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Pipilotti Rist's *I'm a Victim of This Song*: The Rupture of Masculine (Swiss) Neutrality

In her 1995 video *I'm a Victim of This Song*, Swiss contemporary video and installation artist Pipilotti Rist re-situates the absolute neutrality — the reified, universal value of neutrality understood as non-bias, or as a purely non-quantitative and thus non-hierarchical value — of Swissness. Rist interrogates the image and power of Swissness through the staging of her neutrality, naturalized as absolute by its routinized iconography correlating Switzerland's constructed political association with the Alps and her incorruptible bucolic topology with a Rousseauian notion of natural, organic unity and identity. Popular imagination and normative rhetoric processes iconographically figure Switzerland as a coherent nation founded on its monumental, breathtaking, natural (non-man-made) thus neutral — or incorruptible, ever pure, sublime in unsparing equanimity — geography, which is accepted as giving Switzerland a national character of neutrality based on this political iconography despite her pronounced cultural differences, accentuated by geographical differences, between its Swiss German, French, and Italian, and Romansch constituencies, and the regions where each group tends to be demographically dominant. In challenging the putative absolute neutrality — the putatively incontestable universal value of utter parity en face established Swiss political identity, Rist also challenges the association of political identity with an exclusively male solidarity, and so the effacement of gender difference in what Lacan would call a purely phallic — asserted by the external, thus visual, material, and penetrative symbolism of the masculine genitalia indicative physical and abstract power. This phallic signifying economy is embodied by the Swiss founding myth of the Eidgenossen. Literally, the "Oath Comrades," the Eidgenossen story depicts male citizens united by commitment to a natural existence, swears an oath to one another, according to the story, in the thirteenth century at the Rütli meadow outside of present day Zürich. The idea

of Switzerland as a self-formed haven of authentic, natural democracy communicates Switzerland and her political ideation as a natural, thus incorruptible, power where the figuration of the individual is a parallel image to that of Switzerland herself.

The Swiss, thus political icons imaging and communicating natural neutrality — of an unbiased political and social consideration of Switzerland's individual and cultural life rooted in nature, whose elements, or qualities, and processes exist independently and in spite of corruptible subjectivity (the subjectivity is the process of individual or subjective interpretation of factual reality through cognition nuanced by continuous sensual perception, memory, and the related and new emotions with constructed affects). The political iconography of Switzerland models a rooted functioning with the land through the Alps, agrarian production signified by cows and the production of cheese, and the later industry of time precision in watch pieces and clocks. These symbols were conflated in the eighteenth century with hindsight with the equally natural authenticity of the oath between the Eidgenossen, social and now political brothers, thus creating a masculine Swiss neutrality. The idea of Switzerland as a nation willed into being by its people, enacted in choice by the Eidgenossen for a deliberate and functional individual and cultural life, was amplified by how this myth was used in the late eighteenth century to link the national narrative in Switzerland to the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried von Herder and distilled by Friedrich Schiller's Romantic account of Wilhelm Tell. Hans Kohn writes in *Nationalism and Liberty: the Swiss Example*, *Out of the depth of the Swiss thirteenth century, the eighteenth century heirs thought to hear the voice of liberty, conceived by simple peasants and hard-working burghers in their struggle against aristocratic society, a voice resounding in the majesty of glorious and undefiled nature her-*

self. At the origin of Swiss history stood an uprising of yeomen against lords and knights, the protection of a free community of men of patriotic devotion, leading a life of simplicity and equality, which found its symbolic embodiment in *Wilhelm Tell*, the hero of liberty.¹

Johannes Müller, one of the hallmark intellectuals of the eighteenth century Swiss nationalist narrative, published his first volume of *Die Geschichten Schweizerischer Eidgenossenschaft* (Stories of the Swiss Confederation) for his Swiss compatriots in 1768. Müller asserts,

“We have constitutions according to which the free hand and voice of the poorest Alpine shepherd carry the same weight as the authority of the patrician who is honored by dignity, wealth, ancestry, and age ... republics, which are almost alien one to the other [the Swiss German, French, Italian and Romansch cultural and geographic demarcations], are held together by a word pledged centuries ago ...”²

Swiss nationalism functions on the power of the neutral — the sublime political and social equanimity constitutionally devoid of Roman republican martial law,³ distinct from dynastic lineage and property ownership. However, the neutral has been staged ideally and communicated normatively within an exclusively and prototypically masculine — first in the Middle Ages, and then continuing in the image of an ideal democracy rooted in an epic topography, a construction robustly and convincingly maintained well into the twenty-first century.

In her 1995 video *I'm a Victim of This Song*, Pipilotti Rist — who was born in Switzerland's Rhine valley and lives and works in Zürich and the Swiss mountains — alternately pans through a decidedly un-atmospheric, three-star hotel lounge peopled with senior citizens and its adjoining dining room occupied by young, male staff. The views through the windows situate the hotel in a northern city center, far removed from vistas of the Alps and the surrounding fields and lakes that stage Swiss values of identity and its political iconography. Rist films a deliberate counterpoint between the concrete cityscape, the hotel's yellow decor that is indirectly evocative of sunlight; with the idealized cultural life of the bucolic, Swiss landscape.

