Sip My Ocean: Immersion, senses and colour

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Abstract

Pipilotti Rist's exhibition *Sip My Ocean* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney (2017-18) is a dynamic example of screen culture in transition. Rist's aim is to create work that "rethinks the nature of video art itself" and she does this by presenting images and narratives that occupy a space that intersects art, film, sculpture and photography. In *Sip My Ocean* screens do not only appear on walls, but by extending and reducing screen ratios they also appear on ceilings and floors. Rist's video art highlights the use of extreme scale and expressive colour to include and immerse the viewer, destabilising traditional patterns of perception. Extreme screens and heightened aesthetics offer the potential to map the movement of ideas across time, screens, aesthetics and disciplinary boundaries.

Keywords

Feminist Film Theory; Video Art; Pipilotti Rist; New Media; Screens; Aesthetics; Colour

In response to 24-hour news cycle reports of an earthquake, racial violence and political unrest, B. Ruby Rich writes, "so often at times of historical crises, film has risen to the occasion and made a difference." (5) Rich asks, "surely it's time for a new generation of visionaries to arise out of this era of violence and persecution?" (5). This call to action acknowledges the power of film culture to address, and perhaps to intervene, in social and historical issues. Cinema relies on the spectator for activation. Rich wonders what audiences escaping into the deepest 3D experiences today are avoiding (5). Rich asks, "is it possible that a committed digital cinema could arise from the ashes of celluloid and resume the medium's traditional relevance to popular events, historic movements and questions of injustice? And would audiences pay attention?" (5). The questions posed here by Rich require a reconsideration of the position of film and video in the digital age. They wonder whether the movie theatre is capable of activating audiences. However, there is a site where the moving image has been recast in relation to the dynamic transition of technologies and materialities, a site where cinema remains a powerful and relevant force. That space is outside of the traditional

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movie theatre and inside the museum. And one filmmaker/artist who creates such compelling images is Pipilotti Rist.

Pipilotti Rist's survey show, *Sip My Ocean* was exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney (2017-18). Rist's aim is to create work that "rethinks the nature of video art itself" (2017). Her work achieves such a rethinking of the nature of video art through the ways that she presents autobiographical images and narratives that occupy a space that intersects art, film, sculpture and photography (Rist 2017). Rist's moving images are created using light, colour, sound, objects and pixels. Images are sculpted from a range of light intensities and saturated colours. These moving images are projected on a range of screens including television screens, white walls, dual screens positioned at adjacent angles, or joined at a fold, large screens where content is "self-curated," rounded screens suspended from the ceiling, tiny screens that are almost hidden from view, a chandelier-shaped screen made of underwear, curtains, bodies and the air. Rist's video art relies on a reconfiguration of possible spectatorial positions. The viewer is invited to look at, apprehend and respond to the visions Rist conjures forth. In form and content, materials and technologies, Rist's moving image work steps outside of the traditional exhibition space to reframe the history of the cinema, and to imagine it anew. She is a visionary filmmaker whose work responds to contemporary social issues, particularly focusing on women, the environment and the transformation of film culture. Rist's work is deeply connected to popular culture. It interweaves familiar images with Rist's unique perspective. Rist's work is formally, aesthetically and technically rebellious. This is the approach that Rist has consistently taken since producing her first work of video art in the 1980s. *Sip My Ocean* seems to respond to B Ruby Rich's call for an engaged, politicised cinema.

Inspired by the "richness of installations of every kind" that he experienced at the 1999 Venice Biennale, the film theorist Raymond Bellour called for a "new inventory" to begin to describe the "explosion and dispersal" of cinema "redistributed, transformed, mimicked and reinstalled" (427). He suggests that Rist's installations confront the viewer with an "*other cinema*, which in part borrows from aspects of cinema that relate to society and spectacle but is not reducible to only that" (Bellour 7). The first principle of Bellour's *other cinema* is the "reinvention of projection, divided and multiplied" (408). Bellour notes that certain installations evolve towards the concept of *dispositifs*, "in which one sees in very different ways, an increasingly evident element that is in competition with the cinematic *dispositif*-through the deconstruction and reassembly of its specific elements, and through inspiration from its history and pre-history (whether silent cinema or pre-cinema)" (5-6). Inspired by Rist's video art, Bellour's definition of an *other cinema* can be revised in contemporary film culture to acknowledge the *multiplicity of cinemas* and the proliferation of screens that are positioned on gallery walls, on floors, on bottles displayed above bars, on light fittings, using underwear as screens and projecting images across bodies.

