

THE TIRELESS STREAM OF ALTERITY: COGNITIVE-EMOTIONAL POWER OF MEDIATIZED POETRY PERFORMANCE

A fonte inesgotável da escuta: poder cognitivo-emocional da performance poética mediatizada

OLIVEIRA PINTO, José¹

Resumo

O presente estudo de caso recorre à netnografia para estudar os efeitos cognitivo-emocionais da performance poética mediatizada na audiência. Conhecer estes efeitos implica analisar o impacto que as emoções despoletadas durante a performance, associadas ao acontecimento da beleza ou catarse, têm na mente e no corpo do ouvinte. Para analisar os relatos dos quatro participantes, utilizei aportes da ciência cognitiva, nomeadamente da psicologia cognitiva, da neurobiologia e da neuroestética. E para contextualizar e compreender de uma forma etnográfica os relatos dos espetadores, analisei a relação entre ouvinte, poeta-intérprete e texto poético vocalizado, à luz dos conceitos propostos por Paul Zumthor, enquadrada nos aspetos definidores da performance, inter-relacionados entre si, tal como foram conceptualizados por Erika Fischer-Lichte. O esquema cognitivo é um fator-chave no processamento emocional e produz vieses cognitivos que favorecem uma interpretação da informação que é congruente com a estrutura de conhecimentos e as emoções do ouvinte.

Abstract

This case study employs netnography to study the cognitive and emotional effects of mediatized poetry performance on the audience. Understanding these effects involves analyzing the impact that emotions play during the performance, associated with the happening of beauty or catharsis, have on the listener's mind and body. In order to analyze the responses of the four participants, I drew on cognitive science theoretical contributions, specifically from cognitive psychology, neurobiology and neuroaesthetics. To contextualize and understand spectators' accounts ethnographically, I examined the relationship between listener, poet-performer and vocalized poetic text in light of concepts proposed by Paul Zumthor, framed within the defining and interrelated aspects of performance as conceptualized by Erika Fischer-Lichte. Cognitive schema is a key factor in emotional processing and produces cognitive biases that favor the interpretation of an information that is consistent with the listener's knowledge structure and emotions.

Key-words: *poetry performance; mediatization; audience; cognition; emotion.*

Palavras-chave: *performance poética; mediatização; audiência; cognição; emoção.*

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¹ JOSÉ OLIVEIRA PINTO – TXON Poesia – Associação Cultural. CABO VERDE. Email: joseoliveirapinto88@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Kânda diansânsa, kânda isânsa.

The community took care of me; I'll take care of the community.

Proverbial bantu-kongo sentence presented by Bunseki Fu-Kiau

Translated by Tiganá Santana (2019)

The hegemony of global capitalism is associated, in part, to neocolonial practices since the dominant elites often become wealthy by manipulating the powerful elites of the countries they end up colonizing, for benefit of their own businesses. However, if the struggle for the control of territory is part of human history, so too is the struggle for historical and social meaning, as Said (2021) affirms, further noting that the distribution of power and lack thereof in society influences the construction of identity, which is regulated by political issues such as immigration laws, for example. Listening to and revealing other voices — voices representing themselves — becomes an exercise in lucidity in the face of ideological narratives about national and european identity that sustain unfounded patriotic pride and extreme, xenophobic nationalism, propped up by an arrogant sense of superiority that quickly crumbles when confronted with the colonial past, of migration, travel and the mingling of peoples that generated today's heterogeneous western identities (Said, 2021).

When one makes silence, it opens a space for the other to speak. It is this silence that precedes and announces the poetic performance, whether read or interpreted, and it is amid silences and speeches that a spoken word — literally, poetic performance — session takes place. For political reasons too, these sessions are open to anyone who wishes to speak and/or listen to the sound waves of poems, in any language, forming a segment of a human community united by voice and singing. And song is voice and voice is expressed by the body and body builds identity: the black poet and the white poet absent themselves to express the eternal, imperfect poem created by an identity that is eternally incomplete, seeking the sparkling reverberation of the gaze of the “others,” the resonance of an impulse so misterious and so vibrant that the feet can no longer touch the earth. The leap from the depths of the abyss to the intersection of temporalities. The vertigo of listening, arms that harvest before sowing. To touch hearts without hands. To open arteries to love.

This is the experience I witness at the spoken word sessions in Cabo Verde, from which I leave with renewed and strengthened proof that it is possible to build communities of peace through the sharing of poems. Scollon et al. (2012) mention that intercultural communication is full of misunderstandings — and stereotypes — and that we do not need to understand everything about the other to accept their practices, nor do we have to converse to agree, but rather to share knowledge, as apprentices of humanity. The choreography of identities in those sessions is a snapshot of the hybridity and heterogeneity of cultures, interconnected and interdependent (Said, 2021) — from west to east, south to north — that come together and represent themselves in the voice of each poet, who sometimes weeps and the audience applauds because one is together and therefore, alive. Foster (2021), however, critiques the obsession with performance in the emotional activation of the viewer, which sidelines the analysis of the “quality of subjectivity and sociability” that arises from such *pathos*.

And what could be the aesthetic, cognitive and social impact of mediatized poetic performance? Arguing that there is a social need that precedes the production of technological artifacts, Auslander (2012) proposes that live is an interaction accepted by the audience, who consciously engage with the object. In light of this, the present essay is inspired by the physical spoken word community in Cabo Verde and, as a member of this community, I aim to explore the cognitive and emotional effects of mediatized poetic performance on listeners. The specific goals are to understand these cognitive, emotional and aesthetic effects on listeners’ subjectivity through the analysis of their discourse, to critically reflect on the role of plural poetic voice communities in cultural decolonization and the democratization of access to written and/or spoken poetry and finally, to understand the potential and risks involved in creating and maintaining virtual communities for the sharing of oral poems.

