Memories, metaphores and imagination in oral life story narratives[a]

Memórias, metáforas e imaginação em narrativas orais de história de vida

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ABSTRACT

We discuss the imaginative character in life story narratives recorded by methods such as Oral History, considered scientific research resources. We propose the following questions: How do we deal with the imagination and metaphors in oral narratives of life stories? How do we regard the demand for "truth" in texts that activate subjectivity? Individual and subjective memories confer scientificity to narratives? We place the problem of truth and its relationship to language and knowledge, with Friedrich Nietzsche and Mikhail Bakhtin. We articulate theoretical review and case report, considering mental images as media that convey memories and, for this reason, a field of studies for Communication and History.

Keywords: Truth, fiction, imagination

RESUMO

Discutimos o caráter imaginativo de narrativas de histórias de vida registradas por métodos como a História Oral, consideradas fontes de pesquisa acadêmica. Propomos as seguintes indagações: Como lidamos com a imaginação e com metáforas nas narrativas orais de histórias de vida? Como atendemos à demanda pela "verdade" em textos que ativam a subjetividade? Memórias individuais e subjetivas conferem cientificidade às

[a] This article was initially presented to the working group Memórias nas Mídias, of the XXIX Encontro Annual da Compós, Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul, Campo Grande – MS, June 23 to 25, 2020. It was later revised and restructured for submission to this journal..

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DOI:http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v17i1p251-268

narrativas? Situamos o problema da verdade, suas relações com a linguagem e com o conhecimento a partir de Friedrich Nietzsche e Mikhail Bakhtin. Articulamos revisão teórica e estudo de caso, considerando imagens mentais como mídias veiculadoras de memórias e, por isso mesmo, campo de estudos para a Comunicação e a História.
Palavras-chave: Verdade, linguagem, imaginação

TELLING OUR OWN stories is a common act in our lives. "We tell stories about ourselves daily," says Paul John Eakin (2019, p. 17) – theorist of autobiographical studies at Indiana University, in the United States –, even if people do not listen to us, "because the process of the self-narrative constantly unfolds in our minds […]." The act of telling our stories is a constituent part of ourselves. Therefore, we constitute our experiences and relate to our memories, always impregnated with the "fundamental values of culture" (Eakin, 2019, p. 37). We craft our life stories, our identity narratives, and our own personal testimonial "literature":

> Despite our illusions of autonomy and self-determination […], we do not invent our identities out of thin air. Rather, we shape them from the resources of the culture in which we live, which specify what it means to be a man, a woman, a worker, or a person within the circumstances in which we live our lives. (Eakin, 2019, p. 37)

The broader issue that permeates our reflection in this article concerns the human ability to narrate life stories through oral language and understand that the images we form from memory engender a unique mode of communication. When we tell our life stories or convey our past experiences, describing lived or imagined scenes, are we enunciating truths or narrating fiction? Or both things at the same time?

To face this issue, we turn first to Mikhail Bakhtin (2003, p. 21) and his "first philosophy". Each individual is unique for this theorist, and his acts are unrepeatable, as he and only he occupies a specific time and place in the world. Therefore, the "I" only exists in the relationship in dialogues with other "I's" because what one sees is determined (and limited) by the place one occupies and, as different individuals occupy different places, each one sees what the other cannot. Each one needs the vision of the other to complete his own. Being is not enough; the Other is required. Furthermore, it is the necessary and productive complementarity of views and understandings that forms the core of the notion of dialogism.

> When I contemplate in the whole a man situated outside and in front of me, our concrete horizons actually experienced do not coincide. Because in whatever situation or proximity that this other that I contemplate may be concerning me, I will always see and know something that he, from his position outside and in front of me, cannot see: the parts of his body that are inaccessible to his gaze [...], the world behind him [...]. When we look at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupil of our eyes. (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 21)

This theoretical assumption raises a question for academic research developed from Oral History narratives: if two individuals cannot experience a given reality similarly, is it possible to think about the idea of truth concerning life testimonies? How do individual and collective memories, activated in this dialogic relationship, confer aspects of truth – and thus gain reliability – to the narratives? What value of knowledge can be attributed to the representation of mental images when narrated as life stories?

Starting from the assumption that oral life narratives are media and the act of narrating oneself and for the Other, inherent to the human being, never leaves the imagination, the objective of this study is to raise the debate around the following questions: how do we, Human and Social Sciences (particularly Communication) researchers, deal (or can we deal) with the imaginative dimension intrinsic to oral narratives of life stories? And, still: can we consider the oral narrative of life story a document of memory that contains the imagination? If yes, what is its heuristic value?

