INTERTEXTUAL DANCE ANALYSIS

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1   INTRODUCTION

This text is an intertextual distillation of current theoretical and philosophical sources on dance analysis[1]. After briefly discussing traditional dance analysis that should consist of contextual, descriptive, interpretive and evaluative aspects, it focuses on other methods of analysis which are more appropriate for postmodern contemporary works and demand a different approach and a poststructuralist discourse where the concept of intertextuality comes to light. Instead of an introduction, several claims of philosopher David Best stated in his book *The Rationality of Feeling: Understanding the Arts in Education* (1992) are pointed out.

For Best (1992), artistic experience is rational and cognitive. The understanding of the work of art, which involves the emotional response, is answerable to reason (p. 128). Verbal reasoning is a predominant way of appreciating all the arts. Hence, verbal language can be very helpful in contributing to one's understanding and responding to the non-verbal arts (1992, p. 129). In his words, "…a precondition of being able to respond to an art object is that one should have understood the relevant art form, and that includes a grasp of its criteria of appropriate response... very often as a result of reasoning" (1992, p. 131). Finally, he claims that to interpret a work of art is to interpret the artist's intention which is crucial for understanding the work of art (1992, p. 139).

Best concludes that there are two separate concepts that sometimes overlap – the aesthetic and the artistic. He explains: "For if, for instance, appreciation of a work of art is merely a matter of whether one likes it or not, it is difficult to see how it could be argued that the arts are important, in education and society" (1992, p. 143). This is in accordance with the difference

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[1] This paper is an extract of a wider PhD research of the author at the University of New England.

between artistic and aesthetic interest explained by Graham McFee in *The Concept of Dance Education* (2004, p. 11-25). According to him, artistic interest should be distinguished both from mere aesthetic interest and from purposive interest such as economic interest. The distinction between artistic interest, judgement and appreciation of works of art and aesthetic appreciation lies in the fact that a spectator confronts a work of art but does not confront it *as* a work of art and he/she is unable to bring to bear on that "object" the concepts appropriate to the appreciation of art – concepts such as form, style, meaning, etc. (2004, p. 17).

2   DANCE ANALYSIS

According to Janet Adshead's *Dance Analysis* (1988) and Sally Banes' *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (1994), traditional analysis should consist of contextual, descriptive, interpretive and evaluative aspects. It may be postulated that traditional analysis is connected more with a structuralist approach and deals with internal structures of the work and semiotic interpretation of its content.

Adshead (1988) searches for the possibility of giving reasons for opinion, of providing evidence to support an interpretation, of ascribing qualities to the art work and offering means of judging its value (p.11). She explains that dance analysis allows for a detailed examination of its parts but also permits a synthesis of the outcomes of detailed observation with contextual knowledge. This can then advance the process of interpreting and evaluating the dance. For Adshead (1988), in dance analysis features such as subject matter and its treatment, qualities and character of dance must all be perceived. Such an approach surpasses theories that merely remain at the level of description and analysis of movement; appreciating dance requires the viewer to possess specific skills of noting and observing its separate movement components which then in their coexistence with the dancers, costumes, sets and sound make a basis for analysis (p. 12).

Adshead (1988) concludes that to clearly understand dance it is necessary to make an interpretation which consists of a meticulous description of the movement that is supported by supplementary insight into the context of the dance. It does not refer only to biographical and historical data, nor simply the details of the movement and its structuring, but the cumulative

effect of acquiring knowledge and understanding the transformation of these elements into one entirety (p. 13).

Regarding the description of the components of the dance, Adshead (1988) believes that the most basic and fundamental of the skills required in dance analysis is the ability to discern, describe and name the components of the dance, its movements, the dancers, the visual and the aural setting (p. 37). As scholar Stanley Fish (1980) puts it "'description can occur only within a stipulative understanding of what there is to be described" (p. 353). For example, regarding "movement" the shared concerns are those of a range of action and gesture, of spatial and dynamic elements through time (Adshead, 1988, p. 29).

The skills of discerning, describing and naming are the basis also of the second stage of analysis where they are applied to the form of the dance, to matters of structure and relationship which include relations according to components, point in time, through time, between the moment and the linear development and major/minor/subsidiary relations. The emphasis here is on the nature of relationships between components of the dance and not on their nature. It is relationships between components that bring about structure; the movement and other visual and aural elements are manipulated and put together in certain ways to create a form. The relationships are created by movement in time and space in association with visual and aural materials. Relationships may exist within a single movement and between movements or between one dancer and the next (Adshead, 1988, p. 41).