Poetic performance

The oldest known record of written human literature today are the poetic compositions of poetess Enheduanna (2285-2250 BC) in Mesopotamia, around 4,300 years ago. These compositions were probably meant to be sung to the sound of musical instruments of that age. In ancient Greece, Aristotle (2007) reinforces the age-old connection between oral performance and written poetry, noting that it was in the sequence of oral improvisations linked to the cult of Dionysus that “people, joining the name of the meter to the word poet”, began to call poetry the art of words in prose or verse form, mixing different meters or using only one. According to Andrews (2018), contemporary western poetry, influenced by new technologies, is an “intense presence” that condenses the complexity of human experience, especially through rhythm, being a textual genre that communicates through multimodal poetics, that is, through different modes and means, mainly written and/or spoken language.

A quick search on social media shows that there is, globally, an exponential growth in literary festivals, spoken word sessions with open mic and poetry slams. It is also increasingly common to attend performances by individual poets. All these spaces have, in just a few years, gained enormous importance for poets to interact with readers and communicate, through the physicality of performance, the poetic message to the audience. It is a way to be published and have books sold. Poetic performance is multimodal and varies from improvisation (sometimes rehearsed improvisation), influenced by rap, to poetry without music or programmed/performed with music — approaching the song —, to the reading of handwritten or printed poems on a sheet or in a published book (Andrews, 2018).

What aspects should be considered when analyzing a poetry performance? I will use the conceptual tools for performance reception proposed by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2019), adapted to the dual role of the “poet-performer”, noting that, most of the time, poets perform the texts they’ve written (Novak, 2012; Zumthor, 1990). It is essential to contextualize poetic oral communication at the sociocultural, political and philosophical levels, critically reflecting on the four aspects that define it, starting with (1) the physical co-presence between poet-performer and audience, in which both create and nourish a relationship of complicity, which, given the (2) ephemerality of the performance, lasts only as long as the performance itself occurs and it is in this “here and now” that its

materiality is expressed, not only in the energy — presence — of the poet, but also in spatiality (spaces where the performance takes place), corporeality (embodiment as expressed subjectivity, e.g., in gestures) and sonority (voice) (Fischer-Lichte, 2019).

(3) Meaning emerges in the audience following the physical co-presence and the intensity with which listeners experience the space-time of the situation, in a process that, at a given moment, triggers emotions in the spectators and makes them feel moved to the (4) event or “appearance of beauty” or *catharsis*, from an Aristotelian perspective, which causes transformation of the mind and body of the receiver of the poetic message (Fischer-Lichte, 2019). The transformative potential arises from the relationship between the four aspects described above, as well as from the impact of the poet on the audience and of the audience on the poet during the performance. As Foster (2021) and Frade (2022) propose, it seems vital to analyze the aesthetic, cognitive and affective effects on the spectator, in order to enhance the emotions, the aesthetic experience and the social effectiveness of poetic art.

Cognitive-emotional impact on the listener

Audience attends live poetic performances motivated by the aesthetic pleasure they may experience, actively participating in physical co-presence with the poet-performer and fully realizing the reception, since each spectator transforms and recreates for themselves the orchestration of meanings being transmitted, according to their own schema, that is, a system of beliefs and knowledge about the world (Eysenck & Keane, 2004; Fischer-Lichte, 2019; Wassiliwizky et al., 2017). The notion of schema clarifies why “one person’s punctum is another’s yawn” (Foster, 2021), no matter how mimetic the audience’s reaction is in relation to the poet, for they imitate his/her gestures and the voice with which they deliver his/her poetic text (Andrews, 2018; Zumthor, 1990).

To understand the vocal sonority of the poet, Zumthor (1990), researcher in poetic orality from both northern and southern hemispheres, observes that it is unimaginable to have language without voice and that voice is exteriorized interiority, whose sound goes from interior to interior, connecting two existences without mediation. In bantu african cosmogony, the flow of voice is inseparable from the flow of water, blood and semen, expressing the primordial wind, in terms of relationships, separations and articulations

among people in a social group. Vocal communication ensures that the discourse of a community and society about themselves is heard, in favor of the continuity of their balance and organization, and oral poetry is one of the means through which we constitute ourselves as a social body, ensuring we don't become paralyzed by fear (Zumthor, 1990). The proverbial sentence from bantu oral tradition cited in the introduction seems to me a clear example of that.

A key factor for the success of communication is based, according to cognitive psychology, on the cooperative principle, whereby speakers should take into account what they share, culturally and personally, with their listeners and adapt their discourse accordingly (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). This is one of the main motivations of the poet-performer: to incite the listener to identify with his/her words, experienced in common by both. And, considering that spoken language is more informal than written, the relationship between performer and audience sometimes look like a daily conversation, in which the poet addresses vocal text both to everyone and to someone in particular, receiving responses, something that occurs very frequently in certain african cultures, such as in Cape Verde (Zumthor, 1990).

Neuroaesthetic evidence from Wassiliwizky et al. (2017) demonstrates that the audience is more likely to feel chills when the speaker emphasizes passages that directly and personally (emotionally) communicate and address social cognition, that is, reference to loved ones present or absent and/or to personified entities, e.g., mother nature, whose effect seems most evident in the formal and linguistic aspects I'll detail next: the use of direct speech marks and second-person pronouns such as "you", "your", and/or "yours". In each verse, written with the sweaty, invisible weight of what remained silent, there is no careful calculation of these aspects, but rather, the spectrum of a primordial embrace of the human who has just been born and an inaugural cry of the poem in a loud voice, reopening the eyes to millions of futures and worlds.