It is precisely this evident lacuna between city and country that provokes Rist's critique of the founding Eidgenossenschaft. Rist considers the Swiss imagining of cosmopolitan tourism as another manifestation of Swiss values, a subtle functioning of abstracted power, to organize her denizens within her topology. The convincing argument to holiday in city as in country is a re-contextualization of the Swiss political iconography of neutrality — of unbiased parity between individuals — based on the natural, to a capitalistic formulation of cosmopolitan tourism within Switzerland, as opposed to within the irridentist cultures Germany, France, and Italy. This emphasizes the ideals of Swiss democracy as founded by an oath between farmers — between men — to extend to Swiss cultural and intellectual processes embodied by the vibrant cultural life of her cities, comparable to any European capital. This re-signification of the bucolic values iconographic of Swiss political identity, with their convincing counterpoint to the equally staged escapes to Switzerland's cities, is what allows Rist to explore her own Swissness in the video *I'm Not a Victim of This Song*.

Rist's blurred, cinematographic scene of the hotel's lounge then fades into a cloudscape with liminal, nearly transparent, vintage photographs of couples and bikini-clad, single women (the conceit of romantic and adventurous holidays) floating nearly inchoately through the clouds. This deliberate dreamwork is intended to evoke processes of self-formation and interpretation associated culturally, including the Freudian unconscious psyche and the Surrealists' project from the early twentieth century. *I'm Not a Victim of This Song* is a metaphor of Rist as a processual and signifying subject in her own right. As the work unfolds in time and space from Rist's perspective and agency — the functioning as the first person narrator vis-à-vis the cultural staging of the political — the audience witnesses her psychic processes in space and time particular to Rist's own imaging thus iconography of self-becoming. The world and the object are known through her interpretative subjectivity. We never know an object (which can also be an idea — such as democracy and political identity) in pure factuality as it is always filtered through subjectivity. What occurs is the subject re-objectifying the object

in conjunction with subjectivity with processes such as imagination and contextual historicities. The “I” unifies the various “moments” of consciousness and it is the synthesis and analysis of these moments that we see identity operating in space and time. Political iconography penetrates a functioning of power in the self-imaging of the subject with the objects and ideas of the cultural life.

In her video *I'm a Victim of This Song*, Rist critiques her experience of Swiss political neutrality as a phallic absolutism being the signifier in this Lacanian Symbolic discourse. Rist re-situates the absolutely neutrality — the reified impunity of political and social equanimity — of Swissness to transcend the absolutism of the phallus as embodied by the Swiss founding myth of the Eidgenossen. Rist then challenges the notion of Swiss neutrality as a means to transcend purely masculine symbolizing systems that institute power in the individual and cultural life of Switzerland by critiquing neutrality as a modality of a phallic signification. Rist situates the feminine as an equitable alternative to these masculine political systems of Europe and Western patriarchal discourses that stage power and self-formation.

Rist's video reassesses Freudian hysteria, the canonical treatment of feminine neurosis, and evokes the Platonic chora, a connection to a pre-Oedipal Ur-state of the psyche. Although the chora is a passive matrix in Plato's *Timaeus*, in Julia Kristeva, a scholar of the slippage between symbolic identity and semiotic rejection, the chora becomes integral to subjective self-formation. The chora is the locus of the rejected abject — that which is not integrated into the whole as it is deferred difference from the phallic order, or the political and social rule founded on the assertiveness of the visible and material masculine genitalia that penetrates another individual — that can “disturb identity, system, order.”⁴ The Other is understood in most contexts as any subject distinct in being from the masculine—from the Western, colonial patriarchy. Emanuel Levinas recuperates the Other to signify any being distinct that ever merits free and plural processes of being. The Other constitutes heterogeneity in “an effervescence of object and sign.”⁵ that disregards the trinitarian construct of the Freudian psyche of the Id, the Ego and the Es. For Kristeva, the chora

constitutes authentic subjectivity before it is fragmented into a mimetic subjectivity that mirrors the established patriarchal processes codified by Freud.