Concepts through which interpretation is made are the socio-cultural background, context, genre and style and subject matter. Concepts relating to the interpretation of a specific dance are character, qualities and meanings/significances (Hodgens in Adshead, 1988, p. 60). Interpretation includes the work of the choreographer, the performer (dancers give the dance character, quality and meaning which are not necessarily set by the choreographer) and the spectator (1988, p. 63). As social and cultural products, dances are made and perceived in regard to the conventions and traditions of a particular time and place (1988, p. 65). This is in accordance with McFee's discussion on traditions and conventions of an art form in *Understanding Dance* (1992, p. 67-87), concepts whose cognition is a precondition for artistic appreciation.

Regarding the evaluation of dance, Pauline Hodgens claims that each dance encompasses and reflects the values of a society, choreographers and performers. They can be judged for their worth according to whether and how they manifest the given values (1988, p. 91). Therefore, interpreting is used as the general term for understanding dance. It ascribes to dance character, qualities, meanings and significance, without direct comment about its worth. Evaluating is used as the overall term for judging the worth of the dance in terms of its merit, goodness or greatness (1998, p. 92). Furthermore, judging the worth or merit of any dance is possible with reference to two aspects of the dance, the choreography and the performance.

Regarding choreography the judgements relate to the appropriate choice of components and structure, and their effectiveness in terms of the character, qualities and meanings. Regarding performance the judgements pertain to the appropriateness and effectiveness of the technical competence and the interpretative skills of the performer (1998, p. 97). Judgements of appropriateness and effectiveness are made with regard to the background of genre and style values (1998, p. 102).

It is suggested that every evaluation has three important aspects. The first relies upon values which may be explicit or implicit; certain values are assumed - purposive, choreographic, performative or experiential. The second aspect makes a judgement of worth based upon these values; judgements are made which relate to the value. The third includes a substantiation for the judgement; reasons and criteria for the judgement which are found in the dance itself are offered (1998, p. 98). Finally, dance may be judged to be appropriate and effective in regard to the various values and be proclaimed as possessing individual and/or comparative merit (1998, p. 105).

However, some dances are affirmative extensions of current conventions and standards while others reject and question them (1998, p. 103). Adshead (1988) drawing on Virginia Woolf explains:

> …when a new dance form emerges, e.g. post-modern dance, the critic has to be thoroughly familiar with existing forms in order to see how and in what ways the new dance diverges from previous practices and how it draws on them. Being familiar with the varied types of the art allows the spectator to formulate criteria based on interpretative and evaluative principles. It is then possible to make reasoned and reasonable statements instead of making vague noises of approval or disapproval. (p. 8)

Accordingly, McFee (2004) agrees with Best in rejection of any subjectivist trend in aesthetics and argues for the objectivity of artistic judgement (p. 2).

There are other methods of analysis which are more appropriate for postmodern contemporary works and demand a different approach and a poststructuralist discourse. Marco De Marinis (2006) proposes semiotics of reception and claims that today it is the only form of theatre semiotics worthy of the effort (p. 36). He (1993) states that the spectator is much more than a decoder, being an interpreter necessitating competencies of a contextual, intertextual and encyclopaedic order, including pragmatic as well as syntactic and semantic problems (p. 99). Adshead-Lansdale (1999) mentions that the reader's independence lies in concluding how to activate textual levels and which codes to implement from the encyclopaedic, intertextual world of codes and sub-codes. The reader's capacity is demonstrated in the utilisation of coding rules such as style and genre of subject matter and treatment. The informed reader is counted upon and invited to pick up the pertinent reference when required to do so by the text (p. 19).

Roland Barthes makes a distinction between 'works' of art that are classical and monolithic, the result of a single, precisely intended point of view, and 'texts' which are for him more pluralistic and open-ended. The monolithic or readerly work consigns the reader to the role of consumer while the writerly text gives the reader the possibility of helping to produce it; to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text (cited in Foster, 1986, p. 259). Linda Hutcheon (1988) claims that "no text is without its intertexts" (p. vii). However, there are works of art that are deliberately made up of intertextual components.

