

Gender, action and expression in Pipilotti Rist's "Ever is Over All" video art

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Abstract

In this study, two channelled and coloured video installation called *Ever is Over All* dated 1997 by Pipilotti Rist's being one of the artists who shaped video installations is analysed. In this installation produced by Pipilotti Rist as a woman artist, a woman in an entranced mood is shown smashing the glasses of some of the cars parked on the roadside. There is the vast space of the flower field on the one side and then there is a cheerful woman as the main character crashing the glasses of the parked cars on the roadside with a long stemmed flower just like from the field. The female body is especially important in audio and video installations of Rist. This installation by the artist has been assessed in terms of gender, action (movement), expression, freedom and solidarity. The flower used by the woman to smash the car glasses is considered over themes such as nature, life and woman and the fact that a passing by female police officer does not intervene in the situation and goes on her way just by greeting our heroine and smiling is assessed using concepts such as gender, action/movement, expression and freedom. In this research, the effects created by the medium of expression in art are touched upon in the video installation titled *Ever is Over All* and it has been concluded that the subjects and objects included in the video inspire the solidarity of woman, community and nature.

Keywords: video art, Pipilotti Rist, Gender-Action-Expression

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1. Introduction

Pipilotti Rist was born in 1962 in the countryside of Eastern Switzerland as the second child of five siblings as Elisabeth Rist and then created her renowned name by joining 'Lotti' which was her childhood nickname and 'Pippi' of Swedish Writer Astrid Lindgren's 'Pippi Longstocking' character depicting Pippi having no family and rejecting adult authority and ideological apparatus (Şen, 2020: 973) which is somewhat alike Rist's own character. Pipilotti Rist produces multi projector video installations bringing together the physical and the spiritual. Rist by creating fantastic, luxury palace internal spaces consisting of video, music, light effects and furniture tries to break the barriers between the public space and the private space (<https://www.artsy.net/>). Her videos are generally towards the female and the feminine and thus she could be defined as an artist interested in the body, natural life and performance arts giving an organic feel to moving visuals and music. In Rist's work, music is as much an integral part of her art as the performance itself.

Rist's art is established through natural life, a love for colour and an intelligent sense of humour and it creates surprising effects on the viewers while presenting them with a relaxing space at the same time. Images projected onto the ceiling are watched lying on comfortable cushions (Sip My Ocean, 1996) or lying on beds in a hall (4th Floor to Mildness, 2016). She can impress her audience not only with images projected on top or across but also by using the flooring. In the single channel video installation in which she screams, titled *Selbstlos im Lavabad* (Selfless in the Bath of Lava, 1994) the audio, colour and visual are installed into the floor of the LCD screen. In the same way, she provides different experiences to her visitors who pass through her light effect installations (Pixelwald Motherboard, 2016, Cape Cod Chandelier, 2011). Her works were awarded many significant prizes and they are continued to be exhibited in many Contemporary Arts Museums all around the world. In this research, *Ever is Over All* video installation is going to be analysed.

Ever is Over All: Video - 1997

Ever is Over All is the two channel coloured video installation of Swedish artist Pipilotti Rist. This work of eight minutes was exhibited at Venice Biennale in 1997 had been awarded with Premio 2000. This award gave thirty five year old Swedish artist Pipilotti Rist an international star.



Visual 1. "*Ever Is Over All*," 1997 audio video installation by Pipilotti Rist (video still) © Pipilotti Rist. Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth and Luhring Augustine

Rist transforms a destructive instinct into a promising, cathartic gesture in her video installation exhibited at Contemporary Art Museum in New York. This installation consists of two overlapping video projections accompanied with a dreamlike musical film tune. Rist arrives at the art gallery scenes with her installation whereas she combines crashing the glasses of cars in an urban setting with exotic flowers of a rural field (Snell, 2017). On the left hand side projection, there is a woman wearing a blue dress and vermeil shoes pounds along the pavement on a street. She is carrying a tropical red / yellow flower (red-hot poker) with a long green stem seen in the projection on the right hand side in her hand. It has been observed that she uses the flower to smash the glasses of some of the cars parked on the roadside. The same situation is experienced again and the woman smashes the glass of yet another car has an entranced and cheerful facial expression. There is a female police officer who witnesses the smashing right after it takes place who just smiles and greets the woman smashing the car glass and walks past her without any interventions. The woman in the blue dress smashes the glass of another car this time. The woman smashes the glass of five cars in total in the video and she is cheerful as if she gained a victory and the flower she is holding in her hand is a tool in gaining such a victory. It could be said that she uses the flower as a weapon. She waves her flower after the act of smashing and she crowns it by holding it up high. Video installation repeats this four-minute cycle.