Jacque Lacan, a scholar who extended the field of psychoanalysis into philosophy, linguistics, literature and mathematics, continues Freud's project by asserting the trinitarian psyche as self-formation through language, instituted by its dialogic relations with external cultural objects and their processes. Although the subject is primary to the world of constructions, the shared realm of accepted and circulating discourse is the Lacanian Symbolic, a culturally constituted objective subjectivity. Such an objective subjectivity lies behind the Platonic idea of a universal whole, or One. This communication of a whole, incorrupt idea stages the patriarchal polis which Freud extended to structure subjectivity everywhere. Freud's structure of the psyche becomes the power structure of the patriarchy, the Oedipal, communicated by the possession or significant lack of the phallus. Lacan, in the tradition of Plato and Freud, thus concludes in the Symbolic discourse “there is no woman except excluded.”⁶

As this paper argues Swissness as monolithic, neutral — the unquantified, pure value of identity through political iconography, is an instance of the Lacanian Symbolic/Phallic conjunction, Rist's employment of hysteria, a form of the abject, in *I'm a Victim of This Song* undoes this conjunction by returning her viewer to the chora. Jacqueline Rose, a scholar of feminism, psychoanalysis, literary and cultural theory and the politics, culture and literature of Israel-Palestine, recuperates the Platonic chora via Julia Kristeva, demonstrating the rootedness of the patriarchy:

*[...] Kristeva calls 'chora' or receptacle after Plato's cosmology (The Timaeus), where it stands for the mediating instance in which the copies of the eternal model receive their shape. Plato himself described the 'chora' as maternal, and from the beginning Kristeva based the link to Freud on this [...] But if Plato did so, it was because the mother was seen as playing no part in the act of procreation, a receptacle or empty vessel merely for gestation [...]*⁷

Rose calls attention to the traditional view of the feminine as abject, as parenthetical to the constitution of subjectivity, and, by extension, culture.⁸ In this paper,

I will argue that Rist employs hysteria to communicate what Rose considers a precariousness of subjectivity. Rose asserts the undoing of the Symbolic/Phallic as an irrational power with her reassessment of Freud:

*"It was then in his failure to analyse in one such patient —'Dora'— in terms of a normative concept of what a woman should be, or want, that led him to recognise the fragmented and aberrant nature of sexuality itself."*⁹

Rose continues by considering Freud through the Lacanian psyche "which is always and persistently divided against itself"¹⁰ in the Real, Symbolic and Imaginary states. The Lacanian triad, along with the chora, provides an opportunity for the dissolution of the arguably monolithic (the unifying one and all), masculine, neutral — the ironically reified, non-quantitative, sublime, social parity — of Swiss national identity. In identifying the Lacanian triad's foundation and constitution in relation to femininity, Rose considers this lack of a normative concept of femininity a caveat in Freud, allowing a new space for the feminine as feminine, as an escape from postulating the feminine as a binary antithesis to the traditionally rational masculine. Positing the feminine as feminine constitutes a new basis for and a new understanding of a general subjectivity, of a cultural life. Rist's assertion of *I'm a Victim of this Song* is a constitution of femininity responding to its facile reading as a repetitive, ideological aberration and fantasy of power, in the irruption of the unconscious in neurotic slippage.

The soundtrack in *I'm Not a Victim of This Song* is Rist's own poignant, nostalgic rendition of Chris Isaak's pop song *Wicked Game* (1990), with a simple guitar accompaniment. As one falls into a tranquil lull watching the film, connecting with Rist's emotive singing, Rist adds a second vocal to the soundtrack in counterpoint to her aesthetic staging of *Wicked Games*. It is Rist's own voice, a doubling of herself, beginning in a low baleful tone that crescendos into a high-pitched, abject rage emanating from the depths of her soul and psyche, an expression of her feminine subjectivity in abjection. Whereas in men the Oedipal complex is reconciled through identification with the father after the maternal threat of castration (from the mother who has been castrated herself), the female Oedipal complex arises from a lack of the phallus and

its sustained wound. For Freud, this can be reconciled when the woman has a child, thus placing the woman in the role of her own mother and fulfilling her wish for a phallus, or its substitute, with the birth of the child. There is also the specific desire to grant her father a child, preferably another male. According to Freud, a woman's sexuality can also be repressed instead of seeking possession of the phallus. By denying her Erotic drive toward her father — her ideal, from the father who maintains an absolute, or universalizing possession of the phallus — is repressed, and this repressed libidinal energy re-emerges as hysteria, as neurosis, as abjection.

Rose revises the Freudian Oedipal complex towards the feminine to bring the feminine out of the shadow of the masculine and its cultural, or political iconography, to institute a language and science of the feminine, not conceptually dependent upon binary opposition to or an inverse mirroring of the masculine Oedipal processes of self-formation. Rose casts masculine neutrality — the Thanatopic drive to maintain an equitable stasis of the psyche through repetitions of thought patterns and actions — as a fragile identity constituted by its own repression vis-à-vis the unqualified thus unrepressed identity of the feminine. In the face of the unqualified, unrepressed feminine in a return to the maternal pre-Oedipal state, the masculine is threatened to its foundations. Thus, Rose articulates a notion of male psychic identity that makes it the counterpart of Freud's notion of feminine psychic identity — so the projection of male neutrality (or the reified universal of sublime parity, here re-situated as a mythic masculine homeostasis — or equanimity — of a neutralized, or balanced and harmonious and static, psyche and its structured Id, Ego, and Es) masks an "hysterical" fragility. Employing Rose's theoretical framework, we may understand the staging and communication of Swiss national identity and resultant cultural life as an example of the accepted formation of the masculine psyche and its processes.