We aim to discuss truth and imagination in oral narratives of life stories told by those who lived them, considering how the communication of these experiences articulates individual and collective mental images as metaphors. To reflect on such questions, we propose the following script: 1) enunciate the problem of truth and its relationship with language and imagination; 2) discuss the representation of the "real" from mental images constructed in oral life story narratives; 3) attribute to the oral report of life story the value of testimonial literature, a kind of poetic access to memory records.

In this path, we will analyze – as a way of illustrating the proposed arguments – excerpts from the oral narrative of the life story of Olívia Rodrigues Cardoso, collected on December 6, 2004, within the scope of Memoirs Center of ABC, of the Municipal University of São Caetano do Sul[1]. The methodology used in conducting the interview added "the teachings of oral life story and thematic with the communicative character of memory, and the culture and social imaginaries, the perspectives of the constitution of discourses and narratives" (Perazzo, 2015, p. 122-123).

[1] Memoirs of ABC started as a research project in 2003. However, in the second year, it became a center of studies at the Municipal University of São Caetano do Sul for concentrating research and production in communication that relates themes such as memory, culture, narratives of life stories, subjectivities, imaginaries, media, and new technologies. It gathers researchers who seek theoretical-methodological discussions and technological support to develop their proposals. It has been constituting a collection of life stories of the people of the region, who tell their experiences and recollected experiences in Oral Narratives of Life Stories. This method was constituted by researchers from the Center, based on studies of Oral History. The research is based on valuing the subject of the action, recording everyday stories, and constructing identities, which provides a broader understanding of social life and, consequently, of the communication and cultural relations articulated by the subjects. The testimony of Olívia Rodrigues Cardoso, collected in 2004, is part of this collection, with this purpose, and aims to record the memories of her experiences in Vila de Paranapiacaba, in the ABC region.

IMAGINATION AND TRUTH AS METAPHORS

This thread can begin to be unraveled from *On Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense* by Friedrich Nietzsche (2008), the first thinker to formulate a denunciation against the idea of truth as conceived in the Western tradition, more precisely against the belief in truth as the foundation, original principle, absolute value of our culture. The Nietzschean genealogy reveals the truth as the central value from which we build all the other values to sustain our civilization. Every belief in absolute truth – says Nietzsche – understands and hides its fictional character. We must be aware of language's figurative and conventional aspects when considering the relationship between truth and imagination.

What we designate as truth – continues the thinker – is born from a need to agree; its purpose is gregarious life and social interaction (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 29). Through our relationship with language, we established the foundations for this coexistence. In our civilizational path, however, we forget that the truth is nothing more than a language game, a metaphor sheltered under its conventions and figurations. The human being built the interpretative paradigm of truth from the gregarious language. Identity and truth are possible only in language, a convention, or an agreement.

What, therefore, we understand by truth stems from a belief in the identity of the non-identical, concealed in language at the expense of forgetting that every word hides multiplicity, condenses meanings, conforms perceptions, and induces senses. Being trustworthy, by this understanding, is nothing more than being in line with the language codes and how science operates, erecting its edifice of concepts, in a continuous effort to impose its laws on the inconstancy and provisionality of life's own intuitions (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 45). Human beings needed to unite with their fellows to survive due to their natural fragility and in search of protection. Hence their need for sharing, for communion, in word, and for communication.

In the Nietzschean view, although human actions in the world are "incomparably personal, unique, limitlessly individual," when we make them conscious, they no longer look that way. Since we cannot give up our communal and gregarious nature, even if we are committed to understanding ourselves in the unique way possible, we can only "become aware of the impressions of our senses, […] fix them and […] place them outside of us," promoting "a great, radical corruption, falsification, superficialization, and generalization." Our status as "average" – inextricably socially linked – and as "inventors of signs" – either by belief or by imagination – causes a "vulgarized" world, made "shallow, thin, relatively silly, general" and, thus, beneficial to the species (Nietzsche, 2012, p. 223).

Walter Benjamin (2012, p. 124) focuses on the gap between the complexity of human experiences and the limits of their sharing established by language, observing that World War I combatants returned from the trenches poorer – and not richer – into communicable experiences, that is to say, translatable into a given system of signs. He thus alluded to a certain poverty of language to give sense to a dimension of what is experienced in extreme circumstances. Every narrator organizes the language when telling his own story and, through metaphors and other figures, ultimately weaves an imaginary network to sustain his truths, thus making them shareable.

