

Dance, Music and YouTube: Intermediality in *I'm Trying to Reach You*

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Abstract

*The novel as a text-based form is negotiated through the works of art that create a cross-bordered space between different media of representation. The present paper discusses the representation of intermediality in Barbara Browning's novel *I'm Trying to Reach You* (2012). It argues that, the contemporary novels that present hybrid texts and blur the visual and audible media problematize the novel as a visually mediated printed text. The represented medialities under scrutiny are dance, music, and YouTube videos. The paper discusses each medium and its influence on the narrative in light of Werner Wolf's typologies of intermediality, with specific reliance on the two variants of intermediality: Intermedial Reference and Plurimediality. Intermediality is apparent in the novel through the reference to both dance and music. While Plurimediality is present through embedding YouTube videos inside the narrative. The paper reveals how the use of these three medialities does affect the theme and structure of the novel and its impact on the perception of the novel as a literary work of art. The study intends to participate in the field of intermedial studies in literature by discussing the influence of intermediality and breaking borders between different media on the presentation, appreciation, and apprehension of the novel.*

Key Words: Barbara Browning, Werner Wolf, Intermedial Reference, Plurimediality

1. Introduction

The current period is remarked by the creation of works of art that strive to break the boundaries between different media. The novel, for instance, no longer consists solely of written words, and the printed novel no longer is restricted to the borders of the book. Such intermedial works of art have posed the argument surrounding the borders and limits of these works. The area of study that is concerned with the works of art that connect different media of representation is Intermediality. A great bulk of academia is devoted to the current trends in Intermediality theory. However, the number of studies dedicated to the practical application of this theory on the increasing body of creative literary works of art is still tardily expanding. This study intends to fill this gap by discussing the influence of intermediality and breaking borders between different media on how such blurring of media affects the presentation, appreciation, and apprehension of the novel as literary work. The term 'intermedia' refers to works that contain more than one medium and "fall conceptually between media that are already known" (Higgins & Higgins 52). The objective of this study is to tackle the different media represented in Browning's novel *I'm Trying to Reach You*. Despite its importance as a literary work that establishes a dialogue between different media, there exist no academic

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studies on Browning's novel *I'm Trying to Reach You*. Thus, this paper is one of the pioneering studies that discusses Browning's novel in the light of theory of intermediality in literature.

Barbara Browning (b. 1961) is an American novelist, cultural critic, university professor, and performer. She is the author of a number of novels, *Who Is Mr. Waxman?* (2007), an audio novel, *The Correspondence Artist* (2011), winner of Lambda Literary Award, *I'm Trying to Reach You* (2012), short-listed for the Believer Book Award, and *The Gift (or, Techniques of the Body)* (2017). Browning is also a winner of the De La Torre Burre Bueno Prize for outstanding book on dance for her critical book *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (1995). Her other books of cultural criticism are *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture* (1998) and *Caetano Veloso: A Foreign Sound* (2017).

2. *I'm Trying to Reach You*

A brief introduction to the novel foregrounds the analysis of the novel from an intermedial perspective. The novel opens with a sentence that sets the frame of the plot of the novel which is the relationship between art and life, "I was in Zagreb the day that Michael Jackson died" (*Reach You* 5). The events take place in different countries in a linear, diary-like format of its protagonist Gray Adams who introduces himself as "a former ballet dancer, I'm learning to say that. Like many male dancers, I started my training relatively late, and ours is not a line of work known for its longevity [...] I'm trying to transition into teaching, which is why I decided a few years ago to get a doctorate in performance studies" (*Reach You* 14-15). Adams has been granted a post-doctoral fellowship during which he is requested to convert his dissertation into a book. Interesting is the choice of his book title, "The dissertation had been called, Semaphoric Mime from the Ballet Blanc to William Forsythe: A Derridean Analysis [...] I knew that title might be a bit off-putting to a general audience, so the book was going to be: *I'm Trying to Reach You*" (*Reach You* 15). Adams spends his time attempting to work on his dissertation-into-book, attending and participating in performance studies conferences. However, most important for him is watching YouTube videos of a performing ballerina and trying to unfold an imaginary conspiracy that the main cultural figures of the century namely: Michael Jackson, Pina Bausch, Merce Cunningham, and James Gurley did not die in a natural way. He has a Swedish boyfriend called Sven, they exchange visits between America and Stockholm and communicate via phone messages, mostly through emoticons. Adams admits that his YouTube addiction increases dramatically to the extent that "Sven had recently begun ribbing me about the amount of time I was spending on YouTube. He wasn't thoroughly convinced that it was 'productive'" (*Reach You* 13). As a professional dancer, who is concerned with performance studies, the protagonist is obsessed with the performance choreographies of a ballerina who presents her dances through a YouTube channel. The interchangeable dialogue between the narrative and dance presents the novel as a uniquely intermedial work.

3. Typologies of Intermediality

The discussion here depends on the employment of the digital, visual, and audible medialities in the representation of intermedial narration and their influence on the novel. In order to reach that point, we need to bring to the fore the intermedial typologies of Werner Wolf, through which the discussion of the novel is demonstrated.