Thus this paper considers political neutrality as an extension of a reciprocal self-formation of the Ego biased toward the masculine, as embodied by the Thanatopic drive—the drive to stasis consistent with Julia Kristeva's account of the psyche's need for repetition en face of the unquantified and unqualified ever-be-

coming of the feminine psyche. Kristeva is a precursor to Rose's project of recuperating the feminine from patriarchal discourse and its cultural codifications. As Rose asserts neutrality as an affect of the Thanatopic drive, the psychic individual and cultural space neutrality imagines is quite contrary to that valorized by Kristeva as subject-in-process. The ideal of the subject-in-process corresponds to Rose's critique of the concept of male identity she constructs to mirror Freud's notion of female identity. Kristeva argues for a processual feminine signification, or an ever deferred iconicity instead of a fixed and functional iconography, that stands against the Thanatopic drive to repetition — which is a drive aimed to maintain a manageable yet constructed stasis in the psyche that is problematic for Kristeva. Or, by extension, in culture as exemplified by masculine neutrality, as an expression of the pure, natural, and thus sublime faculty of reason in the service of self-reflexive, national identity narratives — Swiss identity.

The dreamwork in Rist's video creates a tension between the phenomena of subjectivity and the phenomena of objectivity as theorized by Freud, Rose, Kristeva, and Lacan. The ego functions and self-forms according to its interaction with and internalization of the images of the objective world. This includes the general objectification of individuals into a quantifiable set of values. As the hotel context is one of objectified sexuality and leisure (honeymoons, anniversaries), the hotel reproduces the psychic structures of gender. Freud asserts the cathected identification to wish herself equated with the masculine through the appropriation of the phallus and (self) genesis is intentional and integral to the Freudian feminine psyche. Rist, by taking on the role of the masculine singer, equates herself with the masculine through mimesis in her wish for the phallus, or for the agency of masculine identity. Rose clarifies why the Oedipal has remained instituted as normative to the constitution of feminine and masculine psyches:

[...] the concept of the phallus in Freud's account of human sexuality was part of his awareness of the problematic, if not impossible, nature of sexual identity itself. [Freud and Lacan] answered, therefore, by reference to a pre-given sexual difference aimed at securing that identity for both

*sexes. In doing so, they lost sight of Freud's sense that sexual difference is constructed at a price and that it involves subjection to a law which exceeds any natural or biological division. The concept of the phallus stands for that subjection, and for the way in which women are very precisely implicated in its process.*¹¹

This is Rose's interpretation of Freudian sexuality having a caveat, of the precariousness of the constitution of sexuality in its construction that opens the discourse from within the Freudian model of the feminine. It is through Rist's original authorship in *I'm a Victim of This Song*, by staging the traditional feminine-masculine subjective dyad — the hotel as a functioning site of romantic leisure — in her (feminine) abjection—that she reconstitutes the accepted, Freudian, intense, psychic investiture of the traditional femininity. Rist thus embodies the problematic Freudian Oedipal and resultant model of feminine sexuality from Freud's "Female Sexuality" to critique Freud and another established patriarchal stagings of discourse. By critiquing the Freudian psychological foundation of sexuality first, Rist, like Rose, establishes a ground to critique power, ideology, affect, and sexuality followed by a critique of her own particular identity as Swiss, in order to critique masculine neutrality — or the irrational power and idea of pure reason as infallible against emotion, or desire, and thus bias — itself. By juxtaposing hotel banality with rather kitschy images of art and nature in dreamy transcendence, Rist illustrates a programmatically, culturally instituted locus of romance and leisure with equally programmatic visions of established norms and ideals of love and beauty from perceived halcyon days. By recreating and then blurring these loci and visions as kitsch, Rist's work renders the Freudian framework of sexuality worthless as it is affected with sentimentality — brotherhood — and vulgarity — onanism.

Rose establishes a precedence calling for a pre-Oedipal psychic space to move away from the onanistic ideology of the patriarchy. In doing so, she joins Kristeva in calling for a critique of the Freudian constitution of subjectivity through her exposition of the phallus as the problematic founding construct of a psychological ideology of sexuality. Freud himself couldn't come to terms with the pre-Oedipal chora as he view-

ed all normative and neurotic behavior (and its manifestation in dreams) as teleologically and tautologically hinged on the phallic. For Freud, pleasure has a use: to relieve tension, especially of the Thanatopic drive. The aim is to produce something — children, mature identity, and such sublimations of both as art — for the psyche to maintain an equitable balance to mitigate repression and its symptom of repetition. Rose's interpretation goes much further than Freud's:

*"It is this very insistence which places the drive outside any register of need, and beyond an economy of pleasure. The drive touches on an area of excess (it is 'too much'). Lacan calls this jouissance ([...] used by Lacan to refer to something more than pleasure which can easily tip into its opposite)."*¹²

This recuperation of Freud allows for unquantified slippage between the tensions of the drives, resulting in a slippage of the subject-object relationship. There is a fluidity in this processual state defying a facile reading of the psyche based on the possession or lack of the phallus, or the possession of lack of a construct, such as Swissness and its functioning iconography.

