

“If”, by Rudyard Kipling - an intermedial production,

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Abstract: This paper aims to build a theoretical support in intermediality studies to a doc-poetry creation on the poem If by Rudyard Kipling. Despite of being short, If is a poem that offers multiple interpretations because it suggests cycles and growth, it stimulates the creation of images. This poem selection went through our perception of the central presence of the embodiment, and therefore it is quite translatable into body and image to create a new media. Its interpretation by the language of doc-poetry becomes a mean of establishing new creative ways of interpreting the poem. As a transcreation process, the choreography's composition procedures have considered the original's poem structure, and also the body's perception. The creative ability of source text transformation into a different media can expand its interpretative possibilities. In this case, cinema, dance/body and poetry were used as media for creating a new artistic expression, which we not permanently term doc-poetry. The choreographic body and a mix of technicalities reveal a potentiality to express beyond the speeches. When crossing theory and practice it is possible to think and test the body in other media and also as a new media itself. Therefore, working the body and the film as artistic and interpretative possibilities of written text is a way of seeing new potentials when reading. Therefore, the research challenge was to work the poem If by the bias of embodiment, where the choreography turns theory, the body, a new media, while dance and cinema, a way of reading poetry.

Keywords: Doc-poetry, intermediality, If, Rudyard Kipling, videodance.

Introduction

This paper is a result of research that started in 2013 while the two authors of this paper wanted not only to create an artistic work that would merge our areas of interest – literature, cinema and dance - but also consider

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the type of knowledge they can bring forth together. This paper has come from an earlier and simpler version written in Portuguese for a Cinema Seminar in 2014³ that needed be revisited in order to deepen the concepts and review ideas. It is intended to contribute to researchers and enthusiasts who are interested in intermediality production, by showing our afterthought about the process and results of creating an intermediality art product which later was coined by us at the time as *doc-poetry*⁴.

The final product expectation was uniting three areas of art: dance, cinema and literature in one, where all of them would be mixed and dependent. Selecting a poem was the first step in accomplishing the idea of filming a danced poem. *If* by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was chosen as for both of us the body was the poem's most significant element⁵.

The body was the trigger in our attempt of creating a new art product where its strength, perception and consciousness would be exposed in our image result due to the poem's transformation to the body's translation of the action.

Although *If*'s composition elements were studied and experienced *in* the body, Kipling's concerns on interpretation have not been the main focus in this translation. Instead, our own perceptions and interpretations from *If* were explored by the body in order to transform it into another product that could empower the poem's understanding by the body and the image. Since one of us has the role as a dancer and the other as a film producer, the second step was to divide this work in two coexisting parts: a dance composition and film production. Consequently, this reading result contains two processes as well, studying and planning a dance work while writing the script and directing the video.

³ The text was presented at the National Seminar *Cinema em Perspectiva 2014* entitled *Produção de doc-poesia: If, de Rudyard Kipling*.

⁴ This term is being reviewed because it refers much to the documentary and so can cause some erroneous interpretations. But we are still in the process of reviewing this nomenclature, so in this article we continue using the term *doc-poetry*.

⁵ Our *doc-poetry* production (an intermediality art piece) can be seen at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XZ1hpwhe7k&list=UU6J8vg2i>>.

The next sections of the text are aimed at discussing our reading and perception of Rudyard Kipling's poem, followed by considering the intermediality approach that assisted us in understanding the process and result of the cinema and dance composition.

Towards a transcreation: from our reading and perception of If to a new media

It is known that every piece of art has its specificities that present themselves in a communicative space with different performative categories - oral, written or even physical. Umberto Eco⁶ claims that many literary works invite us to a free interpretation since they suggest many reading layers and paths, placing readers or spectators front row in the ambiguity of the life and language presented in the literature. In Roland Barthes'⁷ words "inter-text is: the impossibility of living outside the infinite text...the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life". Therefore, restricting possibilities of an art interpretation and reading form to the study of specificity is subtracting their own possibility of reading.

The poetry language is a source of experiences for its audience. Our poetry understanding is that although poetry presents structuring elements that sometimes are very specific, but also very broad in possibilities while deeply connected to its context.