The woman is smiling and there is a roaring sound. The woman moves haphazardly but still it looks as if it was a scene from a ballet (Kane, 2011: 477). Corbin (2021: 38) claims that the most habitual and the most widespread silence is the silence of the rural spaces and thus mentions that the silent trip routes of the rural spaces are the common spaces for re-writing the self. In the video, the roaring sound appearing in the video after a while gives an echo on the silence of nature and thus alters the route of the whole trip. Both of the videos falls into a hypnotic speed, it creates a feeling of tranquillity that is periodically collapsed by the heroine smashing the flower into the car glass and the car glass dramatically smashing. In a poetic use of magic realism, the flower is a weapon as strong as to smash the glass. (<https://www.moma.org/>).

The Act

The street scene gives the impression of an ordinary day and the woman hitting some of the car glasses with the object in her hand looks at the flower with a cheerful expression. Then she lifts it up as if it is a torch, a sceptre and uses it as if it was a baseball bat or carries it along as if it was a weapon and continues to walk the street with a smile. The car glasses are smashed when the woman hits the glass. With such a cheerful destruction, the video is rewind at the place where it ends. Tomkins (2020) considers these factors make up an impeccably put together and rare works of art in joy, tension, timing, comical violence, anarchy and a desirable musical note (Tomkins, 2020).

This two channel video being one of the large scale installations of Rist, she says she has preferred for this specific flower because they do not break in the wind. The resistance of the flower against the wind brings to mind strength and resistance. The body is always depicted in relation to nature in Rist's work. In *Ever is Over All*, it is as if the artist floats on the street downstream. The smashing of the glasses disrupts the drowsy tempo of the video; however, in slow motion it elongates and contributes to the pleasure of watching the smashes. It is cathartic and like some kind of a rebellion or revolt. The passersby, including one police officer seem to be unaware of her apparent vandalism and they even seem to cherish it (Cunnaly, 2018). The preventive duty of the police in the real world is an entity of approval of the act of violence in this video. It is the product of a fictional world. The woman does not take part in the work of art as an object, but shows her existence as an individual. The act taking place on the street symbolises a free and endless form of existence by a woman who is not at home and who is on the street showing an unlimited action without being intervened in.

Rist, deconstructs the traditional and presents us with a picture of freedom. In this lawless paradise, it seems as if the police is on our side. An act of violence has been transformed into something cheerful and encouraging. This aggressive woman image is something we got used to now but what is different in Rist's work is the surreal and dreamlike space of it (<https://elephant.art/>).

It could be said that the happiness of our heroin smashing the car glasses cheerfully does not come from an angry violence but stems from her actions. Although anger causes the most visible bursts of rage of a human being, it is still not linked to a predefined objection that considers violence as a tool. An angry violence is not a tool, it is a manifesto. Here what is present is the criticisable nature of violence, a wholly subjective manner of taking place and such manifestations are primarily seen in the myths (Benjamin, 2014:35). Walter Benjamin (2014:36) shows the Tale of Niobe for such circumstances and points out that the actions / violence of Apollo and Artemis are for establishing a new law rather than punishing the violation of the existing law.

Nava Sevilla - Sadeh (2017) mentions that the enthusiasm of the woman smashing the car glasses reminds us of the madness of Dionysus and claims that the performance by Rist rests mostly on Maenads. Maenads are women worshipping Dionysus the God of Wine according to Greek Mythology and worshipping Bacchus according to Roman Mythology. These women get drunk as a result of the wine they consume and they are entranced, resort to all sorts of violence, caused massacres and shed blood (Vernant, 2016: 103). Dionysus symbolises nature and the exuberance of nature. The long stemmed flowers held by the 'maenad' of Rist resembles *thyrsus* being a fennel cane with a pine cone at the top held by mythological maenads depicted in archaic and classic vase drawings. In addition, the top portion of Rist's spectre is painted in red in order to refer to the shedding of blood (Sadeh, 2017:62).



Visual 2. Macron, Maenad carrying a Thyrsus, fragment of an Attic red figure cup, ca. 480 BC. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Source: Sadeh, 2017:63).

The attribution of hedonism that is imposed on Dionysus is because his agony is always thought of alongside hedonism and such thought having meanings as going mad with pleasure / dying (Kızılcım, 2016: 61). Dionysus causes a crack in this order with his own existence, by revealing a foreign, strange, incomprehensible and straying off holy understanding rather than an orderly, stable and definite understanding (Vernant, 2016: 78). In the Dionysus rituals performed by women, the main characteristic was the destruction and re-establishment of order. The Dionysus madness aimed to

provide a temporary chaos in order to provide catharsis and re-establishment of order. Maenads were women who could taste freedom for a limited amount of time during the Dionysus rituals and thus Rist's maenad presents us with a symbolic visual of contemporary resistance against pressure. The destructive action is performed in the same manner as provocative using the same mechanism as the society of spectacle (Sadeh, 2017: 62 - 63).

