

## UVC - ASSIGNMENT 5

### Pipilotti Rist (1992) *Pickelporno*

### An Experience of a Changing Spectacle

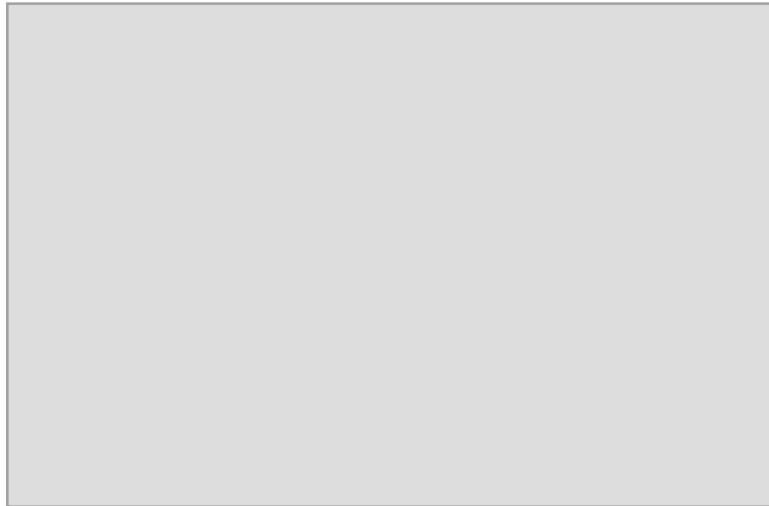


Figure 1: Screenshot: *Pickelporno* (1992) (AtelierRist, 2008 )

#### Assignment Task:

*In what ways do video installations differ from films shown in a cinema? List the physical differences and use these as evidence to explain the differences in experience and aesthetic appreciation.*

*Think about the environment as well as the immediate space in which a film is shown.*

*Consider the types of film and select an example for more detailed discussion. If you have not seen a video installation before now, try to make up for it by viewing available material on Youtube. (1000 words)*

“To equal movement with film, and stasis with photography, would mean to confuse representation with its material support” – Victor Burgin

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## Introduction: The Changing Spectacle

“Art cannot live within the everyday as the everyday. It necessarily interrupts the everyday form within, on the basis of the fact that it is always both autonomous and social fact.” – Theodor Adorno

Difference between cinema films and video installations could be reduced to the respective site: movie theatre versus gallery space. But this may be too simplistic in understanding the multiplicity in aesthetic experience of video art.

As an example of video installation, this essay will look at Pipilotti Rist's *Pickelporno* (1992) and explore physical and non-physical differences. It will look at the question of how the spectacle of an installation of video in 'art spaces'<sup>1</sup> changes the spectator's experience of space and time, and how video installations can offer a new consciousness of duration of life experiences between fiction and reality in today's moving 'visual' world.

## Site as a Spatial Experience

“Things make space happen” – Brian O'Doherty

“Sculpture with a mind” – Bill Viola

Going to a traditional movie theatre means entering a 'Black Box' - and a different world. One is being seated in a dark space between projector and screen and being transported away into an illusionary cinematic narrative through a 'seductive ability to gear into the unconscious depths of desire' (Uroskie, 2014:195). Hitchcock, one of the pioneers of this institutional controlled experience, enforced the 'absolute autonomy for the narrative space [and] an absolute immersive spectatorship' (Uroskie, 2014:79). Baudry described this dreamlike and dislocating space *dispositif*, the mechanism of the cinematic apparatus

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<sup>1</sup> In this essay, the term 'art-space' will be used for spaces related to institutional spaces of art e.g. gallery, museums, and other spaces that create an 'art experience'.

(Neumeyer, 2015:395), and Freud related the mechanism of dreamwork to *displacement* (Buchanan, 2010:135-136).

In the 1960s, artists subverted or opposed the cinematic illusionary and narrative conditions. Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) and *Empire* (1964) or Nam June Paik's *Zen for film* (1964) are examples of bringing the spectator's attention back from displacement towards the process of projection and materiality inside the movie theatre space<sup>2</sup>.