Michael Worton (1999) states that dance can also be perceived as text and can be better comprehended by being "viewed through the prisms of intertextual gazes and speculations" (p. x). For him, every text is "bound up with a host of other texts, some known and intended by the author, others known only by the reader and evoked as reference points; no two readers will 'read' exactly the same text" (p. x). Furthermore, Jennifer Jackson (1999) says that the dance text can be seen as an assemblage of its fragmented components that refutes the likelihood of an ultimate transcendental connotation, but which demonstrates certain features and qualities, conjuring associations and responses that raise other texts and questions, which can in turn be elucidated as bearing a lot of meanings (p. 105). However, McFee (1992) states that "works of art are essentially interpreted objects" (p. 84). Nevertheless, he continues that speaking of "the

meaning" of the work of art is misleading because there is not only one correct judgement of any particular work (p. 86). According to Lansdale (2010) "...practices, of intertextuality can be used to demonstrate how different interpretations are possible, how a range of texts, and traces of texts might prompt them, and how viewers or readers can construct them" (p. 163). Correspondingly for Worton (1999) interpretation is "a performative act, a speculative response to a text and, crucially, a response both to the contexts in which the text was created and the contexts in which one is reading it" (p. xi). For Adshead-Lansdale (1999) interpretation is not an effort to ascertain a one-to-one analogy between movement and meaning, it is an inventive and intellectual process (p. xiii).

Yet, Worton (1999) makes a crucial differentiation between interpretation and explanation (p. xi). Explanation is valid in an acknowledged pre-set frame of reference and expectation. Such an explanation mostly falls into the traditional analysis described above that includes description, interpretation and evaluation. However, it should not establish a firm relationship between every signifier and signified in a semiotic sense[2] considering limitations of a semiotic approach to theatre which operates within a structuralist framework as De Marinis (1993, p. 3) puts it.

Adshead-Lansdale (1999) proposes intertextual analysis as relevant to the current philosophical moment (p. xv). She differentiates three approaches to interpretation: authorial intention, text analysis and reader-response processes. Furthermore, De Marinis drawing on Gianfranco Bettetini identifies three relationships to be discussed: text to sources, texts to other texts and text to its receiver (cited in Adshead-Lansdale, 1999, p. 11).

Adshead-Lansdale identifies a range of contexts from the broader political and social events to the artistic frame and to the immediate dance context. In analysing dances these features relate as potential intertexts from which the reader can choose, in a range of ways to form multiple interpretations (1999, p. 11). As Umberto Eco (1984) says the intertextual frame recognises that "no text is read independently of the reader's experience of other texts" (p. 21). In post-structuralist critical practice, the intertext assumes a different importance from plainly a linear

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[2] According to Smith-Autard (2002) "care should always be taken not to *fix* correlating ideas and movements, since their expressiveness depends upon their role in each individual dance". She states that "meanings become different in different contexts and juxtapositions" (p. 34).

set of references; it can be a complex interweaving of literary, poetic, musical and other quotations (Adshead-Lansdale, 1999, p. 12). For Lansdale (2010) it becomes evident that any language of movement and dance, both the practical form and analysis of it, is rooted in a specific context: its own internal language created within "a frame of its cultural and political ecology" (p. 160).

3   INTERTEXTUALITY

The early 20th century notions of intertextuality, usually attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin, were later developed by Julia Kristeva in her essay *Word, Dialogue and Novel* (1969). From a perception of a text as a "mosaic of quotations" she contends that the "interpretive process is the creation of a dialogue from an intersection of textual surfaces, in opposition to a more traditional view of the construction of a single point of meaning" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 66). There is no plain or straight-forward characterisation of the concept of "intertextuality" (Adshead-Lansdale, 1999, p. 8). It can take many forms as De Marinis (1993) puts it: "borrowing, citation, implicit or explicit references, dialogues from afar, and substitutions, which substantiate the relationships between the texts of a given culture (and even between texts of different cultures)" (p. 4); this emphasises the importance of contextual analysis. He states that intertextuality is "an exploration of texts, both of the time and prior to it, both theatrical and non-theatrical; ...a rich network of echoes and references" (De Marinis, 1993, p. 81). He continues that the revelation of the intertextual aspect underlying each performance permits us to concentrate more clearly on the performance text as a mixture of the old and the new, of the already said and the not yet said (De Marinis, 1993, p. 4) which can be linked to the postmodern concept of deconstruction.[3] The intertextual point is that the texts relevant to any dance bear traces from the immediate present, as well as the supposedly dead past. If it is obvious that "all texts contain

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[3] This desire to see what is happening under the surface and how things work at any level as a part of structure or as an entirety made up of components can arguably be linked to Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction, which he introduces in his book *Of Grammatology* (1967) and discusses in his text 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' published in the book *Derrida and Différance*, edited by David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (1985, p. 1). Correspondingly, one of Derrida's translators Barbara Johnson (1981, p. xv) claims that the deconstructive reading indicates the necessity with which what an author does see is systematically related to what he does not see. According to Lansdale (2010) "deconstruction and intertextuality are inherently related since together they raise underlying theoretical and value positions to a level of awareness where they can be examined in relation to the text" (p. 162).

traces of other texts", a more sophisticated version of this idea focuses on "the interactions between texts, producers of texts, or readers' lifeworlds" (Meinhof and Smith, 2000, p. 3).