Werner Wolf distinguishes between two basic variants of intermediality: the ‘intracompositional’ and the ‘extracompositional’ intermediality. Intracompositional sense of intermediality is the “direct or indirect participation of more than one medium in the signification and/or structure of a given semiotic entity.” Whereas extracompositional forms of intermediality “result from relations or comparisons between medially different semiotic entities” (Wolf, “Intermediality” 253). Wolf observes two variants of intermediality under each of his two basic forms, namely the intra- and extra- compositional forms. Thus, Wolf here refers to four main phenomena or variants of intermediality: Intermedial Reference and Plurimediality as intracompositional variants and Transmediality and Intermedial Transposition as extracompositional variants.

‘Intermedial Reference’ refers to the presence of one medium in another medium “covertly or indirectly [...] the other medium enters as a conceptual rather than a physical presence, and the base medium retains the character of a homomedial semiotic complex.” Whereas ‘Plurimediality’ takes place when more than one medium are “overtly present in a given semiotic entity.” In this type of intermediality “the medial mixture are discernible on the level of the signifiers without being semiotically dependent on each other (as a verbal text would be that is reproduced as a part of a picture).” Instances of ‘Plurimediality’ are “The combination of media, e.g., in ballet (a synthesis of dance, non-verbal drama, and music), in comic strips (combinations of words and images).” Such combination of different media in one ‘semiotic entity’ results in the creation of “medial hybrids,” which carry the possibilities of “the emergence of new, syncretistic media” (“Intermediality” 253-4). Through the definition of these two variants of intracompositional intermediality, we can figure out that they can affect the structure and meaning of the intermedial work of art and thus, create unlimited possibilities of media mixture that may introduce new literary genres or add to the richness of the already existing ones. In contrast, the other two variants of extracompositional intermediality; namely ‘Transmediality’ and ‘Intermedial Transposition’ have no such effect on the intermedial work.

Transmediality, as referred to by Wolf, is not restricted to a sole medium as long it can be perceived in different media forms and “point to palpable similarities between heteromedial semiotic entities [...] such as repetition of motifs and thematic variation (e.g., in music and literature), metalepsis (in fiction, film, painting, etc.), and narrativity [...] opera, film, ballet, the visual arts.” While the ‘Intermedial Transposition’ can be recognized in the “adaptations of novels into film, film into novels, drama into opera, etc” (“Intermediality” 253-4). In these two variants, the relationship between different media is either through comparison or adaptation. Thus, the represented medium retains its own characteristics and does not have a direct interaction with the other medium.

In the light of the above, I analyse *I’m Trying to Reach You* depending on the two variants of intracompositional intermediality: Intermedial Reference and Plurimediality. Intermediality is apparent in the novel through the reference to both dance and music. While Plurimediality is present through embedding YouTube videos inside the narrative. The following discussion reveals how the use of these three medialities does affect the theme and structure of the novel and its impact on the perception of the novel as a literary work of art. The discussion encompasses two intertwined media that are presented covertly in the novel, thus as intermedial references. Dance is the first intermedial reference that is thoroughly

constructed in its relation to the written text. The other intermedial reference to be under scrutiny is music. In that part, the musico-literary relationship is highlighted, supported by Wolf's argument on that point. These two represented medialities; dance and music, affect the novel as a literary genre on the thematic level. The influence of intermediality on the structural level is present through the employment of YouTube videos in the narrative. It is discussed in the light of Plurimediality.

4. Intermedial Reference: Text-Dance Encounters

Both literary texts and dance can express narrativity. However, each medium "truly makes a difference about what stories can be evoked or told, how they are presented, why they are communicated, and how they are experienced" (Ryan 18). While the novel as a literary genre must be mediated by at least one sense modality, which is sight, and consequently it is a visually mediated art form. Thus, textual literature is communicated through language, whereas; dance is defined as "any patterned, rhythmic movement in space and time" (Copeland & Cohen 1). In light of this, we can acknowledge that both the novel and dance are 'texts' that communicate meaning through different channels of communication. Stephane Mallarme confirms this view of dance as a text:

[T]he ballerina is not a girl dancing; [...] she is not a girl, but rather a metaphor which symbolizes some elemental aspect of earthly form: sword, cup, flower, etc., and she does not dance but rather with miraculous lunges and abbreviations, writing with her body, she suggests things which the written work could express only in several paragraphs of dialogue or descriptive prose. (qtd. in Fuchs 566)

What kind of relationship can be established between two 'texts' that communicate through different media? This question can be answered by illuminating the difference between intertextuality and intermediality. Intertextuality means the presence of a 'text' in another 'text' (Wlof, "Intermediality" 252). Thus, the presence of a 'text' in another 'text' may take place through reference - by referring to a certain work within the context of another work either explicitly or implicitly. Explicit reference is the "individual or system reference through medium specific signification without heteromedial imitation: 'thematization.'" While implicit reference is the "individual or system reference through forms of heteromedial imitation." it is divided into three subcategories: evocation, formal imitation, and (partial) reproduction (Wolf, "Literature" 468). In that case, both texts belong to the same genre and intertextuality does not affect the dominating medium of representation. Whereas intermedial works may contain two or more 'texts' that belong to different media of expression and thus the outcome can carry varied possibilities of genre classifications. Here, defining the term 'text' is of vital importance in interpreting both intertextuality and intermediality. Wolf explains that the confusion between the two concepts still takes place when the term 'text'

is used as an umbrella term covering all semiotic systems. If, however, 'text' is used more narrowly, referring to verbal texts only, the distinction between

intertextuality and intermediality is straightforward. Thus understood, intertextuality is a variant of ‘intermediality’ and refers exclusively to ‘homomedial’ relations between verbal texts or text systems. Intermediality, in contrast, applies in its broadest sense to any transgression of boundaries between media and thus is concerned with ‘heteromedial’ relations between different semiotic complexes or between different parts of a semiotic complex (“Intermediality” 252).