At the cognitive production of discourse level, Eysenck and Keane (2004) prove that the use of prosodic cues — word and sentence accentuation, tones and pronunciation — provokes an intense activating effect and that speakers should use them more than they usually do, adding that more experienced speakers can better anticipate and avoid errors, thanks to more effective discourse planning. However, in improvised poetic performances, usually by rappers, there is no prior planning of what will be said and,

although there are occasional breaks in vocal rhythm due to lack of words, they are imperceptible. Why? Not because of prior planning, but, in my opinion, thanks to creativity, expressed in the ability to quickly find new connections between words, from this error and, sometimes, from an apparently wrong word that changes the flow of the voice, towards new territories of meaning.

The listener, if not judging, focuses his/her attention on a place outside language and body, in the infinitesimal gap in which listening occurs and potentially identification and empathetic sharing with the poet (Frade, 2022; Zumthor, 1990). Eysenck and Keane (2004) highlight the importance of lip reading in the perception of spoken text and suggest this perception is strongly influenced by contextual factors. Perhaps this is the reason why — and to avoid distractions — it is common to ask for silence before the poetic performance begins. Spectators themselves adopt this practice, in line with Andrews' interpretation, who says that keeping silence is the frame of poetic performance (2018). Regarding the aesthetic dimension, Wassiliwizky et al. (2017) show that poetry triggers intense affective responses, in a study in which 77% of listeners felt chills, even though they were unfamiliar with the poems and not closely connected to poetic language.

But how does the audience become aware of these aroused emotions? The neuroscientist Damásio (2012) shows that any emotion experienced has both a bodily and a cognitive substrate that mutually influence each other, pointing to the body-mind interrelation, in which some part of the process is not accessible to consciousness. To know an emotion, the researcher continues, we need to (1) feel a feeling — transform bodily and brain changes into images (mental representations) — and (2) apply consciousness to all these phenomena, that is, to be self-aware, in the process outlined in Figure 1 (Damásio, 2012).

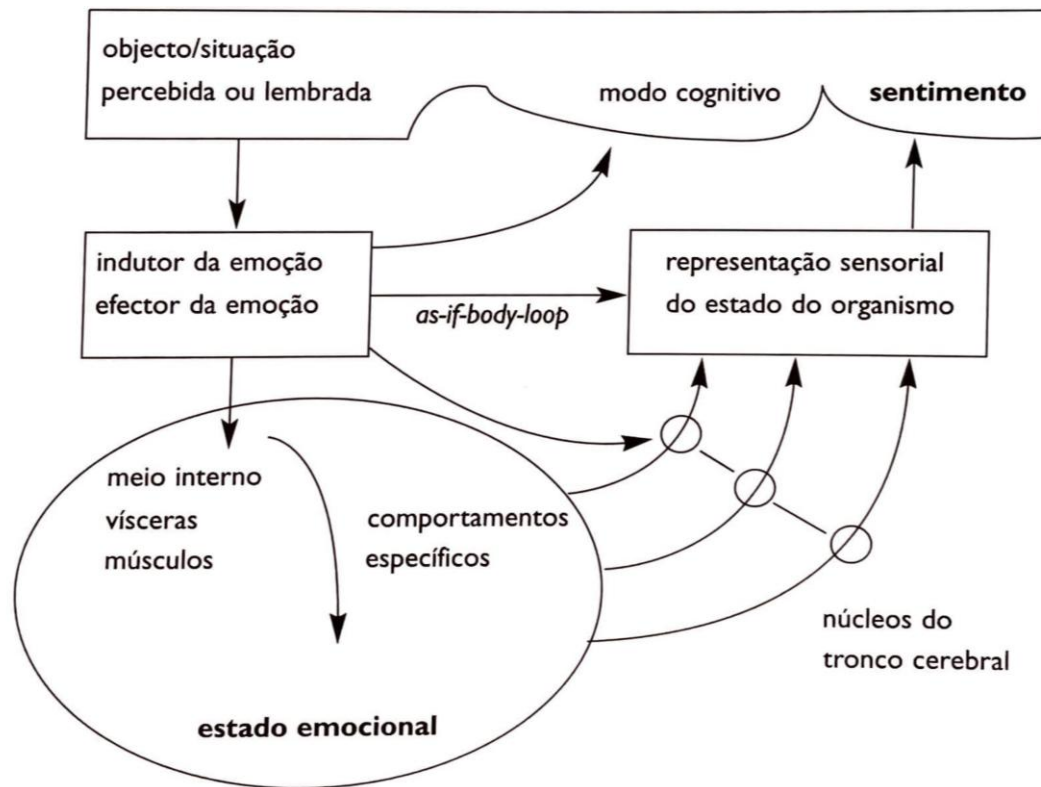


Figura 1 – Effects of emotions in the body and the mind¹
Source: Nava, 2003.

The cognitive processing of an emotion interacts reciprocally with personality and affective mood, in a process that starts with the activation of the schema, producing cognitive biases that favor an interpretation of information that is congruent with the listener's knowledge structure or emotions (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). At the neuroaesthetic level, Wassiliwizky et al. (2017) found that negative emotions, such as depression, are present when listeners experience chills, which seems paradoxical but reveals the intimate relationship between audiences and tragic stories since Aristotle. Why are there unforgettable performances? Cognitive learning is better memorized when the learner perceives that his/her mood has been altered by the experience that led to learning and mood has a greater impact on the memorization of internal stimuli, such as the aesthetic experience, than external ones (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). A performance is unforgettable because it painfully triggers a catharsis that teaches us something new and transforms our inner world.