Lansdale (2010) summarises that intertextuality is firstly a method of tracing the interrelationships of "author", "text" and "reader" (p. 164). Secondly, it can identify and clarify the potentially conflicting sets of genre coding that add other layers to the possible modes of interaction. Thirdly, intertextuality can reveal both what is present in these texts and what is absent, pointing to the traces that dominate and those that appear to retreat as we construct different readings. Fourthly, intertextuality focuses on the social and cultural representation of embodied human beings. De Marinis calls for numerous but limited interpretations, unlike Kristeva who advocates the assumption of the infinity of poetic language[4], while Eco thinks that references and archetypes multiply to the point of talking among themselves (cited in Adshead-Lansdale, 1999, p. 15).

Louis Althusser claims in his book *For Marx* (1969) that "the play is really the development, the production of a new consciousness in the spectator ... the play is really the production of a new spectator, an actor that starts where the performance ends" (p. 151). Althusser's idea is that the interaction between performance and audience is a "clash of two illusory consciousnesses (spectator versus performance)" (cited in Kowsar, 1983, p. 473). This is in accordance with Barthes's idea on diffuse authorship, constructed through improvisation and experiment (Auslander, 2008, p. 50). This approach is based on the idea that life is a permanent performance: we are the spectators and performers at the same time. People simultaneously watch and are being watched, therefore, they are at the same time the audience and the performers. This is consonant with the concept of carnival that "does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators" from Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and His World* (1968,

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[4] Stephanie Jordan and Helen Thomas (2010, pp. 156-157) are open to the possibility of multiple readings on the basis of intertextuality, but argue that they do not want to propose that any account will do, as is often the case in postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches which put emphasis on the relativisation of accounts and an appearingly endless play of signifiers.

p. 7)[5] and Jean Baudrillard's (1983, p. 81) concept of simulacrum that is an image or representation of reality[6].

Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of *rhizome* discussed in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) meaning that the artistic work does not come from a single root, but is rhisomatically interwoven with numerous influences which is all in accordance with the concept of intertextuality.

Litza Bixler (1999) claims that "intertextuality becomes a quest not only for meaning, but a personalised way of seeing" (p. 249). This is in accordance with Jean–François Lyotard's (1984) postmodern "incredulity towards grand narratives"[7] (p. xxiv). Hutcheon (1988) writes about this paradox in what she calls the poetics of postmodernism, when "modernist aesthetic autonomy and self-reflexivity come up against a counterforce in the form of a grounding in the historical, social and political world" (p. ix). She describes a paradox of self-conscious narratives which request from the reader both involvement and detachment and discusses a doubled model that merges the semiotics with the formally intertextual and claims that formalist and pragmatic approaches require expanding to involve ideological and historical considerations. According to her, postmodern art and theory live out the contradiction of two divergent urges: one is to essentialise art and its language into a unique textual preserve and the other is to make it relevant by placing it in larger discursive contexts. For her postmodern is a problematising force in our culture today where the self-reflexive stays distinctive from the historico-political context in which it is ingrained: it never offers definite answers, but underlines the notion of process that is "at the heart of postmodernism" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. xi). It is the process of conferring postmodern contradictions that is put forward, not any convincingly concluded and closed product that arises from that resolution. She explains this

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[5] "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (Bakhtin, 1968, p. 7)

[6] Jean Baudrillard's (1983, p. 81) concept of simulacrum is an image or representation of reality that has three main phases or orders—the first phase emerging in baroque with artifice over realism, the second being the modern age of mass production with its realism and the third postmodern phase, where simulacrum has lost all relation to reality, producing its own reality. In postmodernity the simulacrum has replaced the real, so that we live in a world of simulacra (Auslander, 2008, p. 57).

[7] Lyotard discusses that metanarratives are "being replaced by a proliferation of *petits récits*, 'little stories' or testimonies that draw attention to particulars as opposed to universals—that is, to local events, individual experience, heterodox ideas..." (quoted in Auslander, 2008, p. 133).

challenge to the humanist assumption of a unified self and integrated consciousness by both establishing consistent subjectivity and overthrowing it.

4   THE CONCEPT OF THE AUTHOR

This self-reflective approach is part of the postmodern paradox and offers new interpretation of the concept of the author. Barthes (1968) states that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (p.147), a concept from his essay *The Death of the Author* (1968) that, according to Auslander (2008, p. 46), echoes the Nietzschean pronouncement of the "death of God". Barthes (1968) claims that: "... it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality ... to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (p. 144). He continues: "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture ... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original" (Barthes, 1968, p. 146). Furthermore, Bixler (1999) states that "in the postmodern arena of self-conscious, self-quoting, televised, repeatable and reproducible imagery, nothing seems new or original" (p. 238) which agrees with the concept of intertextuality.