Maria Fuchs argues that “while textual literature that communicates through verbal language can be considered a monomedial, dance through its connection to music, fundamentally multimedial” (562). Thus, dance is ‘fundamentally’ multimedial that comprises the dancing body, the gestures/movements, and music in order to communicate certain artistic/cultural message. These prerequisite ‘tools’ that constitute separate media cannot be separated when creating/performing a dance, however; they can be separately considered only for the sake of study and analysis of a choreographic performance. Consequently, despite being a multimedial art form, we can consider dance as a sole medium when discussing it in its relation to other media of representation, following Wolf’s definition of medium as:

conventionally distinct means of communication, specified by particular channels (or one channel) of communication but also by the use of one or more semiotic systems serving for the transmission of cultural ‘messages.’ This definition encompasses the traditional arts but also new forms of an ‘art.’ (Wolf, “Musicalization” 35- 36)

The transmission of a message entails a sender, a medium, and a recipient. What Derrida describes for language as a bearer of meaning is still applied to dance; that meaning is produced through “difference and dissemination, through a complex play of signifying traces” (Derrida 125). In attempting to grasp the meaning of dance as a medium of generating a certain ‘cultural’ message, fruitful is to identify a number of elements that characterize dance:

The dancer and his/her body, the dancer’s movements but also spatial and rhythmical patterns as well as the musical accompaniment add to the signifying process. Yet, the signifying elements are [...] sender, message, and channel [...] are fused to one in the dancing body. Furthermore, dance is ephemeral. It is over by the time one can pick up a pen to set the movements on paper. (Fuchs 563)

How does *I’m Trying to Reach You* succeed in bringing the act of dancing into a written text? The following discussion encompasses dance as an intermedial reference that its presence takes place in the textual narrative through the description and interpretation of the performed choreographies of the YouTube videos.

In *I’m Trying to Reach You*, dance is present as both an explicit and implicit intermedial reference. It is present explicitly through the discussion of choreographies performed by a ballerina through YouTube videos. In a choreographic video named “mudere satie,” the

narrator discusses the kinetic movements of the ballerina referring to the medium of dance explicitly:

Some of the references were pretty clear: the mudra-like hand gestures (“okay”), which morphed into antlers, and then something like a map of her ovaries; a little Charlie Chaplin walk, ending with a swat at her ankles; a delicate circling of her index finger over her head, as though it were a phonograph needle sounding the clunky little score. And then I saw it: looking at her feet, she swiveled to the side, and discreetly moonwalked backwards across the floor. (*Reach You* 15)

The reader is left with gestures and movements that create an imaginative image of the described dance and “it is in the hands of the informed recipient to unfold what is enclosed in [the] ‘intermedial nutshell’” (Fuchs 547). The signification of the ballerina’s gestures and movements “happens through the act of reception,” “The viewers, and more so the readers of texts that include dance as a signifying element, participate in the production of meaning” (Fuchs 563) as dancers are “writerly texts” through which the viewers/readers are the “producers of [those] texts” (Barthes 4).

The production of meaning takes place through the narrator, who has the faculty of interpreting performances depending on his academic knowledge, and through the reader who is enhanced to participate in the act of interpretation. Another choreographic video is described by Adams for the same ballerina:

She was wearing vaguely athletic clothes, and had on Converse sneakers, which slapped the floor as she danced. In fact, this slapping of her feet against the floor constituted the entire soundtrack of the video [...] The slapping of her shoes created its own percussive pattern [...] you began to hear her breathing. Her in- and exhalation were in time with the pattern of her shoes. The sound of her lungs increased in volume and intensity until, at the very end, it was a positive cacophony of lungs and slapping feet. (*Reach You* 46)

The detailed description of the ‘performance’ with the ‘slapping of her feet against the floor’ and the sound of breathing which gradually ‘increased in volume and intensity’ create a multi-sensory mental image of the dance where the dancing body, the gestures/movements, and music/patterns constitute one entity that communicates a certain artistic/cultural message, or in Fuchs’ words; “The dancer and his/her body, the dancer’s movements but also spatial and rhythmical patterns as well as the musical accompaniment add to the signifying process” (563). Here, the evocation of the choreography stands as an implicit reference through the heteromedial imitation of the performance.

The implicit intermedial reference is further present in another instance when the narrator refers to another performed choreography that touched him in which the performance takes place through the accompaniment of a song and its non-verbal version of the sign language:

First she shows Forster rehearsing the song in a casual shirt [...] You can faintly hear him moaning the words over the recording of Sophie Tucker singing as he signs with his hands [...] The sign for home is an O shape that sweeps up from the mouth to the cheek. When Tucker sings “just built for two,” Forster holds up two long, thin fingers in the shape of a V. He signs roam by tracing a zig-zagging line before him [...] Sophie Tucker’s voice can say what Forster can only signal mutely. (*Reach You* 35-6)

Despite the re-production of the song through quoting from it, and thus re-presenting it to the senses, the sign language adds to the signification of the dance as long the narrator figures out some signs to the reader who is not acquainted with that language. The song, the sign language and the kinetic movements of the performers all contribute to unfolding the interpretative message or impression of the recipient. Adams introduces his own interpretation of the song; “I think it’s more about the lack of an object of desire. That song is about the desire for desire, a love object that doesn’t exist” (*Reach You* 36).

