

Mette Edvardsen: Stills and other works

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Whatever

“Stills” is a video that is not a video that is a video that is not. The question is whether to stop on *is* or *not*? It is precisely in the gap between is or not, in the disjunctive synthesis of open-ended recording (or... or... or... or...) that Mette Edvardsen’s work operate. It activates an indefinite series of constellations or states of experience, each of which get recognized and consummated *après coup* by a subject of the experience.

Signature to Mette Edvardsen’s work in performance and video is how it approaches singularity through a maintained indifference. It is *whatever* but not in the sense that it does not matter which, indifferently, but precisely the opposite, i.e. such that it always matters. Following Georgio Agamben’s argumentation from “The Coming Community” this *whatever* simultaneously must be activating yet not directional, or intentional in order to remain its singularity insofar as it is whatever singularity. Her work thus is not performing a traverse towards something else but towards its own taking place.

Almost and not quite

In fairytales the clever child always bring breadcrumbs, wise princes a woolen thread to find their way home. It’s a matter of socialization. Children and others should want to find their way back. The breadcrumb is for adults like visits to the psychoanalyst. A thread we one day, proudly, can follow back to its origin and think, “Gosh, I have improved so much!”

Psychoanalysis can only find out for you what society wants you to be.

Traveling with the aid of maps will only take you to places that you could already visit. Cartography implies to make a landscape, or anything that can be introduced into a grid, neutral territory. To rob a bank is only a matter of technical precision from the moment you’ve got hold of its architectural drawings. That’s why the attic always is the most exiting place; there’s no map. On attics we are all explorers

Freud confesses to his readers in “Das Unheimliche” that he involuntarily returned no less then three times during the same afternoon to the red lights district of the unknown city he visited. Freud was probably not the clever child or he would have brought his breadcrumbs. But he did, it was just that *they*, read representation, wanted him to return to exactly where he could already have been.

Mette Edvardsen’s work begins where Freud gets worried, where the uncanny has ceased to be a state of exception. On the outskirts of maps, on the part that has been folded so many times nothing seems left. She gathers the breadcrumbs, wipes out the site of departure and creates an acronym for Far Far Away, or Close Up. In her labyrinth the Ariadne-thread is wireless and the Minotaur an aging architect whose angles never was straight.

The motif is to produce the possibility for a space, respectively a time, without coordinates. A space and a time that has always been here, around us, or somewhere next door, it is just that it was forgotten or not useful anymore. Spaces and times that are yet to be captured and named by representation, and actually doesn't exist not even for us as we experience their unknowingly complex polygonal structure unfold in front of us in all directions without goals, back and forth without dimensions.

To experience Mette Edvardsen's work is to know that you are but not where, and certainly not when. It is to be given a moment of the new, of the self. Something that can occur only where we don't know.

In the end of Hitchcock's "Murder" Sir John and Miss Diana Baring, whose death sentence Sir John has discovered to be inaccurate, is seen resting on a chaiselongue. Sir John contemplates the situation "Yes, it would have been a pity, you would fit so well in my new play". In the next scene we meet Sir John in a bourgeois saloon. A butler opens double doors and Diana, dressed up as a lady of the day enters. They kiss as the camera zooms out and we realize that we are in a theatre saloon. The curtain falls and the film ends.

The first aspect of this ending draws attention to how Sir John might just have staged the entire drama as a male fantasy about the mysterious Diana Baring. Does he have to stage the fantasy due that he cannot grasp the indifference with which Miss Baring receives her punishment?

A second aspect would be to read the film as a kind of film noir where Miss Baring with high risk has staged the entire narrative to capture Sir John?

A third version relates solely to the last two scenes. It seems as if an impossible yet actual space opens precisely in the moment when we realize that the saloon is a theatre. The cinematic narrative collapses, the equation between two fictionalities fall over and we don't know where we are. What is this space?

Space as we know it is defined by certain ideologies referencing back to Hellenistic architecture. Throughout history the definition of space and room has created numerous conflicts and disputes but one aspect is constant, namely that space and room has been defined by certain representational orders, always through a struggle between an inside and an outside. In the 19s century architect Schinkel's terminology e.g. through the tectonic and a dressing of a building, the structure and the façade, where the human body is a major reference.

