

Pipilotti Rist

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the experience of his *lack(ing)*. Conversely, by declaring that lack, he also points to the fullness (which he seems unable to appreciate at this moment) — his multiplicity — the co-existence of sex(es) within one/his subject. Here, Taylor fascinatingly sutures us into the landscape of the protagonist's psyche through a stylistic device that makes us aware of subjective multiplicities and of that painful gap that we cannot fill except the through movement of thought that provokes reactions. As articulated, the strong forces of desire — of becoming — and this video's theoretical base, I would argue, can not be fulfilled (or not yet, perhaps). In a sense, desire must be kept in flight so as to allow the cleaner, as the voice over insists, to "come back for more" — to embrace. Indeed, he must come back, for all is not successful. *Armide 2000* points to failures that occur in communication between individuals (perhaps as socially alienated as the cleaner may be) and groups of people, where there is no space for dialogue, despite physical proximity, as in the gym. To repeat, the cleaner remains invisible to his attendants. Taylor stages an ignorance of the *other* while emphasizing a desire for *otherness* by way of apparent binary oppositions that produce productive tensions; so strong are they, however, as to become untenable. That is why we have contrasts of skin tones, slender and muscular bodies, weakness and strength, which, through desiring forces — the women in pursuit of the athletic, powerful body, the cleaner disguised as woman desiring that black, feminine physique —, start dismantling singularities of thought. The acceptance of multiplicities on all levels, individually and socially, requires such a dismantling.⁷ As *Armide 2000* problematizes boundaries of gender and race, it offers, through the personification of the cleaner as (desiring) mediator, an event of unfoldings that anticipate a time of futurity. Futurity, as the ultimate of new perspectives in thinking and living, is where moments of becoming turn into being.⁸ *Armide 2000* positions itself as critical discourse without firmly positioning the viewer. We are only caught or, better still, arrested, by the temporality of event, but we are also mobilized emotionally and intel-

lectually, the effects of which are the (strong) lasting forces of (our) becoming. These forces extend back to the ancient Amazons with whom, in part, otherness started and was overtly displayed. ■

Picturing the Modern Amazon
New Museum of Contemporary Art,
New York
March 30–June 25, 2000

NOTES:

1. I extend my sincere thanks to Alice Ming Wai Jim for her editorial contributions.
2. The right breast is, indeed, absent in some antique statues of Amazons (Roman sculptures modelled after lost Greek marbles).
3. Plato, *Laws*, Book VII. For an interesting discussion, read Monique Canto, "The Politics of Women's Bodies: Reflections on Plato," Susan Rubin Suleiman ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture, Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 1986, 339.
4. Elizabeth Grosz, "Becoming... An Introduction," in E. Grosz ed., *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory and Futures* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), 1999, 3.
5. Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. M. Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press), 1995, 146. More also in Patrick Hayden, *Multiplicity and Becoming. The Pluralist Empiricism of Gilles Deleuze* (New York: Peter Lang), 1998.
6. For the production of *Armide 2000*, Taylor hired actors Jarod Gibson, Greg Keller and bodybuilders Rosemary Cheeseman, Betty Moore and Valrie Peart.
7. Dorothea Olkowski, "Flows of Desire and the Body Becoming," in E. Grosz ed., *Becomings*, 107.
8. This is further discussed by P. Hayden, 3 ff.

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PETER
DUBÉ

Though admittedly a truism, it's hard to deny that reading is a difficult process. Trapped in the surface, between the words, images, signs, and the unretrievable "signified" we hope lies behind them, we all struggle to carry something away from the book and the gallery.

And, gallingly, the text always contradicts itself.

The best texts do it over and over again. That's one of the reasons — a good one — we return to them time after time; to try and trace the forks in the path of possibility. Contemporary texts, burdened with the baggage of post-modernity, contradict themselves with a rich dose of self-consciousness. The work displayed at The Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal by Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist does so with a noteworthy exuberance.