Rist is part of a generation of video artists who emerged after the one-hundred-year anniversary of the cinema. Eivind Røssaak classifies this generation as filmmakers who "represented a cinematic turn through their interest in cinema and its techniques and iconography, but they have also been labelled post-cinematic as they mixed video and

new media often using the installation format" (87). The immense transition that Rich sees present in contemporary cinema emerges in the themes and subject matter of Rist's moving image art, and becomes most evident in her experiments with screens, materials and technologies, both solid and ephemeral. This article investigates the particular type of media expansion that is presented throughout *Sip My Ocean*, focussing on marks of Rist's authorship as they arise explicitly and implicitly within the content, aesthetics, style and form of specific exhibits. Throughout, I explore each exhibit in detail, identifying the materials, technologies, form and aesthetic that comprise individual artworks. This analysis is designed to trace Rist's particular creation of fluid screens in both form and content. It follows the layout of the exhibition to identify the transitions across the screens that comprise Rist's career. I consider how spectators experience and participate in the installations within *Sip My Ocean*. Simultaneously, I consider how the exhibits imagine the spectator beyond the singular focus, or physical stillness in the movie theatre, or living room. Throughout this article, I focus on what is theorisable in Rist's video art, identifying the filmic, spatial design, objects and the spectator herself, as discursively constructed. I track some of the ways Rist's video art articulates and enables new forms of intimacy and reciprocity between bodies, images, objects and screens and the ways it renews cinema as it does so. Convergence, for Rist, is less about the conflation of media and materials and more about the dynamic expansion of screens and the interrelationship between media.

Meditation for Suburbbrain: The (over) proximity of suburban life

Meditation for Suburbbrain (2011) consists of a number of interrelated elements. A single-channel video and a two-channel video installation, *Kleines Vorstadthirn (Small Suburb Brain)* (1999/2007), an assortment of white packing materials – *The Innocent Collection* – covering a wall, and a miniature diorama of a flat-roofed modernist house surrounded by a fence combine to identify the suburban home as an isolated fortress. The architecture and surroundings appear to be stilled in time. The lawnmower is abandoned on the grass, the blow-up pool sits alone in the yard, the clothesline is bare. The home is lit by small screens that glow with an unnerving orange hue. The packing materials appear as a frieze in sculptural form, surrounding the diorama. Both walls carry a wash of projections of yellow abstract landscapes, with one wall featuring an insert of Rist, often in extreme close up. Rist reveals that this installation is concerned with the beauty of what is usually overlooked. *Meditation for Suburbbrain* shows both the horrific constancy of suburban life, and the "contradictions of today's civilisation" (Rist 2017). Rist is referring here to the ways that what is classified and excluded as the decay of everyday life produces evanescent effects akin to the sparkle of "instant diamonds" (2017). *The Innocent Collection* begins in 1985, presumably when the objects were collected, and ends in 2032, perhaps referring to the year when the PET materials break down. Her decision to include polyethylene terephthalate packaging cleaned of branding to sculpt the wall reverses the traditional hierarchy of value that usually orders the gallery space.

Meditation for Suburbbrain has multiple iterations with the 1999 iteration being the most influential. Raymond Bellour's experience of Rist's precursor to this installation, the triple screen model of a suburban Zurich home, entitled *Vorstadthirn/Suburb Brain* (1999) highlights the ways that her work destabilises the solidity of domestic architecture by overlaying it with liquid screens. Multiple screens juxtapose the joy of celebrations such as birthdays, with nightmarish images of decapitated bodies and disarticulated heads. Adding such a dark dimension to domestic femininity dispels preconceived notions of blissful suburban life. Bellour writes, "this suggests that everything in the house is a screen; that it is both a place of projection and a support for it; that it becomes a place of fiction told by the work as a whole, according to the conventional identification with the heroine, whose voice guides us, through fragmented views that never stop combining with the unpredictable spectator" (7). Multiple iterations of this video artwork show that adaptation is characteristic of Rist's *oeuvre*. In Rist's work, concepts transform, as do screens, aesthetics and narrative. Convergence is less a system of domination and blurring or erasure of media here than a phenomenon or process that highlights the specificities of materials and the interrelationship of screens and materials.