The analysis of poetic performance is not limited to the relationship between the poet-performer and the audience. It implies an understanding of the poetic text as an element of equal relevance within the relational interplay it maintains with the other two elements (Zumthor, 1990). Eysenck and Keane (2004) demonstrate that language comprehension is considerably dependent on working memory capacity, which varies from person to person, to process greater or lesser amounts of words and, at the sentence level, its processing is associated with syntactic comprehension and meaning assignment by the listener, who also builds a coherent meaning of the speech, interpreting the information received based on his/her individual goals, through which he/she explains the actions and events that occur in the text.

Therefore, the choice of the theme in crafting the poem is important. Andrews (2018) even attributes to the contemporary western poet a rhetorical (discursive) intention, a motivation to “say something” and to express arguments within the socio-political context. At the mental representation level in the spectator, the Van Dijk and Kintsch’s text processing model proposes three levels of representation: the first consists of creating a surface representation of the text — forgotten more quickly; the second, in the building of the propositional representation that conveys the meaning of the text — the textual base; and the third, in the creation of a mental model based on the propositional representation — the situational model, which takes longer to be forgotten and, therefore, I will detail below (Eysenck & Keane, 2004).

The processes of creating situational models show that the audience pays attention mainly to five aspects in the evolution of the situation: protagonist, temporality, causality, spatiality and intentionality (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). The intense emotional response in the mind of the poetry listener, according to Wassiliwizky et al. (2017), is also related to the position of words throughout the poem and they note that chills occur more frequently at the last words of a line/verse of an individual stanza and/or an entire poem. Regular spectators of poetic performances anticipate this bodily awakening in the rhythm of vocalized words from the outset, waiting for the last words to bring the sound of the unspeakable bomb, just as the poet plays with that anticipation, always putting the bomb on time.

Since the pandemic outbreak, there has been much more social media posts containing poetry going viral, mainly autobiographical, whose creation is multimodal, primarily textual and performative. But does mediatized performance, that is, mediated by new technologies, incite the same aesthetic and cognitive-emotional effects as live performance? Zumthor (1990) states clearly that audiovisual media reconstitute the image of a presence that leaves much of the listener's inner world untouched, replacing the word audience by interlocutor, since the participatory relationship of physical co-presence that would constitute the community instead gives way to an imagined performer and performance and, consequently, mediation is more suited to solitary listening experiences.

From a historical perspective, Auslander (2012) observes that the relationship between live performance and live mediatization spans several decades and states that any technological artifact suggests to viewers that it is live — a suggestion realized in its presentation, e.g., allowing real-time response and interaction or being permanently connected to other people. For live to occur, the author argues, audience must seriously accept the suggested premises and become aware of the object so that it becomes “live” for them; in other words, live is not a characteristic of the object nor an effect caused by any aspect of it, such as medium, real-time responsiveness or anthropomorphism: live is an interaction produced by the listener's involvement with the object and their willingness to accept its premises (Auslander, 2012).

Drawing from the performative work, Foster (2021) questions the role of art today and urges artists to take a stand, based on a constellation that brings together the aesthetic, cognitive and critical registers of experience. Rather than adapting to the “strangely static” fluidity of images and information networks, the author proposes that efforts can be directed towards countering this “virtual confusion” in two complementary ways: (a) the critical mimetic exacerbation of particularities and contradictions, through these images and networks of information, so that they evoke the chaos of the ruling elites, such as the violence of global capitalism — both political insecurity and the economic precariousness of the neoliberal order, and (b) formal resistance (whenever possible) defending the “art of social practice” to address the current socio-political conditions in a heterogeneous and productive way and to establish genuine dialogue with the audience (Foster, 2021).

CASE STUDY

The research methodology I used in the case study was netnography, defined by Kozinets (2013) as a variant of ethnography that uses computer mediation to investigate and obtain data, in order to arrive at an understanding and ethnographic representation of a certain cultural phenomenon on the internet, with approaches ranging from the creation of public groups to interviews via Skype. In my case, I used Messenger app to interview two participants and WhatsApp to interview other two participants. In total, I interviewed four participants — three women and one man — who agreed to watch the two stimuli I suggested them to. Both poetic performances were published in *txon*, poetry and poetics magazine, #000 (2020), and are respectively a reading in portuguese of “ainda sou muito nova para escrever este poema” by Calí Boreaz, available at <https://videopress.com/v/VTKnwyPV>, and an oral improvisation in cape verdean creole titled “HISTÓRIAS D NHA AVÓ” by Rui César, available at <https://videopress.com/v/8RdJ4wRI>.

The stimuli were vídeos of two poetry performances to look like a live poetry performance; therefore, the selection criterion was the quality of diction and voice projection with which the poets perform their texts, so that the listening experience would be intense and free from noise and any other distractions. One performance is spoken in portuguese and the other in cape cerdean creole, thus closely resembling the experience of a spoken word session which, I note, is open to any language. The two vocal poems were previously unknown to the participants and I suggested to each that they would listen with headphones. After each participant watched the performance, I asked the following question: “After listening, what thoughts and emotions come to you at this moment?”

In summary and before proceeding with the analysis of the case study, I think that in order to understand the cognitive-emotional effects of mediatized poetic performance implies studying the impact that emotions triggered during the performance, associated with the experience of beauty, on the mind and body of the listener; prior to answer the question I asked in the interview, the participant had to become aware of all these phenomena, that is, to become aware of themselves (Damásio, 2012). It is equally important to contextualize the effects, to better understand them in depth. Therefore, I will also analyze the co-presence between the listener, the poet-performer and the vocalized poetic text (Zumthor, 1990), as well as the other three defining aspects of performance, as conceptualized by Fischer-Lichte (2019).