Michael Foucault proposes that eventually the author-function disappears. In his essay *What is an Author* (1969) he says that the idea of the "author" establishes the privileged moment of individualisation in the history of philosophy, art and sciences. He claims that in a culture such as ours, the authors became individualised (1969, p. 101). In the dance field this is obvious. For example, various ethnic dances from Africa or Asia, as well as early folk dances in Europe, have no individual authors. Joanne Kealiinohomoku (1983, p. 537) states that some cultures do not place the same value on preserving the names of their innovators as we do, referring to traditional dance forms. In contrast, Foucault (1969) observes that in our Western culture we are used to claiming that the author is the "genial creator of a work"; in it he "deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an exhaustible world of significations" (p. 118). We are accustomed to thinking that the "author is so different from all other men, and so transcendent with regard to all languages that, as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely" (1969, p. 118). However, Foucault (1969) suggests that we must

completely reverse the original idea of the author that is for him an "ideological product" (p. 119). For him:

> the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. (Foucault, 1969, pp. 118-119)

Foucault (1969, p. 112) claims that all discourses that encompass the author function possess plurality of self[8]. According to him:

> in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first-person pronoun nor the present indicative refers exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work. It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance. (Foucault, 1969, p. 112)

The third self, according to Foucault (1969) would be "the one that speaks to tell the work's meaning, the obstacles encountered, the results obtained, and the remaining problems" (p. 112).

5   CONCLUSION

Regarding all of the above, the intertextual approach proves to be valid at least on two levels: the first is the creation of a new work where the author can function as the editor, aware and conscious of the interplay of disparate texts and their sources which co-act in the mind during the creative process and the second one is the possibility of a more objective dance analysis in combination with a semiotic structuralist approach. Intertextuality is considered as a tool for

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[8] This corresponds to Bakhtin's idea that, according to Auslander (2008) "the author's function is that of a ringmaster who deploys various voices without identifying entirely with any of them" (p. 41). Bakhtin in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984) searches for "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (p. 51).

dance analysis as well as for the creation of multi-layered works that are conceived as *writerly* texts open to multiple interpretations. This is connected to the concept of *deconstruction* that reveals the underlying multiple layers of the performance and puts equal significance on the already said and the not yet said, emphasising its process-driven and open-ended feature which is in accordance with *incredulity towards grand narratives* that emphasises the importance of particulars as opposed to universals, involving individual experience. The concept of the *death of the author* is used to question the role of the author, drawing on Barthes and Foucault, positioning the author as the editor of various intertexts emphasising the notion of the *plurality of self* and *diffuse authorship* proves to be a concept that enhances the possibility of re-considering existing monolithic or *readerly* texts.

Finally, it may be concluded that contemporary dance analyses can work on two levels. The first level is a structuralist semiotic analysis in which works are subjected to a traditional analysis that contains description.; interpretation/explanation of authorial intentions follow with an evaluation based on criteria that draw on firm and wide knowledge of the field, its context, conventions and traditions, genre and style. The second level takes into consideration Adshead-Lansdale's (1999, p. 7-8) claim that an alternative to envisaging description as being capable of resonating some prior reality is to consider the dance text as an open construction, containing the fluency and enigmatic quality of art and leaves the interpretive position open. Such an intertextual approach should give an objective stance to examine a project and possible constructions of meaning that can differ from the authors' original intentions, moving from strict relationships between signs to a multiplication of signifiers, combining structural, semiotic and intertextual analyses[9].

This paper is deliberately conceived as an intertextual *collage* that gives an insight into the relevant theoretical and philosophical sources starting from Best's (1992) notion that "…verbal reasoning is a *principal* way of learning to appreciate both verbal and non-verbal arts and that …verbal language is a principal way of helping students to understand all the arts" (p.129).

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[9] Intertextuality is employed in structuralist, post-structuralist, semiotic, deconstructive, post-colonial, Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic theories, and has been applied across a range of literary and cultural texts according to the preliminary statement in Graham Allen's *Intertextuality* (2000, p. i).

However, for additional consideration I offer a different view of the dancer-choreographer Alexandre Munz (2015) who argues against a "deep-rooted bias privileging the power of the word over the power of corporeality" (para. 2) and against a "disavowal of the body as a thinking being able to express the inexplicable and the invisible, which is, in fact, precisely the realm of dance" (2015, para. 3) that opens possibilities for further research.

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