

Dance on Screen: Four Collaborative Works

***Hands*, Adam Roberts, 1995, 4.5 mins**

Choreographer Jonathan Burrows and I wanted to make a film that would treat only one part of the body, ignoring the whole that is the usual subject of dance. While Jonathan was excited by the beauty of a pair of hands and their particular movement possibilities, I had been intrigued by the expressive possibilities of human parts other than the face that so dominates and organises film framings. For both of us hands were important and beautiful. What kind of a film could we make? We knew Yvonne Rainer's film *Hand Movie* of course, but this would be different. There is a concept in mathematics called "mapping". This says that one set of quantities can be used to perform calculations or manipulations in terms of another set, as long as a mapping has been established. Thus notes on a score could be mapped onto a set of movements. Composition in one domain can be used to structure and organise the other. This seemed a novel idea, enough to build the piece on.

Composer Matteo Fargion produced a score, which in its own terms (rhythm and value) was supple and interesting. Jonathan devised a set of hand movements. Each gesture was mapped onto a note. The piece was "played". It worked. A conventional musical score was composed to form a superimposed layer (written in "counterpoint" to the gesture score).

The immobility of the camera seemed to decide itself, bar the opening dolly movement that would serve as a curtain raiser. The close had to be a question of stillness sustained beyond any easy count. The costume and set design had to defy ready interpretation (naturalism would have been plain wrong), yet it needed to provide a vague sense of purpose (if unidentified) to the activity. The cue for the set design was Nauman's *Space Under My Chair*, and Rachel Whiteread's negative domestic spaces.

The film was commissioned by BBC TV and The Arts Council as part of the Dance for the Camera strand. We billed it as "dance reduced to a single pair of hands, cheekily ignoring the usual focus of televisual attention". It was transmitted in 1996 on BBC 2, and has since been seen all over the world. (Adam Roberts)

***Maynard*, Tanya Syed, 2016, 27 mins**

A cinematic rendition of Simon Whitehead's live performance work 'Studies for Maynard'. Ambiguous relationships to gravity, location and object, as seen in Syed's earlier films, are explored to poignant effect. Whitehead's leaning towards pedestrian movement and his conversation with a weathered school table move us through a percussive and ever-shifting orientation. Here, the physical immediacy of performance meets the proximity of the camera's eye and its desire to bring us closer. Throughout the filming, we were constantly looking for the right place to film, which never arrived.

This film also became about the different spaces we moved through. The intention was not to make a document of the choreography, but rather to take it in a new direction through the process of filming and editing: to make a new formation in film. Most of the sounds are taken from the environments we were filming in, including sounds of the body and table in space. Some sounds are transformed through variations in speed.

The process of filming is always to do with loss. The common belief is that when we record something we are fixing it in time. But actually as we film, we are losing the moment forever. What remains is a shadow of the moment, like when you start to talk about your dream, each next word you utter, erases the multidimensionality of the actual experience that becomes past. Something of what just happened has been transformed through the camera eye. As a filmmaker, I am aware that the performer experiences 'a little death' in the process of shifting from live performance to that of 'object' in the 'moving image'. And of revisiting something reduced and made strange. (Simon Whitehead and Tanya Syed)

***blue/yellow*, Adam Roberts, 1995, 13 mins**

Sylvie Guillem, the celebrated ballerina, asked Jonathan Burrows and I to make a dance film. The film would be included in a prime time experiment to be called Evidentia, funded by BBC 2 and France 2. The film is called blue yellow after the Matisse's painting intérieur jaune et bleu, 1946. This colour scheme inspired my design and much of the pictorial composition. Inevitably, being neither a dancer nor a choreographer, I felt rather removed from the choreographic process, and so decided that I should reflect this in the form of the film. I also wanted to consolidate ideas I had first tried out on a film called *Very*, where I had explored and made overt the very fragmentary nature of my untutored, subjective experience of dance. The aim would be to make it a task for a viewer of the film to imagine the space and the continuity of movement – so that the dance, if it exists at all, exists and is held in the mind of the viewer.

The filming took two days, and the editing about a week. Kevin Volans suggested using a section of one of his string quartets, which we cut up and interspersed through the film. At first we laid out the sections at regular intervals, but, as with all editing, human judgement finds some coincidences more pleasing than others. Hugh Strain at De Lane Lea sound studios achieved a perfect sound mix, foregrounding the music, as if it were, “this side” of the door. (Adam Roberts)

***Legal Errorist*, Mara Mattuschka & Chris Haring, 2005, 15 mins**

A performance of transformation, a transformance, changes its medium and encounters a camera, which plays dance music under the secret eye of a room that bends and twists along with it. The Legal Errorist personified by the dancer Stephanie Cumming is a creature that cannot stop crashing. The sudden overpowering by the error, the system error, engenders the creature's obsession. She commences with great relish through a series of transformations; that which hits upon the limits of a simple machine serves as a learning program for the Legal Errorist. Film and performance-parallel projection or articulated interference? Massively, like a mountain, the body of the Errorist falls to the floor and lands with an obstinate sound whose source seems remote from anything human.

As though she were her own director, she speaks animatedly with numerous invisible colleagues. She speaks to the microphone, not through it: an eerie animated world of objects, which become fellow creatures when one creature cannot categorize herself precisely. ‘What?!?’ roars the Legal Errorist defiantly, as though to a higher being in the dark, and not the diffuse collective of the audience. And she begins to lure the gaze through the catalogue of her body parts. The voyeur's fatally bundled attention seems inverse to the body set against it, anamorphically distorted by the extremely wide-angled lens. Does this gaze document a foul subjectivity or does this closed world look back as its own lens? The camera is a shrewd ally in the counterattack launched by the body on display. (Katherina Zakravsky)

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The project explores new directions for the study of cinematic intermediality, focusing on the ways in which the moving image is shaped and revitalised by artistic cross-fertilisation. It brings together creative practitioners and researchers across the Humanities. For more information please visit our website: <http://www.filmandarts-network.hss.ed.ac.uk/>.