According to Nóbrega⁸ the wish for the absolute and for not renounce anything is the essence of poetry For this reason, translating a poem is definitely a challenging task because the text, the context and everything that is parallel to it needs to be considered. Haroldo de Campos⁹ studied and theorized the translating poetry process. In his approach the poetic translation makes visible what is hidden in the original as a reinvention process through languages, time

⁶ 1995.

⁷ 1976, P. 36.

⁸ NOBREGA, 2006, P. 253.

⁹ Reading Suggestion: *Transcriação*. Campos, H.

and space. He then coins the process of translating a poem as *transcreation* (*transcrição*).

Inspired by Campos' transcreation studies, we have thought the process of translating a poem is a possibility of expanding our understanding of it, since its formal characteristics are retraced in a new version of it.

Claus Clüver in "Interart Studies: concepts, themes and objectives" (1997) reveals the paradigm of treating the text as an absolute has been becoming distant from current artistic studies. The poem's self-sufficiency has reached unsustainability, as it excludes all intertextuality concerns from its context. "There is a greater concern with the reception of the text and the interpretive community than with the text itself"¹⁰.

In order to experience Rudyard Kipling's *If* we have worked with the body and the video as ways to present another reading key that can be considered as a translation, since it is characterized by the representation of verbal signs in nonverbal language¹¹. The outcome of the inspired artistic production maintains relations with the initial text¹².

Some people may say that when they read a poem they visualise it, and in some ways it is what happens, but only as a non-mandatory part of the process. For instance, when reading this poem by Kipling the heart and other body parts are clearly represented during the reading process, stimulating images.

Due to the fact that "perception is in part constituted by our possession and exercise of bodily skill"¹³, one's ability to picture things such as the head and a nerve while reading *If* depends on this person's sensory knowledge, for instance, sight. Although sight plays an important role in most humans' sensory perception, it is not the main one.

¹⁰ CLÜVER, 1997, P.40.

¹¹ JAKOBSON, 1999.

¹² PLAZA, 2003.

¹³ NÖE, 2004, P. 25.

In fact, Nöe also claims “an active approach to perception raises a more significant concern [...] than reducing our perception to a matter of generating internal representations of the visual world”¹⁴.

Taking into account the proposition that a human’s action and perception are tightly connected, *If* by Rudyard Kipling is a work inspired by sensory perception. This stanza exemplifies the body’s manifestation:

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’
(Kipling, 1943)

It is possible to notice Kipling’s visual appeal of the body. Its linguistic and stylistic choices acknowledge the world’s understanding as something related to the body’s perception. This has led us to experiment a reading that would not necessarily grasp the persona’s environmental perception, but use it as a trigger to experience it by ourselves.

As stated by the enactive approach to perception, perceiving is understanding one’s sensation. Thereby, exploring a poem’s understanding can take forms that stimulate exploration through perception.

In addition to the enactive approach to perception, we have been encouraged by Clüver and Campos’ standpoint to create a new art product that would maintain the poem’s tone, intent, style and context seeking to transcend the art boundaries.

Enlightened by the senses, we have proposed a reading (and consequently a new product) to experience the body and its physicality, based on our sensory perception and reaction to it. In this poem’s reading, we have tried to enhance the senses by merging two strategies/means from other arts: Cinema to portray sight, and dance as the tactile (and everything that is related to the flesh) experimentation, reading through another media ensues subversions of the texts.

¹⁴ NÖE, 2004, P. 22.

It is a kind of independent creation where “omissions and persistence, transformations and expansions”¹⁵ from the source-text are observed, and yet, in some cases, none of this prevents the perception of proximity between the old and the new text. The source text possibility of transformation to another media enables its expansion of the interpretive possibility. It implies, as well, that the understanding of body perception is a knowledgeable field that must be explored.

As we hope our audience will see in our version of *If*, there are two different conceptions merged in one work: a) the poem as a background - the evocation of Kipling’s poem is achieved by means of subjective associations that can (or cannot) be provoked in the viewer’s mind as a type of representation; b) the poem as an *embodiment* – in which the interplay between the brain, body and world are overlapping.