Bellour uses the word "gesture" to describe Rist's installations. Bellour suggests that the effect of the gesture *Suburb Brain*, is to seduce and to overwhelm the viewer (410). This is certainly the case with the inclusion of moving images that alternate between the distant perspectives of landscapes and the over proximity to the body, fragmented and framed in close up. Bellour outlines various principles of Rist's gestures, one of which is the projection that is extended onto everything, with the body becoming "a site for a frenetic expansion of projection" (410). The body of the visitor comes into contact with the body on screen, which is often Rist's body in extreme close up with context occasionally masked, or uncertain. For Bellour, this is powerful and dynamic work, "more forced and more lively than that which we experience at the cinema" (410). Bellour sees Rist's work as a "mimesis of cinema using alternative means" (6).

Sip My Ocean: Rupturing the romance

Pipilotti Rist says that in *Sip My Ocean* (1996) there is a "kind of mutual understanding of which art can be a non-linguistic offerer" (2017). Two large dual, intersecting screens form a corner for the exhibit. These screens extend beyond the limitations of vision, "cornering" perspective. The image-track shows transforming abstract impressions folded like Rorschardt block prints. The fold connects the images, doubling, duplicating and mirroring these fluid figurative animations. Abstract images are presented in layers, requiring the viewer to simultaneously look in to the image, and to notice the images that appear to billow across its surface. Depth is revealed in the spaces and layers glimpsed through gaps in the surface patina. Abstract images morph into figurative images of a body that swims underwater. A television falls into the water and bobbles around, uncharacteristically light. Two animated mermaids ride whales off into the distance. Rist plays guitar and begins to sing Chris Isaak's "Vicious Games" sweetly. Gradually Rist is heard singing out of synchronicity and in an increasingly discordant style. Towards the end of the song, her voice screeches the lyrics. Sweet harmony finds

its counterpoint in the screaming rendition of the song. The soundtrack augments the complexity of the surface and depth of the image-track. This exhibit begins with a sense of play. Screens, images and sounds appear harmonious. Gradually disconnection emerges in the cacophony of sounds and complex, layered images. As Harriet Hawkins notes, *Sip My Ocean* is an exhibit that relies on abstractions, fragmentations and implied images to build patterns of "accumulative associations rather than linear narratives" (159). Rist reveals that whilst the illusion of synchronicity and connection might be present in the images, her rendition of the song "Vicious Games" shows the impossibility of being totally in tune with others.

On the surface, Rist's screens display extraordinarily coloured fantasy worlds. Catherine Elwes notes that "cinematic pastiches in the mid to late 1990s reveal the extent to which the creative imagination is colonised by phantasms of Hollywood film. They are also a form of retreat from the real, a re-immersion in the escapist enchantment of a celluloid dreamland" (170). Elwes continues, "it is always easier to recycle an elegant, glamorous and illusive past rather than face the uncomfortable realities of the new millennium" (170). Rist certainly creates a celluloid dreamland, but throughout her *oeuvre*, she engages with social and political issues. Rist provokes the spectator by drawing the eye towards vivid colour, establishing a sense of enchantment and then dispelling that illusion. Revising and disrupting the glamour of an illusory past is crucial to the attraction of *Sip My Ocean*. The deconstruction of cinematic narrative across the exhibition more broadly, and the revelation of the contrivances of filmic illusionism, denies spectatorial omniscience. Elwes notes that feminists working with video art in the 1980s showed "a need to externalise the internal struggle with cultural ideals" (164). Writing specifically about *I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much* (1996), Elwes comments that the key themes of this installation, "distance, time, performance, parody and the technological collapse of video realism, all point to the imperfect absorption of culture by the individual. This imperfection suggests a kernel of resistance that puts paid to the arguments of semiotic essentialists who see nothing but the workings of language and culture in the make-up of the individual" (164). Such imperfect absorption is clearly evident in the discordance and dissonance that structures the dual views, soundscapes and abstractions, figurations, where surface and depth are represented implicitly and then explicitly in *Sip My Ocean*.