Reception of Calí Boreaz's "ainda sou muito nova para escrever este poema"

Calí Boreaz was born in Portugal, where she studied law in Lisbon, amidst nights of fado and flamenco. She lived in Bucharest, Romania, where she studied romanian language and literature as well as literary translation. Currently, she lives in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where she is devoted to the study and practice of theatre. In literature, she translated from romanian the novels *O regresso do hooligan* [ASA, Portugal], by Norman Manea, and *Lisboa para sempre* [Thesaurus, Brazil], by Mihai Zamfir. She has published two poetry books, *outono azul a sul* [Urutau, Portugal & Brazil, 2018] and *tesseracto* [Caos e Letras, Brazil, 2019], as well as the short story *islandeses*, included in the collection *Identidade* vol. II on Amazon Kindle [2019]. Her works have also appeared in several literary magazines and exhibitions in Portugal and India. She created the online contemporary poetry program *ainda somos muito novos para escrever estes poemas*, in which portuguese-speaking contemporary poets share their texts.

The poetic performance “ainda sou muito nova para escrever este poema” is a live reading of the eponymous poem, printed in Boreaz’s book *tesseracto*. It communicates its poetic message through moving images (video) and is set to the song “Raquel” by the cape verdean guitarist Bau. The medium of moving image gives the sensation of watching a film, showing the image of the present body but not its presence (Zumthor, 1990). Thus, there is no co-presence in Fischer-Lichte’s (2019) conception; the physicality must be imagined by the listener, as poet and audience do not influence one another in the unpredictability of a live human encounter and the formation of the social body. Communication is exclusively unilateral, delivered by the performer to the spectator.

Neither performer nor listener interact in the “here and now” of the performance, as it was pre-recorded, and the spectator can only give feedback after viewing. Co-presence thus gives way to interaction (Auslander, 2012). Moreover, the fleetingness defined by Fischer-Lichte (2019) for the limited temporal aspect of a live performance — which makes the listener aware of the uniqueness of the moment and focused on it — is less intense, since the video can be rewatched at will. The fact that the stimulus is always the same each time further diminishes this intensity, contrasting with live performance, which is unrepeatable since the processes of production and the interpreter’s subjectivity are always different, even if the title remains unchanged.

The poet's experiences of migration and travel are reflected in her communication, revealing an embodied subjectivity influenced by diverse cultures (Said, 2021). Born portuguese, she expresses herself in brazilian and sets the reading to "Raquel" by cape verdean Bau. Signs of cultural hybridity created during production, in line with the cooperative principle (Eysenck & Keane, 2004), adapting her poetic delivery to empathize with cape verdean listeners and facilitate identification with the poetic message, as the performance was published in *txon*, a poetry magazine based in Cape Verde, targeting a cape verdean audience.

If the body's presence yields to its image, the performer's energy persists in her voice, whose deep timbre and low volume give corporeality to melancholy, complemented by her black-and-red attire (Fischer-Lichte, 2019). The ongoing contrast between pain and the lightness of the music produces beauty and hope, in tune with the poet's weary, survivor's facial expression. At no point does the music compete with the voice — instead, it serves as a backdrop and accompaniment, a sonic landscape for the spoken text with rhythm that occasionally opens into silences, showing the poet's generosity in allowing the listener — real or imagined — time to process the information, often lacking in poem performances (Andrews, 2018).

The remorseless, persistent rhythm of her speech is reinforced by her gestures, most intense on the words and lines she wishes to emphasize, especially at the end of stanzas and the poem itself (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017). Prosodic features such as stress and word accentuation, as well as correct pronunciation and reading of the text, ensure pleasurable listening and sustained attention throughout (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). Another important aspect of "ainda sou muito nova para escrever este poema" is its interactive function, addressed to the first person plural — "we" — and, at one point, to "neighbors," referencing an imagined community (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017).

At times, the poetic text is spoken almost intimately to this imagined community and the domestic-like performance space creates this sense of intimacy, though the work is publicly available online (Fischer-Lichte, 2019). The language of poetry differs from that of storytelling — with defined protagonist, time, causality, space and intent — so oral poetic communication often delivers only a single, incisive message or argument, reinforced by rhythm and repetition, with tremendous effect (Andrews, 2018). Here, the poem's theme is the ceaseless difficulty of daily life and the enduring ability to remain

unbeatable.

For a deeper analysis of the poetic performance, we must consider the socio-political context in Brazil at that time. Institutional narratives were manipulated by far-right populists, whose harshness worsened after the Covid-19 outbreak, as political negligence toward public health cost millions of brazilians their lives through inadequate care. It's worth noting that Rio de Janeiro, where the poet lived, had a high proportion of populist supporters, prone to verbal and physical aggression, producing public insecurity — so much so that people avoid showing their phones in the street. The poem's theme appeals to unbreakable hope for a better life, empathizing with both brazilian and cape verdean realities, since social practices of both cultures are historically linked. In the west, too, we need hope.

How was Calí Boreaz's poetic performance received by the audience? Its reception depends entirely on the audience, since the poet cannot alter the video. Even when viewed again, the reception changes only with the listener's shifting perception — a viewer feeling more depressed may interpret the poem more negatively, feeling sadness instead of the initial hope (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). Mediatization, thus, requires audience acceptance and lets the audience hold more power over reception, without the direct influence of co-presence with the sender (Auslander, 2012).