Not only the articulation of two different conceptions, but also two artistic materialisations/manifestations characterise this attempt of creating a new *If* as a piece that is connected to the intermediality approach.

The recognition of the intermediality concept, borrowed from the German term in this field of research, has been growing worldwide. These term conceptions pursued by different disciplines such as literary studies, media and semiotic studies, film studies and art history, pose some difficulties because of its multiplicity. Hence the conception of intermediality has divergent practical and heuristic values and objectives.

Rajewski explains in “Intermediality, Intertextuality and remediation¹⁶” that Intermediality from its beginnings has served as an umbrella-term, and its “proliferation of heterogeneous conceptions and heterogeneous ways in which the term is used may be rewarding, but it is also confusing, leading not infrequently to vagueness and misunderstandings”.

¹⁵ CLÜVER, 1997, p. 45.

¹⁶ RAJEWSKI, 2006, p. 45.

Although researchers have begun to formally specify their particular conception of intermediality, it is unlikely that a single and uniform theory that applies to the entire research community would arise from these conceptions. Clüver in “Inter textus/ inter artes / inter media”¹⁷ discusses the concept of media and speaks about the difficulties and advantages of conceiving interart studies as intermedial studies. It is not an aim here to clarify the ambiguities that the term may carry. Instead, some denominations are presented briefly here so that our creative and theoretical experiment of translating *If* through a final product that ties body and image reading of the original poem. Therefore, we do not wish to create a random mix of media either.

Our *If* production is an intermediality process because it applies to every item explained by Helbig¹⁸ cited by Clüver because:

- a) There are relations between media (cinema, body and poetry);
- b) There is an intersemiotic transposition, which is a transposition from one media to another (poem to body);
- c) There is a fusion of media (body and cinema)

Rajewski¹⁹ also proposes three similar subcategories. The first is the sense of medial transposition where there is an intermedial transformation process in which a media product comes into being. In particular, the original *If* is the “source” of the newly formed media product, which we call/term *doc-poetry*.

It also relates to Rajewski’s second term conception in which intermediality is a communicative-semiotic concept based on phenomena of media combination. Dance and images are combined through the body and video media.

It is not yet clear how mutual are dance and video in our piece, assessing our own production is delicate since wishes and results do not always relate.

¹⁷ 2006.

¹⁸ CLÜVER, 2006, p. 24.

¹⁹ RAJEWSKI, 2006, p. 51.

This is an attempt of revealing an afterthought about our artistic praxis and product which was considered under transcreation, embodiment and intermedial concepts

Given the above, the specificities of intermedial references and concepts has made us as artists combine two completely different processes in order to comprehend Kipling's piece of work. The considerations and concepts included in these distinct processes are explained in the next two sections.

Dance Perspective

The choreographic body and new technicalities reveal a potential to express discourse beyond what can be said. When crossing theory and practice it is possible to think and test the body. Today theory and practice are established making an inset between languages, confusing references and borders. Contemporary studies consider the body as something permeable that performs an exchange with the environment, and the body can be considered a kind of language.

If guided on the assumption that symbols are representations of reality (readers' associations) and that art transcends and recreates a reality, it is interesting to maintain certain gaps to give room for interpretive poem possibilities. Focusing on the interpretation of the poem in a production environment would restrict its reading to a specific audience.

For this, dancing this poem is not to limit it to a single interpretation or reduce it to the imaginary body in the poem. As explained previously, human knowledge also implies body perception. Eastern cultures have never seemed to forget the mind-body connection when producing knowledge.

The body is a montage of images, not the means of dance theatre, nor an instrument in which the movement is expressed. In fact, in this study, we use Katz and Greiner "*corpomídia*" (*mediabody*²⁰) theory that the body is a media itself, an arrangement of communication and cognition, reinforcing the concept

²⁰ GREINER; KATZ. .2005 – this term and concept is widely used in Brazilian dance and body studies.

of language as a means of action. Greiner²¹ states the “*corpomídia*” theory that the body itself is a subject, it is not suspended nor just a possession of a subject. It is an inseparable part of the environment. Hence, the ultimate goal is to understand the body as an activator of mediation between the elements that are categorically separated.