A Swiss identity grounded in masculine neutrality is deconstructed by the subject-object relationship framed by the feminine. The feminine does away with the Oedipal and its foundation in the phallus. The Freudian and Lacanian Ego is problematized when it seeks to incorporate itself in discourse as "place and structure inform the subject's future identifications."¹³ Rist's abjection within and established identitarian framework, the methodology argued by Howard Caygill in the subsequent text, demonstrates the effect of the masculine neutral as negative. It is through Rist's audible articulation of (negative) jouissance (the 'too much' of the Thanatopic drive) and her identification of the romantic masculine / feminine iconography while in a banal, spiritless, quotidian environment (the three star hotel could be anywhere in Switzerland) she establishes its re-interrogation. As the video unfolds, it is through Rist's eyes and the viewer is privy to her externalized, cathected investiture in the juxtaposition of the hotel interior and the dreamscape.

"What is important here is that the demand of the subject is in each case directed outwards to an

*external object, and it is the relationship of this demand to the place of the object it claims that becomes the basis for identification."*¹⁴

The feminine, issuing directly from the unconscious — the chora — shatters the Thanatopic structures of identity functioning through a place (within a bordered space) by reconstituting subjectivity as an evident process, rather than a drive to recuperate a lost object (the mother, the phallus, traumatized social cohesion). If the onanism of masculine neutrality as ideology is at the heart of Rist's critique, it is because jouissance naturally allows for a transcendence of its ideological structure. Jouissance, a drive in excess that is not repressed (that is the pleasure — allowing the drive to exceed structure and place), is a function of the original nurturing mother before the Freudian castration complex is instituted.

Rose, who believes that sexuality should be rooted in a connection with the intuitive process of the unconscious, allowed to recapitulate in a fully relational manner with other, and not from the strictures of the Oedipal structure, further critiques Freud's attempt to institute the feminine:

*It was then [Freud's] failure to analyze [...] 'Dora'[...] in terms of a normative concept of what a woman should be, or want, that led him to recognize the fragmented and aberrant nature of sexuality itself. Normal sexuality is therefore, strictly and ordering, one which the hysteric refuses [...] The rest of Freud's work can then be read as a description of how that ordering takes place, which led him back, necessarily, to the question of femininity, because its persistence as a difficulty revealed the cost of that order."*¹⁵

Freud considers hysteria as a repression of the phallic, Oedipal narrative instead of a harbinger of a direct connection between sexuality and the unconscious. As a result, Rose states, Freud could not rigorously establish the feminine, her sexuality and psychological independence from the phallus, as the discourse would open a direct dialogue with the beginnings of the unconscious in the pre-Oedipal state and not with the castration complex. Freud's entire project was threatened by the feminine. Rose, Kristeva, Irigaray, Caygill, as well as art historian and critic Hal Foster in the subsequent text, argue against Freud's ordering

of the psyche in terms of the phallus (its possession or lack). This ordering is demonstrated as problematic and even irrelevant to the processual subjectivity of the feminine and of the Other. The Oedipal ordering, masculine neutrality, is a problem as its ordering that is defensive (paranoiac in its structural repetition), asserting the exclusion or co-option of the Other.

Rist negates the ordering Oedipal paradigm in her daydream in its fragmented montage which "refuses" fixed, Platonic forms of sexuality thus identity. The cloudscapes in Rist's video compliment the hotel context as a dream state in which wishes are virtually, yet not actually fulfilled. Rist, even as she works from a Freudian basis, rebuts Freud in keeping with Rose's discourse on Freud to recuperate the feminine from the male objectifying institution of the feminine. Through her soundtrack — the nostalgic and evocative sing-song vis-à-vis the subsequent abject rage — Rist creates a doppelgänger of the traditional feminine role in the patriarchy, an extended sign of the masculine, and then contests it. The sweetly nostalgic evocation of *Wicked Games* pre-disposes the viewer to accept Rist as yet another feminine flower who blooms in the wake of the masculine presence, here signified by his absence.