When asked about her thoughts and feelings, participant 1, a portuguese speaker, replied: “Well, I felt many things... I savored the words as if chewing them in my mouth, I felt the softness in the harshness of contradiction, the fluidity passing through the eye of the needle, lightly touching the edges of the sphere, in a dance where the end comes before the beginning, and time is so quick it stops in the light of each gaze 😊.” The complexity of the message is evident in “I felt many things...,” showing that awareness of poetry's effects isn't immediate but grows clearer over time (Eysenck & Keane, 2004; Zumthor, 1990). She describes the mimetic process, savoring the words as if chewing them (Andrews, 2018; Zumthor, 1990).

The “softness” of the music and the “harshness” of the spoken words may have

generated the “contradiction,” likely triggering an aesthetic experience, as the art/reality opposition increases (Fischer-Lichte, 2019). The “fluidity through the eye of the needle” alludes to the poet’s voice connecting with the listener’s interiority, “in a dance” showing their interaction (Zumthor, 1990). The subverted temporality, possible only in poetic language, affected this listener, who says “the end comes before the beginning” and, with “time is so quick, it stops in the light of each gaze,” reveals that she used the pauses to appreciate the poet’s gaze and process the message (Andrews, 2018). The final emoji suggests positive emotion.

Participant 2, a portuguese and cape verdean creole speaker, said: “I felt a sense of calm and peace, relaxation, while keeping my mind active, as the poem brought reflections like that even ugly things have their beauty if we know how to look at them—something I had thought, but the poem made clearer. I felt well, it’s beautiful.” Like participant 1, this listener felt tranquility and said that “kept my mind active,” suggesting cognitive attention was sustained throughout by the spoken poem.

She mentally represented the poem propositionally, relating to the idea “even ugly things have their beauty if we know how to look,” clarified by the poem (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). Feeling well and calling it a beautiful moment may aid in long-term memory retention, as learning accompanied by a mood shift is better memorized and mood influences memory of internal, aesthetic experiences more than external ones (Eysenck & Keane, 2004).

Participant 3, a portuguese and cape verdean creole speaker, said: “I’m struck by the idea of life’s finitude, which is not easy regarding our smallness, but I also see that we can achieve our goals. It is difficult, at least for me, to reflect on poetry, as it’s a language with all possible meanings.” His apparently rational answer highlights the theme of the text, suggesting quick propositional processing (Eysenck & Keane, 2004).

Although he does not mention emotions, his clear understanding of the message suggests he may have felt something but doesn’t wish to address it openly — perhaps, as a middle-aged man, due to a lack of emotional education in earlier generations. Or, as he notes, “It is difficult, at least for me, to reflect on poetry, because it’s a language with all possible meanings,” which may relate to poetry’s complexity (Andrews, 2018), or to how formal education has often rigidly taught canonical poetry, making difficult to interpret

in a subjective, free way (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017).

Participant 4, also a portuguese and cape verdean creole speaker, said: “Beautiful poem. I kind of traveled within it. It was very moving; I remembered being a teenager. I was afraid to write, thinking I wasn’t old enough.” This listener expresses aesthetic pleasure not only in calling the poem “beautiful” but also in “traveling within it,” signaling emotional movement (Fischer-Lichte, 2019; Zumthor, 1990). The performance evoked a memory of her adolescence, showing identification with the poet’s oral communication, though she does not mention overcoming that fear or a cognitive outcome she might have drawn from that experience.

Reception of Rui César’s “HISTÓRIAS D NHA AVÓ”

Rui César is a rapper and member of the cape verdean hip hop group B.T.M.. He was born in Cape Verde in 1996, in the town of Mindelo, on the island of São Vicente. He has a range of music projects out on the streets, including an EP, two music videos, a single and more than ten collaborations with other artists’ works. He released his solo EP in 2020. In addition to rap, Rui César is slammer and host at Spoken Word Mindelo sessions. He is part of the project “*Rap Educação*” and part of the group of freestylers made up of MCs who meet every Sunday to practice freestyle, usually at Praça Amílcar Cabral, the main square in Mindelo. He was finalist in the Cabo Verde Poetry Slam 2020. The poetic performance “HISTÓRIAS D NHA AVÓ” is an improvised slam in cape verdean creole, strongly influenced by rap, in which the poet-performer conveys the poetic message through moving images (video).

I emphasize that the possibility of creating co-presence between poet and audience in front of a computer or smartphone does not exist as an experience of shared emotions, thoughts and meeting of bodies in unpredictable relation. Without unpredictability, where is the astonishment? It seems to me that online interaction has the power to produce a certain intensity in listening and viewing the vocalized poem, to generate aesthetic pleasure and to transform the listener’s mind and body. However, it is a lonely experience, whose dialogue and sociability fall short compared to live spoken word sessions — which, at times, become life politics, debated and commented on by the group, based on certain poems that critically addresses realities relevant to the audience (Wassiliwizky et

al., 2017; Zumthor, 1990). The result is socio-political awareness, open to millions of possible futures, driven by a collective desire to find new ideas and solutions (Foster, 2021). And it is for this potential transformation that one looks forward to next in-person spoken poetry session.

The characteristics of interaction strip some intensity from the performance, since presence becomes merely the image of the person rather than the body itself, with the inherent eroticism of physicality (Zumthor, 1990). The ability to rewatch the video as often as one wishes causes the magic of fleeting physical performance to fade and gives way to a more uncommitted listening, since, if the listener wants, they can pause the video, go do other things and come back to it whenever they want.

