Mutation of the poem on the web

Lígia Dabul

Abstract

This article focuses on changes concerning the ways of creating poetry and what I will treat as *the body* — the form — of poems, which occur alongside a democratization of web-based poetry writing. Studying poetry and poets by means of what is shown on the Internet allows us to reach unusual realities, very different from printed poetry, based on original elements, with a new nature, so to speak, as well as access data about poetry that is being created right now. I would like to point out some ways in which poets and non-poets interact on the Internet, evaluating practices linked to poetry. I would also like to present some of the new configurations that creating poems have been appearing in that support, especially the ones concerning significant modifications on their body, and, as a consequence, on their image — their outline, colour, texture and visual ambience. Some ideas about how this mutation could be linked to more wide transformations will be presented.

1. A discussion of the production from poets and poetry in Portuguese on the Internet

I find in art, literature and many other spheres of social life an assumption of certain behaviours acquired from the web — a fact that is perhaps due to the new forms of expression and creative possibilities we can find online, as well as large numbers of new contacts and information. This work is a discussion of the production from poets and poetry in Portuguese on the Internet. I base my study on some works concerning the impact that new technologies have on artistic production, such as the work of Diana Domingues (2003: 15–30). I also analyse artistic creation as a social activity, as in Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam (2007: 1–24) and Lígia Dabul (2007: 56–67; 2014: 93–111), and on ritual aspects of artistic creation, as in Dabul and Pires (2009: 77–88).

Naturalizing a series of communication procedures and ways of sharing space on the Internet always seems to come along and to overlap with surprise towards innovations that are quickly presented to us and then assimilated. Poet and visual artist Laura Erber posted a protest some years ago on Facebook — overall not very explicit, probably not very common — about accepting the

forms of interaction that almost automatically come along when taking part in social networks:

> Laura Erber,
> Thursday, February 25, 2010 at 12:53
>
> Does anyone here managed to understand the idea of friendship on which Facebook is based on, I mean, the friendship that ties us within these justified margins (I still long for italic and verse break inclusions)? there are many ideas, of course, and each one has an inflexion of his or her own, but I wonder (yet without an answer) why this chain is somehow painful. I try to imagine the shape of that slutty friendship. tremendously, frighteningly vast and unlimited. pure monotony. boredom without spleen. what to do? say it's enough, rest one's hand on the delete key? But how can one define that filter? let it be. I never make it. Virtual life carries on its estrange course of aggregates. Wouldn't it be some kind of relief when here we come across good old piques, strifes, punches, verses d'escarnio & maldizer, HUMPFS and PAFFS and blocks. life signs? cheers. (Erber, 2010)

People who follow poetic productions that others make and share on the Internet possess a familiarity with all of the innovations and transformations that have been appearing in this field for more than twenty years. However, as in many other areas of social life, studying poetry and poets by what is seen on websites makes it possible to contact uncommon realities — as well as access data — based on original elements, with a new nature, so to speak. The Internet has the power of establishing realities that echo and create events beyond screens, technologies, languages and habits, forming a variety of experiences that researchers have not yet studied by asking questions and using appropriate conceptual apparatuses that are part of the singularity of these phenomena. In this article I point out some ways in which poets and non-poets interact on the Internet according to poetry-linked assessments and practices, and present some new configurations that poetic creation has been assuming on this platform.

2. Turning on the body

I intend to contemplate some aspects that poems on the web have undergone. Therefore, my intention is to treat poems as a totality. For that, I will use the metaphor of the body; for we can refer to it as a whole, with its textures, feelings and misdemeanours, or its outline, appearance and momentum, and its

transformations. I start by assuming that this body, and the variability it may acquire, has a direct relationship with the democratization of writing and reading that go along with both the use of new technologies and the rise of new sociabilities on the web. This analysis would be better if I had Internet access here, within this article. What I actually bring — apart from what I, of course, can imagine — are still images, that is, without motion and without sound, and links to other sites where we can find poems, sometimes even their motions and sounds. However, I believe that I will be able to present the fundamental aspects of what I would like to bring to ponderation.