As the camera pans through the hotel, punctuated by visions of the dreamscape, we are party to Rist's apparent longing for the masculine. She is not visually figured either, heightening a sense of the uncanny — Rist's singing can be the wistful singing of any woman anywhere as staged by the traditional feminine-masculine roles with femininity as a consequence of and enlivened by masculine power and its functioning. As Rist's voice is doubled, the nostalgic sing-song now being overtaken by her second, abject interpretation of *Wicked Games* relieves the tension of the repressed Thanatopic drive. Rist's first voice is the repetition of the song to fulfill the scope of romantic ideology — it's onanism waiting for masculine choice, or agency. Rist's second voice is the unrepressed Thanatopic drive, no longer held in abeyance and in full expression — a direct connection between Rist's amorphous unconscious experience in relation to her conscious staging of the (objectified) world. By nostalgically repeating Isaak's love ballad *Wicked Game*, Rist calls attention to the staging of the masculine through the

Thanatopic drive. It is the Thanatopic drive that seeks stasis. The Thanatopic drive, repeating an event or a pattern as (self) preservation en face potential trauma, parodied by Rist with her nostalgic singing — a break-up, the continued absence of a lover. The potential trauma here is the efficacious irruption of the feminine, of the non-masculine: or amorphous experience seeking to intuitively, rather than programmatically, engage with the world. Although Freud's essay *Totem and Taboo* demystifies the myth of the *Eidgenossen*, Rist subverts both Freud and the Swiss founding myth.

Rist's video addresses not only Freud's institution of the masculine and the feminine but also her particular identity as a Swiss citizen. As Swiss and literate with the masculine neutral iconography constituting political Swissness — foremost the Alps and the *Eidgenossen* — Rist penetrates the repetitive didactic of Swissness. It is Swissness that is repeated to institute the means of national identity — the continued construct of Swiss (masculine) neutrality. The empty hotel, its yellow walls substituting for authentic sunlight, is perfectly metaphoric: it is a goal that works toward a continued means. The artificially cheerful environ, conflated with transcendent ideas of holidays taken during national holidays or romantic interludes, reinforces an eidetic process that should be enjoyable, yet is actually at work, seeming like leisure while actually being ideologically functioning — a reconstitution of nationality. The Thanatopic drive's impulse to repetition represses the satisfaction of the Erotic drive in the Erotic drive's quest for unity in consumption, in the internalization of fulfilled desires.

As such the Erotic drive is consumerist, fueled by the fantasy of an idyllic unity based on the possession of affect and physical status markers, such as unity through the objects of iconography and their staged values. The Erotic drive is asocial as the Ego attempts to relate qualitatively through objects and objectifications, rather than through a subjective — the individual's historically particular emotional, spiritual, psychological perception and thus experience of reality — relation between the psyche and an understanding of the Other qualitatively expressed reciprocally to the Other. It is the notion of satisfaction the Thanatopic drive and its discontents share — considered by Sla-

voj Žžek as ideological onanism in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Stasis is a metaphor for neutrality and the prevention of abjection, a trauma that is ever on the horizon as it has already occurred and the reification of political iconography is a calculated function staged to overcome cultural differences. Ideological stasis overwhelms the abjection of one culture and its topology in confronting one another (Swiss German vis-à-vis French) for primacy within Switzerland and a resulting reinforcement of Swiss identity through sameness. Ideological Swissness is the rational mastery of the thirteenth century founding myth of the Eidgenossen from the perspective of the eighteenth century Enlightenment nation-builders.

Although neutrality is arguably an empty structure in oppositional balance, a balance between the signified (Swissness) and the signifiers (the Alps, the Eidgenossen), neutrality is actually a form of becoming. Neutrality precipitates the irruption of the repressed unconscious. Neutrality augurs an eventual and necessary overturning of the repetitive symptom / construct to maintain a useful equitable integrity of the psyche.¹⁶ Neutrality acts a preventative measure, thus catalyst of the abjection. The abject is defined as the Freudian devouring mother — the one who births, feeds, rebukes, cleans, and takes away from the child. Thus the abject is also the fear of becoming, of becoming outside of the identification with the pristine, totemic father, towards the devouring mother. Julia Kristeva asserts,

*The abject, mimed through sounds and meaning, is repeated [...] the final Platonic lesson has been understood, one does not get rid of the impure; one can however, bring it into being a second time, and differently from the original impurity. It is a repetition through rhythm and song, therefore through what is not yet, or no longer is 'meaning,' but arranges, defers, differentiates and organizes, harmonizes pathos, bile, warmth and enthusiasm.*¹⁷

The not-yet can be anticipated historically. The not-yet, or flexible creativity rather than rigid paranoid structure, can also precipitously stave the abject, amorphous unknown and thus is uncanny. The uncanny tautologically incites Thanatopic repetition to preserve the truths of the psyche — for example,

Swiss thus masculine neutrality. As Swissness is constantly instituted iconographically across distinct cultural groups (Swiss-German, French, Italian, Romansch), the feminine is subsumed, or repressed, by the masculine institution of Swissness, maintaining the integrity of Swiss identity against the abject — against dissolution of its logical yet unnatural unity.