Fuchs argues that the interpretations of dance or, more precisely here the “literalised dance,” “differ according to dance genre, which in themselves can be markers of class, national identity and cultural history” (564). She further explains that the division of dance into genres can depend on different classifications: “while the eighteenth-century minuet represents aristocratic culture, country dances [...] stand for vulgar peasant entertainment. [...] classical ballet stresses patriarchal structures and social elitism while modern dance stands for the theatrical revolution and gender emancipation” (547). A similar view is adopted by the narrator of the novel as a performance study professor; “Of course there’s plenty of classical, romantic choreography that I enjoyed dancing, and I can see the beauty, but let’s face it, there are problems with this. [...] Modern dance changed a lot of that” (*Reach You* 57).

The relation between dance and text in *I’m trying to Reach You*, as demonstrated in this part of the chapter, is still covert in the sense that the two media are expressed monomedially through the written text in its narrow meaning as Werner Wolf puts it; “intermedial reference does not give the impression of a medial hybridity of the signifiers, nor of a heterogeneity of the semiotic systems used; rather intermedia references represent a medial and semiotic homogeneity and thus qualifies as ‘covert’ intracompositional intermediality” (Wolf, “(Inter)mediality” 5) where “the other medium enters as a conceptual rather than a physical presence, and the base medium retains the character of a homomedial semiotic complex” (Wolf, “Intermediality” 254). Thus, dance is discussed as expressed through the same semiotic system of the novel, which is the written word. Another medium that has an apparent presence in the narrative is music, which has a close relation to the presence of dance.

5. Intermedial Reference: The Musico-Literary Relation

Understanding intermediality as “a direct or indirect participation of more than one medium in the signification and/or structure of a given semiotic entity (a ‘work’),” Wolf in his chapter “Literature and Music: Theory,” “attempts to map the wide field of musico-literary relations on a typology of intermediality which draws on Steven Paul Scher.” He states that; “one of the most frequently used typologies in the field of musico-literary relations was Steven

Paul Scher's triadic distinction between 'literature in music,' 'music and literature' and 'music in literature,' which he devised long before the emergence of intermediality studies (Scher 1968; also Scher 1970 and Scher 1984)" (Wolf, "Literature" 459-60). The repetition of the word 'music' twenty times in *I'm Trying to Reach You*, in addition to two times the term 'musical performance' is mentioned, is of great significance. It draws attention to the role music plays in the narrative. Intermedial reference to music takes place on two levels: explicitly and implicitly. The explicit reference is present through the discussion of music in the novel, and the reference to a number of musicians throughout the narrative. As Wolf confirms of explicit reference; "it is present whenever another medium (or heteromedial work) is mentioned or discussed ('thematized'). Explicit reference can also appear in representations of heteromedial artists, such as painters or musicians, as characters in a novel" (Wolf, "Literature" 464). The implicit reference is apparent through evocation; the description of musical compositions in the novel, and through the (partial) reproduction; re-presenting a song through quotation of the song text.

Wolf identifies the relation between music and literature through explicit reference which he refers to as the "individual or system reference through medium-specific signification without heteromedial imitation: 'thematization,' e.g. the discussion of music in a novel" (Wolf, "Literature" 468). In *I'm Trying to Reach You*, the novel is loaded with abundant discussions of music: musical performances, theory and genres of music, musical instruments, bands, and musical figures. In introducing the type of music preferred by the narrator he says: "You will already have surmised from my brief mentions of my musical choices that I'm not really somebody you would describe as a "rocker." Sven's exposed me to a certain amount of pop music, but on my own I tend to listen to classical and jazz" (*Reach You* 69).

As long 'choreography' which is consisted of kinetic movements and accompanying music constitutes the thematic background to the events of the narrative through the life of its narrator as a ballet dancer, the evocation and re-production of songs - as subcategories of implicit intermedial reference - formulate a considerable part of the novel. Throughout the novel, Gray Adams watches choreographic and music performances along with re-presenting songs in the narrative by quoting from them. That act of re-presentation evokes the audible sense and brings to the mind the whole song along with its evocative feelings or related connotations. It is also re-presented in the context of the narrative, expressed through the evoked feelings of the narrator.

By watching a choreographic video for the ballerina, whom the narrator is obsessed with, Adams recites the words of the song "Shine On, Harvest Moon," which he hears in the video;

The night was mighty dark so you could hardly see,
For the moon refused to shine...
Couple sittin' underneath a willow tree,
For love they pined.
The little maid was kinda 'afraid of darkness
So she said, "I guess I'll go..."
Boy began to sigh, looked up at the sky,
And told the moon his little tale of woe...

In describing the emotional impression of the song, Adams finds it “ridiculous, melancholy, amateurish, luminous, lewd, indecent, and foreboding, all at the same time” (*Reach You* 30). Here, the song is re-produced through the narrator’s comment. The song as an artistic medium can be heard differently according to the listener’s mood and in accordance with its changing contexts. This notion is expressed through the narrator when he refers to a song he was listening to on, of course, YouTube; “I countered a song I had, of course, heard before, but I’d never really heard it quite this way” (*Reach You* 69).

The evocation of the act of music listening is present in the description of another video that mingles music and dance.