For that I limited my research and deliberately selected poetry written in Portuguese, especially that from Brazil. That being so, I almost exclusively refer to Brazilian poetry and poets, although I believe I can also cast thoughts on other poetries and poets from occidental societies. Equally, I chose what kind of Brazilian poetry and poets I would bring to analysis. I understand poetry as a widespread social practice, extensive, far beyond that which the academic poetry field — with institutions, editors, publications, websites, awards, critics and consecrated poets — acknowledges as a poet, a poem, poetry or a poetry reader. However, in this article I will especially refer to what is called contemporary poetry, simply because this is the one I know better and because we can include within it all virtually all of the poetry that is created and shared on the Internet today. This is what directly interests us here, accepting as poetry what the contemporary poetry *field* does not always know, nor, if knowing, considers as such.

I depart from the fact that every poem has a *body*, which represents its creation, manipulation and reading. Let us take a poem, 'Musth', which I published some time ago in the *Rattapallax* magazine:

Figure 1: Poem 'Musth', by Lígia Dabul

MUSTH	MUSTH
Tudo esquemtizado. Abandonar	Everything is design. Abandon
a música. Ficar só com os músculos.	music. Keep only the muscles.
Abastecer com urros a manada	Supply the herd of boys
de meninos tomados pelo rumo.	getting carried away with howls.
Defesas, tromba, másculas batidas,	Defense, trunk, may beats,
dor onde ninguém pode chegar perto:	pain where no one comes near:
na imaginação de uma divisa,	in imanining division,
na agonia infinita porque quer	in wanting anguish
que passe logo rápido mas volta	to cease, but it soon returns,
o primeiro desejo de ser nela.	that first desire of being in her.
O amor está sozinho mesmo agora	Love is alone even now
que o corpo não comporta tanto. Resta	that the body no longer holds so much.
catalogar mais uma variante	All that's left is to list another variation
de viver, esse lapso de elefante.	of living, this elephant's lape.
Lígia Dabul	*Translated from the Portuguese by Flávia Rocha & Anna Ross*

Source: Rattapallax, 12 (New York, 2005).

If we only consider my point of view, as the creator of this poem, the body of this poem existed even before it was written. But the body of the poem, which I will be dealing with, is turned on and made by reading it too, which implies and updates the idea that the reader acknowledges what is a poem. In Portuguese, as well as in English, this body, the poem, generally has a title and it is read from top to bottom, from left to right, along the lines that draw its stanzas. This body possesses a silhouette, a shape, and possesses a fundamental unity, among other unities (such as the strophe, the verse): the word. Changing one word, new sounds, rhythms and meanings will be brought to life: 'music. Keep only the muscles', is completely different from 'music. Keep only the brain'. Also, by moving one word, or cutting it out, a new body, a new silhouette, a new rhythm and sound and new meanings will be placed on the body: 'music. Keep only the muscles' is completely different from 'Keep only the muscles', for example.

In order to understand this body it is a fundamental fact that the poem is in a page — a body surrounded by silence and emptiness, usually rectangular (as the pages are usually rectangular), and cut through by silence and emptiness. The momentum we add to it is possible and built on this contrast, and generally, until very recently, visually laid as a black flow over a white page — letters and words that are chained over a white page. And by starting it and setting it up,

the poem body embroils with a group of poems, also black and cut through by white empty spaces, usually brought by memory and by habit. But it has often been living not only in this forest or in this party, or in other forests or parties, but also in an organized colony of poems: the book. Thus, in a very disciplined way, numbers live nearby in that colony, often below the poems, marking pages: first page, second page, third page.... Somewhat more consistent we find walls — as the covers of the book, even though they are covered by the body and the rectangular limit of the emptiness of the poem while reading — which at some point will join to keep, to hide, the poem's physical referent that some eyes acknowledge (using the same imagination as when visiting forests and parties).