Moreover, Setenta²² claims that the exercise to recognise, to select, and even to omit information is a common procedure for both body or text. Taking this into account, body is the means in which a poem could be translated to. Artistic experiments have developed hybrids that uses a range possibilities for two representative forms of communication and expressive material, building thoughts and reflections, speeches and narratives.

Cinema Perspective: Directing the Image

Dance as artistic expression is three-dimensional that takes place in space, shaped or not through rhythmic movements. It is an ephemeral and singular expression: each presentation will never be repeated identically, even when the choreography is very fixed and dancers proficient.

Dance takes place through and in the body; it leaves traces in memory as feeling, as experimentation or as image. Dance has been building interfaces with other arts, environments and somatic techniques and conquering its place and recognition in the academy.

Artists from different areas have been involved in several manners of experiencing the body and retrieving its effectiveness. The video has already become a support that contributed decisively to a new generation of choreographers who used the body to try new written in conjunctions with technological mediation, opening the possibility for interdisciplinary arts.

One of the greatest inspiration for *videodance* studies was the director Maya Deren (1917-1961) whose film work’s central themes were dreams, rhythm, ritual, identity.

²¹ 2005.

²² SETENTA, 2008.

Her first film, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), made way for the avant-garde American films of the 40s and 50s and would be recognized as an essential framework of experimental cinema. Maya Deren also held other innovative works in 16mm, *At Land* (1944) and *Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945). Her work begin to emerge at the time next to underground cinema and experimental cinema. *A Study In Choreography For Camera* (1945)²³ is an example of a cautiously constructed exploration choreography since it is impeccably synched as the dancer appears and returns.

A new artistic style that has emerged from this experimentation of different process and material is *videodance*. In the 1970's, video started to speculate a new body construction with its peculiarities. Videodance, then, goes through a process of building new signs. The choreographer Merce Cunningham²⁴ and the filmmaker Charles Atlas produced *Westbeth* in 1974, one of the first videodance productions.

The *videodance* denies and exposes the real - the camera's gaze becomes a new body organization. It works as it is a kind of eye extension, because it lets the audience see more, while it simultaneously restricts to the images and movements that the camera records.

Videodance raises concerns and advertises possibilities and it has contributed to dancers and choreographers for decades worldwide. In Brazil today, contemporary dance production is a variety of many types of dances and influences, then creating a piece with video and dance is definitely not a novelty.

While directing the video, the idea was to make a step-by-step cinematography, directing screenplay, art and photography, sound editing, and other aspects. As can be seen at the beginning of *If*, the conception of the screenplay was to be as a voice over narrating the poem. The voice over is a sound technique where a voice is used to narrate. It is common technique used not only in film, but also in radio, television or other forms of production.

²³ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnUEr_gNzwk>.

²⁴ Some of his film and media productions are available at: <<http://www.mercecunningham.org/film-media/media-list/>>.

Accordingly, the idea was not to explain information, but to narrate it, to narrate the poem. Thus, a character was built that would incorporate the poem in the body and head of the dancer. This character is a female dancer who possesses the poem in her body and expresses herself through dance, via body expression. A reading tool is that the dance is in the head of the dancer while the poem is entirely canvassed by her body. Therefore, the script makes you think about the body simultaneously as you watch the production of the body constituting a main part of the image composition. Therefore, the choice included a raw costume, little clothing and few colours in the image to bring together and place a central attention to the body for the entire duration of the piece. .

Another aspect is that the largest inspiration to create the image was to use *videodance* as a spark to formulate another product, while using the translation process in the dance composition. The final product would not only be a *videodance*, but something where all three media – dance, cinema and poetry - would be granted the same importance as a new product. The dialogue between the creations of the choreography, directing and photography were constant because the initial proposal was to create a joint art.

Owing to body our biggest inspiration, the camera view develops a new body organisation because it works as an eye-extension as it allows the audience seeing more details it restricts the body's to the filming direction. It is undeniable that our media production is a type of *videodance*. However, our piece has its own specific characteristics which made us define it as *doc-poetry*. The new product would not arise only from the junction of three media, but also from the junction of artists.

