiced, which, combined with the fact that there is no prohibition in that sense in slam, can represent an indication of this possibility, especially if we consider small improvisations between the verses and the introduction or finalization of poems.

Considering the relevance of improvisation in these forms, it is necessary to emphasize that originality represents a relevant factor for its success with the public: in slam and in *cantoria*, originality levels vary, since, in the former, the text is produced before its enunciation, and in the latter the originality is in the background in relation to the tradition. In addition to originality, the competition character of the game is relevant: in slam, a jury is chosen from the audience, who must award marks until the best poem is reached; in *cantoria*, “[.....] the challenge represents the highest level of competition, in a game whose speed is surprising, especially in the improvisation of verses with specific meter and rhymes” (Souza, 2011, p. 96). In a *cantoria* between Geraldo Alencar and Raimundo Simplício, the latter emphasizes not only the ability to improvise verses, but also the concomitance of the presence of poets and audience, referring directly to audience members:

Because you lady are seeing me

and I can see you,
the woman who accompanies you
and the man who adores you.
I am indeed a *repentista*,
everything I do is on the spot (Ramalho, 2000, p. 148).

In recent years in Brazil, the success of improvisation has been observed on television programs, on the internet and in theater plays and sketches¹⁰ that are improvisational theater games:

[...] the participants begin to improvise situations drawn on the spot, based on a word or on an idea also drawn. At other times, there are game modalities that test each participant's resourcefulness in responding to phrases, sometimes rhymed, created by other players. It is very clear that with each presentation the themes and proposals for the game change, preventing the repetition of a staging in another presentation. It is possible to notice the pleasure that this factor provides when observing jokes or puns that are not very laughable created at the moment of the game lead the audience to laugh, when those same jokes, in a previously elaborated program, would not have the same laughable effect (Souza, 2011, p. 97).

Although in this example a more playful than artistic performance is highlighted, the same taste for improvisation of the audience is observed: the fact that each game round provides a spontaneous conception and staging, in addition to the possibility given to the spectator to suggest words, phrases and themes for each move, can justify its success:

[...] the simple fact that the audience does not know what or how the situations are going to happen on the stage generates, in the performer, a stimulus and willingness to surprise it through his representation, validating his art. Improvisation also arises from this context of wanting to convince the audience, where the pre-established is confronted with the new. The audience is not a passive receiver, it causes an effect on the actors' performance with a direct result in their interpretation, at the moment of capture, an evident exchange between both of them is established (Biancalana, 2011, p. 141).

Improvisation, at different levels, is made possible by the internalization of practice by process agents, especially performance poets. Gilmar de Carvalho (2002, p. 32) informs that “[...] the construction of a *repentista* implies this daily exercise, combined with a mastery of the rules, a rich vocabulary and agile improvisation”. These are social idiosyncrasies (Mauss,

2003) linked to the practices that make up patterns of conduct and body use not only in poetry and art, but also in work and other cultural elements. These patterns are internalized in the body by force of habit, through tradition, as mentioned by João Miguel Sautchuk (2012, p. 27), regarding improvisation in *cantoria*:

Interactions require the practical knowledge of a spontaneous semiology (actions decoding) and the ability to improvise and develop strategies, from the immediate reading of the situation. In *cantoria*, there are detailed rules of rhyme, metrics and thematic coherence for poetry, but *repentistas* are much more dependent on practical mastery, based on incorporated standards, than on explicit poetic knowledge, to improvise their verses.

These incorporated patterns are part of the habitus that Maurice Mauss deals with, in the sense of the apprehension of social acts by the individual's body. According to the anthropologist, "The act is imposed from the outside, from above, even an exclusively biological act, relative to the body. The individual assimilates the movement series that comprise the act performed before him or with him by others" (Mauss, 2003, p. 405). This way, these "[...] physio-psycho-sociological assemblies of series of acts [...]" (Mauss, 2003, p. 420) relate the influences of the social context to the "[...] instinctive taste for rhythm and harmony [...]", as alluded to by Segismundo Spina (2002, p. 29), who emphasizes that "[...] aesthetic feeling is innate to man". These assemblies between the social and the innate also constitute poetic performance, both in the societies' history and in the formation of new poetic forms.

In these ways, there is pleasure in speed, in the agility of reasoning. In the same way, the *cantador* needs to be agile, he has no time to hesitate, to reflect deeply, he needs wit and an active posture to ensure his performance. The metric is strictly determined, there is only one stanza for the locution before the other resumes the speech turn. The *cantador's* gymnastics to beat his challenger provide foolproof entertainment. In opposition to written literature, with which the societies of second orality are familiar, this one is more dynamic, as exposed by Câmara Cascudo (1984 [1978], p. 27):

The literature we call official, due to its obedience to modern or ancient school rites or individual predilections, expresses a reflected and purely intellectual action. Its older sister, the other, very old and popular, acts by talking, singing, representing, dancing in the middle of the people, in the farm yards, in the church yards on 'novena' nights, at traditional cattle cycle festi-

vals, at the dances of the end of sugar harvests, in the salt pans, the 'patron saint' party, *potirum*, aid, drinks in the Amazon barracks, waiting for Midnight Mass; outdoors, loose, aching, shaken, within reach of all the criticisms of an audience that understands, lyrics and music, all the gradations and changes in the *folgado*.