It is this body, within its surroundings, that is usually recognized and, for that reason, relived and remade — as everything, including artworks, cinema works and life works, can also be recognized, relived and remade. Nina Galanternick (2012) shows that such an acknowledgement is achieved when artworks are recognized in documentary films that thematise them, and in an earlier text I also describe things that trigger conversations in art exhibitions, when artworks are constructed collectively, so to speak, and their meaning built during the exhibition by visitors who interact (Dabul, 2014: 93–111).

This recognition of the body of the poem (which is extremely variable depending on social classes, literary practices, age of the reader, context in which it is read, etc., a variability that I will not analyse directly here) adds to the very poetic disposition, or to the predisposition to experience poetry by means of reading it. While it is not the objective of this article, the range of this disposition to the habitus built socially can be extended, which would lead us to variabilities and singularities concerning the ways in which individuals are prepared and willing to acknowledge poetry, somehow predicting it. Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) work appears to constitute a good example to this notion of habitus.

This poetic disposition is being modified, together with the transformations suffered by the mechanisms of poetic creation from the new tools that the Internet offers, involving the way the poems, their bodies, are perceived. The possibilities that a poem has of being recognized, its body acknowledged, in the very different conditions that a book presents, as described earlier, are today established and are considerably variable. On the other hand, the changes that the body of the poem has suffered walk alongside the issues we see in Brazil and in many other places concerning how poets and poetry are identified and assessed, and how they reach their public.

3. Far and wide

By observing the recent poetic production on the Internet we can visualize relevant dimensions and events of contemporary Brazilian poetry, and even many of the new mechanisms available to constitute identities and to consecrate poets. On the Internet, poets create networks of poetry; at the same time they lead non-virtual pre-existent networks, which stop being the same after they visit these virtual spaces. These are also of another kind, read in a different way, in many different ways, and change very quickly. An example of this is the As Escolhas Afetivas [The Affective Choices] blog[1], organized in Brazil by Aníbal Cristóbo, where poets introduce themselves and their poetry, naming other poets from their circle, who name others, who will name others: making explicit, deforming, redefining preferences, maps, acclamations and identification between poets, which will be commented on and added to by different means, far and wide. It is also of note that, in the structure of this network, identifications and prestige markers are linked not only to the number of nominations that an individual receives but to the author of those nominations and how quickly a poet was nominated, which takes him or her closer to the centre of poets that the network was built around.

Poets' blogs also select and suggest other poets' blogs, following a common nominating procedure, normally in a crossed fashion based on clear reciprocity together with non-poet bloggers. More information on this can be found through E. Nascimento's work on the Projeto Cultural do Brasil's/Cultural Project of Brazil blog, where she lists the nominations that she found in websites and blogs (2009: 295). These highly noticeable relationships and ways of interacting between poets (on blogs that involve many poets, as in the As *Escolhas Afetivas* blog, in which the author, the owner, interacts with readers, visitors, poets and non-poets, as well as in sites like Facebook, in which poets interact with other poets) are developed mainly as they are in other areas of social life. However, we may wonder how web creation affects poetic production — ways to transform and constitute the identity of poets and their mechanisms to create art.

One of the effects of using written language during web-based communication is that it brings about new and different ways to write, even in poetry. Here we can imagine that there is not a differentiation between

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[1] Retrieved from http://www.asescolhasafectivas.blogspot.com/

writing/image/sound: the writing — therefore the poem — has a body and bears a sound in every case — a concern I will include in my analysis further on.

Along with the great number of ways to disseminate poetry, I can affirm that there are users repeating the consecration of well-known poets, long-publicized by the educational and editorial system and by critics, scholars and poets. In Portuguese, writings by Fernando Pessoa, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Clarice Lispector and Cecília Meireles, many being unauthentic or inaccurate reproductions, are scattered over e-mails, blogs, websites, news and online events. I also found important changes in writing and in the forms of unknowledgeable consecration, less valued by social actors and institutions that study with zeal what we call literature — such as academies, universities, official events and editors. In fact, due to the generalized boost of traffic of information caused by the Internet, which also affected poetry, poems and poets are wanted, read and publicized, despite the fact that they were only accepted among a few social actors in the past — perhaps known by these poets because of very close relationships, such as friends, family, colleagues or neighbours.