Other artists appropriated the dislocating qualities of cinematic film as a metaphor for the spatiotemporal character of art within their conceptual practices (Uroskie, 2014:34). Youngblood coined 1970 the term *expanded cinema* for the 'expanded consciousness of the displaced conditions of postwar art' (Uroskie, 2014:28). Cinematic experience entered the institutional 'White Cube' art space. *The Paradise Institute* (2001) (see Figure 2) by Cardiff and Miller is a quite literal example (Cardiff & Miller, 2013).

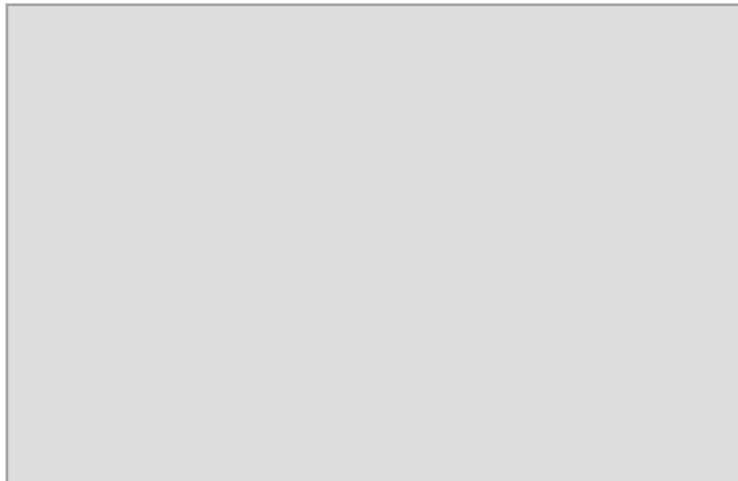


Figure 2: 'The Paradise Institute' (2001), installation photo, in: (Uroskie, 2014)

In conclusion, cinematic films and video installations have in common a dependency on architectural space, the dark movie theatre, or the 'dark' space within an 'White Cube'. Viola's description of a 'sculpture with a mind' expands human experiences of space and

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<sup>2</sup> Warhol's long duration films 'clashed' for its elimination of a moving narrative and audio by focusing on one static image. With the results that no one could stand to watch it for its entire screening duration. Paik returned the spectator's attention to the nature of projection and materiality through showing light projected through a film leader, the first part of a film reel that is been used to mechanically insert the reel into the projector (Uroskie, 2014: 53-55)

stretches a minimalist site experience. Kwon described the institutional conditions of site with its 'differential function' related to a 'dematerialized site disconnected from physical and empirical realities and to establish authenticity of meaning, memory, histories, and identities' (Kwon, 2013:50).

In short, video installations are a hybrid space of material installation and immaterial space of moving images. Artists explored this dynamic space through sculptural TV sets installations, multiple or split screens alongside a flexible movement of the spectator through that space.

In particular, Pipilotti Rist<sup>3</sup> investigated in her single screen installation *Pickelporno* (1992) (see Figures 1, 3-5) new spatial and temporal experiences with a provocative life situation of sexual arousal and human intercourse. The question to be looked at how this would change the role of the spectators.

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<sup>3</sup> aka Elisabeth Rist, a Swiss visual artist born 1962 in St. Gallen and studied in Basel. She is known for her large-scale video screen installations of a hypnotic world of pop colours and music, and her exploration of life, beauty and cultural gender conventions

## Renewed Spectatorship and Consciousness

“.. undoing and rearticulating the connections between signs and images, images and times, or signs and space that frame the existing sense of reality.” – Jacques Rancière

Pipilotti Rist's *Pickelporno* (AtelierRist, 2008 ) with its hypnotic and surrealistic imagery, sound and spoken fragments, questions how we aesthetically perceive this work. It resides between boundaries of psychedelic porn and cinematic fiction, mediated by the 'differential function' of the art-space.