The post was titled celebrate the body electric, and it began with a single, reverberating electric guitar [...] Suddenly a drum began pounding, [...] and just as suddenly the pounding drums evaporated – poof – and there was just a shimmering of guitar strings [...] Then slowly the drum began its persistent thump again [...] The music crescendoed into a chorus of voices both human and instrumental: “Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ahhhh.” (*Reach You* 91-2)

The representation of that ‘audible’ scene involves the reader in a mental process of listening to the variation of the music performance between the electric guitar and the drum. The sound of the chorus rehearsing the tone is quite apparent in the reader’s imagination. As Wolf puts it regarding the implicit intermedial signification, that it is:

the effect of some kind of imitation or iconicity with regard to another medium or heteromedial artifact, at least to (some of) its features (concerning its nature, content, effects or structure). If successful, this iconicity leads to a representation of the heteromedial entity in the recipient’s mind [...] permits them to experience the other medium in imagination as if it were present in the work in question to some extent. (Wolf, “Literature” 464)

6. YouTube Videos: Plurimediality in *I’m Trying to Reach You*

In *I’m Trying to Reach You*, the combination of text, image and videos is of striking importance. In the acknowledgement page, Browning puts a link to a YouTube channel. The videos of this channel are related to the novel and affect it on the thematic and structural levels. They are twelve videos that are present through the twelve chapters of the novel. Although the novel is published in a printed form, the YouTube videos are embedded in the novel not only through external links (plurimediality), but also through the engagement of the main protagonist in the process of watching, describing, and commenting on/criticizing their content (intermedial reference), as well as the comments on them by other viewers. Julie Bloom in an article in *The Slate Book Review* comments that “the fact that the videos themselves can’t be fully integrated into the text makes *I’m Trying to Reach You* the rare instance where a digital version of the book might really be better than print.” I find that the external links to the videos enforces the argument that the author’s intention throughout the whole process of creating the

novel is to cross borders between different media of representation. The fusion takes place between the media: the written, visual and audible; between the printed and hyper texts: the text-book and the YouTube videos, and between the fictional and real worlds (to be further discussed in a following part of this chapter). Such blurring of boundaries is a characteristic feature of Postmodernism; the cultural period through which the novel is created and published.

The use of YouTube videos reflects the influence of digital media on the creation and communication of meaning. Through its narrator, the novel relies on the growing role of the social media and the space it occupies in the lives of people in the 21st century. The narrator, Gray Adams, does reflect his obsession with the YouTube videos; “It’s possible I’d lost all my critical faculties. But at that moment, all I wanted to do was hear this moderate little piano solo, and watch this moderate little chamber dance [...] I hesitated for a moment, and then opened up the Internet browser, heading straight for YouTube [...] I watched it again” (*Reach You* 15-16).

The videos exist in the virtual world of the novel and in the actual world, so that we can find them on the YouTube channel. Thus, they are part of the text, literally; by constituting the external body of the book. The videos are present in the novel both covertly and overtly. Thus, we can approach the videos via two channels of communication: intermedial reference and plurimediality. The first stance takes place through the written text: the description of the videos’ content. Whereas the second instance is present through the physical existence of the YouTube videos. Despite sharing the same worlds and characters, the two narratives are not dependent on each other; each medium has its own signification which is related to its media specific characteristics. If the reader is not interested in watching the YouTube video, the narrator presents it along with his own interpretation and accompanied by a screenshot of it into the printed text (see below figs. 1,2 and 3).

This research was simultaneously reassuring and a little demoralizing. What else could I watch? The SpongeBob SquarePants dance? Something with cats? I ended up on falserebelmoth’s channel page. She’d put up a new video!



It was called “ipod samba.” The description read: “Breath – and I.” I clicked on it. She was back in that same odd little domestic setting, though now evidently in the

Figure 1. From *I’m Trying to Reach You* by Barbara Browning

the rebel moth! The neck of a miniature guitar, secured by a large, pale hand, was visible in the lower right-hand corner of the screen. The bathroom's fluorescent light cast a dreamlike glow on the frosted glass of the shower enclosure.



The title of the video was "bathtub dance (harvest moon)." I clicked play. Another plunky little chord progression started up – not Satie, but the old Tin Pan Alley tune, "Shine On, Harvest Moon," on the uke. After four stumbling little bars of an intro, a scratchy, crooning voice came in:

Figure 2. From *I'm Trying to Reach You* by Barbara Browning

One was very weird. At first I couldn't figure out how it found its way into the "michael jackson" related videos playlist. It was called "modéré satie" – and indeed, it was set to Satie's fifth *Gnossienne* – one of my favorites.



A woman in a black leotard, her dark hair pulled back, was dancing a subdued dance in an interior space – her living room? There were some peculiar paintings on the wall. One of them appeared to depict Bruce Lee in *Enter the Dragon*. The dancer wasn't looking at the camera. Her eyes were turned down throughout her

Figure 3. From *I'm Trying to Reach You* by Barbara Browning

The act of navigating between the visual world of YouTube and the world of the written text gives the reading experience a different dimension. While the novel is communicated through the written word and the printed text, the act of navigation between the visual and the written in Browning's novel changes the way the novel as a literary genre is acknowledged and apprehended. Despite being already written and published in 2012, the physical existence of the YouTube videos that constitute the external part of the narrative, the open access of these videos, along with the ability to comment on them create a different perspective to the novel. This space of commenting on the videos enables the readers/recipients to participate in the writing of the novel on a virtual level. Actually, the comments on the videos that exist inside the narrative are all fictional; the videos that exist on YouTube carry no comments that date back to the time of the publishing of the novel. However, there are comments on a number of videos written by viewers. Thus, through that particular act of browsing, watching, and

commenting on the videos that exist in both the fictional and the real worlds, the writer blurs both worlds and pushes the boundaries of the novel as a literary genre to new spaces. Consequently, the multi-sensory world created through the novel enriches the reading experience and puts in question the boundaries of the printed novel and the role of other external medialities such as YouTube in reestablishing these boundaries.

