

Shakespeare's Hamlet in Ballet: Transformation of an Archival Recording of a Neoclassical Ballet Performance into a Contemporary Transmodern Dance Video Applying Postmodern Concepts and Techniques

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Abstract : This four-year artistic research project hosted by the University of New England, Australia has set the goal to experiment with non-conventional ways of presenting a language-based narrative in dance using insights of recent theoretical writing on performance, addressing the research question: How to transform an archival recording of a neoclassical ballet performance into a new artistic dance video by implementing postmodern philosophical concepts? The Creative Practice component takes the form of a dance video Hamlet Revisited which is a reworking of the archival recording of the neoclassical ballet Hamlet, augmented by new material, produced using resources, technicians and dancers of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. The methodology for the creation of Hamlet Revisited consisted of extensive field and desk research after which three dancers were shown the recording of original Hamlet and then created their artistic response to it based on their reception and appreciation of it. The dancers responded differently, based upon their diverse dancing backgrounds and life experiences. They began in the role of the audience observing video of the original ballet and transformed into the role of the choreographer-performer. Their newly recorded material was edited and juxtaposed with the archival recording of Hamlet and other relevant footage, allowing for postmodern features such as aleatoric content, synchronicity, eclecticism and serendipity, that way establishing communication on a receptive reader-response basis, thus blending the roles of the choreographer, performer and spectator, creating an original work of art whose significance lies in the relationship and communication between styles, old and new choreographic approaches, artists and audiences and the transformation of their traditional roles and relationships. In editing and collating, the following techniques were used with the intention to avoid the singular narrative: fragmentation, repetition, reverse-motion, multiplication of images, split screen, overlaying X-rays, image scratching, slow-motion, freeze-frame and simultaneity. Key postmodern concepts considered were: deconstruction, diffuse authorship, supplementation, simulacrum, self-reflexivity, questioning the role of the author, intertextuality and incredulity toward grand narratives - departing from the original story, thus personalising its ontological themes. From a broad brush of diverse concepts and techniques applied in an almost prescriptive manner, the project focuses on intertextuality that proves to be valid on at least two levels. The first is the possibility of a more objective analysis in combination with a semiotic structuralist approach moving from strict relationships between signs to a multiplication of signifiers, considering the dance text as an open construction, containing the elusive and enigmatic quality of art that leaves the interpretive position open. The second one is the creation of the new work where the author functions 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. It is argued here that the eclectic combination of the old and new material through constant oscillations of different discourses upon the same topic resulted in a transmodern integrationist recent work of art that might be applied as a model for reconsidering existing choreographic creations.

Keywords : Ballet Hamlet, intertextuality, transformation, transmodern dance video

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