Naming – it is important not to lose sight of this – is always to simplify the complexity, reducing the multiple, obliterating the singularity of the individual intuitive knowledge; representing through language is to make choices, establish hierarchies, and assign value. In the voice of Nietzsche (2008, p. 54-55):

> very word immediately becomes a concept to the extent that it should not serve as a reminder of the unique and individualized primordial experience to which it owes its emergence, but, at the same time, it should be consistent with innumerable cases, more or less similar, i.e., never equal when taken strictly, to clearly dissimilar cases, therefore. Every concept arises from the equalization of the non-equal.

Own to everything that lives are – in the Nietzschean view – the continuous interpretive activity, the always unfinished movement of sense, the creative impulse inherent to the imagination. Forgetting this moving multiplicity of the original experience required establishing a statute of the word, an identity world of representation capable of making a collective human project viable. The condition for the existence of language is the forgetting of plurality. Every word must only refer to the universe of signs. Words do not relate to things but to the meaningful universe of the words themselves (Mosé, 2018, p. 67).

The relationship between narrative and truth also takes on complex contours in Mikhail Bakhtin's thought. For the Russian philosopher, statements always reveal, to some extent, the position of those who express them. In other words, they become "incarnated" and gain authorship from concrete subjects, who may or may not be known but are all equally endowed with a creative will. Thus – as explained by Todorov in the presentation of Bakhtin's collection *Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*, published posthumously in 1979 –, for Bakhtin, "we must content ourselves with quoting instead of speaking on our own behalf" (Bakhtin, 2003, p. XXI). As early as 1929, Voloshinov, one of the Bakhtin Circle intellectuals, stated that to disguise uncertainties, modern society resorted to citations in its most varied degrees; "we no longer speak except between quotation marks" (Bakhtin, 2003, p. XIX)[2].

[2] Bakhtin (1981) considers that Dostoyevsky was the creator of the polyphonic novel.

Memories, metaphores and imagination
in oral life story narratives

Nietzsche and Bakhtin are thinkers who inspire us to reflect on oral narratives of life stories as human experiences and also as media. In this way, we can consider oral narrators as authors who agree with their interlocutors through language to shape and thus express their individual experiences. They compose images, outline voids, resort to metaphors, modulate their speeches according to their linguistic skills, and finally establish comparisons that make their memories communicable. Their authorial voice is balanced in words, pursues the sharing of senses, and gains communicability as it incorporates the dynamics of language.

THE LITERARINESS OF THE TESTIMONY

As a modality of memory and communication, testimony is closely related to imagination. Since Aristotle, memory has been conceived as "a set of mental images of sensual impressions", belonging "to the same part of the soul as the imagination". Narratives of this nature take on a literary character and are "hybrid[s] of uniqueness and imagination" (Seligmann-Silva, 2008. p. 72 e 74), which is why they have always found acceptance in the field of arts and psychoanalysis, but have awakened the mistrust of the legal milieu and traditional positivist historiography. However, testimonies have achieved prominence in historiographical studies in recent decades, interested in exploring the literariness of these reports to enter where only the doors of imagination allow us to arrive. The reports of life stories can be considered as literature of the real: that which has "its peculiar ability to intertwine literature and the 'phenomenal world'" (Seligmann-Silva, 2003, p. 376-377).

Testimonial literature has a long history with inserted autobiographical accounts and testimonies (Dosse, 2016). However, it gained shape throughout the 20th century, a time marked by the experience of catastrophes – world wars, atomic bombs, the Nazi holocaust, and others genocides[3]. These experiences forced the history of literature to review itself based on its commitment to the 'real,' taking the understanding that "this 'real' should not be confused with 'reality' as it was thought and presupposed by the realist and naturalist novel" (Seligmann-Silva, 2005, p. 85). In improving languages, we can investigate the possibilities of representing the "real" and, advancing in this direction, the imaginative ways of shaping all representation. If we understand language like Nietzsche (2008), we know that every word – scientific, poetic, rhetorical, or testimonial – has metaphor as its matrix, which is behind all truth.

By drawing attention to the imaginative character constitutive of all life story narratives, we are not, therefore, paying attention to a possible epistemological weakness of Oral History[4], nor relativizing the value of testimonial

[3] Concerning the 20th century and the idea of catastrophe, see Rosso (2016). On the idea that catastrophe engenders an "age of testimony," see Wieviorka (1995).

