

**Adam Roberts, digital video and photography**  
**Todds Gallery January 2008**

I have always called myself a film-maker, and yet I have always been interested in working beyond narratives, with open ended forms and limited subject matter. The video piece presented in this exhibition is the first of three I made last year investigating such limited situations, attempting a kind of philosophical investigation. The photography also shown began as a series of studies for a film based work, but the images took on lives of their own. Again, the interest is a philosophical one: what if the usual subjects of attention are removed. What is left?

In "three", my collaborators are performers Gerard Bell and Raquel Cassidy, whose task was to stay resolutely in their moment, without thinking forward or backward.

I am very grateful for their skill and virtuosity. I am also grateful to Milfid Ellis for her support and input.

To introduce "three", I asked two very different kinds of writer to give a reaction. Deborah Tiso is a maker of dance, film and theatre, while Niamh McDonnell is a philosopher, currently completing a doctoral thesis on Deleuze and Leibnitz.

Deborah Tiso:

"three" is a 2 screen installation, featuring 2 scenes shot from the same angle over the course of 1 hour. A man and women sit together in the corner of a comfortable sitting room. They are engaged in a type of a dialogue, but it is not with each other.

On one screen, *he* appears to observe her very closely, yet *she* remains a passive recipient of his gaze, apparently unaware and unmoved by his close proximity to her. Yet his gaze is not exploitative.

Neither is Roberts'. He employs a number of strategies to ensure that the camera does not devour the female performer, empathising rather with her initial inactivity, insecurity, and subsequent playfulness.

On the other screen, *she* scrutinises him, but remains seemingly invisible. *He* is introspective and totally unaware of both her physical presence and intense interest in what he is doing.

The camera is the third collaborator in the work. Roberts allows his lens to float freely and democratically over the 2 scenes, hovering momentarily on fragments of luxurious sofa material with the same interest/disinterest as shown towards the performers gestures, bodies and facial expressions.

The apparent simplicity of the 2 scenes is set against an acoustic backdrop created from the sound of floor boards creaking in the environs of the sofa. There is no artifice here, the sound is in complete synch with the action. Nothing is added, nothing is subtracted.

Neither is there any conversation. She laughs out loud occasionally. He shifts his weight from the sofa to the wall. She blows a small white feather that has escaped from the sofa and watches it drift. She drifts. He continues to read. They are at once, enigmatic and beautiful.

"three" offers no story line, or narrative drive. There are no clear beginnings or endings. "three" dispenses with suture. Nothing happens in terms of cinematic convention.

Roberts creates his own alternative agenda and set of conventions. He forces nothing onto the viewer, choosing instead to engage with visual detail in the 2 scenes so as to emphasise the very emptiness derived from the sustained inaction of the 2 participants.

Perversely this inaction soon begins to read as highly purposeful. Even the simplest of tasks such as the turning of a page takes on its own significance, as this "non-drama" unfolds.

12/12/07

Niamh McDonnell:

Two screens mirror the encounter between a couple in a domestic scene filmed as one long take, set on a loop. Close up pans track the action in an encounter without verbal dialogue; the physical sense of the camera movement delineates the space of a narrative interior to the film. A miming of relation to the other is figured without the exchange of glances, without the recognition of presence of each to the other; the camera appears simply to render the world of the actors' private gestures; adopting the role of subject the camera withholds privileging an ideal subjective view, the exercise of camera zoom-out shot proffering the knowledge of its command of all vantage points from which the locus of the scene may be surveyed; the refusal of this imaginary ideal through the purely technical means of camera direction resists framing the field of vision around the pivotal role of a scopic sensibility. Following the temporal register of the long take and the duration of the shoot the documentary function of the camera seems to simulate the modulation of affects in a haptic space. The viewer is invited to witness the mere record of the traces or intimations of what cannot be seen.

Commenting on "three", Adam Roberts maintains that the composition of the film view does not appeal to a desire to encompass sensibility through some form of universal understanding. In this respect his approach draws perhaps upon that of Béla Tarr, exemplified in films such as 'Werckmeister Harmonies' and 'Satantango'; subjects do not fulfil the role of enunciating a metaphysical dimension wherein the cause of their actions may reside; the existential terms representing a narrative sequence of events circumventing the ideal synthesis of a third view. 'Three' also circumscribes an approach to film's representation of its subjects in which sense actors perform as models, as global affects rather than psychological referents. However unlike Bresson's approach, the social role of film in the context of the redemptive capacity of a third view, is not one embraced by "three". The concern with representation of subjects and the construction of viewpoints through exposure of film to long takes, places "three" in the tradition of Warhol's 'Screen Tests', taking the question of the social role of film in narrative construction from the context of its linear mode in the analogue to its non-linear in the digital.

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Please contact Adam Roberts via Todds Gallery:

Todds Gallery  
32a High Street  
Hastings  
East Sussex TN34 3ER  
t: +44 (0) 1424420188  
e: info@toddsgallery.co.uk