



Dancing Texts: Intertextuality in Interpretation. Editor: J. Adshead-Lansdale. (Dance Books : London. 1999)

Foreword

One of the most important developments in critical theory over the past thirty years has been the shift in attention from belief in the autonomy of the text and scrutiny of its formal features to a focus on the reader and his or her activity. The theory of intertextuality in its diverse manifestations has, crucially, alerted us to the fact that 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 by him or her as he or she engages in the process that is reading.

The reader is now no longer viewed as a perpetual latecomer who is passively, even parasitically, dependent on the artistic text. Rather, we now recognise that in the act of reading and interpreting, the reader not only co-creates the text but engages in an act of self-creation or, more precisely, of self-definition. Interpretation is, of course, a function of identity and no two readers will 'read' exactly the same text. In this sense, reading is a personal transaction, a transaction operated between text and reader by the reader - in order to recreate him/herself.

As we think (through) our identities in ever more interesting ways, it is surely crucial that we allow our reading practices to become more than mere decodings of texts (no matter how dazzling), more than responses to texts in which the text is always-already established as the fixed point in a dialectic relationship. We need to take the risk of interpreting, of challenging the boundaries between what we define as the textual and what we define as the real or non-textual.

Of course, in its personal dimension, reading is always narcissistic to a certain degree, but we should remember that there are several forms of narcissism and that an alternative to retracted narcissism is *expansive* narcissism, which permits and enables a movement towards the other, and offers the individual possibility of transforming his or her extreme subjectivity into an openness to - and acceptance of - difference.

The essays in this volume are all personal in this sense: they articulate strongly held positions, but also reach out to us and show how dance is, of course, not only text, but that it is *also* text and can be better understood by being viewed through the prisms of intertextual gazes and speculations. Interpretation itself is not a process of reconstruction or rehabilitation -

and it is certainly not explanation (although it is all too often presumed to have explanation as its main purpose and function). Rather, 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. Furthermore, whereas an explanation can occur and have validity only within an accepted, pre-established frame of reference and expectation, a performative interpretation must bring about its own criteria and persuade the unknown reader of their worth.

In this volume, there are many such creative impositions of new criteria, as the history of dance, ethnicity or gender positions, for example, are re-textualised and 'choreographed' into historical and theoretical speculations that contribute not only to a reconfiguring of dance studies but also to a repositioning of the theory of intertextuality.

These readings, these 'dancing texts' are themselves truly performances; each of them is the staging of an act, of a process of seeing and thinking in a space between cultures and between discourses. Seeing and reading dance from new and different points of view and, constructing their own narratives of interpretation, they move between discourses in order to liberate us and the works they consider from the tyranny of *singular* concepts of telling, showing, explaining.

Michael Worton
University College London