That is to say, what we call public and literature's unknowledgeable products, are shown, asserted and widened. Poetic production, disseminated far and wide, was increased, meaning it became visible and that it presented itself whenever, posted together with traditionally consecrated poets and those poets consecrated by specialists. In further elaboration of this I refer to my interview with Thiago Ponce in Algaravaria in 2006, in which I pointed out that there are kinds of poetry and poetics with social concentrations of poets' attributes (Ponce, 2006).

The mechanisms applied to outline what poetry is and what poets are — as in As *Escolhas Afetivas* — remain present, as they have always been and probably will be; additionally, now they can be easily reached by many more people, who were not paying enough attention to those spaces back then. Yet, several lists, groups and poets' networks, not accepted by traditional mechanisms and/or institutions that hierarchize poets and poetry, are equally visible and coexist.

4. Disseminated and inseminated

There are important and direct outcomes resulting from poets occupying and creating spaces on the Internet, such as magazines and blogs. Poems withdraw from the traditional white page support, remarkably increasing their possibilities

using colours instead of black letters, and it has made explicit the existence of a body for poems shaped in types of fonts, in sharpness, in size, in justification, in relation to the background that invades poems, with modifications and intensities only recently available. In addition, poems detach themselves from books, their old home, — although that is not always the case and it sometimes does not even exist, as when poems are made known to the public without having had a home, without belonging to a family of poems, to a book, etc. In other words, poems have moved and their individualization and detachment somehow goes with a displacement made by other written materials in network environments; kept away from publications in which they originally came out, fitting in a different context and, for that reason, obtaining new meaning. José Furtado (2006) shows that these units now 'freed' on the Internet — such as poems and scientific works — consist in fragments of a book, whose shattering would accompany the removal of its parts.

In poets' blogs, poems tend to mix with other authors' poems, as well as with posts and news about poets' personal life, with poetry-related events — book releases, courses, workshops, readings — with literature texts, and sometimes, as it happens in Ademir Assunção's blog Espelunca (2004), with chronicles and harsh judgements on public policies focused on literature, among other subjects. In most cases, there are more than just characters in the environment of a poem. Besides the changes in size, texture and colour that directly affect the body of a poem, poets make use of visual material, which does not mean only illustrations. The 'Gallery' section of the Cantar a Pele do Lontra [To sing the Fur of Otter] blog by poet Claudio Daniel[2] regularly shows pictures on every post, normally belonging to professional photographers or plastic artists. Furthermore, there are poets who frequently add their own visual works next to their writings on their blogs, as does João Miguel Henriques, a Portuguese poet, on Quartos Escuros [Dark rooms][3]. Numerous literary magazines also associate poems with photography, and an example of this can be found in Germina, Revista de Literatura e Arte [It sprouts, Literature and Art Magazine][4]. In addition, in Literatura no Brasil's blog [Literature in Brazil's blog][5], founded in 2004 and which has been adding writers ever since, poems and

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[2] Retrieved from http://cantarapeledelontra.blogspot.com/
[3] Retrieved from http://www.quartosescuros.blogspot.com/
[4] Retrieved from http://www.germinaliteratura.com.br
[5] Retrieved from http://www.literaturanobrasil.blogspot.com/

pictures of uncountable events and participants are presented side by side. Both poets and non-poets unmake the margins of the poem by placing it together with such different images. Talis Andrade, in his Poesia e Pintura: Arte Versos blog, conjointly presents paintings and poems, such as a poem from Adélia Prado alongside a painting by Wassily Kandinsky, and such associations are often commented upon by his readers.

