

## At Lincoln Center, Dancing in the Dark Installations

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There are certain events that manage, in the most charming way, to reduce the vast metropolis of New York City to something like a village. One such is "Slow Dancing," at Lincoln Center, which, since it began last Thursday, has fostered the sense that something special is going on in New York.

From atop the roof of Avery Fisher Hall, the images of 43 dancers in isolation are projected through the evening air, across the Josie Robertson Plaza, onto 50-foot screens attached to the façade of the New York State Theater. There they will remain, between 9 p.m. and 1 a.m., through July 29.

What you see is a five second video clip of such dancers as Trisha Brown, Wendy Whelan, Holley Farmer, and Fang-Yi Sheu, each engaged in a single movement slowed down so drastically that it stretches out to 10 minutes. This public art piece is the creation of a video artist and photographer, David Michalek, who used a high-definition, high-speed camera at 1,000 frames a second. That extreme density produces a surprisingly smooth and fluent movement, the very antithesis of the jerky frame by frame progression that you might expect.

Through the fortuities of scheduling, "Slow Dancing" will coincide for most of its run with "A Midsummer Night's Swing," the highly successful dance class that takes place at the Josie Robertson Plaza for much of June and July. Unfortunately, the complex bandshell that accommodates the latter makes it impossible to obtain an unobstructed view of all three screens at the same time from the plaza. We will have to wait until July 22 to see the piece as Mr. Michalek originally conceived it. But even now it has a somewhat jolting effect on the architectural ensemble of Lincoln Center, despite the fact that, by drawing attention to the metal braces that hold in place the columns of Philip Johnson's façade, the screens banalize what — by pure default — is probably the best building in the complex.

There is something essentially postmodern, in the best sense, about "Slow Dancing." It is all about the transfiguration of the commonplace, to reapply a phrase made famous by the art critic Arthur Danto. Though there is nothing exactly common about a prima ballerina airborne in the midst of a jeté, nevertheless, an unmistakable transfiguration occurs when that same dancer is reduced to silence, slowed to an almost mortuary stillness, and blown up to the size of a colossus. Here is a paradox typical of a certain strain of post-modernism, whereby the most exacting, tangible data of the real world are rendered to such a degree that, in their very factuality, they take on an alienated, destabilized quality. But then, beyond that ruptured reality, there is a higher calm, a peace that reigns through these almost still images of taut muscles and gyrating forms, until a higher and ultimately consoling resolution is achieved.

As with so much public art recently seen in New York, an essential component of this work's success is the nature of its interaction with the public. When I saw it on Friday, at around 11 p.m., about 150 souls were there, some standing, some lying on the travertine embossed floors of the Plaza, either commenting to their companions about the unfolding or peering up in awed silence.

"Slow Dancing" is quintessentially a work of summer. It would make far less sense during the winter months, despite the success of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's Gates project in February 2005. In the cold of winter, everything is what it is and not another thing. But in the slightly hazy, languid air of deep summer, a certain shimmer of something else, of something more, attaches to the hard data of the world. To sit at midnight on the floor of Lincoln Center's plaza, watching a supernaturally beautiful giantess go through the paces of classical ballet, has an invincible logic that it would not have at other times of the year. This latest item of public art integrates itself into the poetry of the summer of 2007, as well as the collective memories and mythology of New York City.