Doc-poetry

Doc-poetry is how we term, for now, our production that seeks to unite all three areas - dance, film and literature -, but we do not know whether this nomenclature can be maintained, since it evokes the idea of a documentary which has not been intended. Therefore it still needs to be discussed and brainstormed. The initial motivation for the conception of the video was that the

image and the body would come together so that the most striking aspects of the poem could be exploited by the bias of other arts.

The purpose for using this term was inspired in the film theorist Bill Nichols. He classifies the types of documentary into 6 categories: a) the *performative mode*, where the filmmaker is also a participant/a character; b) the *reflexive mode*, which shows the constructed nature of documentary, giving us not necessarily *the truth*, but a possibility, a director's point of view; c) the *participatory mode*, that has a direct engagement between subjects and filmmaker, in this one the filmmaker becomes part of the events that are recorded; d) the *observational mode*, in which the filmmaker is a neutral observer that attempts to capture the objective reality; e) the *expository mode*, that emphasizes the use of a narrator and also uses interviews, it is most associated with television programs; f) the *poetic mode*, there is a wish to display a subjective artistic expression, emphasising visual associations and interpretations.

The *poetic mode* is the one that interested us for our production. This kind of film does not only communicate information or arguments, but, above all, feelings or impressions towards a subject. It builds a tone or a mood more than explains or describes actions; it represents the artist's imagination world.

The poetic mode is particularly skilled in enabling alternative forms of knowledge to transfer information directly, proceed to an argument or specific viewpoint or present proposals on problems that need solution. This mode emphasizes more the mood, tone and affection than knowledge statements or persuasive actions. (Nichols, 2001: 138)²⁵

Hence, our production was coined *doc-poetry* since it aims to explore subjective views from the authors and also spectators, as a creating possibility of a new reading tool in written poems interpretation.

The combination of narration rhythm, movement and editing seeks to awaken an effect on the spectator. In addition, the *mise-en-scène*, the narrative

²⁵ Although Nichols' text is originally written in English, our source was a Portuguese edition, that is why this is a translation from the authors.

trajectory, the body movement, the camera frames and the ambient soundtrack invite a type of contemplative involvement to the spectator.

Despite the fact that people can easily remember book's adaptations to movies, there is also a broad range of procedures that are literary translations vented in video and dance. Throughout history there have been many types of choreography and dance based on literature. Some literary translations to dance (several types and procedures) were considered, as well as other dance and video works inspired or based on literature when thinking our own transposition.

As an attempt to demonstrate dance productions based on literature it is possible to list an enormous variety of them. As an example, it is possible to cast complete ballet as *Romeo and Juliet* (1940), dancing with Prokofiev music, in which every dancer is a character. Poems have always been an inspiration to ballet *Le Spectre de la rose* (1911) was a ballet production based on a Théophile Gautier poem, and performed by Nijinsky choreographed by Fokine.

Some current productions are very connected dance and literature, we chose some Brazilians ones to illustrate this connection. A very interesting one is by Rose Mara da Silva, inspired on a poem by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, the videodance *A flor e a Náusea*, based on homonymous poem. Maria Falkenbach and Daniela Aguiar, made their own dance *trascructions* of Gertrude Stein work.

It could have been conceived in the past and still conceived today, specifically (in the past) in classical ballet and early modern dance that choreographing was passing a message from the artists presented on the stage who were there merely as objects to portray the story. Hence, Dance and Theatre were deeply connected to a production of meaning. These was a common understanding when *Le Spectre de la rose* and *Romeo and Juliet* were produced, for instance.

Today, after Grotowski and Stanislawski, theatre and dance conceptions, and consequently the body, have changed. These changes have provoked the way dance and theatre deal with the text or other influences in the scene

composition today. Lehmann²⁶ explains that today in *postdramatic* theatre production, the text can be considered as part scenery or *landscape*²⁷ that does not reduce the *landscape* concept to a non-visual dominated practice, but sets the text as “an element, a real intrusion, and fictional cosmos reduction”.

Nowadays, when trying to merge text and the dance context, each work is unique not only for choreography, scenery and costumes, but for the different decisions that each dancer makes while exposed to the same source text. The body in this work is the media itself and therefore a new text.