[4] Discussions about the role of subjectivity in Oral History and the relationship between memory and truth are already well-established in history. On the subject, see the works of the French Philippe Joutard (2015), the Italian Alessandro Portelli (2006), and the Brazilian Verena Alberti (2004). Studies on communication and media also addressed this issue. See Caprino and Perazzo (2011) and Ribeiro (2015).

accounts. In this sense, we distance ourselves from the critical position assumed by Beatriz Sarlo (2007), which stresses the overvaluation of first-person narratives, characteristic of the subjective shift produced by the culture of memory in the contemporary world. On the contrary, we want to underline "imagination" as a compelling operative concept for understanding the phenomena of memory and history. After all, an experience always comes back in fragments, from which the remembering subject establishes connections, distinctions, patterns, and reconfigurations. According to Keightley and Pickering (2012, p. 7), "This is what gives it its creative potential, but this potential is only realized through the productive tension arising between memory and imagination".

The correlations between truth and imagination, articulated by the always metaphorical language, as Nietzsche (2008) warns, can be identified from the excerpt of the following testimony, recorded within the scope of Memoirs of ABC. This is an episode in the life story of a lady who was born in March 1923 and lived most of her childhood and youth in the village of Paranapiacaba, a place at the top of the mountain range belonging to Santo André, in the ABC Paulista region, currently listed as a railway village. Dona Olívia tells her story and that of her family, who lived there in the first half of the 20th century.

> My father came from Portugal when he was 13, with a very strict aunt. When they got off the ship, the aunt told him: "Now you're on your own, because you're already a lad, and I can't support you. I am also coming down here without a job." My father accompanied an older man who came on the ship, and he felt sorry for my father. He stayed with this gentleman. They went to work on Matarazzo's farm, harvesting coffee. That's when the British set up this empire there, and my dad heard about it. He was already 17 years old and heard that the railroad was taking employees, so he went there to enlist. My father started working on the railroad at the age of 17.[5]

[5] Interview by Olívia Rodrigues Cardoso held on 12/06/2004, aged 81.

Taking its metaphorical potential to express the experience of the arrival of immigrants to Brazil in the first decades of the 20th century, we can infer latent meanings in this narrative voiced in an informal tone. Thus, it is possible, for example, to correlate the adjective "strict" that characterizes the aunt's personality – accentuated in the harshness of her words, addressed to a relative whose fragility is summarized in his "13 years" – with the relentless circumstances faced by those who disembarked in strange lands without any protection or privileges. A sense of generosity, however, is soon intertwined in the story through the introduction of a character who, combining advanced age and a feeling of piety, inserts the perspective of welcome and protection in the narrated migratory experience, referring it to one of the commonplaces of our culture: hospitality.

The account also suggests a significant contrast between foreign entrepreneurship, metaphorized in the Italian family farm and the English railroad "empire," and the hard and precocious work of the Portuguese immigrant, whose workforce served both the coffee plantation and the operation of the railway line, activities that left indelible marks on the economy, culture, and history of that region.

Always organized chronologically, Dona Olívia's account goes on to describe scenarios and narrate events in "*realis* mode, i.e., presenting facts as if they had actually occurred" (Labov, 1997 as quoted in Ferreira Netto, 2008, p. 42):

> The railroad had everything you sought; nothing was missing. Once, a lad went to cross the line in front of my house, and as there was a lot of fog there because there was a replica of London, there was that fog rising from the ground. It doesn't come from above but rises from the ground, that fog goes up, and you can't see from here to there. The lad went to cross the line; he had even stayed up until nine o'clock at night playing cards with my father, who was our distraction because there was no television, no radio, nothing, so they went to our house, my mother would make some coffee, some cakes, and they would play cards. When he left, he was crossing the line, a train came, took him, and cut his leg. I saw my mother; I was this size; I saw my mother pick him up and lift him off the line with his leg dangling. My mother told my father to tear a sheet into strips, and my mother tied him up so he wouldn't bleed to death. My father ran to the landing and called; the Englishman had already sent a special car and took him to Santos. He lost his leg, but didn't lose his life. He died of old age.[6]

[6] Interview by Olívia Rodrigues Cardoso, held on 12/06/2004.

Once again, Dona Olívia uses expressive language resources to build her narrative – starting with the hyperbolic dimension she attributes to the railroad. In her memory expression, the railroad was nothing less than the world, a macrocosm, a totality where "nothing was missing",and capable of sheltering "everything" that was "looked for" and fit in life. In the context of the narrator's family life story, her formulation synthesizes the existential conditions of those immigrants and their descendants, their perspectives – or lack thereof. The same railroad used to transport and provide mobility also closes horizons and circumscribes the destinies of those whose lives are tied to it.

