

Hold Me Closely (From the Dark)

Choreography and film should get along famously. Dancers move;, films move. Right?; right? Yet dancers tend to defy the movie camera, which. Film often ends up making them look either too large or too small in the film by shifting awkwardly between a close-up of their bodies and a wide-angle shot of the entire stage. Even if a dance stage measures about the same size as a movie screen, transposing a choreography into a film is never a simple 1:1 affair. And even if dancers and films both move – even if spectators experience choreography and film in a similar way by sitting in a theatre and looking at a stage / screen – the two mediums seem utterly incompatible.

Eva-Cecilie Richardsen has found a way to overcome this incompatibility. Her films work precisely because she rejects the visual conventions of both mediums. We are not watching a traditional choreographydance film or choreographed piece since we never get a clear view of the whole stage, a perspective of one entire scene, a sight of all the dancers, nor a sense of where we are sitting with respect to them. Yet we are not watching a traditional film either since there is no continuous sequence, no narrative plot, not even a hint of a good ol' documentary, let alone a movie about dance. Instead, we see rapid-fire shots: intimate, faraway, shifting, fragmentary, clipped and above all repetitive. Through repetition, the shots match each other visually – we come to recognize each dancer's gestures – but these shots are partial in terms of perspective and discrete in terms of narrative. Essentially, Richardsen has edited in a type of repetition that is usually foreign to choreography, to film and certainly to films of choreographies.

Throwback (2015) is a good example. We watch a young woman take a microphone in her hands, only to turn her back on it. Although we never actually see the stage, we know she's standing on one because of the microphone and the strong lights that illuminate her mane of blonde hair. Instead of singing, she bends forward and then back sharply, flicking her hair forth and back. We hear a muted pop, another one and still more... Her gestures are not clear, nor is the source of the dull sound, because the shots are so tightly edited: too close, too far, too fast, cutting off her body and

then her head, even straying out of focus, a bit overexposed, a quick replay moving a split second back in time. Again: it's neither a dance, nor a film, nor an attempt to forge a middle ground. We come to realize that the woman is throwing her hair back to hit the mike but without looking at it. She stretches out her arm like a custom-made ruler that can gage hair length, microphone height and bodily distance. What we hear are hundreds of tiny blonde fibres travelling at unknown speeds impacting the compact metal head of the mike. What we actually see is harder to classify. It's as if Richardsen had in mind, not a dance, nor a film, but rather a jigsaw puzzle – as if she filmed the choreography as so many little misshapen parts which viewers must put together to get the whole big picture, even if many parts are left out, even if some parts are doubled. Yet as with a jigsaw puzzle, we recognize when two distinct pieces match and fit together, even if the others are missing.

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Richardsen – a choreographer by training with many works behind her – clearly understoodunderstands the basic problem of filming dance. Films add endless movements that were never part of the original choreography as well as forced perspectives that rob viewers of the freedom to let their eyes wander across a stage. Again, Richardsen rejects the visual conventions of both of these mediums with her rapid-fire repetitive clips, which are too close for choreography and too redundant for film. Repetition allows for recognition. In a way, she has reformulated the classic loop of video art into a shaking stutter; her films seem to be made up of so many tinier loops which have each been truncated and then stuck all together in the end; although the clips can be disorienting, their visual similarity allows for an identification in the manner of an ellipsis. Most importantly, Richardsen has eliminated the old equation between the camera and the audience, between the lens and the human eye: close to the stage, far from it or even one on it. However human her dancing subjects, her method of displaying them does fully away with the anthropocentric perspectives of the stage and the screen. Her camera is not an eyeball but seems to have multiplied into a flock of wild drones, flying around the dancers, approaching them from all angles, including the bird's eye perspective from above, sometimes crashing, sometimes missing the mark, sometimes flying back to

the same point for another look, sometimes blinking. Although we never see the entire stage, we see more of it than we could ever hope to glimpse from a seat in the audience: not only microphones and lighting but also rafters, curtains, cables, dust particles floating in the air and just left-over stage stuff hanging around that is hard to classify.

Indeed, it's hard to classify exactly what Richardsen does. She calls this large body of work *Speaking and Building. Processing Choreographic Relations* (2011-15). But the relations go beyond the dance and performances that usually go with a choreography. Sometimes her dancers create sculptural works in her films: *Weaving* (2012) shows one wrapping reams of paper around her arms, as if the paper were skeins of wool, while *Verticalization of Ground* (2011) offers the view-from-above of dancers winding up giant curtain-like cloths, like caterpillars spinning cocoons for the break during the theatre season. In light of these works, Richardsen might well be considered as a choreographer of sculptures who leaves the work to others in a manner reminiscent of Andy Warhol's factory or Martin Kippenberger's many assistants. Yet that's not quite right either because she does not display the sculptures as the final works, as Warhol and Kippenberger used to exhibit the paintings and prints made by others. Her choreographies are performed and filmed on a stage, but there is not always a live public audience, so her oeuvre is not about performances, nor about the various relics from them, whether sculptures or props. In *Hole in Wall* (2015), two dancers whisper to each other through a divide with an intensity reminiscent of Abelard and Héloïse, but this work is not a theatre play either. When Richardsen does add a live performance to an exhibition, she is more likely to invite other people: not dancers, nor actors, but perhaps a band, in the manner of an impresario. Yet she could also be called a filmmaker – a director-choreographer – yet her films are projected on corners, walls or mdf boards, among other surfaces, which hold the moving pictures while adding another sense of surface movement to them. Moreover, the projections tend to be scattered around an exhibition space in a kind of hide-and-seek itinerary which turns the viewers into unwitting choreography extras. Since Richardsen comes from choreography, her exhibitions are likely to veer away from the white cube towards a stage which allows

viewers to walk around behind the wings and to manoeuvre their way through technical equipment. In other words, just as her films never offer a clear view of the entire stage, she never creates a clear borderline between the stage and the audience. By eliminating the division between the stage and the audience, it's not entirely clear where the spectacle is taking place: in the films, in the space, in the people wandering around or in the hired band. Equally unclear is the duration of her works: not only where they take place but also when they begin and end. In addition to making films of her choreographies, Richardsen adds other material – photographs of them as well as films which she considers “documents.” Yet her documents do not seem to function like traditional documents because they do not quite record an event that has taken place. After all, when have her events taken place: in the dance, in its filmic version or when the viewers watch the film? Where do her events actually take place, if the stage and the audience are no longer divided? And is the dancer moving or is the sculpture moving the dancer or even the editor moving them both in the final cut of the film? And who are the spectators, if they themselves might be filmed as they watch the exhibition? Richardsen confounds all of the traditional frames that have long served to define an event: from the starting time to the stage. She thus revives a constellation described by Richard Sennett in *The Fall of Public Man* (1977): a continuous collective space that thrived before the nation-state introduced the division between the public and the private realms. Sennett bemoaned the fall of public man from the stage among the actors into a seat in the quiet audience; Richardsen's oeuvre suggests a resurrection.

Such oblique methods question the divide between not only choreography and film or the stage and the audience but also all artistic mediums. We are forced to rethink the simplistic ways we have used to mix and to divide mediums, to identify them and to deploy them. It's tempting to use vague labels such as “mixed-media,” “multimedia” or “installation,” which allow us to classify the work while deferring other questions. If there is no clearly delimited event, spectacle or even artwork, have the physical distinctions between people and things been replaced by purely visual differences? What seems to create an object – a thingness – in Richardsen's works

is not the appearance of actual objects but the repetition itself. However her works appear – as dancers, as rolled up paper, as films, as