What occurs in Hitchcock's film is a moments destruction of the correlation between inside and outside, a hatch or void opens into another space.

Mette Edvardsen's work draws attention to this opening, an opening that cannot be proposed but which only can be addressed as the possibility of a production. If space is defined by specific representational orders, or hierarchies, how could a specifically minor space exist? The answer must be that it can't, or at least that it can only to the extent of a maintain whatever singularity, since the very notion of space is violent and hierarchical. Mette Edvardsen addresses this through a sort of complexification where space as we know it over the course of the performance decomposes. Through a succession of seemingly insignificant reorganizations of space the performer produces a polygonal structure so entangled that the viewer loses his/her orientation. It is in the abundance of spatio-temporal coordinates that a third space can open, a space that through the surplus of coordination is as much a conjunctive synthesis of continuity

(and... and... and...) and, as we have seen earlier, an open-ended disjunctive synthesis of recording (or... or... or...).

Jacques Rancière draws in “The Names of History” out a notion of this space as ‘vacance’. The French philosopher proposes that there indeed are no female spaces, and refers to e.g. female baths as strategic escapes issued by male authority. A vacance is rather a space which has shown to be insignificant or otherwise useless and thus forgotten by governing forces. Spaces and sites that so to say is not in place. To replace these places (spaces) however also implies to free the space, to re-establish it or even to create it. Mette Edvardsen proposes a radical temporality as she creates space again as if for the first time, through a plethora of coordinates oscillating between two and three dimension, where the very first image precisely implies to undress the structure and from there continuing to create in the voids of representation, yet not evacuating it and hence creating a new institutionality. Mette Edvardsen annihilates the opportunity for Sir John to dwell in the genius loci of male fantasy, as well as Miss Baring’s possible double standard and gives to the theatre space in which her performance takes place, an uncanny atmosphere, a passage between the almost and not quite.

...is being felt

The obsessed professor transgresses conventions and sets a new creature to the world. We all remember the films: homunculi, cold war, gene technology, the mastermind pushing buttons in order to change the paths of history, but something always ends up ‘wrong’. An unexpected side effect transforms the obedient creature into a kill-em-all monster reproducing malignly with the aim of erasing humanity. It is in the side effect that invention resides, not in the creation hence the creature is already given a function. Inventions are no monsters; they are side effects without a name.

Mette Edvardsen’s work is the production of these very side effects. In fact there is no performance, no video, however there must seem to exist one as the side effect otherwise would carry a name, be the central axis of production.

One could say that there is nothing to see in the works of Mette Edvardsen, but that the performances is the seeing itself, a looking out for nothing as it comes towards you, irrecognizable.

The recurring theme of Edvardsen’s work is a production of a ‘vacance’, a site within which the marginal is gaining its own orders of representation, no longer defined as the ‘other’ of a recognized, or established order of representation. Mette Edvardsen doesn’t occupy the role of the professor but is rather passing onto the spectator the blind character that hosts the side effect, unaware of it’s fierce capacities to undermine the coherence of representation and hence able to affiliate with its potentiality as invention.

The necessity for the Western world to exterminate its own inventions, its side effects, and to define them as fierce lies in the importance to reassure the coherence of a symbolic order. Mette Edvardsen’s doesn’t undo this order but complexifies it to the

extent where an accursed share is allowed to surface and sedimentations of norms appear soft and conspicuous.

There is no collection of beginnings only superimposed continuations, and it is in this discontinuity that the beginning is the promise of everything in its particularity, of a specificity which is not special.

“Stills” is a video that is not a video that is a video that is not. Mette Edvardsen proposes in her work series of collapsing causalities, interruptions that is never to be surprising yet puzzling as they stretch those moments that can not be stretched by passing them to the viewer to fill with desire. It occurs as if her works are becoming things, more things than things. Individuals in “Stills” is and not, but *whatever* singular, and it is in this becoming that they offer a passage from the subject’s *I feel* to a deferred subject that *is being felt*.

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