The story that follows this first nocturnal image of everyday life in childhood articulates language in such a way as to reproduce a narrative tradition (whose origin is the Homeric epic) in which the description of the environment announces the "climate" in which the plot will unfold. The fog that "raises from the ground" foreshadows a disastrous event (an image embedded

in the imagination by literary composition and cinematographic fiction), which will break through the calm of the night in which the hours of rest allow "the distraction of people" with playing cards, a kind of predecessor of radio and TV in the home recess, in which the kindness of cookies and fresh coffee reiterates the sense of welcome. Outside, in the replica of a London setting, danger lurks who crosses the tracks, thus exposing oneself to the world that language (con)fuses with the railroad.

The drama of the story then takes on the narrative speed of a thriller, thanks to the use of overlapping images: the train, the severed leg, the mother's vision, and the short stature of the narrator in contrast to the tragic scenario described, the run over carried in his lap, his leg dangling, the torn sheets to stop the blood, her father running to the phone, the hasty request for help, the rescue. The end of the story assumes a resigned tone, suggests a moral, a lesson that has the gift of impregnating the whole sense of that story and that life: the railroad that subtracts something as valuable as a leg – the human member of locomotion, the one that enables us to displacement and the autonomy of transit –, on the other hand, it weaves ties that guarantee the survival of those who live along its length, destined for longevity, thanks to the solidarity that permeates (in) ordinary life. A permanent source of threat and safety, deprivation and fortune, this is the world, the railroad, childhood life in an immigrant family turned into a language in Dona Olívia's narrative.

Not a few thinkers have pointed out that our existential conditions, the world as we know it, coincide with our expressive horizons. "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world", summarized Ludwig Wittgenstein (1994, p. 111). The reality of things is the meaning we give them and find them in and through language. There is no "outside"; we only exist – we are, and we are in the world – in the relationship we establish with language and with the world through it, as expressed by Martin Heidegger (1997, p. 126):

> Man's being is founded on language, but this actually occurs only in dialogue. Dialogue, however, is not just a way in which language happens. Rather, language is essential only as dialogue. What we normally mean by "language," namely a stock of words and rules for combining them, is just the outer appearance of language. […] Dialogue and its unity support our existence.

By this understanding, one cannot conceive of any experience outside the horizon of language and, evidently, of communication. This is also what Bakhtin (1987) states, who attributes an ontological value to dialogism. In this regard, we should also turn to Gianni Vattimo (2019, p. 27): "Experience,

every kind of experience, is possible because 'we are a dialogue' (Hölderlin) because we inherit a natural language, which constitutes our pre-understanding of the world". In Fernando Pessoa (1986, p. 358), we find another expressive composition in this sense: "My homeland is the Portuguese language", since "the word is complete seen and heard" and "the gala Greco-Roman transliteration dresses me in her true royal mantle, for which she is lady and queen", writes the poet, weaving the indelible links between a pre-understanding of the world, culturally and historically conditioned, and the inheritance we receive, streamline and bequeath through language. If we want, then, to have access to Dona Olívia's world, particularly the relationships she establishes with her childhood memories, it is with her narrative that we must dialogue.

> She [the aunt] had the little girl already grown up, who is now 69 years old, and when she had the boy, my mother was her midwife. My grandmother made me stay outside; it was a magnificent moonlight. The moonlight back in the day looked like silver. You would draw on the ground, and I would draw hopscotch on the ground to jump; it was a game they had, we would draw with chalk, and the moon would lighten, and the stars would appear. There were Three Maries, Southern Cross, which looked like a cross in the sky. Now you don't see it anymore, not even a star. You only see it when you smack it in the head. But every night, it was that beautiful moonlight. My grandmother made me sit outside so as not to hear my aunt scream because she screamed a lot, suffered a lot to have this child, and my mother was her midwife.

Once again, the narrator uses a recurrent image in our tradition to enhance the senses of her story. Everything takes place in the light of silvery moonlight, which covers the "old days" with an opulent glow, disappearing in the present. On those childhood nights, the sky holds the brightness of the stars, which today can only be experienced as a figurative image of the pain perceived by those who hit their head. In this account, the outside amusingly welcomes those who have not yet lived long enough to approach the pain inherent in life. The suffering of giving birth, intuited by the perception of the intensity of the screams, is kept inside, which contrasts with an "outside," where the alibi of young age consents to scratching the floor with chalk, jumping hopscotch and surrendering to the (re)cognition of the luminous points that inhabit the sky. Another time whose distance is perceived in the lapse of life that aged the cousin, "a girl [then] already grown up, who is now 69 years old."