It is clear from the exhibition's first closed room, in which the artist's *Sip My Ocean* sprawls across a corner, that these objects revel in their

internal conflicts. The piece builds on the profound challenge to the hermetic boxes of traditional video — fine art and broadcast — that marks the work of Bruce Nauman and Gary Hill, for example. A projected work, it troubles most of the formal, iconographical and discursive assumptions about video art. The magnified image foregrounds troubling, grainy pixels, disrupting the tendency to read oversized images as filmic. The fragmented bodies displayed are never complete as they move through hallucinatory water. They are constantly doubled on the intersecting walls. Legs, arms and torsos melt into their twins at the building's seam, anonymously, since no head is ever revealed. Brightly coloured detritus sinks to the bottom. All of it is distorted yet familiar, kitschy yet disturbing. All of it moves like TV, is accompanied by a recognizable pop tune, and is so clearly not the comfortable patterns of the nightly entertainments. But this interrogation of scale and sense extends throughout the show. *Selfless In The Bath Of Lava*, in the next room, pointedly undercuts the heroicizing of large-scale works with its presentation of a minuscule monitor set in a hole in the floor that literally commands all of the otherwise empty space.

Rainwoman (I Am Called A Plant) — among the show's high-points — slams into the viewer's anticipations with singular effect. Here too, a large image fills the space, depicting a nude body prone in a downpour; a figure that might well be dead save for the occasional — startling — movement. The tape is projected atop a wall of cabinets and kitchen counters, playing the image's grain against the bold contrast of the smooth, determinedly *finished* effect of the surfaces beneath it. As the viewer moves closer, the effect of the contrast is heightened. It provokes a parallel con-



Pipilotti RIST, *Désintéressée dans le bain de lave (Selfless In The Bath Of Lava)*, 1994. Video installation. Courtesy Hauser and Wirth Gallery (Zurich), and Luhning Augustine Gallery (New York).

flict in the studied counterbalance of opposing images of nature and a kitchen; of water untamed with water running hot and cold, and of the human body in a «wild» context with domestic spaces stripped of the human.

The most overt upending of viewer expectation occurs in *Das Zimmer* (The Room), with its over-sized furniture and console television set. Clearly out of scale, the vast sofa and armchair are set in the centre of a room completely collaged with images. One may sit on the furniture and use an equally out-sized remote control to select a channel on the TV and view the Rist videotape of one's choice. Spoofing the position of broadcast programming wonderfully through an installation in which the television set-up has greater weight and presence than the viewer, the piece also undercuts itself by creating a false choice in which anything one selects is the product of a single hand. It is a cogent critique and one that points out the too-often overlooked political edge to some of the artist's output.

Another — and ambiguous — example of this political edge animates *I Couldn't Agree With You More*. Here a towering woman's head commands the screen with a curious, unchanging presence; an immobile expression that suggests any number of emotions at different points in the tape. Superimposed on the face — and occasionally hovering to the left or right — is a second image of naked people moving through a wooded area at night, while behind the central figure the ground continually shifts. At some points, we are situated in what we presume to be the figure's home. At others, we are swooping over a highway, and at still others we stalk the aisles of a shop as the camera lingers over the multitudinous wares on display, pulling us toward the brightly-coloured packages. It is the compelling tension between these disparate images that fascinates and pulls us into the implied narrative. It is a conflict present in the work's very title.

What is assented to? The vast cultural and political distances between the nudes playing in an image of the natural world and the store counters? Or are we to draw the implied causal chain between a mythic "state of nature" and the triumph of an

imperial corporatism? Or is it a tragic representation of the faint consolations of reverie trapped under the heel of consumerist ideology?

Of course, one could — or perhaps even ought — to grapple with all of these. There is something in the uncertainty present in the images, their rhythms and delight in layering so much saturated colour atop texture. Something in the languorous almost choral movement through recurring imagistic patterns and in the constant, blank presence of the face that both allows and requires it.

Something one is almost tempted to link to that most ambiguous of terms; beauty.

And, like everything really beautiful, the videotapes are eminently accessible; open, eager to be looked at and read — with or without any theoretical framework. It is the one thing they unquestionably do pick up from music videos, regardless of the popular reading of Rist's work that finds them far more deeply indebted to that form. A reading, I would argue, that puts aside my questions about their seductive self-contradictions, their polyphony if you will. Music videos, after all, are less concerned with a tease than with a sell. Rist's combination is really more powerful; something beautiful that provokes questions, something seductive that changes its mind.