Sadeh (2017: 64) mentions that Rist's maenad seems like she had lost her way during a ritual enthusiasm and found herself on the street suddenly at a different historical time and space and thought of the cars that are subjected to Rist's violence as the victims of Greek maenads and questioned why cars were chosen as subjects of violence. It seems that the cars represent the Western World that is defined as the society of spectacle by Guy Debord (1967), where show is both the object and the primary production and the language of the show consists of production displays.

The female police officer passing behind Dionysus who is the protector God of women and greeting the maenad who is in a state of ecstasy represents Dionysus. The entranced state of Rist wipes of her surrounding with a visibly artistic and thus creative act. It reminds us of a reference to Dionysus's catharsis in this respect. The female police officer symbolising the role of Dionysus and greeting as she passes by confirms both the destructive and creative action of this maenad at the same time (Sadeh, 2017: 64- 66).

In Rist's artistic expression, the one holding the reins, the one making out the game, the 'divine human being' crossing to the other side is the woman smashing the car glasses. Such a human being could come back to this world maintaining the memories of all that she had experienced there through the magical powers she had managed to possess, after abandoning the her body in a cataleptic state of sleep where sensation ceases to exist and after travelling freely in the other world (Vernant, 2016: 88). Such characteristics are represented through the entranced enthusiasm of Rist on the street.

Sevilla-Sadeh considered the woman walking down the street in an entranced state and smashing the car glasses in the *Ever is Over All* video as an act of civil disobedience and a celebration of feminist anarchism. Cunnally (2017: 4) assessing the performance of Rist madly running in the city as dangerous just as the dangerous states of maenads' madness, put down the note that maenadism is a therapy for healing a dysfunctional society.

Freedom

Ever is Over All is a live feminist call to arms. The heroine (Rist herself) is presented as a cheerful anarchic figure holding a flowering phallus in her hand and staying victoriously graceful while dealing well timed blows to authority and wonderfully naughty girl/ woman. Her carefree attitude draws us into her stroll and we join her rage in a delighted state. It is surprisingly liberating and yes, incredibly cheerful! (Snell, 2017).

The expression on her face at the moment of smashing is a clear manifestation of a cheerful state. This free and cheerful state of the woman reminds us of carnivalism having a different form from the Real World. Şen (2020: 973) studied the reflections of carnivalism in children's literature and mentioned that Pippi Longstocking is a typical carnivalesque character. Pippi Longstocking turns the norms of the real world upside down with her way of life, behaviours and thoughts. Pippi almost monopolises all control. The fact that Rist was influenced by this character and got her the same name could be identified with the acts of the woman in the video.

Gender

This is one of the first larger scale installations of her and it creates excessively content worlds of partly real and partly fantastic by combining visuals depicting generally female sexuality with developed nature and daily visuals (<https://www.moma.org/>). Bice Curiger finds Rist's work colourful, cheerful and humorous and adds: "It's somehow feminist with a sensual knowledge that is completely different from the generations before her. It's not propagandistic." (Kennedy, 2009).

In this artistic video, the woman smashing car glasses on Zurich streets with a metal flower prepared influenced by a resilient plant endemic to South Africa is Rist's friend Silvana Ceschi. Rist asked her to smash the glasses using protective goggles but her friend claimed she would not need them. While the woman is attacking three more cars with her flower, a small child on a bike passes by her travelling in the opposite direction. The middle aged woman in a red coat in the video is Rist's mother. The young man crossing the street in a striped shirt is her brother Tom. The idea of smashing car glasses with a flower occurred to Rist while arguing with a Swiss art magazine editor. Rist had the idea of using an old woman in the magazine to which the editor replied No and Rist thought to herself 'I will smash your car!' Thus the foundations of *Ever is Over All* video installation were laid (Tomkins, 2020). Feminist art history and criticism; tries to reflect the consciousness of a female artist regarding women while referring to a series of critical perspectives on art and woman (Keser, 2018: 158). Rist as a female artist had reflected her action on her art using her own ideas.



Visual 3. Louisianachannel shared *Ever is Over All* video installation

A social media user named Louisianachannel shared *Ever is Over All* video installation as a tribute to 8th March International Women's Day. The user noted down under this post that Rist wanted to use an old woman in the cover of a newspaper and the newspaper editor did not accept her idea and then she decided to shoot this video. In a video interview with Rist herself with the title 'Colour is Dangerous', she said that 'I felt an urge to smash his car afterwards'. With this work of hers Rist is challenging the order which interferes with her ideas.

