



RODERICK COOVER
PHILADELPHIA

Panoramas and Other Circular Stories, Roderick Coover's swirling panoply of video and sound, creates a kind of music from images and the human voice [Esther M. Klein Gallery; January 12–March 31, 2007]. Like an orchestral composer, Coover carefully scores his instruments—a kaleidoscope of street scenes, sampled bits of pre-recorded voice, and the words of many poet-collaborators—to create richly varied, convergent, yet slightly subversive works.

The Theory of Time Here, 2007, is a tour de force composed with the tightness of a baroque fugue. A palette of alternating shots of London passersby—both human and motorized—sets the theme for this video installation. Playing against this visual structure is a voice ripped from a computer-generated announcement system—the British equivalent of Julie, Amtrak's electronic ticketing agent. Her mechanical and slightly disjointed utterances—"at the tone...the time will be..."—have been cut up and rearranged to repeat at regular intervals. The images too appear, disappear, and reappear in new sequences—creating a tension between circularity and linearity, between the repetition of a theme and its development. As traffic drifts by, so do thoughts in our mind—on the nature of time and space, and the rhythm of life itself. Voice samples eventually seem to grow more clipped and staccato, promising a finale. Yet, the actual ending is unnervingly anticlimactic as the images end up much as they started. We're lost in a world of interchangeable phrases and views that, like the bits and bytes of the announcer's synthesized voice, can apparently produce limitless permutations.

Where *The Theory of Time Here* is a single-channel video montage of multiple clips, *Something that Happened Only Once*, 2007, is a single shot lasting ten minutes. Both works raise questions of the nature of time, but *Something that Happened Only Once* tips the balance toward an evolving story rather than endless

cycles of repetition. The artist simply planted himself in Coyocan Plaza in Mexico City, gradually panning his camera around the entire space to capture every bit of activity there. This moving-image piece is not, in fact, a motion picture but an animation of still images. The work's soundtrack combines multiple registers that sometimes interlock in a call and response pattern. These include the poetry of Deb Olin Unferth, spoken and sung by Jodi Gilbert, and instrumental sounds performed by saxophonist Michael Moore.

As you watch *Something that Happened Only Once*, you gradually sense the artificiality of the panorama. You see that the shot has been spliced together, the activity fabricated. Like *The Theory of Time Here*, this video has been constructed with a kind of musical gamesmanship: the buildings and some of the figures remain static, while other bodies play hide-and-seek. A head suddenly turns, a face pops to the extreme foreground, a person disappears and then reappears. Words also partake in this game, with phrases spoken, repeated, and picked up much later at a barely audible level. Here, the mood is more varied than in *The Theory of Time Here*—a sudden accumulation of voices and activity punctuates long periods of quietness. As a result, the work is surprisingly dynamic, even if it is based on the controlled and repetitive structure of the single loop.

Roderick Coover's work juxtaposes incommensurates in a puzzle that the mind takes pleasure in unpacking. Yet his casual reshuffling of familiar experiences leaves us to wonder if our own stories aren't rather small and insignificant—musical notes that make sense in the score but mean little by themselves.

—Edward Epstein

Roderick Coover, *Something that Happened Only Once*, 2007, video projection, 22 minutes [© Roderick Coover]