In online-only literature magazines there seems to be a special approach by poets who are also editors in the field of poetry. Although not common in poetry, these approaches are known in visual artists' works. In Zunái. Revista de Poesia & Debates [Zunái, Poetry & Debates Magazine][6], founded by Claudio Daniel and Rodrigo Souza Leão and with artwork by visual artist and poet Ana Peluso, in the 'Poetry' section poems are called 'sound sculptures'. Even in poetry publications that already existed in print form and have now been reproduced on the Internet, we find a new visual makeup, a new body and a new semantic field, also with visual markers, which now houses poems. As an example, see *Panorama da Palavra*, issue 69, edited by poet Helena Ortiz (2008).

Furthermore, there is a poetic production that makes the most of sound and image in the form of processes that run through, join and determine creation by means of the word. Poet and musician Cid Campos highlights the impact of digital technology's arrival on poetic creation developments, especially those accompanied by music (2008: 185–88). Andre Vallias, a poet and a graphic artist, was one of the pioneers of that kind of visual and sound production in Brazil. Revista Errática [Wandering Magazine][7] publishes audio-visual materials involving writing in different ways. For example, the poem 'Alegria e dor' [Bliss and suffering] by Armando Freitas Filho (2013), unpublished at the time, is included in Errática with an audio-visual treatment, providing it with a reading experience that greatly differs from the one usually achieved using books by this poet. Arnaldo Antunes, on the other hand, creates a 'sound collage' of the poem called 'Tradição', which receives a graphic and animated treatment by André Vallias (Antunes & Vallias, 2007). In this poem, he submits the possibilities of presentation to the reader/ spectator/ participant, who chooses the possibilities and applies a rhythm with the mixtures he or she likes by clicking on the image.

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[6] Retrieved from http://www.revistazunai.com/
[7] Retrieved from http://www.erratica.com.br

Open-source fashion stimulates the participation of the reader/spectator public in virtual poetic production by the permanent possibility of changing finished works, as occurs with 'Tradição'. It has become common to see the publishing of poems still in process, not yet finished. Lau Siqueira keeps posting on his blogs Pele Sem Pele [Skin with no skin][8] and Poesia Sim [Yes to poetry][9], which is presented as a space to create and to make quick thoughts about the ever-challenging poetry and its processes within literary and cultural contexts.

On Poesia Sim, Siqueira shows what he calls 'red poems', which are poems still in process, easily recognized because of their colour on the blog, alongside works from other poets, comments, news about cultural events, and illustrations. Writer Rosana Caiado, who owned the Pseudônimos [Pseudonyms] blog[10] for some years, founded Complete a frase [Complete the sentence][11], directly aimed at making readers participate by welcoming them to create 'answers' to the sentences she starts. Somehow, presenting unfinished works — with or without the reader's participation in writing them — opens users' access to a stage of poems that are usually kept by poets or exposed to a reduced circle of poets and friends. That restricted circle of sharing can become public, as happens in Oui! à l'inspiration blog by poet Claudia Roquette-Pinto. Focusing on a circle of people — composed mostly of poets — with whom she wanted to talk about her literary production — now related to collages — she sends an e-mail with the subject 'my new blog', announcing the blog on which she will present her works in process:

> my new blog
> hello, friends,
> I just finished creating a blog (oui! à l'inspiration), where I've been posting separated (and random) pieces from my new book, in prose, yet to be written — that will probably be called entre lobo e cão [half wolf, half dog].
> I'm also posting on it, on the blog, my collage works. I hope you like it — and if you can, send me an opinion...
> kindest regards from
> Claudia
> (Roquette-Pinto, 2008)

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[8] Retrieved from http://www.lau-siqueira.blogspot.com/
[9] Retrieved from http://www.poesia-sim-poesia.blogspot.co.uk
[10] Retrieved from http://www.pseudonimos.blogger.com.br/
[11] Retrieved from http://www.completeafrase.blogger.com.br

Figure 2: Collage work by Claudia Roquette-Pinto on Oui! à l'inspiration blog and attached to the e-mail 'my new blog' (24 September 2008)

Source: Oui! à l'inspiration blog and e-mail 'my new blog' (24 September 2008).