This video shared on International Women's Day could remind us of the slogan 'We want bread and roses too' of the women's movement started with a fight for winning bread. "Bread and Roses Strike started in January 1912 and continued until March of the same year and it is one of the landmarks of American Working Class being given the relevant place in history. The strike got its name from James

Oppenheim's same name poem written just one month before." 'Bread' meant the humane fees claimed by the workers and 'Roses' meant a working environment and life that is worthy of a human being according to the textile workers of the city of Lawrence (Sakinç, 2012).

It has also been observed that the flower that is used as a means of violence in the video has been previously used as a symbol for reconciliation in the protests against military forces by the protestors. 17 year old Jan Rose Kasmir became the symbol of anti-war demonstrations against the Vietnam War held at Pentagon in the year 1967 by presenting the soldiers with flowers. During the same demonstration, George Harris pushed the black carnations he held in his hand into the barrels of the guns pointed by the soldiers of the riot squad. This demonstration against the military police pointing guns at the civilians has been covered as 'flower power' in history (Rothman,2016).



Visual 4. Kasmir, October 21, 1967. Marc Riboud—Magnum Photos

The flower held by Rist in her hand had been transferred to a different power against war just as in the case of this historical event. Her cheerful and entranced state behind the act of violence and her use of flower instead of a weapon against war, the greeting by the female police officer in support of such action and the flowers presented to the police in the demonstrations show that this video has made its point. Maybe no laws are breached according to the female police officer.

After a period of almost twenty years, in 2016, Rist's art resurfaces in a music video by Beyoncé called 'Hold Up'. Instead of a cheerful woman destroying cars in an anarchist manner holding a flower in her hand; we see Beyoncé smashing the glasses of parked cars with a baseball bat. Rist having the same self confidence as the woman in the video installation mentioned the following after acknowledging that she was very proud of this situation: 'Pop Music opened up a new window for me to Yoko Ono and the world of art and I am happy to give back some of what I have earned. I would have rather Beyoncé did this using a flower instead of a baseball bat because it changes the whole meaning.' This act by Beyoncé being influenced by a video installation of an artistic nature by a female artist to express herself and making her a reference point has shown itself in the art of music as an act of solidarity and respect felt for the social status of women.



Visual 5. Rist (left) and Beyonce (right), Source: Carr, (2020).

Reviews of Rist's installation call it "a vivaciously feminist call to arms", The juxtaposition of the joy on the faces of both the main characters in each video and the approval of those around them, create a sense of community. We see both artists as strong, positive, and most of all: motivated. The sense of motivation in both Rist and Beyonce is likely meant to be a catalyst for motivation in all people (Carr, 2020). In a likely manner both contemporary artists Rist and Beyoncé seem pretty calm while performing acts of violence.

Discussion

Rist's *Ever is Over All* video that is considered to be an outstanding feminist work of art reminds us of the liberation claim of women. In this study both the manner of production in Pipilotti's art and the themes used by her through one work of hers are touched upon. The researched video of Rist each work of whom feeds the other, presents us with a metaphor of early stage feminism in her journey of maturing as a critical image. The aim of this cheerful destruction is to lay the stones on the way leading to liberation and creating an illusion of merging with the divine (Sadeh, 2017: 65). In fact, the acts of violence in this video are without an aim and beyond violence the acts could be read as a manifestation of rage. Our heroine steps across the line of the order establishing the law and breaches the boundary between the real life and fiction (Şen, 2020: 977 - 978). Derrida (2014: 106) making an assessment based on the statements of Benjamin claims that the police is represented everywhere where there is a rule of law, and they effectively exist everywhere where there is a need to protect the social order all the time; appears in a different state in this video. The greeting by the female police officer for the act that has been performed means the social acceptance and support for woman as a free and liberated character. Such performances have gone beyond being examples of works of art to being tools for reflecting the woman and woman's psychology to the audience.

As it is seen in the video with concepts such as gender, cheerfulness, freedom and solidarity with the act of smashing car glasses on the street; the power of the female body expanding its boundaries is shown alongside the grace it possesses. A ceremony of peace after a ceremony of war means that a new rule of law shall be established. And war considered as primary and archetypical violence to attain natural objectives is in fact a form of violence to establish the rule (Derrida, 2014: 100). In

addition, the expression on the woman's face while performing the act in the form of happiness and cheerfulness could be likened to carnivalism. Smiling adds authenticity to carnivalism. The carnivalesque smile has a liberating function. It frees the individual of the pressures of the dominant ideology, religious conception or political power and acts as a tool to help the individual relax at least for a while (Şen, 2020: 973).

Pipilotti created a strong, free and resistant female figure using herself. She created a strong and free character who could cross the habitual boundaries of the society with a feminine grace and with cheerfulness and who would not break against the wind exactly like the flower that she holds which would not bend. Such character could have been influenced by the myths of history and that could influence the production of works by other women to follow in her footsteps.

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