7. Documentary Characteristics of the YouTube and *I'm Trying to Reach You*

The reading experience is what particularly concerns Browning. The program "*The Novel as an Art Form*" introduces Browning's participation as follows:

Browning's talk will focus on the role of the reader as an active one: the act of reading as a performative act, which forces the artwork to acknowledge the other as subject, to include the reader in the creative process. The novel is thus defined as an intersubjective space, which gets distributed in the public domain through dispersion.

This inclusion of the reader in the 'creative process' is the key to understanding the novel, starting from the very beginning, the title of the novel. *I'm Trying to Reach You* is a call for the reader to participate in the performance when the novel becomes an act of performance. It is a call to the reader to become a character in the novel, to perform a criticism and a meta-criticism of the intermedial forms that are intersected in the novel. Moreover, it is a call to the reader to read the text and its intertexts, to share the narrator his passion of searching: googling information about writers, artists, musicians, watching movies, videos of performances, listening to music, and finding clues of the overlapping relation between art and life. In the presentation of her paper entitled "Dear Reader: The Novel's Call to Perform" at The Book Lovers' program Browning says:

Reader, I call you: hypocrite, my similar, my brother. Hypocrite because your ostensible passivity is a pretense – it's you who's in charge. My similar, because the hypocrite is also me, addressing you indirectly, rarely deigning to speak your name, calling out to you while I act like I'm speaking into the wind.

In her attempt to reach the reader, Browning writes *I'm Trying to Reach You* as a ficto-critical novel, through which she, not only displays information about art and performance theory but also keeps engaging the reader in the process of research. Through intertextuality, a great bulk of information about artistic figures, books, articles, choreographic videos, and movies are introduced in the novel, urging the reader to seek such information in order to fully get involved in the reading experience of the novel. Thus, the act of reading here is open wide beyond the presented narrative. The narrator introduces the reader to Pina Bausch, a German dance performer, Les Paul who is "the inventor of the electric guitar" (*Reach You* 72), James Gurley, or "Saint James [...] the Yuri Gagarin of the psychedelic guitar" (*Reach You* 113), and Merce Cunningham, a prominent American choreographer. Browning also sheds light on the relationship between Cunningham and John Cage, Viet Dinh states in *Lambda Literary* that

“the novel shows ambitious scope, encompassing everything from critical theory to the relationship between Merce Cunningham and John Cage.”

Through her protagonist, Mr. Adams, and the intermedial novel, Browning chooses to reflect her passion for art, especially performance art. Browning puts foreground “a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience in the world” (Waugh 3). Crossing borders is not restricted to media of representations, but also the fictional and the real worlds. This mingling of worlds takes place through diverse channels; first: the employment of different data such as YouTube videos of the ‘fictional’ character of the ballerina - which can be reached via YouTube channel. Second: other referenced YouTube videos, movies, interviews, articles, books, and conferences that exist or take place in the real world with their precise dates. Third: is the presence of fictional characters who carry titles and positions as they precisely exist in the real world. Thus, these characters are present in both fictional and real life. Patricia Waugh argues that:

Fictional characters [...] are not epistemologically indeterminate in the way of ‘real’ people (because the words on the page are the people in fiction). As part of an imaginary world they are always ontologically indeterminate, always uncertainly awaiting completion. However, [...] texts which introduce real people and events expose not only the illusion of verisimilar writing but also that of historical writing itself. The people and events here may ‘match’ those in the real world, but these people and events are always recontextualized in the act of writing history. (106)

Although Browning’s novel is not classified as a Historical novel, the wide array of information and resources about the history of performance studies present the novel as a documentary book that records the mainstream artistic and cultural occupation of the second half of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st centuries. Leonora Flis refers to the documentary novel as “stories that combine facts and imagination” (2). She further explains that:

the documentary novel, a genre which indeed denotes an innovative break with the conventional boundaries of the established literary genres. The documentary novel reflects one of the seminal tendencies of the times of its re-birth, namely, that of opposition to establishment, tradition, and convention of any kind. I am referring to postmodernisms [...] The concept of fragmentation and decentering, criticism of the idea of logocentrism as well as of any other notion that implies criticism of the idea of meaning (essence, consciousness, conscience) necessitate the creation of hybrid genres which, is precisely what the documentary novel is at its core. (3)

The reference to different theoretical and artistic sources of diverse periods of time throughout the narrative promotes the concept of fragmentation. Meanwhile, the structure of the novel that foregrounds the discussion of a main artistic figure in separate chapters creates decentering of a sole dominating character and implies ‘criticism of the idea of logocentrism.’

Moreover, reference to choreographic and music performances with comments on them either through the protagonist himself or the viewers on the YouTube channel introduces variable interpretations to the same work of art and thus presents a ‘criticism to the idea of meaning’ as a stable and structured entity. Consequently, the characteristic features of *I’m Trying to Reach You* as a documentary novel echo the characteristics of postmodernism. Both are linked through “common features as pluralism of truths, blurring of borders between facts and fiction, and the relativization of truth and reality” (Flis 2).