IMAGES OF LIFE, PLOTS OF IMAGINATION

A possible analogy with the dimensions of fiction in the composition of photography (Kossoy, 1999) leads us to reflect on the "plots of reality and imagination" that we build, any one of us, when we tell our life story, because in this act we are, like a photographer, constructing images so that our attentive listener can "see" our past and our history.

> There [in Paranapiacaba], the houses had no walls, and the front was open. One day, she [the neighbor] had a pigpen in the woods with about 30 little pigs. I went there; it was close to the river. I went there to catch fish, saw the little pigs, and then came up with [the plan]. She said it was me, she said it unfairly [that I was the one who took her wraps], and now she's going to speak fairly. I went there and opened the gate, and the little pigs came out. They went deep into the bush and crossed the river to the other side. The woman went crazy and became a beast.

The term *image*, which for Kossoy (1999) is intended for photography, in our case, alludes to the narrative that people build when telling their life stories. In the specific, but not exclusive, performative forms of oral reporting, the mental images communicated through spoken language are equivalent to means of communication. Lucia Santaella and Winfried Nöth (2001, p. 15) also state that "there are no images as visual representations that have not arisen in the minds of those who produced them, just as there are no mental images that do not have some origin in the concrete world of visual objects".

In this sense, we endorse the idea that the mental images constructed in the oral narrative are constituted as media that fulfill the functions of communication, expression, and even information. "Open front," "come up," "go crazy," and "become a beast" are figures of speech that Olívia uses so that her listener can imagine the context and the state of anger the neighbor got into. With language resources, she builds images. With such mental images, represented through metaphors, she gives senses, expresses, and communicates the lived experience. In this perspective, oral reports can be considered as media of individual and collective memory[7].

Like Lucia Santaella and Winfried Nöth, Stuart Hall (2016, p. 20) also theorizes about the senses we attribute to individuals, objects, and events since they do not have a single, fixed, and unalterable meaning. For him, the meanings we attribute to words and things depend on how we integrate them into our daily practices, i.e., on how we configure them through culture, which allows us to understand the fundamental role of the symbolic domain:

[7] Maurice Halbwachs (1990) is one of the leading and first authors who thought about individual memory in its relationship with collective memory in the sense of a set of memories constructed from one or several social groups. His work *On Collective Memory*, published posthumously in 1950, although criticized in different aspects, is cited and recognized even today.

> (…) we make sense of things by the way we represent them – the words we use to refer to them, the stories we tell about them, the images we create of them, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, in short, the values we embed in them (Hall, 2016, p. 21).

While Lucia Santaella, Winfried Nöth, and Stuart Hall theorize about the representation of things through images, Ferreira Netto (2008, p. 52) reflects on the process that involves memory and language: "the idea that memory is a cognitive phenomenon dependent on its exteriorization in the form of any of the available languages raises the need for a vehicle for this […], the language itself is the one that best facilitates its exteriorization." However, it should be remembered that there is no mental content before a semiotic realization. Memory is not expressed in language; language is the materiality in which memories gain existence and form. In this sense, we understand the dialogic-communicative character of memory and know oral narrative as an enunciative medium that uses its own language.

For Boris Kossoy (1999, p. 14), the character of the representation is inherent to the image, and therefore it "contains in itself realities and fictions". When we reflect on archives, memories, and historical reconstitution, we find in the life story narrative, as in photography, the same "ideological plots" to which Kossoy refers. Similarly, photographs are stories told through images, like oral narratives of life stories are images said through words. Both are part of the human ways of constructing realities and, in this way, of constituting a world according to an "ambiguous and definitive condition of document/representation".

Following Kossoy's thinking (1999, p. 15), we can think about the ambiguity between reality and imagination present in documents that refer to memory, such as photographs and narratives of people's memories, i.e., oral reports of memory. We can also reflect on the "processes of creation of realities".