For Kristeva, it is the enunciation of the abject that provides individual and societal redemption as it is the recognition of the abject as knowledge, as communicative discourse: "Power henceforth belongs to discourse itself."¹⁸

*"Communication brings my most intimate subjectivity into being for the other; and this act of judgement [avowal, or confession] and supreme freedom, if it authenticates me, also delivers me to death."*¹⁹ Although Kristeva here speaks of death as 'sin' en face the Catholic rite of absolution (the subject is judged and condemned anticipating redemption), she cogently argues this denunciation of the self as jouissance, "*the glorious counterweight to the inquisitorial fate of confession ... art provided sinners with the opportunity to live, openly and inwardly apart, the joy of their dissipation set into signs: painting, music, words.*"²⁰

Kristeva here quotes from the biblical New Testament, Mark 16:17: "they shall speak with new tongues."

The figures throughout the video are evident for their seniority, sometimes as couples and often with solitary women as a third-wheel, thus emphasizing the historical iconography of the dominant patriarchal tradition. As there isn't an anchor point in the video, there is a freedom in the daydream in contrast to the fixed, bland, semblance of cheerfulness in the hotel and to the relatively static, seated figures. Thus the feminine dream, or perception, revises the masculine: the hotel can be any three star hotel anywhere, for it constitutes a neutral, thus masculine ground. It is the interpolating daydream, or perspective, that gives it, fills it with value. The video is uncanny, as the accepted locus, or home, of Swissness (of identity) is mimicked and then confronted with the abject. The mimesis of the Thanatopic, is eventually overcome as the energies of the psyche do not remain compartmentalized: they must flow in compensation for an ethical balance

of the psyche — the energies directed to a cathexis are balanced by the unconscious with the creation of neurotic symptoms to relieve the energies directed toward fixation. Rist's baleful screaming overcoming the love song epitomizes the feminine's rupture of the masculine's Thanatopic form in a natural overturning of imbalanced, biased, inauthentic, codified structures of subjectivity in society. The uncanny results from the valorization of differentiation and pluralism allowed for by a direct connection with and expression of an unrepressed unconscious.

Rist shatters the metaphor of neutrality and its ideological knowledge structures with music via mimesis as the natural, ensuing, cathartic step to Thanatopic repetition necessary for the reconstitution of the energies of the psyche. That is, the discourse of knowledge is a concerted repression of the unconscious, as evident in repetition. The psyche must relieve this cathexis to restore an equitable relationship between the Id, the Ego and the Es.

"Aristotle seems to say that there is a discourse of sex and that is not the discourse of knowledge — it is the only possible catharsis. That discourse of knowledge, audible, and through the speech that it mimics it repeats on another register what the latter does not say."²¹

Aristotle tells us that meaning in an artwork (epic poetry) must be resolved dialectically, between the staged values of the image and the interpreting subjectivity. He argues in favor of the emphatic transient, or Kristeva's processual abjection, which connects to Kristeva's interests in pre-Oedipal subjectivity and affectivity in language. Kristeva tells us, beyond affect, the drives' emphatic speech in formal mimesis (language) inaugurates the abject, the jouissance of an excess of being. The non-recognizable and non-quantifiable within codified speech and memory, the uncanny for the feminine — Kristeva's interest in pre-Oedipal affectivity and sociality in language, is overly determined in her separation as Other from the patriarchal, evident in counterpoint to Oedipal ordered, historic speech. Rist's cathartic song is an expression of the unconscious in conflict with the artifice of Swiss identitarian ideology as catharsis inaugurates a processual space that is a genesis of free and new subjective, or individualized, articulation — the genesis of

the unrepressed and intuitively relational unconscious. By doubly dubbing Chris Isaak's *Wicked Game* in her own untrained, high-pitched and deliberately high-strung voice, Rist is in cathartic process through the abject. Rist, in processual being, recapitulated through the mimetic singing — the repetition, of a popular, established, supposedly romantic song—inhabits a Thanatopic surreality laden with the uncanny. By purging her abjection, by allowing it to surface in counterpoint to the conformable, nostalgic signing, Rist opens a space for discourse. The doubled singing exists in tension with the avowal of the abject creating a new space for knowledge.

Rist's *I'm a Victim of This Song* explores the psyche by repeating a convention of popular culture — the romantic ballad. Hal Foster re-contextualizes the surrealist artwork from the Thanatopic drive, as opposed to the traditional and standardized interpretation through the Erotic. In doing so Foster gives precedence to the natural, unconscious irruption through the feminine processual thereby creating an argument for Rist's decontextualization of subjectivity through the feminine as opposed to the masculine neutral. For Foster, as for Rist's understanding of the psyche, the Thanatopic stasis cannot be perpetually sustained as the psyche demands equity in its homeostasis of its energies (the Id, the Ego, and the Es). This equity is ethical, as the psyche will recapitulate itself based on its historicity that processes the kernel of subjectivity, simultaneously framing the intuitive response to the drive of the Thanatopic and Erotic drives irrupting from the unconscious. The biological drives are thus allowed to exist relationally in an intuitive and spontaneous instantiation of experience and capitulation of the present moment. Does this then necessitate an assimilation of constructed, ideal forms of identity (such as Swissness) as historicity to establish the present? Or is it the inception of the uncanny and the processual identity of the Bergsonian *durée*? Rist's double mimesis of *Wicked Games* sustains the latter. Discussing

