BOOK REVIEW

**Interdisciplinarity in the performing arts: contemporary perspectives**, edited by Stefan Aquilina and Malaika Sarco-Thomas, Malta, Malta University Press, 315 pp., €35.00 (paperback) ISBN: 978-99909-45-89-8

*Interdisciplinarity in the Performing Arts: Contemporary Perspectives* addresses a relevant, current, and widespread field of research; one that demands to be explored through manifold perspectives and according to polyhedric methodologies. Edited by Stefan Aquilina and Malaika Sarco-Thomas, this collection of essays proposes thirteen case studies that discuss contemporary issues grounded in the performing arts through interdisciplinary approaches and applications. In this book, interdisciplinarity is considered in a twofold way: as that intrinsic proximity between artistic disciplines that encourages aesthetic and poietic exchanges between different disciplines; and – perhaps most importantly – as a methodological activity within which models and praxes of research belonging to different disciplines blend and interact. The contemporary perspectives and case studies offered here do not only operate strictly within the sphere of the performing arts, but reach out and converse with other humanistic and scientific disciplines, such as philosophy, pedagogy, neuroscience and social sciences. In this way, as Aquilina and Sarco-Thomas write in the Introduction, this book’s ‘collection of essays are both inward and outward looking’ (2).

The strength of the book resides in its ability to offer a significant number of practical approaches, applications, and interpretations of contemporary interdisciplinarity, allowing the notion of this term to acquire definition essay by essay. It is the variety of approaches and applications presented in the book that gradually displays interdisciplinarity’s ‘potential’: a potential to investigate, through means of intellectual promiscuousness, areas of knowledge that would otherwise be left undiscussed, or perhaps neglected, by discipline-specific research. From this point of view, the notion of interdisciplinarity emerges as a *modus operandi*, rather than a field of academic research; a *modus* of ‘bringing together’, of designing ‘a framework that allows for different approaches to coexist and complement each other without losing their individuality’ (32), as Rutgeerts *et al.* write in ‘Choreographing Research’, the book’s first essay. Concomitantly, as Philip Ciantar proposes in his essay ‘Beyond the Music and Spectacle’ – the third in this collection – interdisciplinarity reveals itself to be a realm of multiple truths, which reside within the integration and synthesis of concepts, theories and methods: ‘the truth, or at least part of it, lies in the space "in between”, a contested terrain where most interdisciplinary studies exist’ (62).

The structure of the book offers a linear journey for the reader, and it coherently facilitates the above inward-outward looking. The essays are grouped in four sections, outlining the following trajectory: in the first part there is an initial reflection on the nature of interdisciplinarity, exploring strategies for interdisciplinary approaches. In the second part the discussion turns to the matter of theorising interdisciplinarity in performance through exchanges between the performing arts, philosophy, and social studies – the links between Performance Philosophy and Poetry-Philosophy proposed by James Corby in ‘Disciplining Performance Philosophy’, and Mario Frendo’s ‘perspective of the tragic in terms of the musical’ (133) in ‘Nietzsche’s Musical Perspectivism’ are particularly interesting. The third section is dedicated to interdisciplinary readings, ranging from musical works to dance writings and contemporary theatrical productions. The essence of this third part enables an implicit consideration of the artist as an (arguably unconscious) interdisciplinary thinker. This is the case, for instance, of the composer Sergei Prokofiev, who – as Brandon Shaw writes in ‘Friction, Antagonism, and Interdisciplinary Partnering’ – ‘plotted every moment of his Romeo and Juliet down to the second, even occasionally indicating how certain actions should be performed’ (177). And it also is the case of the performance company The Wooster Group – discussed by Johan Callens – whose production of Tennessee Williams’ *Vieux Carré* ‘converge[s] towards a kind of totalizing work of art’ (213) that befogs the margins between real life, performance and consumerism. Such an interdisciplinary thinking perspective, in Henrique Rochelle’s ‘Communication through Dance Writings’, possibly gauges a wider panorama, proposing a sort of connatural osmosis between disciplines; an idea emerging from ‘the possibility of understanding dance as a language’ (193). Finally, the fourth part of the book offers discussions and interdisciplinary links within the field of applied interdisciplinary performance. Here, the attention is addressed towards processes that are inherently interdisciplinary, as for example ‘the attention to materiality [seen] as both physical and imaginative performance practice’ (237) within the exercise of contact improvisation, or the dancers’ ability to ‘practice experiencing the material world through frames beyond everyday reality’ by ‘imagining [themselves] as sensible movers’ (250) and through ‘infra-actions’ (245); these themes are discussed by Malaika Sarco-Thomas in ‘Momentum, Gravity, and *Sens*ational Facts’, the first essay of the fourth section.
There is an underlying reflection running across the book regarding the notion of knowledge. Knowledge itself – perhaps unavoidably within the context of the book – emerges as interdisciplinary knowledge and – within certain essays and practices – as embodied knowledge. Regarding this aspect, the book offers reflections that transcend particular essays or sections, and instead silently flow across all articles; stimulating further scholarly implications and pointing towards further research paths.

Similarly, there are passages across the book dedicated to interdisciplinary teaching, both as a pedagogical model and as an invitation to enquire into universal themes through a plurality of perspectives; an invitation that can certainly benefit our post-truth era, productively encouraging holistic views. It has to be said, however, that although the themes and approaches of this book can greatly inform and enhance some foundational principles of teaching and learning, and consequently benefit contemporary models of education, it is not a textbook of easy access to undergraduate students. Its sophisticated themes, specificity of case studies, and often intricate tone and specialised language, would instead appeal to researchers, academics, and doctoral students. This is not a criticism, but rather a reflection on the implicit contradiction that emerges when pondering the importance of an inter- disciplinary education able to integrate and synthesise different perspectives, and the difficulty of conveying such an importance.

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