In our *If*, it was decided that the project would not be only a translation of a poem to the language of dance, nor the language of the video. It was not intended either to make a videodance based on or inspired by a poem as many interesting masterpieces are done today.

The viewer can experience something unique in the video and in the dance that may extend in some way into their life or alter their previous thinking or conception. As explained earlier in this paper, the film would have subjective impressions, focusing on expressiveness and poetry, an expanded perception of the poem. In a sense, the later interpretation is an authorship of the viewer. The literary structure of the text is not discussed here not intentionally.

While *videodance* is a hybrid of two representative forms of communication, being the film and the dance, it was thought that the same principle would be used in the production of our *doc-poetry* in question. To this extent, this would show the body and the intellect in an integrated manner, as Spinoza's²⁸ key proposition notion that mental and physical (thought and extension) phenomena occur in parallel.

Our new product would use the possibilities of expressing literature, film and dance to build a new narrative that reflects the thoughts and issues of the poem. Reducing the filmic production to *videodance* would omit the word

²⁶ LEHMANN, 2007, P. 59.

²⁷ It refers to Gertrude Stein's notion of landscape, as Lemmann explains in page 59.

²⁸ Check Spinoza's *The Ethics*.

context and illuminate only two types of media: the body and the image. Therefore, the poem *If* has to highlight the words to be a part of this production, and to demonstrate this we chose the narrative format in voice over. Leading on from this, our *doc-poetry* also gave attention to another element, the sound.

Some Considerations

A poem's transcreation estimate the source text structural elements such as the number of verses, the repetition, the circularity effect the increasing pace in order to maintain meaning and effect. However, it was an even greater challenge to develop a piece where all its intra and extra textual elements become perceptible.

One important feature to be reconsidered is the term we coined our artist product: *doc-poetry*. We have noticed while discussing our work to other researchers and spectators that the term *doc-poetry* provokes them mistaken expectations. Most of them assume they will see a documentary instead of a type of *videoart*. For this reason, we have been considering other terms but we have not found a better one yet.

Despite our intent of making an intermediality product in which the three arts initially thought would inseparable, an afterthought about it made us realise we may not have accomplished our wish.

Based on our audience's comments about the *doc-poetry* reception (from conferences and video festivals) our assessment is that body/dance and cinema are truly mingled, but maybe we have not managed yet to make the three media inseparable since poetry might still seem to have a self-sufficient existence.

Because of that, it is possible to assert that our result was a *videodance* piece, because the junction of them became a hybrid. In case we decided to switch the poem narration to any other soundtrack, image and body would still be undoubtedly blended.

Conversely, the poem narration assumed a *Landscape* position in this *doc-poetry*, since it is not an accessory to the *videodance*, but something intrinsic. There is an unquestionable relation between body/dance and the

original poem. The body has successfully made a transposition of the selected poem. The transposition can be considered a transcreation since the inner and outer poem elements became part of this new piece.

The dancer/performer body carries the poem; it bridges the gap between poem and video. Accordingly to Pierce's Semiotics perspective, this body behaves as *index*²⁹ since it correlates with the poem, pointing to it. It is, then, a connection between old and new, between what the audience recognizes and what inner Kipling's original poem.

The *doc-poetry* is powerful for letting both the narration and the body's image tenacious in the piece. We believe that the body's sensory perception of the environment is visible and watching our documentary may indicate the audience one possible *If's* reading. Also, the gaps that our piece leaves are essential in poetry. When a poem becomes a closed meaning-definition thing, it not only misses the poem's allurements, but it also fails as poetry for missing its essence.

Through the senses, we wanted to turn a thought into a movement thought. We might not have merged the 3 media as we have wished to, but we managed to make the choreography become theory; the body takes the role of media and dance then tie dance, literature and video. This praxis encourages us to study new strategies and concepts to produce new and different doc-poetry and it might encourage other intermedial productions.

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²⁹ There are 3 kinds of sign- the *icon*, the *index* and the *symbol* – for the late 19th century philosopher on Semiotics Charles S. Peirce.

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