Regarding the materiality of “HISTÓRIAS D NHA AVÓ,” I highlight the white background of the performance space, which seems like a house, transmitting intimacy while also focusing the viewer’s gaze solely on the poet-performer (Fischer-Lichte, 2019). Without distractions, the expressiveness of the voice is revealed, reinforced by provoking gestures adapted from rap, which keep the inner self connected from the beginning to the end of the vocal poem. Expressiveness is enhanced by casual clothing and the informality of spoken language, which, unlike written language, serves a more communicative function, inciting the interlocutor to interact: both at the beginning and at the end of the performance, the poet-performer greets and bids farewell to the listener (Eysenck & Keane, 2004).

The loud volume of the voice and the rhythmic cadence with few pauses give an incisive speed that reinforces the listener’s attention. The voice, along with the gesture — both unrestrained — incite mimetic exacerbation (Foster, 2021), unlike the reading in the prior performance, which was less expressive since reading is programmed and gestures are “tied to the book.” The improvised sound flow breaks at a moment when the performer stumbles over the words, but the intensity is not lost, as improvisation practice — which requires creativity training to quickly find solutions — allows him to give new semantic direction to the oral improvisation, immediately leading the listener to a new territory of meaning (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). The repetition of lines plays a key role in strengthening the poetic message and in giving the improviser time to find new connections between what is being said and what will be said next (Andrews, 2018).

By referencing the national memory of cape verdeans, poetic oral communication enacts the cooperative principle and directly addresses social cognition, namely, collective identity, whose empathy is facilitated by effective prosodic cues and discourse markers that speak directly to the familial, personal, and emotional context of the viewer, whether they speak creole or portuguese, since Portugal, Angola, São Tomé and Príncipe and Guinea-Bissau are mentioned (Eysenck & Keane, 2004; Frade, 2022; Wassiliwizky et al., 2017). The theme of the vocal poetic text mentions the value of freedom throughout the country's history since independence and appeals to all cape verdeans, especially as the main theme of Cabo Verde's national anthem is freedom. In contemporary cape verdean context, marked by neoliberal policies that have ceded sovereignty to foreign investment and increased the gap between rich and poor, visible after the Covid-19 outbreak — and with reports of the government's connections to brazilian and portuguese populists — the vocal poem recalls what it took to win freedom and prompts serious reflection on whether today's social practices reify it.

The overwhelming corporeality of the poet-performer was felt, through mimesis, with positive emotions by listeners, as can be seen in the following statements from three participants: “So good! 😊”, “Rui really is good,” and “The most expressive poem” (Andrews, 2018; Zumthor, 1990). In particular, participant 1 states: “I understood without understanding, that words carry much more than meanings. Pure energy loaded with sweat, pain, emotion, passing through the pores. Reaching the core, surrounded by spiraling rings weaving Life's fractals. The smile in the trench of generations that build the fabric of humanity in ongoing revolution! 🙌 So good! 😊”. Considering that the poem is spoken in Creole and this participant speaks Portuguese, not Creole, the impact was felt almost entirely through the performer's tone, perceived as “Pure energy loaded with sweat, pain, emotion, passing through the pores,” through the voice that connects, holds attention and maintains interaction (Auslander, 2012; Fischer-Lichte, 2019).

I asked the viewer to be a bit more objective, and the response was: “[Sent audio] Hi, José. Hmm, I can't be objective, because... I don't know, that was what came to me when reading, when listening and feeling the video... I don't, I don't fully understand what he says, that's why I said I understood without comprehending, or comprehended without understanding. But I enjoyed it very much, I really did. You feel all that, don't you? You feel all that, well, it's what my words say. I don't know how else to put it... He

talks about history, the history of these people, doesn't he? These people who went through a lot in search of that smile, in search of that bread... I can't be more specific. Hope that helps. What can I say? I like both poems very much. I see a parallel between the two, because both... I don't know, they transmit a very similar energy to me where everything mixes a bit, all that spiral, those fractals, in the end from the smallest to the greatest in the universe. Everything is, in a way, a repetition but not a repetition, because it is in constant expansion... So, it's very hard to be objective. I'm not quite sure what you're looking for. [Sent another audio] Actually, words—and this is something I've thought for a long time—are never enough to describe everything that comes through in a... in a text, and much more in an interpretation of a text or, in this last case, that I see, at least he speaks of improvisation, right? And so much information comes through, which goes far beyond words. And so, for me, these words arose, both for the first and second texts. To be objective, I think both are very good and play with, with duality, with human experience, with opposites, and ultimately the beauty of all this fabric, which is life."

Despite the lack of understanding creole language and not being cape verdean, the participant mentally represented the vocal poetic text at the propositional level, grasping the reference to the smile of the human generations that are constantly struggling (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). I suggest that not understanding the language as well as unfamiliarity with a culture, which often leads to intercultural communication misunderstandings (Scollon et al., 2012), do not prevent aesthetic pleasure, emotional movement and the potential for transformation of mind and body, as evidenced by the mention of learning from the poetic message, felt as hope (Zumthor, 1990). Also worth noting is, "I really like both poems. I see a parallel between the two, because both... I don't know, they transmit a very similar energy," which reinforces that the perception and interpretation of the poetic text depend more on contextual aspects — such as sound (voice), rhythmic cadence, prosody cues and adaptation to shared cultural and personal aspects between poet-performer and audience — than on detailed comprehension of the spoken poetic text.

Participant 2 said: "It brings the feeling of awakening a memory, perhaps the collective memory that the theme brings. The poem captured my attention. I felt that in a few words you come to know a whole part of Cape Verde's history, and for that, the poem is relevant, it brings a certain relief not to live in those times, while also evoking fear for

the planet's future. I felt active and focused, and at the same time the sensation of watching something beautiful." Because she is cape verdean and speaks both portuguese and creole, she understood the specific historical and cultural dimension of the poetic message, which gave her "the feeling of awakening a memory, perhaps the collective memory," along with the aesthetic pleasure of "seeing something beautiful" (Fischer-Lichte, 2019).