Ever Is Over All: Colour and rebellion

Rist describes the two-channel video installation *Ever Is Over All* (1997) as a "modern fairytale" that "questions obvious, but illogical rules" (2017). She revises the David and Goliath battle using the red-hot poker stick to represent David and the environmental destruction of civilisation to depict Goliath. Whilst Rist draws from mythology to frame her narrative, we can also identify the gleeful radicalism of an unidentified woman (Silvana Ceschi) who almost skips down a street smashing the windows of parked cars using the stem of a kniphofia plant, which is also known as a red-hot poker. As she continues down the street a female police officer passes her, nods and smiles and continues on her way. With ruby slippers and a flowing blue dress, she appears as a rebellious incarnation of Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming 1939). More

accurate cinematic references would be to Vicky Page's mesmerised, wild dance where the shoes begin to control the performance, allowing her to take flight in *The Red Shoes* (Powell and Pressburger 1948), or the coda of *Black or White* which begins by focusing on Michael Jackson's shoes and then tracks his dynamic movement around and on top of cars, smashing their windows (Landis 1991). Like Vicky Page's magical red shoes and the dynamism of Jackson's dance steps, Ceschi's shoes provide rhythm, propelling her forward, focused and deliberate, unrestrained by the forces of the law. It is hard not to see the exuberant glee associated with the destruction of systems of oppression as a premonition of the #MeToo movement, twenty years prior to the uprising. Even the police are on her side.

On an adjacent screen, hypersaturated images of kniphofia plants waft and bend in the wind. Time is slowed, highlighting the flows of bodies and plants. Looking closely, we notice the diminution of the outline and the bleeding of saturated colour blocks as they stretch out, unrestrained by outline. Colour escapes its outline and becomes its own animated force. It mirrors the thematic emphasis on disruption and disturbance. This is evident in the blur of the red shoes and in the blue dress that Silvana Ceschi wears. Rist acknowledges the value that has traditionally been attributed to outline in favour of colour and uses the painterly aesthetic of video in combination with a heightened colour balance to resist this hierarchy. In *Ever Is Over All* line blurs and becomes unstable, compromised by colour. Hawkins writes of Rist's tendency to refuse to prioritise "outlines that contain things within determined forms and spatial fields," pointing out that "the saturated colour volumes that Rist creates put at stake structural outlines and so distinctions between objects" (172). This refusal to define images clearly casts the spectator as participant, rather than distanced voyeur.

Colour is one of the many rebellious forces within this video. Rist talks about formless colour, suggesting that "colour is something dangerous, like music, very seductive; you don't know where it stops. It's also linked with the proletariat" (2012). Saturated colour is both sensual and political. Rist aligns her video art with broader art traditions that had to fight for colour, "whilst the intelligentsia distances themselves from colour" (2012). Colours pulse and move, escaping outlines and creating a kinetic spectacle on their own. Colour attracts, directs and diverts attention. It does not regulate perception into a coherent structure but provides myriad viewing possibilities. Rist's aesthetic is influenced by David Batchelor's argument that colour has been the object of extreme prejudice (63). Batchelor labels "chromophobia" the loathing of colour due to a fear of contamination and corruption by something that is unknown (64). This fear manifests in the tendency to devalue colour and to purge it from culture (64). Batchelor suggests that colour is marginalised is in its alignment with the feminine, Oriental, primitive, infantile, vulgar, queer or the pathological (64). A second way that colour is disregarded is by its classification as superficial, supplementary, inessential or cosmetic (Batchelor 64). *Ever Is Over All* reverses this bias in valuing the heightened colours and contrasts that are possible using video. It centralises extraordinary colour and links it to rebellious femininity. Bellour describes the colours of *Suburb Brain* as violent and overexposed (409) a similar aesthetic is visible in *Ever Is Over All* and each of the screens, spaces, materials and objects included in this exhibition.

Ted Snell perceives *Ever Is Over All* as an intermedial text occupying a liminal zone between video art and music video (2017). Snell argues that the, the rhythm, sound, spectacle and rebellion borrowed from the music video, joyfully encourages our complicity (2017). Beyoncé borrows the rebellious gesture of *Ever is Over All* and combines this with the cultural critique explicit *in Black or White* in her music video clip, *Hold Up* (Åkerlund 2016). Beyoncé centralises her African American identity and replaces the red-hot poker with a baseball bat. Beyoncé is barefoot as she strides down the street, swinging her bat, with the explosive fire of high concept action films behind her. Baseball bats and fire replace the symbolic violence that is enacted with plants and fugitive, hyperreal colours in Rist's video. The impact and influence of Rist's work is seen in such quotations. Beyoncé's homage is part of a pastiche loop that includes *Ever Is Over All* as it nostalgically reframes iconic images from film history. Significantly, *Hold Up* imagines feminist intersectional rebellion inclusive of African American women. Snell suggests that, "This feminist intervention provides a powerful and ebullient critique, which is in turn having a powerful effect in re-shaping popular culture" (2017). Beyoncé's *Hold Up* is part of that new generation of visionary media that assumes film's traditional relevance and social intervention. In this respect *Hold Up* resonates with Rich's call for filmmakers to look, "further and harder at the rigors of contemporary societies, the toll exacted on individuals, and the systems of repression and domination that resist examination" (6).