Whoever tells us a story, implicitly or explicitly, tells us: "Look, it's all true; I was there… I saw it…" Or else: "I witnessed it, I was personally there, nobody told me". There is revealed the intention of attributing to oneself the condition of the bearer of truth to the witness of the story. In the testimonial account or the life story narrative, narrators must demonstrate "some basic level of respect for the truth of their lives" (Eakin, 2019, p. 35), which, in our approach, means consonance with the predominant language in the world. When the narrative is autobiographical, i.e., reported by an active character in the story, by a protagonist narrator, it is considered valid and, therefore, a report of reality, insofar as it expresses what was experienced in a communicative language and, therefore, that's right, believable, even if it is something surprising

or frightening. This is what Kossoy calls the "reality creation process", valid for constructing photographic images and mental images arising from oral reports or testimonies. However, in this process of narrative structure, the narrator uses fictional elements (not necessarily lying), which allows us to understand the life story as an "imaginative reconstruction" (Eakin, 2019, p. 36). In other words, the individual can only remember and narrate his experiences when he triggers the "mnemonic imagination" (Keightley & Pickering, 2012).

For Kossoy (1999, p. 22), historical information sources cannot be considered "faithful mirrors of facts." They are documents that carry ambiguities, carry meanings that may be explicit or omitted. However

> its informative potential can be achieved to the extent that these fragments are contextualized in the historical plot and in its multiple developments (social, political, economic, religious, artistic, cultural, in short) that circumscribed the act of taking in time and space from the registry.

The narrator produces the image that they want their listener to apprehend, constructed by their oral testimony, based on a determined subject, creating a representation that results from their "creation/construction process" from their point of view, i.e., their way of being in the world, and also from the point of view of the relationship they establish with their real or imagined interlocutors. This is done based on their cultural repertoire, worldview, senses of life and social life, filters and ideological position, and interaction contexts. This narrative becomes a document representing this subject's experiences (Kossoy, 1999, p. 30), whether for photographic images or the mental images constructed in the descriptions of oral reports. Stuart Hall (2016, p. 21-22) calls the "cultural circuit" the process through which different individuals attribute similar senses to varied cultural objects as long as they are integrated into everyday practices and rituals. For him, examples range from the use of "a pile of bricks with mortar" to mean "house" to the ingenuity with which "we weave narratives, plots – and fantasies – around them […]".

If we return, then, to Dona Olívia's narrative, we will understand that the story about the railroad accident is the representation she makes of her childhood memories: a girl who was born and raised in a railway village, whose father worked in the railroad since he was 17 years old. Her mother was a midwife in the village. Indeed, countless accidents occurred in Paranapiacaba, directly or indirectly related to the railroad. Numerous people were cared for by her mother, who, as a midwife, practiced care and assistance to people. However, her story gains the contours that her experience in the world gives her memory of the events, such as the details of

the torn sheet tied in strips on the bloodied leg and the fact that the young man died of old age. The accident occurred on a foggy night after a fun game of cards. These metaphorical elements constitute what we can call imagination, which is experienced as "real" in her memory since they express feelings and senses associated with her experience. These elements are composed as images formulated in the narrative structures of the interviewee: the characters (among them, the narrator herself), the plot (or theme), the space (or environment), and, finally, time, as conceived by Paul Ricoeur (2010), as we will see later.

Theorists in the field of literature also reflect on the characteristics of the narrative that give it efficiency, i.e., success with the public. For Afrânio Coutinho (1976, p. 44), suspense is essential since the story "does not cause the effect instantly, but through a progressive revelation of its parts." By selecting the sequence of facts, revealing or omitting information to hold the interlocutor's attention, the narrator seeks to reach the climax to end with the sanction, i.e., with the confirmation or validation of the consequences, most often manifested in the last sentence.

Let's see how this occurs in Dona Olívia's narrative: the story's beginning points to her family's emigration from Portugal to Brazil: "My father came from Portugal when he was 13, with a very strict aunt." Next, we have information that her father started working on the railroad four years later since it "[…] had everything you sought and nothing was missing". The suspense begins to be built in the following statement, with a more detailed description of the weather conditions where the train station was located: "Once a lad went to cross the line in front of my house […] that fog goes up, and you can't see from here to there." The climax happens immediately afterward, with the running over of his father's worker friend. At this point in the narrative, the tension gradually increases: the lad leaves Dona Olívia's father's house, crosses the line, and the train "comes" and finally "takes" him and cuts his leg. Such descriptions, although brief, already allow us to imagine the whole environment, the cause, and the consequence of the dramatic accident, which could have been fatal.