She states that "in a few words you come to know a whole part of the history of Cape Verde," reinforcing the poet-performer's argument and making the poem perceived as "relevant" for the listener at the level of identity, who even felt "relief" not to live in the past (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017). However, the reflection prompted by the vocal poem incites "fear for the future of the planet," which suggests that the theme has a strong socio-political awareness dimension (Foster, 2021; Zumthor, 1990). The viewer also says she felt "active and focused", suggesting affective involvement and heightened attention to what was being transmitted. The cognitive-emotional effects on participant 3 were described as follows: "Rui really is good. He reflects on our land's reality—about freedom, about generational clash." I asked if he could elaborate, and he answered: "He attacks the notorious article 4 of our first constitution and shows young people the difference between life under that constitution and them living now in a society guided by a constitution that defends freedom. That's why we can speak today..." Being cape verdean, the theme assumes remarkable relevance for his identity and emotions, setting in motion mental representation processes at the propositional level in participant 2, but particularly in this listener, whose subjectivity demonstrates and reflects the performer's discursive intention (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). Combined with aesthetic pleasure, the critical reflection that this viewer initiates after hearing the vocal poem is a clear evidence of the transformative potential of this poetic performance (Fischer-Lichte, 2019).

Participant 4 is also cape verdean and describes what she felt with the vocal poem as follows: "The most expressive poem about the people's problems. Look, the poem made me think of the people's problems; sometimes we're so buried in our own ego and problems. It made me feel the need to reflect. Although I work for the government and much has been done, space must be given to do more on other fronts." She began by comparing this performance to the previous one, aesthetically, and suggests she felt this one with more intensity, considering that this spoken poem is "more expressive". She says it "made her feel the need to reflect," confirming, as happened with the other

participants, the effectiveness of the poet-performer's oral communication, since, according to the answers, it generated critical thinking without sacrificing the beauty or emotional impact of the experience (Foster, 2021).

CONCLUSION

All participants answered the question regarding the two poetic performances, which suggests that everyone felt cognitive-emotional effects, regardless of the spoken language. That is, both poetic performances produce aesthetic pleasure, although some respondents felt it more intensely than others. Some responded more cognitively and others more emotionally, which demonstrates the importance of cognitive bias and each listener's personal goals in the perception and interpretation of information (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). However, memory activation is an analytical category — and the only one — to be mentioned universally by all viewers in the interviews.

Each listener consciously chose to engage with the mediatized performance and acted as an interlocutor to the interpreters (Auslander, 2012). If the technological artifact seems to empower the audience, on the other hand, it seems dangerous that there is no intermediate, shared space where poet-interpreter and spectator meet face to face and together, seek a communicative agreement. This agreement cannot be sought online, as the physical barrier of mediation prevents the physicality of bodies and separates them, each to opposite sides — as in war — leaving nothing, but the longing for an energizing presence and the bittersweet taste at the end. Nevertheless, virtual communities can play an important role for sharing poems if they enable real access to voices and identities silenced through processes of domination — not only by colonial practices, but also due to the elitism of canon.

Taking the case study analysis into account, I suggest that becoming aware of cognitive-emotional effects is not immediate and I question whether the potential for audience transformation is a process that unfolds over time, for instance, in the following days, depending on one's cognitive framework (Eysenck & Keane, 2004; Fischer-Lichte, 2019). This is, without doubt, an open field of investigation and what I attempted here was to explore some relationships and associations between concepts and processes. To conclude, I propose — obviously without unproductive prescriptions — a guiding map

inspired by the guide created by the BBC (*Writing Slam and Spoken Word Poetry Guide for KS3 English Students*, n.d.) for writing a poem to slam, to perform, based on theoretical references mentioned above and in line with the international rules of Spoken Word movement, whose founding principle is to democratize poetic language.

Reading texts and watching performances by other poets, as well as practicing writing texts of one's own and rehearsing one's performance are general guidelines. So is adapting one's communication in accordance with what one has in common with listeners, in cultural and personal terms (Eysenck & Keane, 2004). As for the text, it can be written by the slammer or by other appropriately credited authors, in dramatic genre, short narrative, poetry, diary, song lyrics or combinations thereof. The starting point can be a striking everyday memory that raises a theme you'd like to address, as well as your reasons for discussing it. Then: is there another possible world? What did you learn from the experience? What message do you want to convey? Direct and personal (emotional) communication is more effective; that is, referencing loved people present or absent and/or personified entities (e.g., mother nature), as well as an interactive text, e.g., using direct speech markers and second-person pronouns: "you", "your" (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017).

Regarding performance, there are no limits to creativity: it can range from improvisation (sometimes, rehearsed improvisation) influenced by rap, to poetry without music or programmed/read with music — approaching song — to reading handwritten or printed poems from a sheet or published book (Andrews, 2018); props, costumes, music can be used, as well as dialogues and interpreting characters. Voice is important, as it is externalized energy that creates co-presence and builds a relationship with the audience (Fischer-Lichte, 2019; Zumthor, 1990) and so are prosodic cues: stress, tonic accent and word emphasis, tones and pronunciation, improvisation in unpredictability (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017); fast and incisive message delivery reinforced by rhythmic cadence and repetition (ritual) (Andrews, 2018); and silence: it is the frame of any performance and each pause gives the listener time to process the information. Painful emotions, such as depression, provoke a more intense catharsis and are more effective when learning the message — transforming the listener. Finally, attention to position of words, especially the last words of a line/verse of an individual stanza and/or of an entire poem (Wassiliwizky et al., 2017).

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