5. Exit

In this article, I pointed out some variations of how a poet's identity is produced and the criteria through which to measure what is web poetry. I also showed changes in the body of poems, and even exposed their unfinished states. However, if we look more closely we can find the wandering poet on the web, everywhere, interacting and strolling at a speed that is mainly determined by technological innovations and by its own will to create life signals.

In her last post on Pseudônimos, Rosana Caiado gives us a series of places for exhibiting works and interacting with people, created and/or occupied by writers:

> 1.3.10
> The end
> Pseudônimos lost its meaning long time ago, but only now the courage came to end it.
> To follow my column on MSN, click here.

To Complete de Sentence, <u>click here</u>.
To follow me on Twitter, <u>click here</u>.
To add me on Facebook, <u>click here</u>.
Or send an e-mail at any time to <u>rosanacaiado@gmail.com</u>
Written by Rosana Caiado Ferreira, who hates good-byes.
(Caiado, 2010)

Alongside this, poets build personae through time, although journeying and writing on several different websites. These most special avatars remain and act on their own will, somehow constituted from the use of tools that reach their hands and their mind, and from answers from contact with readers — or spectators, for those who already add to poetry a visual and sound production beyond the evident, constitutive, existence of visual and sound aspects of any writing.

We could also try to follow in what manner writings are shared visually, sometimes including their sounds, changing the ways and means whereby bodies of poems are acknowledged, outlining the webs that start being formed when they are gaining life. This transit is becoming more unconstrained each time in the virtual environment, allowing poetic creations to transform poets, poems and the relationship between poets and readers. We can also consider this transit from other perspectives. The fact that these developments of poets going deeper into web space are highly diverse highlights the complexity that implied freeing and transforming the body of a poem and keeping the transformation now as a sort of momentum, because it is always about to be acknowledged by readers when reading it, listening to it and interactively manipulating it. At the beginning of this article, I associated these events with democratization and with poetic creation performed by individuals not considered as poets by traditional consecration mechanisms (some of those still practised today). The fact that these remarkable modifications concerning poems — especially their bodies — as a result of the democratization mentioned above have been made by individuals who did not know the experiences that avant-garde poets had been creating for decades, suggests that some more comprehensive cultural changes (that we have difficulties to recognize as innovations) are taking place. Common people, in normal situations of creating poetry, by different ways get to results that specialists (sometimes called avant-garde poets) get to after years of research, and years of persuading the academic poetry field that these results are still — and very much — poetry.

This coincidence involving the extension of poetry — the one that sprang from the democratization of poetic creation allowed by the Internet happening simultaneously with the avant-garde poets' proposal — makes us think about how cultural improvisation processes can take very different configurations and be extended to creative individuals and creative practices that we generally do not link in our analyses. Researchers usually prefer, really, to separate *poets* and *poetry* from those individuals and poems not consecrated in the literary world.

Ingold and Hallam (2007: 1–24) cultural improvisation precisely by questioning our modern conceptions of creativity, which do not allow us to recognize an important part of cultural transformations and their relevance. In the case we analysed, it is a generalized alteration affecting poetry, which is somehow related to the standards of recognizing poems — i.e., it is not shown to be intentionally innovative. On the other hand, it is not an eruptive alteration, but occurs in a temporality that is appropriate to the temporality of the virtual ambient where it rests. And this alteration affecting the body of poems cannot be associated with an individual trying to break from other individuals or from society; such is the way I usually identify creation and creators. On the contrary, the alteration appears as a natural way, fit for communication between people interested in poetry. Using the terms of Ingold and Hallam, this alteration that affects the body of poems is simply the 'way we work'.

We cannot know until when our avatars will make poetry and up to where they will take the body of poems. The liberty to create poems and become a poet is deeply changed. The boundaries between poetry, photography, music, noise and colours move at speeds I cannot determine. A possible work for the future would be to reflect upon these boundaries in territories not mentioned here, perhaps, such as the persistent writing on paper. However, in this situation, I would be dealing with other subjects, continuing far beyond the limits of this article.

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