4th Floor to Mildness: Clandestine encounters

In *4th Floor to Mildness,* Rist creates under water images that dissolve boundaries between the human and organic ocean plants, simulating our own dissolution (2017). Bodies are imagined as emerging from, and sinking back into the organic quagmire at the base of the Old Rhine. The heavily curtained, darkened room that houses *4th Floor to Mildness* (2016) invites viewers to take off their shoes and lay down, positioning bodies horizontally and intimately within this public space. As participants recline, underwater images unfurl on screens above. Rist is interested in how perception changes when the viewer's head is supported by the bed (2017). These images were shot underwater in the Old Rhine, close to Rist's childhood home. Rist avoided using any horizontal camera movement, rather the images only provide impressions of vertical movement – gliding down, coming up to the surface of the water (2017). Perspectives shift from the horizontal layout of the space, its furniture and surfaces, expanding out to a vertical imagination of human bodies, flesh and our inherent connection to plants and water, their growth, flows and movements. Rist points to the intersections that are visualised on these screens. She draws connections between bodies and their organic, living, miniscule component parts, particularly "mud, slime, molecules and atoms" (quoted in Bullock 480).

Beginning with a perspective that is individual and immediate, the experience of *4th Floor to Mildness* expands out to connect the individual with the group, highlighting the viewing connection as shared fantasy or daydreaming. The bed, the pillow, the linen has been shared by previous visitors and will be used subsequently. Rist mentions that participants are asked to take their shoes off as a sign of respect for the next viewer, but

it is also an acknowledgement of the participants who are connected by this experience (2017). *4th Floor to Mildness* extends the potential for the cinema to provide, as Balsom describes it, "a site of erotic possibility and clandestine encounter, whose pleasures redouble those culled from the entertainment on screen" (29). She writes about the public experience of collectivity and public intimacy, describing the "specific aesthetic experience as at once personal and intersubjective" (32). Reclining horizontally, the participant looks up at the projected images that wash over the screens where underwater reveries of plants, water, seagrass, bubbles and body parts are disembodied and de-identified, all moving vertically. Close by, *Selfless in the Bath of Lava* (1994) reverses this perspective entirely. This single channel, miniscule projection has Rist peeping out from amongst the floorboards. Here, the artist appears naked and surrounded by what seems to be the orange heat of lava flows. This is one of the elements of the multi-dimensional, multi-screen exhibit titled *Your Room Opposite the Opera* (2017). Another is a cosy bed where viewers can lay down and feel the projected images of the universe fall across their bodies.

Administrating Eternity: Ephemeral screens

Administrating Eternity (2011) expands the traditional definitions of both screens and spectators. This exhibit is designed using intersecting net curtains that catch and deflect projected images. The curtains materialise and distort the image, revealing the fragility and ephemerality of the projected image. These projections are images that don't have a consistent screen to settle upon. The curtains are diaphanous, billowing and responsive to their environment. Each shows a delayed movement as it registers the impression of the visitors who were present moments ago. These are screens that can be touched, that waft in the breeze as visitors pass through. Projected images that appear in focus, or coherent on one curtain "fall apart on the ones behind" (Rist 2017). Images on these screens are elusive. Rist says that the only place where we don't see an image distorted is when we go close to the surface, "if we want to be close to the other, we have to take a look from her or his position" (2017). Rist imagines these innovative screens as analogies for memories that can be both clear and diffuse, part of the encroachment of the past on our waking consciousness (Bullock 473-474).

This exhibit also reveals the influence of pre-cinematic experiments on Rist's videos. Bellour understands moving image installations as both deeply connected to film history, and exceeding it. He writes, "by both duplicating cinema and differentiating itself from it, the installations thus also make cinema enter into a history that exceeds it. The history of installation begins with the invention of the camera obscura and projection, and unfolds through its many different devices (from phantasmagoria to the diorama) throughout the nineteenth century" (407). These diaphanous screens have their origins in early spiritualist photography where images of people, often recently deceased, were projected onto smoke or fog. These images are only glimpsed fleetingly as spectres of those who had once existed. Walking through *Administrating Eternity* participants can touch and imagine the history that exceeds these projected illusions.

