

Jason Salavon

The Late Night Triad

Part I: The Tonight Show with Jay Leno

Part II: Late Night with Conan O'Brien

Part III: Late Show with David Letterman

2003

Single-channel DVD's, video projectors, DVD players

Courtesy of the artist and Projectile, New York City

Jason Salavon's *The Late Night Triad*

(3:26 min)

It is a three-panel projection piece and it presents a collection of 64 nights each of *Late [Show] with David Letterman*, the Conan O'Brien show, and the Jay Leno evening program. 64 different nights have been sort of coalesced and mathematically averaged into single screens. You end up having each separate panel with these sort of ghostly presentations of what happened in 64 different nights overlaid into one. Rather than getting specific detail, you end up with these sort of overall general patterns, of how the shows are arranged, where the talk show hosts stand, and sort of how they perform their craft.

Each performer has a really sort of distinct performative personality and that personality is sort of captured in sort of a macro way by these videos. In the Conan O'Brien, he's very sort of restrained in his physical movement and in sort of his performance style. Often during the piece, his features lock in. His nose and his eyes become really recognizable, whereas Jay Leno is quite active and busy with a sort of almost nervous performative sense where his figure is the most ghostly of the three and he's all over the stage. His figure sort of has this really nice blurry quality to it and Letterman is sort of between the two. So there really are three distinct performative identities going on here in the way these sort of bodies are moving captured in aggregate over 64 nights.

The late night talk show hosts was sort of this instinctive choice that was based on this sort of nightly repetition and the sort of structures of those talk shows and these individual figures standing in their sort of stage without the camera moving in a real classic head and shoulders portrait shot.

And in portraiture, I was interested in this idea, and this sort of goes in my work across the board, there's a real interest in this tension between an individual, an individual's sort of place in some sort of larger group, and those sort of ideas of group dynamic and one's individual uniqueness within some sort of common group seem to be something I explore over and over again and in this case you have all of these distinct evenings where these things happen in unique events, what about the sort of overall pattern that a portrait of an overall pattern of say a nightly monologue from three different talk show hosts. And so

there's this interest in the portrait of the general, the portrait of structure rather than the portrait of sort of specificity, and I think that is where a lot of my work tends to go and in this video piece there's a particular interest in that. And then the sort of integration of that with an interest in pop culture and in more common content and in more sort of shared communal material. As long as those things come together in this piece with the core idea of these singular figures, in sort of head and shoulders shots, performing their nightly routines.

It's the notion of the portrait taken to the more general I think, and what can you say about an individual and, in this case, what can you say about an individual's performance when you look at it in this sort of macro over 64 days simultaneously sort of method rather than sort of looking at an individual view or a single view of an individual. And so for me there's sort of this element of the meta-portrait, the sort of next level up portrait.

Jason Salavon's Process

(3:05 min)

It's the first project I've done along these lines. It's a process I sort of call amalgamation where I've written various pieces of software to sort of average photographs in a common class of things. I've taken to sort of the video realm with *The Late Night Triad*.

The first task, which was sort of a real long process, was just gathering the material. So I'd already decided I wanted to focus on these three shows and I wanted to gather a couple months worth of these intro sequences and monologues and so that's just this one task of setting up these systems to just remotely and autonomously capture these shows every night.

Once I had the raw material in place, I had a couple different and interesting challenges. One is how these pieces will be registered in time, that is when does this piece start, when does it end, and how do you define how these sequences will be aligned. And there's a moment in all three shows where the camera is doing its thing, there's the intro music, we've already gone through this sort of beginning sequence and there's this moment where the camera cuts to the performer and then the camera is locked and then for the next however many minutes, we have a monologue. So using that cut point, that where I end up lining up all three shows with each other and with themselves. It becomes an interesting common alignment tool and then from there, I sort of work backwards in time and forwards in time.

I've sort of employed my own methods to take individual frames of video or photographs and average them. What that really means is just taking these little pixel points and sort of using some mathematics, finding the average color for each pixel. Then that's all reassembled and the audio is also mixed and placed back in there. There's this sort of taking things apart and putting them back together in a new way that is happening in this piece.

One thing I try to do is I try to sort of build tests while I'm in process to get an idea. I feel like I do a pretty high percentage as far as my instincts and what happens, but I've had a number pieces where I really had an expectation of something happening formally and as a aesthetic experience that didn't actually come the way I expected and I've had a few pieces that I just haven't been able to continue and a couple where I invested a lot of time. So I have this sort of process where I try to do some tests to get an earlier sense of where this thing is going. But the moment where you actually see the whole thing going in some sort of test environment...I had them all running on monitors, it was a very gratifying sort of experience because again I thought, especially with the soundtrack I felt the whole thing sort of exceeded what I was expecting would happen as far as a formal experience of these ghostly forms and then this sort of idea of they connect back to this really obvious, you know, everybody sort of knows this material, especially in the States. So those sorts of relationships and that sort of dynamic is sort of really gratifying to see come full bloom.