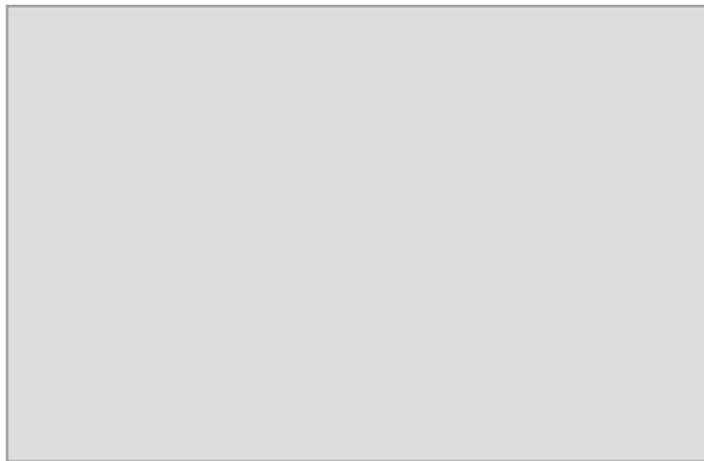


Figure 3: Screenshot: *Pickelporno* (1992) in: (AtelierRist, 2008 )

A fragmented movement of photographic, symbolic and metaphorical images displaces the spectator from a passive voyeur as seated in a movie theatre towards an active agent within this psychological 'happening' of a metaphorical explosion. The art-space site slows the spectator down in a mix of contemplative viewing and reflexive consciousness between fiction and reality. Through the forensic eye of a surveillance camera one feels trapped in stereotyped roles. The video reminds of Ann Hamilton's *draw* (2003) and her use of a surveillance camera following the movement of a thread through silk organza (Hamilton, 2003). It also reminds of Hitchcock's psychological dense films (e.g. *Psycho*, 1960; *Suspicion*, 1941) investigating visible and mental imagery through stillness and delay.

These films have in common a voyeuristic notion. The feminist and film theorist Mulvey criticized Hitchcock for 'finding pleasure in the investigative side of voyeurism'

(Røssaak, 2016:227). A perspective that Rist subverted through her extended positive perspective on sexual pleasure beyond cultural stereotypes of gendered gaze, and beyond a banality asking for a renewed cultural sensibility and spectatorship. She expressed her intention to establish 'female erotic cultural imagery and the man's body as object of desire' (New Media Encyclopedia) and as a 'glorification of wonder of evolution' (Southbank Centre, 2011). One could relate her positive aesthetics to Kant's universal aesthetics of the beauty, disinterested and with unconstrained joy.

Additionally, another difference to cinematic films is a perception of a kind of 'clash'. Rancière described 'clash' as the paradoxical situation between aesthetics of politics and politics of aesthetics (Rancière, 2013:79-80). One viewpoint of the 'clash' could be noticed in Richard Serra's *Boumerang* (1974), an exploration of desync of aural perception and speech. The 'clash' as a tensioned moment destabilizes the spectator's consciousness of certainty and

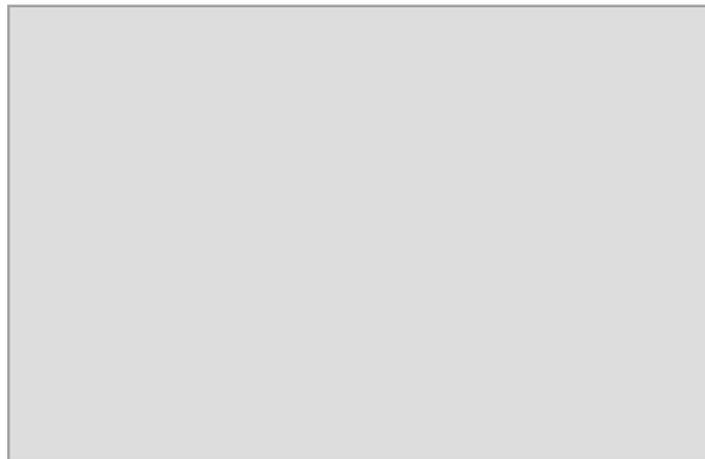


Figure 4: Screenshot: *Pickelporno* (1992) in: (*AtelierRist*, 2008 )

memory by framing a new 'sense of reality' (Rancière, 2013:86). Contrasting to cinema films, *Pickelporno* shifts the spectacle of the narrative towards a new spectacle of this transformative experience.