The documentary nature of the novel encompasses an encyclopedic capacity through the abundant references to artists, movies, YouTube videos, interviews, articles, books, and conferences. It further comprises a transmedial possibility by sharing part of the constituting narrative, represented in the choreographic videos, through two media of representation, namely, the intermedial reference and intermedial combination, in other words, monomedially and heteromedially. The choreographic videos can stand by their own, obtaining their own interpretational meaning and medium of communication apart from the printed book. However, both the printed book and the YouTube videos share the narrative and the character of the ballerina. Thus, they constitute a transmedial storyworld.

A transmedial storyworld must have an encyclopedic capacity. It should inspire the same passion that leads some people to spend hours researching family history, military history, and the lives of their favorite celebrities; to create online maps and encyclopedias of the worlds of popular novels; or to build their own imaginary worlds on the Internet. This passion can be an ethnographic curiosity about the institutions, ethnic groups, history, geography, and cultural traditions of the storyworld, or it can be motivated by the desire to solve a mystery. The theme of conspiracy particularly encourages detective activity. (Ryan 7)

Digital media, including YouTube, comprises the capacity of being ‘encyclopedic’ in the sense that it constitutes the reference for a wide range of information. Thus, it is by virtue documentary. The documentary nature of YouTube is reflected through the constant dependence of the protagonist, Gray Adams, on it as a main source of information. Its sensitive documentary role lies in sorting the kind of information that cannot be preserved through other forms of documenting data; precisely choreographic performances. As an external medium within the intermedial narrative of the novel, the encyclopedic capacity of YouTube puts to the fore the capability and internal power of the narrative when the two media; the written and visual ones, contribute to its construction, presentation, representation, and apprehension. It is no longer the solely written text and its fictional world that are represented in the narrative, it is neither a hyper-text that leads to different worlds of the narrative. Rather, it is a written text interwoven with a YouTube channel that opens wide new possibilities for reading the novel and the whole constellation of the genre as a literary work of art.

In the first chapter of the novel entitled “The First Line of my Novel,” when Adams knows about the death of Michael Jackson, his first reaction is “I went to YouTube. This was, increasingly, my first resort in dealing with questions from the particular to the unfathomable”

(*Reach You* 13). He was “convinced that it was ‘productive’” (*Reach You* 13). Adams’ “first thought was to watch a couple of Jackson’s music videos, but when I typed in his name an avalanche of MJ-wannabes popped up” (*Reach You* 13).

In another instance, Adams decides to go on the Internet, ending up back to YouTube, he watches the Satie dance of his preferred ballerina and then watches another one that appeared in the “related videos” for Natalia Makarova “dancing The Dying Swan” (*Reach You* 27). When Adams knows about the death of Pina Bausch from his friend Sven “‘im so sorry pina died :(,” he goes to YouTube and watches videos for her; “If you’ve never seen Lutz Forster doing this dance, you should really watch it on YouTube. That’s what I did as soon as I’d verified Sven’s news” (*Reach You* 35). When Adams knows about the death of Merce Cunningham he pursues his addiction to research through watching Cunningham’s related YouTube videos,

Over the next few days, I watched a lot of Merce. There were some more interviews, and films of him giving class in his studio [...] I watched him in some old archival footage dancing in Martha Graham’s Appalachian Spring. I watched the Charles Atlas films, and Beach Birds for Camera. But the film that I found most beautiful was an excerpt from Septet, which he composed in 1957 [...] Even though he was already collaborating with Cage, Septet was set to Satie – Trois morceaux en forme de poire. (*Reach You* 53)

Besides referring to other media forms that enrich the narrative and keep the reader engaged in the act of reading, Browning invites the reader to participate Gray Adams in a critical analysis of what he watches:

Merce’s Septet, you see, was – unsurprisingly – positioned as a related video to falserebelmoth’s new addition. I say unsurprisingly because they both featured Satie compositions, and if anybody at YouTube actually cared about such things, they displayed a certain similarity in spirit, if not precisely in choreographic style. Merce’s, admittedly, was more technically refined. (*Reach You* 60)

Here, the protagonist holds a comparison between “one of the greatest choreographers of the 20th century,” as described by David Vaughan in *The Guardian*, and an obscure ballerina who carries a YouTube name ‘falserebelmoth,’ which puts in question the whole constellation of unknown works of art published online. Besides, “related videos” implies the big-data function of YouTube through which information is revealed upon its relativity to the searching process. It also highlights the documentary role of the YouTube channel.

The fifth chapter of the novel which encounters the death of Merce Cunningham sheds light on the documentary role of digital media and thus reflected on YouTube also. It opens with “I was in Stockholm the day that Merce Cunningham died” (*Reach You* 50). “I watched a lot of Merce” (*Reach You* 53).

Just a couple of weeks before Merce's death, there'd been a story in the Times about the "legacy plan" he was developing with his company. [...] his former dancers and archivists would establish "dance capsules" – digital pods containing video documentation, lighting plans, décor and costume designs, production notes and so on. These could be accessed by researchers, or by dancers interested in recreating the pieces. [...] He told the reporter for the Times: 'It's really a concern about how do you preserve the elements of an art which is really evanescent, which is really like water [...] It can disappear.' (*Reach You* 55-6)

These choreographic videos for passed-away dancers cannot be reached by anyone, at least easily, except through YouTube. Thus, YouTube becomes the main documentary source and reference for such great works of art. The YouTube channel is functionally similar to Merce's 'dance capsules' in that it 'preserves' "the elements of an art which is really evanescent." (*Reach You* 56). The temporality of dance is one of its constituent elements as stated by Fuchs "dance is ephemeral. It is over by the time one can pick up a pen to set the movements on paper" (563).

