



Forever reveals the relationship between a woman (Helen George) and her autistic son (Joshua).

Charged atmosphere from little

FILM FOREVER (R)

ACMI, Sunday, 3pm

Adrian Martin Reviewer

Ben Speth, a former New Yorker now based in Melbourne, begins his new feature *Forever* in observational documentary style. We see a woman (Helen George) dealing, in a relaxed, everyday manner, with her autistic son (Joshua George).

After a few images, we

expect a reassuring, television-style voice-over from the woman, filling in the background of this situation. But this voice never comes. The images, for the most part still, quiet and uneventful, are only occasionally, ominously broken by a slow-motion shot accompanied by a resonant note on the cello.

Little by little, unusual details enter this portrait and we become unsure whether we are watching a documentary or fiction, or perhaps a strange, surprising hybrid of the two.

Helen's attachment to her telephone is revealed to be not

simply the way she copes with loneliness; in fact, she is a phone-sex worker. While she arouses clients down the line, Joshua plays his video games in the lounge room.

Those who have seen Chantal Akerman's classic *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), covering four days in the life of a diligent Belgian housewife who is also a work-at-home prostitute, will recognise a similar impetus.

Like Akerman, Speth is keenly sensitive to the double-edged sword of domestic experience, especially as lived

by women. This home comes across as a prison and a haven, with the affection flowing between mother and son deeply palpable.

With very modest means, *Forever*, shot on digital video, maintains an admirable edge of mystery and poetry in its framing, cutting and unfolding. It is a fascinating example of the school of "Melbourne minimalism". Only near the end does anything really "happen" — and, even then, questions and open-ended speculations remain in the air for the viewer to take away and contemplate. ★★★½