To summarize, one could relate the movement of the visual imagery to a destabilization of the spectator's identity as a voyeur. Kwon described these transformative sensible cultural practices and encounters with the capability to 'transform intimacies into indelible, un-retractable social marks' (Kwon, 2013:51). The question is how this changing spectatorship impacts experience of reality?

## Fiction as new Experience of Reality in a Moving World

“The role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually show ways of living and models of action with an existing real.” – Nicolas Bourriaud (Bishop, 2013:13)

As seen before, spectatorship is challenged through a transformation of spatial and temporal experience. Pethő articulates a new sensibility of 'post-media' art and the 'photofilmic', as a convergence of features of video, photography and painting that 'enhance sensual, synesthetic experience of 'image-ness' within film' (Pethő, 2016:235-238). In comparison with cinema films, Pethő offers a different conception based on stillness as an 'antithesis between image stasis and conventional narration', a 'tableau vivant' of video art opposing mainstream cinema. Bill Viola's slow motion animation *The Greeting* (1995), inspired by a painting by Jacopo Pontormo<sup>4</sup>, is one example

Consequently, video art can't be reduced to frames per seconds<sup>5</sup> as it relates more to the motion in between, the delay between what was and what appears next, the visible and the mental image. Douglas Gordon investigated this aspect in his ten times slowed down version *24 Hours Psycho* (1996) of Hitchcock's *Psycho*. One could also see a relationship to Bergson's concept of duration, delay and memory (Røssaak, 2016:223).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jacopo Pontormo (1494 - 1557) was an Italian painter and portraitist from the Florentine School.

<sup>5</sup> Frames per second (fps) are based on analogue films. With the continuum of digital films, this term seems less relevant.

<sup>6</sup> Bergson's conception of time and duration was further appropriated by Deleuze. It would take more space and time going beyond the scope of this essay to investigate deeper in this aspect related to Rist's *Pickelporno*

Resulting from this, *Pickelporno* is about the movement of the surveillance camera as well as of the motion within the spectator's consciousness and ambivalent sensual experience. Røssaak described the blurring distinction between an image seen and an image remembered as a 'play with readymade images much like a brain can' (Røssaak, 2016:228).



Figure 5: Screenshot: *Pickelporno* (1992) in: (AtelierRist, 2008 )

In conclusion, the spectator's attention is shifted from a detached narrative and escape from reality in a movie theatre towards the here and now of a psychological encounter. Nevertheless, *Pickelporno* has some common ground with Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941), an investigative superimposition of external and mental images and a 'stillness' showing 'ways of living and models of action' (Bourriaud).

## **Conclusion: Video installation – Spectacle of Experience**

“I have always depicted a world that is different to the one we all see as ‘reality’, an inner world that resides in our dreams or in our subconscious mind, a world where we can focus on the mysteries of life.”

– Bill Viola (Steer, 2017:139)

Video installations can expand human experiences of space and time in the tradition of Minimal and Installation art. The spectator’s consciousness is shifted towards the process of perception itself. Video installations are a spectacle of a psychological. The spectator is immersed in visual and auditory images in a continuum between a physical and mental space with blurred distinction between what is visible and what imagined.

The essay has shown how contemporary video artists as Pipilotti Rist offer new site experiences between fiction and reality. Her kaleidoscopic and hypnotic *Pickelporno* shifts the passive spectatorship as observer and voyeur towards an agent of memory and creator of meaning. Social stereotypes of gender and gaze are contradicted through her highly sensual and positive visual-aural stimulations.

In conclusion, the difference between cinematic film in movie theatres and video installations in ‘art-spaces’ are less a physical or medium-specific difference but a difference in itself through raising a consciousness of time, space and memory.

Total word count: 1175 (+18%)

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