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, while dance is an 'ephemeral' and fundamentally visible art, it needs to be preserved through a digital medium and YouTube efficiently carries out the role of being a documentary for that art form. And while *I'm Trying to Reach You* is argued to be a documentary book that records the mainstream artistic and cultural occupation of the second half of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st centuries through reference to a wide array of artistic figures, books, articles, choreographic videos, and movies, the intermediality of the novel pushes the boundaries of the printed book and the literary genre in a whole. The presentation of the novel through different medialities: dance, music, and YouTube makes it a multimedia work of art and enhances the dialogue between different media. This dialogue, despite being provoked throughout ages, it is crystalized in this work through the contribution of the digital technology that added to the richness and multi-dimensional reception of the novel.

The events of the novel revolve around the activities of its main protagonist and narrator Gray Adams who is a former ballet dancer shifting his career to become a university professor in performance studies. Adams is obsessed with watching choreographic videos of a performing ballerina. Thus, dance is embedded in the textual narrative through the intermedial reference to the act of watching and analysing the performances of that ballerina. The presence of dance in *I'm Trying to Reach You* takes place through the discussion of choreographies on YouTube videos. Through presenting a number of videos of choreographic performances, the narrator discusses the kinetic movements of the ballerina referring to the medium of dance. Such discussion left the reader with gestures and movements that create an imaginative image of the described dance. Thus, the act of reception contributes to the construction of the meaning of these performances. The production of meaning takes place through the narrator, who has the faculty of interpreting performances depending on his academic knowledge, and through

the reader who is enhanced to participate in the act of interpretation. Thus, dance is discussed as expressed through the same semiotic system of the novel, which is the written word. The reference to dance in the novel both implicitly and explicitly enhanced the mind to imagine that act and consequently added to the experience of reading and apprehending the written text when introduced through the lens of intermediality. Further, it contributed to discussing the novel genre in the collaboration between two different 'texts' - in the wider perspective of the meaning of 'text' – which are literature and dance.

While dance is fundamentally multimedial that encompasses the dancing body, the kinetic movements, and a piece of accompanying music, thus, the discussion of music is present in the same context. The presence of music in the novel takes place through the musico-literary relation and its discussion relied on Werner Wolf's study of the relationship between music and literature. Similar to dance, music is present in Browning's novel through the intermedial reference. Wolf clarified that the existence of two different media in one semiotic entity, in this instance literature and music, may take place through the imitation of the structure of music; the discussion of the theme of music; or the re-production of that medium. Intermedial reference to music takes place on two levels: explicitly and implicitly. The explicit reference is present through the discussion of music in the novel, and the reference to a number of musicians throughout the narrative. Whereas the implicit reference takes place through the act of evocation; by describing different musical compositions in the novel. It is also apparent through the (partial) reproduction which happens when the narrator re-presents a song by quoting from that song. In addition, the presence of music in the novel is observed through the discussion of music: musical performances, theory and genres of music, musical instruments, bands, and musical figures, which occupies a considerable part of the narrative through the 'artist' narrator.

Throughout the novel, Gray Adams watches choreographic and music performances along with re-presenting songs in the narrative by quoting from them. That act of re-presentation evokes the audible sense and brings to the mind the whole song along with its evocative feelings or related connotations. It is also re-presented in the context of the narrative, expressed through the evoked feelings of the narrator. Thus, the interaction between the literary and the musical created a unique text that evokes senses and opens the door for future discussion on the cognitive perception of the text when collaboration between audible and written media takes place. It further presented a different reading experience and pushed the boundaries of the written text to a wider space affecting the perception of the novel as a literary genre.

Both media; music and dance are present in the novel through the choreographic and performance YouTube videos that are embedded in the narrative. The YouTube videos are present in the text through a link to these videos in the first pages of the novel. The presence of the YouTube videos takes place through intermedial reference: by the discussion of their content; and through plurimediality: by navigating to the visual version on the YouTube channel. The use of YouTube videos reflects the influence of digital media on the creation and communication of meaning. Through its narrator, the novel relies on the growing role of social media and the space it occupies in the lives of people in the 21st century. Thus, the videos exist in the virtual world of the novel and in the actual world on the YouTube channel. Consequently,

they constitute the external body of the book. The act of navigating between the visual world of YouTube and the world of the written text gives the reading experience a different dimension, changing the way the novel as a literary genre that depends on the written and printed text is acknowledged and apprehended. Through the narrator's act of browsing, watching, and commenting on the videos that exist in both the fictional and the real worlds, the writer blurs both worlds and pushes the boundaries of the novel as a literary genre to new spaces. We can reach the concluding point that; intermediality took place in the novel through the multi-sensory world created via the three represented medialities: dance, music, and YouTube videos. The blurring of media within the narrative enriched the reading experience and put in question the boundaries of the printed novel and the role of other external medialities - such as YouTube - in reestablishing these boundaries. The novel uses an intermedial narrative that expands the frame of the written novel and opens the discussion of the endless possibilities the literary work can carry when combined with different media of representation. Thus, the question of the boundaries of the literary genre permanently exists as long the relationship between the novel as cultural production and the digital culture is present.

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