The sanction appeases: "He lost his leg but didn't lose his life. He died of old age." The narrative continues with other descriptions of the environment as if to announce an episode that has yet to be revealed. Again it is the night that is remembered: "My grandmother made me stay outside; it was a magnificent moonlight. The moonlight back in the day looked like silver. You would draw [the hopscotch on the ground] with chalk, and the moon would lighten, and the stars would appear. There were Three Maries, Southern Cross, which looked like a cross in the sky." It is not by chance that the night is remembered as a

continuation of the account about the accident that tore the leg off of his father's colleague. However, Dona Olívia's story presents two distinct descriptions of the nights in Paranapiacaba at that time: either it resembles London due to its intense fog, or it is the opposite, thanks to the clear sky and the characteristic constellations of the Southern Hemisphere, visible to the naked eye.

How much time elapsed between these two distinct memories of Dona Olívia? What is the time interval between the narration of her life story narrated in 2004, when she was 81 years old, and her childhood, when she witnessed the events transcribed above? Paul Ricoeur (2010, p. 173) calls "articulation of the experience of time" the existing distinction between "the time it takes to narrate and the time of things narrated." If Dona Olívia told this story in 2004, at 81, about her childhood, we calculate that the time of the narrated things is in the transition from the 1920s to the 1930s if we consider that she could have been around ten years old when she witnessed them.

Taking 70 years of separation between the past and the present, perhaps we can understand the meaning of the "time it takes to narrate" compared to the "time of things narrated." And, then, we ask ourselves how much experience accumulated in this time interval could have covered the narrative expression of this memory of what we call "imagination"? It must be considered that past experience is not stored in a repository waiting to be retrieved. The past is always in process, resulting from countless re-elaborations and reinterpretations produced at different moments in an individual's life. It is like the image of the dead father mentioned by Halbwachs (1990), which constantly changes as the son grows older and brings him closer to the place previously occupied by the father.

"In oral history, there is no 'lie' in the moral sense of the term. Every lie stems from intentions [conscious or not] to be understood" (Almeida et al., 2007, p. 107). In our analysis, we did not use the idea of lying. We prefer to discuss truth as a metaphor and imagination as a narrative expression. Thus, mental images are fictional resources typical of language: narratives are successions of images constructed by the narrator to dialogue with his "imaginative and interested" interlocutor and make himself understood.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The imaginative character in life story narratives, recorded by the Oral History method, does not delegitimize their importance as sources of scientific research. We academics should consider the fabrics that constitute elaborating the past through memory. Its sense lies in the sharing of horizons of meanings

and feelings. Storytellers, understood here as authors, establish an exchange of images with their interlocutors since every enunciation is dialogical and always produces senses, even if, instead of words, there are silences.

Memory can be the needle that aligns the images to the narrative while we weave our representations of the time we live, our experiences, our world, and ourselves. The language game, in its dialogical essence (Heidegger, 1997), engenders the metaphorical potential of the meanings with which we researchers will operate. If we want to know or recognize what truth is, we must remember that it rests on an illusion perpetually supported by oblivion. Ultimately, imagination stalks all testimonies and all History; after all, everything we understand by truth is precisely the metaphor that hides the fictional nature of the hierarchy of values (Nietzsche, 2008) established between everyday colloquial speech and the marked word of science.

Based on this understanding, the fact that the scientific environment suspects the value and worth of oral narratives stems from what our tradition legitimized as science and its "superior" form of knowledge. To know, in a sense bequeathed by Western language since Plato, is to make the unknown known, placing what would otherwise remain ignored within preconceived conceptual perimeters. For science, eager to categorize, standardize, and regulate the world, to know is to endow with reason, imprint rationality, and translate into concepts supported by a paradigm that appears disordered in existence. Science acts by "controlling," so to speak, our understanding of the world with its hierarchical, simplifying, and unifying language.

We understand, however, that to know is to be open to the plurality of existence; it is to launch oneself into the potential of the most different situations of communication and exchange of experiences, valuing the differences, the individualities, and the insolubilities of life. Only in the diversity of perspectives and dialogic interactions – when senses are shared, negotiated, and disputed – can we know and understand the world's multiple dynamics of functioning and transformation over time.

Our culture's preponderance of positivist scientific language still disqualifies the performative meaning of orally narrated life stories. However, the knowledge intended by science must also include questioning the authoritarian nature of culture and tradition. Fortunately, in the words of Vattimo (2019, p. 37), "the historical horizons in which the experience of truth is placed are never closed". This is where possibilities open up for a methodology, also endorsed by Communication studies, such as Oral History, whose value lies in its bet on the creative interpretation of experiences rather than on the accuracy of the description of facts. M

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Article received on May 3 and approved on September 20, 2022.