It echoes, in some respects, the American critic Dave Hickey's observation (in his *The Invisible Dragon*) that beauty — as the agency of visual pleasure, as the efficacy of art — was likely to be the issue of the nineties. Clearly, Rist's interrogations rely on our desire to believe in them, in our willingness to stand and watch them to their ending. A challenge is more palatable when accompanied by charm. That's a problematic thought for many of us, though, privileging as it does the «object» and the object's work in the world at the expense of an abstracted hermeneutics. Still, in light of the Mapplethorpe controversies and their wake, and in the path from there to the paradoxical and reductive preference for viewing Rist's work as so much highbrow borrowing from a marketing tool — perhaps Hickey wasn't so far off the mark. Just a few years early. ■

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Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal
May 11, 2000 to August 6, 2000

Christiane CHABOT

Retour à la nature

Les formes naturelles ont fourni et continuent de fournir des modèles extrêmement fertiles pour l'invention et la création. Les domaines de l'ingénierie, de l'architecture et de l'informatique, pour n'en citer que quelques-uns, puisent dans les modes d'organisation et de structuration du monde végétal des exemples qui, une fois adaptés, proposent de nouvelles solutions aux problèmes formulés par la science.

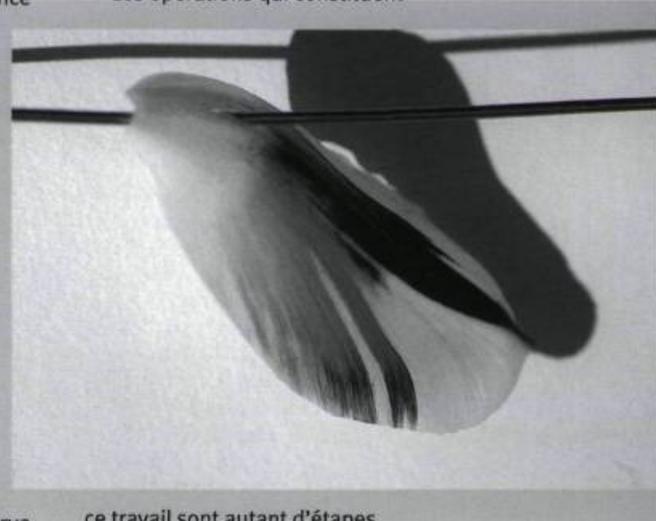
Compréhension des phénomènes naturels et connaissance scientifique semblent progresser de pair. L'élargissement de notre capacité de saisir les différentes facettes de notre environnement serait ainsi en adéquation directe avec le développement de moyens dont les humains disposent pour s'adapter aux conditions de vie dans notre univers.

La saisie des mutations de certains éléments de la nature afin de les transformer en nouveaux savoirs semble constituer le programme au cœur de la recherche de Christiane Chabot. Sa production est fondée sur un esprit d'observation et de conservation de l'évolution de la nature lorsqu'elle est considérée à l'égal d'un artefact. Ainsi, selon elle, le réservoir des informations fournies par la nature n'existerait pas pour lui-même, dans un état original, stable et permanent, mais plutôt comme une substance en développement, dans l'évolution d'un cycle où il est intégré à des ensembles plus larges fournis par d'autres matériaux. La nature est ainsi altérée par la

présence de l'homme, qui influe sur les corps naturels, et avec laquelle ces corps doivent composer.

Ce que nous apprennent ou nous rappellent les œuvres de Christiane Chabot, c'est que la nature est aussi un matériau contemporain, transformé, manipulé, hybride, renouvelable certes, mais dont la durée sous sa forme actuelle est comptée. Ses interventions visent à réinsérer cette nature modifiée dans un environnement lui aussi en mutation. Ses œuvres pointent vers de nouveaux alliages où art et nature se conjuguent dans un ordre nouveau.

Les opérations qui constituent



ce travail sont autant d'étapes d'un processus continu où, à chacune d'elles, se dévoilent des strates propices à l'émergence de différents niveaux de sens. Le prélèvement d'échantillons de spécimens : pierre, feuille, pétale et fruit fournit la matière première d'un vocabulaire formel et symbolique en élaboration. Ces éléments sont à la fois choisis pour leurs qualités propres et pour leur capacité de s'amalgamer entre eux. Chaque fragment est célébré de façon isolée par le biais de la photographie en cou-