The role and responsibility of the screen is extended to the body of the audience as they move through the exhibit. Rist offers the participant an opportunity to become a

"projection surface" (2017). The role of the spectator is reconfigured as a mobile, gliding screen, picking up impressions of projections. *Administrating Eternity* borrows the skin to project its imagery. Bullock describes the experience as, "folding the viewer into space, image and sound. We become part of the experience, surrounded by fabric we can touch, images that fleet across our bodies and sound that tinkers and seduces" (473).

Whilst voyeurism is "central to the affective economy of film spectatorship" (Balsom 32), installations like *Administrating Eternity* subvert the distance required for such a power structure. The intimate spectacle of the female body, fragmented and framed in close up provides a proximity and detail that undermines the power structures that support the gendered gaze that Laura Mulvey argued was characteristic of mainstream Hollywood cinema (1975). On the contrary, Rachel Stevens perceives the relationship as one of intimate proximity, writing "If such a fluid artist could possibly have a system, you might say she systematically reimagines a relationship between the body, the viewing experience, and the image, bringing them ever closer to one another" (24). The differences between film spectatorship and the experience of moving image installations usually highlights the contrasts between mobility and stasis, distance and proximity, as well as the temporal difference in the durational commitment inscribed into their respective invisible rituals. By wandering through *Sip My Ocean*, stopping to watch some screens, experiencing exhibits and passing by others, visitors create and curate their own experience based on the rhizomatic pattern of the exhibition design. Bellour describes the programmatic experience of the spectator of an *other cinema* as operating by jumps and fixations (420). The cinematic gaze and the televisual glance are replaced by a visual, sensual and corporeal apprehension of the spaces and projections of *Sip My Ocean.*

Erika Balsom argues that "the act of looking long and hard can in fact be an important and politically invested gesture in today's visual culture" (31). Balsom describes a "chronopolitics of the image for a digital age," which acknowledges the importance of both time and the level of engagement afforded exhibits. Rist's images are inherently political, and they call for an equally political apprehension of both the spectacle and the rebellion that is inherent within some of her images. The site-specific digital video *Open My Glade (Flatten)* (2000) which consists of seven, one-minute films originally made for projection in Times Square positions Rist's face framed tightly, pressed up close against glass acting as a camera lens. The effect is the squeezing of the face into the space, the imposition of femininity into a space where she is constrained, limited, and struggles to occupy. Scale is invoked here again, this time to deconstruct the illusion and augment direct address. The chronopolitics of vision and engagement have additional significance in cultures that show signs of redress amid the #MeToo movement. The affect and intensities characteristic of Rist's textured spaces and hypersaturated images address and centralise femininity.

Building on Luce Irigaray's research, Hawkins argues that Rist's installations build "a feminist photosensitivity" from a range of encounters with the exhibition that are offered as experiences of surfaces, volumes, colour, light and screens (161). Hawkins and Irigaray aim "to develop a feminist language of light … to build an alternative vision

and language of thought" (161). Hawkins disarticulates the illuminations presented by Rist to investigate light as texture and how light is cast across bodies, reflecting the potential for corporeal screens and the interrelationship between vision and touch. As Hawkins contends, founding vision in touch destabilises the power dynamic that opposes subjective and objective, the intelligible and the sensed (162). If, as Vivian Sobchack suggests, film is created in the discursive space between the spectator and the screen, this distance is diminished and replaced with proximity as the spectator comes into contact with Rist's screens (2004). In *Sip My Ocean* this includes spatial positioning as well as ephemeral, hapticity, the touch of the surface of the screen with the eye and the light that projects onto the body, directly and indirectly. Touch is configured as a complex reciprocal relationship between the eye, screen, light, colour and body. Distance recedes in favour of intimacy in the ways that the screens and the body interact.

Pixelward Motherboard: Exploding the screen

It is with *Pixelward Motherboard/Pixel Forest Mutterplatte* (2016) that we find the "exhibition's spiritual climax" (Bullock 2017). In this experiential site, three thousand hanging LED lights are surrounded by illuminated, crystalline strings of "pixels." This is visual, sensual and experiential installation art. The light bulbs are programmed in dialogue with other exhibits, or "gestures" within *Sip My Ocean*. Pixels are programmed to understand where they are in space and they change colour in response "to music in the corresponding exhibition spaces" (Bullock 2017). As Rist describes it, individual pixels work to create "a 3D image," one that we can walk into and create ourselves (2017).

