

Short Circuit

3 Church Walk

Emily Richardson



THE HOUSE APPEARS ABANDONED, THE GARDEN OVERGROWN. Through the milky glass furniture can be seen, wood by the fire, records stacked up and pictures on the walls. Lost time, suspended time, layers of dust and mould.

H.T. 'Jim' and Betty Cadbury-Brown designed and built 3 Church Walk in 1962 and lived there until their deaths. The Breuer-style chair featured in Eamonn McCabe's photograph that accompanies the *Guardian's* 2009 obituary of Jim, Betty died in 2002, is still in its place by the window.¹ As is the now-dead African hemp plant on the windowsill behind it. Picture hooks on the wall, and the slight staining of the paintwork where the frames once sat, suggest missing artworks that occupied the house in Cadbury-Brown's lifetime. The Anglepoise lamps that populate the main room appear like people standing around at a party, the records stacked up by the record player ready to bring the place back to life. Sunlight filters through milky windows and light scoops. The play of light and shadow give the only sense of movement in this space otherwise caught in time; a film set waiting to be reactivated.

This modern ruin could conjure feelings of nostalgia but its portrayal in this abandoned state, without resort to sentimentality, might also question how nostalgia and the museumification of the past are linked to our view of modernism now. At the time of filming, 3 Church Walk stood semi-abandoned in a state of transition. Unlike its counterparts – such as fellow Modernist architect Erno Goldfinger's 1930's Hampstead home, 2 Willow Road – it has not been conserved or made into a museum. It is still an active, lived space, although temporarily abandoned, and remains important due to the way its history can inform our understanding of the present.



Figure 1. Emily Richardson, *3 Church Walk*, 2014, still frame.

Follow the link below to watch an extract of *3 Church Walk* (2014) by Emily Richardson.

<https://vimeo.com/169067128>

All images appear courtesy of the artist.

Interview with the artist

Q. You are currently a student at the Royal College of Art (RCA); H.T. Cadbury-Brown famously designed the College's Kensington Gore building in 1959. Was this the reason you first became interested in Cadbury-Brown's former home?

A writer friend, Jonathan P Watts, introduced me to the house in 2012 (coincidentally, he was a student at the RCA at the time). He was interested in writing an article on Cadbury-Brown's 3 Church Walk and thought I might like to photograph the house to accompany the piece of writing. This developed into a film collaboration between Jonathan and I that became *3 Church Walk*. It was only later that I went to the Royal College of Art to complete the film and embark on a larger research/film project looking at British architects' houses of the 1960s.

The films that are part of that research project, *3 Church Walk*, 2014 (22min), made in the house of H.T. 'Jim' and Betty Cadbury-Brown in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, and *Beach House*, 2015 (17min), shot in John Penn's Beach House at Shingle Street, Suffolk, take the house as protagonist. This is to create an experience of architectural space on film and a portrait of a place at a particular moment. In each film a house is reconstructed on film, reactivating the architectural space as filmic space.

Q. Owen Hatherley has described the recent developments in London architecture as 'austerity nostalgia', typified by the vernacular of mid-century

modernism. Why do you think modern architecture and design is so popular today?

Maybe because much of it was good design and although demonised through its associations with poorly maintained council housing, it actually works well. It's good to live in. Also, everything goes in cycles - there was a time when Victorian terraces were seen as awful places to live. It's true to say that modern architecture and design has been commodified and is being sold as an aspirational lifestyle, a smokescreen to distract us from the reality that all our public housing has been sold off and we have a housing crisis in the UK.

Q. Can you say anything more about the relationship, as you see it, between nostalgia and modernism?

If nostalgia is to critically reflect on the past, to establish meaning rather than simply offer a sentimentalisation of the past, then it is important when looking back at modernism, to see that, despite failures in the project, there were also many positive lessons learnt.

The 1960s houses that I am looking at in my research are past visions of the future. I am interested in rural modernism and particularly houses that architects designed and built for themselves as they contain a multitude of experiments and a culmination of ideas and that would not perhaps be possible when working for a client. Each one is a handcrafted object that reflects both the architect and the time in which it was made. A house is the key to the way architects think about architecture. In the houses I have chosen to film each has been designed by the architect for himself, encapsulating the ideals and narratives of the architect at a particular moment in time. The house becomes, as Giuliana Bruno puts it, 'the hinge that opens the door between architecture and cinema.'² The narrative of a house is a filmic narrative; the house is a collection of objects, memories, images, an archive and in some cases a private museum. It is these narratives that can be seen in the films I have made. I am primarily interested in the relationship between architecture and film, especially experimental film that is focused away from the prescribed narratives of modernist nostalgia and which attempts to present an alternative view of these houses through the camera's lens.



Figure 2. Emily Richardson, *3 Church Walk*, 2014, still frame.

Q. Turning to 3 *Church Walk*, what can you tell us about the current condition of the house? To whom does it now belong? How did you gain access to the site?

Following our initial visit to the house, Jonathan and I found a book on the Cadbury-Brown family written by Natalie Wheatley, Jim's niece-in-law, in the Aldeburgh library. We contacted Natalie to ask about the house and she gave us access to make a film there, along with access to the family archive for the research.

Finally in 2014, after years of legal wrangling, the house was handed over to the person that Jim had left it to in his will and it has been restored.

Q. The film is collaboration between yourself, Jonathan P. Watts (words) and Simon Limbrick (sound); how did this collaboration come about? Why was it important to have fragments of text and a soundtrack accompany your visuals of the house?

Jonathan introduced me to the house so we were working together on the project from the beginning. Jonathan wrote a script for the film as we initially thought it would have a voiceover but in the making of the film and working with Simon's sound recordings it was decided that in fact what was needed was to book end the film with the text and allow the viewer to experience the house and soundtrack unmediated during the central part of the film.

I wanted to explore the way spatial, sonic and temporal structures operate in describing a space through experimental film practices, to go beyond the functional description and into the realm of the poetic, narrative and the event. The film attempts to show new ways of seeing architectural space through the use of experimental film techniques, focusing on the transformation of space as opposed to documenting space to extend the potential of documentary practice. The soundtrack was made up of recordings of objects, surfaces and materials in the house and composed to form a score that sits on the edge of musicality.

Q. What projects are you currently working on?

Jonathan and I are currently working on a book about 3 Church Walk with Occasional Papers, to be published in September 2016, that includes the entire text of the original film script alongside images of the house and archive materials that relate to it.

I am working on a third film at 22 Parkside, built by Richard and Su Rogers in 1968. Parkside is a significant example of early British High-Tech architecture and is currently undergoing restoration. This film will complete a trilogy and is due to be shown later this year.

Royal College of Art

Notes

- ¹ Diana Rowntree, 'HT Cadbury-Brown', *Guardian*, 13 July 2009 <
<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/jul/13/obituary-ht-cadbury-brown>>
[accessed 16 May 2016].
- ² Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 104.

Works Cited

- Bruno, Giuliana, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*
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- Rowntree, Diana, 'HT Cadbury-Brown', *Guardian*, 13 July 2009 <
<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/jul/13/obituary-ht-cadbury-brown>> [accessed 16 May 2016]