Besides being an older sister, oral literature is therefore more alive, more active in the experience of its practitioners. Cascudo explains that dance, singing, children's games and legends are part of *cantoria*. Its audience is involved in this means of dynamism and playfulness.

In Portugal, an interesting activity has been carried out in terms of improvised poetic clash: Violent Poetry, which consists of a competition, inserted in the context of Hip-Hop, in which young people gather, often in open areas and at night, and challenge each other in pairs. A jury is appointed by the event's organizers and, in addition, the video recordings of these confrontations are posted on social networks to receive votes from Internet users. The practice proves to be successful on the internet, possibly because it consists of improvisation and insults are freely thrown between opponents.

In slam, there is a poignant communication of experiences, from social and political themes to the most lyrical ones, so that these expressions are sometimes the defense of ideals, sometimes the expression of feelings, doubts, individual anguish, versified in an impetuous game of mutation. As the poets of this art claim, "[...] slam is the symptom of a society deprived of communication"¹¹ (Slam Productions, n.d, p. 5, our translation).

Thus, it is observed that the scenic character inherent in the poetic performance in which slam and *cantoria* are constituted is remarkable and in many cases becomes an integral part of the work, complementing its meaning. In different measures, the two genres use, in the presence of the audience, gestures, body movements, intonations, facial expressions, among other planned systematic elements, in order to intensify the expressiveness of the work, which, in both cases, is only justified in orality and therefore cannot do without this kind of enrichment.

Thus, this factor is crucial for observing the performance of slam and *cantoria*. This study points out, as a result, the finding of this analogy between the two genres based on their scenic character, intending to contribute in a relevant way to performance studies in a comparative perspective.

Notes

- ¹ The Portuguese word *cantoria* describes an artistic poetic genre, which is a Brazilian kind of singing. Therefore, we have preferred to use it rather than the English word *singing*.
- ² We use the term performance according to the understanding of Paul Zumthor (2007, p. 29-30), who explains: “Although historically from French, it comes from English, and, in the 1930s and 40s, was borrowed by the dramaturgy vocabulary and spread in the United States through the expression of researchers such as Abrams, Ben Amos, Dundee, Lomax and others. It is strongly marked by its practice. For them, whose study object is a cultural ludic manifestation, no matter of what order (tale, song, rite, dancing), performance is always constitutive of the form”.
- ³ *To slam* is an English verb which means to close or to make something close (e.g., a door, a window) in a strong and loud way; to put, push or throw something somewhere with a lot of strength. As a noun, the word means an act or the sound produced by this act (Oxford, 2005, p. 1433).
- ⁴ When we use the term *cantoria*, we refer to *repente* and *cantoria de viola*, not in a broader way that comprises other genres such as *coco*, *embolada*, *aboio* etc. According to Maria Ignez Novais Ayala (1988, p. 15), “[...] although *coco* and *embolada* singers are also improvisers, they use percussion instruments, such as the tambourine and *ganzá*, and develop different poetic genres [...]” from those found in *cantoria* – also called *cantoria de viola*.
- ⁵ “Slam is a show in the form of poetry encounters. Created by Marc Smith in Chicago in the 80s, it quickly aroused a media craze which allowed it to spread around the world. It brings a renewal to oral poetry and highlights the art of poetic performance. In France, the movement has been developing since 1998. The stages flourish in Paris and multiply throughout France” (França, 2007, p. 77).
- ⁶ Regarding the pedagogical use of slam in France and the spread of the genre in Europe and the French-speaking world, see *Poétique du slam: de la scène à l'école: néologie, néostyles et créativité lexicale*, by Camille Vorger (2011).
- ⁷ Original text: “Texte écrit original qui doit être dit a capella [sic]. Le texte proféré par le slameur ou la slameuse est une performance poétique qui se concentre uniquement sur les mots et leur rythme” (Slam Productions, n.d).

- ⁸ Original text: “Le slam présenté par le candidat ne pourra excéder 3 minutes. Le participant aura la possibilité de déclamer sa création poétique sur fond musical (facultatif) en s’abstenant de jouer d’un instrument durant sa performance. [...] Le Slam est un art du spectacle oral et scénique. Né dans les années 1980 à Chicago, le slam est focalisé sur le verbe. Il s’agit d’un type de scène d’expression populaire dans laquelle des poètes s’affrontent devant un jury choisi au hasard dans le public” (Slam Productions, n.d).
- ⁹ “It is possible to say, in a general way, that *performance* is for the 70s what happening is for the 60s. [...] The main characteristic of the transition of *happening* to *performance* is the ‘improvement of aestheticism’: if *happening* marked the radicalization of what we call ‘mythical theater’, *performance* will tend to a great approximation with the ‘Aesthetic Theater’” (Cohen, 2004, p. 134).
- ¹⁰ We have selected as examples the television programs *É tudo improviso*, aired on TV Bandeirantes and *Quinta categoria*, transmitted by MTV; *Improvável*, available at: <www.improvavel.com.br>. Accessed on: April 30, 2020; and theater plays in presence such as *Improvável: um espetáculo provavelmente bom* and *Deznecessários* (sic).
- ¹¹ Original text: “le slam est le symptôme d’une société en manque de communication” (Slam Productions, n.d, p. 5).

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