In *Pixelward Motherboard* Rist reconciles various types and qualities of light that we are exposed to including: harsh fluorescent lights; warm glowing forms of illumination; coloured lighting; the blue light that emanates from computer screens; cool lighting; even "sparks in the synaptic clefts, nerve cells, chemical signals between neurons" and sunlight in its "different temperatures according to the daytime and one's position on the planet" (Rist 2017). One way that Rist imagines this exhibit is from the perspective of an oceanographer beneath water, describing the pixels as appearing like "oxygen bubbles" that are emitted by sea grass (2017). From a different perspective, Rist describes *Pixelward Motherboard* as an attempt to "explode the flatness of the screen" into the space where people could wander through the pixels "as though they could wander through a brain" (2017). But rather than the eradication of the screen that has been feared by the threat of media convergence, *Pixelward Motherboard* re-inscribes the power of the moving image. Balsom posits that, "the cinema-beyond-cinema of the gallery can offer a way of interrogating film history and medium specificity precisely as the medium undergoes significant transformation" (26). Balsom reminds us that "as Bellour has emphasised, technological convergence is not just a homogenizing motion; rather, it is a dialectical movement that compromises boundaries between media at the same time as it allows new considerations of medium specificity to come to the fore under the spectre of obsolescence" (35-36). *Pixelward Motherboard* is a new consideration of digital screens and the spectator.

Pixelward Motherboard magnifies, fragments, atomises and disperses what would otherwise be the barely visible components of an image, displaying its elements as if under a giant microscope. Colours are literally suspended on their power cords, creating a forest of pixels. This exhibit shows the complete deconstruction of the screen and offers an invitation to visit its microcosmic remnants. Viewers are able to see, touch and wander through the core components of contemporary digital screens, atomised and diffused in the gallery. Here there is a complete eradication of the frame and a breakdown of the distance between the spectator and the pixel. This frameless magnification is not signalling the end of cinema, nor the end of video art; rather, it provides an environment of increasing proximity and intimacy between spectator and moving image. *Pixelward Motherboard* invites the spectator in to the image. Spatial relations are reversed as the magnified and dispersed pixels surround and miniaturise the visitor. Bellour writes, "the desire for installations thus makes use of the desire for film in order to explode it" (417). *Pixelward Motherboard* becomes a space where the digital image is exploded and then recreated. Visitors bring their own screens into this space. Selfies reinscribe the importance of the screen, frame, body and installation. These images are subsequently (or simultaneously) disseminated along a new, powerful network for the circulation of images – social media. The immense transition that emerges in *Pixelward Motherboard* is evident in the eradication of the frame, the magnification of the atomic structure of the image, and the reconfiguration of production, distribution and exhibition as visitors take new images of this exhibit and disseminate them online.

Conclusion

B. Ruby Rich writes that, "the horrors of the age demand expression in what I still believe to be its foremost medium, right there alongside its greatest dreams and fantasies" (6). The transportation of the moving image into the gallery provides a space for the expression of the historical and social crises that Rich outlines. It also offers an experience that is sensory and experiential. Rich perceives a similar potential in Harun Farocki's work. She writes, "moving from film to video to multiscreen gallery installations, he continuously developed works of critique, essay films, and reflective meditations that inspired a generation" (Rich 6). Such "works of critique" and "reflective mediations" also describe the work that Rist offers in *Sip My Ocean* which revises, repositions and deconstructs the moving image. It also activates the viewer by destabilising conventional relationships between spectators and screens that support omniscience.

Inscribed into celluloid, recorded on video and captured by digital cameras, Rist's creative work spans the shifting materialities of the moving image. In each instance the images test the limitations of the aesthetics of its media. Rist's moving image installations are multidisciplinary. The design of spaces is architectural, the formation of technologies and screens are sculptural. In *Sip My Ocean* screens are positioned to provide a range of kaleidoscopic attractions. In each instance the spectator is invited to take up various positions and poses in relation to the screens. The participant is dazzled, entranced and unsettled. In form, content, design, in the blurring of colour and

the atomisation of elements of the image, *Sip My Ocean* expands the possibilities of exhibition, resulting in the potential for the gallery space to become "a newly radicalised 'cinematic' space" (Elwes 153), an aspect of screen cultures that B. Ruby Rich calls for urgently.

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