[...] the famous surrealist game of the cadavre exquis (exquisite corpse), whereby different parts of a drawing or a poem were produced by different hands oblivious to what the others had done. As is often said, such collaborations evaded the

*conscious control of the individual artist, but do they not also mock the rationalized order of mass production? ... The uncanniness of the machine and the commodity ... is a projection of a particular subject — in surrealism as in Freud an anxiously heterosexual male. It is important then to stress again the fetishistic link made between a historical ambivalence regarding the mechanical-commodified and a psychic ambivalence regarding woman — a desire for master over these figures mixed with a dread of servitude to them.*²²

Rist's authorship as recuperating the feminine from the Freudian castration complex and the subsequent wish fulfillment (for a child, for a phallus) rooted in the envy of the phallus, examines the role of technology (the harbinger of progress) in the uncanny. Rist's hand-held camera records the scenes with an eidetic blur, along with her double enunciation of the song (one in high-pitched yet nostalgic angst eventually paralleled by and overcome by an emerging second crescendo of abjection) breaks with mass production and its ordered production of dreams satisfying the oral drive of the subject. Rist's artistic choices and her signing are counterpoint to the fixed, clean, stasis of masculine neutrality juxtaposed with Rist's compositional and editorial agency.

Rist's refusal of sharp editing, the use of state-of-art technology, and software images the irony of the masculine technological as the harbinger of progress. Technology enhances what has already been staged and reliably put to use, demonstrating, for Foster a "gendered ambivalence, this sexed oscillation between technophilia and technophobia, is still very evident today."²³ Technology, arguably the masculine neutral functioning from harmonious reason, is a system much like ideology whereby a self-produced artwork announcing the lacunae of the feminine is not genitive but a cog in the wheel. Thus Foster concludes that the traditionally feminine technophobia can be overturned by its insistence on the nascent, the original, the unprocessed, the unconscious. Rist playfully interpolates Polaroid stills of couples and bikini-clad women in the film reel spooling in transparency through the clouded sky. The Polaroids are vintage — from the 1940's or 1950's — arguing for a

nostalgia wrongly fixated to happy and suburban domesticity allowing the occasional holiday adventure.

Domesticity and staged holidays are stipulations of a banal Thanatopsis which codifies and unites couples, the binary of the masculine and feminine under the masculine, beyond Swissness. Rist's *I'm a Victim of This Song* — singing "It's strange what desire will make foolish people do / I never dreamed that I'd meet somebody like you / And I never dreamed that I'd lose somebody like you" — irrupts the classic binaries of signification (masculine-feminine, conscious-unconscious) creating a psychic and quotidian space to understand the feminine through the feminine. Neutrality as ideology instituted by the Thanatopic drive, in its concerted effort to keep abjection at bay with a simulacra of stasis through the institution of ideology, precipitates subjective (historically affected, particular individuality), abject jouissance. Rist's jouissance limning in her self-produced video evinces both an interest in complex media in its utter technophobic inversion. This is metaphoric of ideology, particularly functional in staged Swiss political iconography.

One could argue that any specificity of subjectivity, feminine or masculine, to unlock universal subjectivity is not at all universal. One could also argue that the staging of a feminine ideology and resultant iconography as a solution to the reification of the Other is equivalent to instituting a newly hegemonic ideology and iconography which could be advantageous to a determined few, adverse to the task of creating a plurality of subjectivity in equitable parity. As such, the rubric of the feminine would subject culture to a traumatic upheaval from its stabilizing foundations of society that have, however tenuously, brought Western civilization to this point in time. If society is reconstituted toward the feminine, the project of recuperating meaning and the telos of history from the masculine would destabilize history and its interpretation, in a project whose scope would take decades, if not centuries. However, if subjectivity has historically been accepted from the masculine perspective, true symmetry with the feminine is necessary to offer a truly universal and holistic interrogation and codification of subjectivity that can redress the reality of the feminine and the Other, that can redress the persistent exclusi-

on of the feminine and the Other from masculine agency in history.

Resistance through the aesthetic, through creativity, occurs in a dialogic arena that, while not constituting political policy, foments awareness in a discursive space that is widely acknowledged as both provocative and ambivalent. It is the viewer's ultimate choice whether or not to leave the values articulated by the artwork at the gallery, the museum or the installation. Rist's video engages with an exploration of nationhood through the philosophical, not through the political nor the economic, in theory and praxis. The relevant theoretical frameworks of performance art, theater, film and video, as well as comparisons with other feminist artworks are intended for a future project, as has the theory of gender roles.

Thus, this paper aims to re-constitute historical feminine subjectivity through the creative and resistant metaphysics of the durational artwork, Pipilotti Rist's *I Am a Victim of This Song* (1995), in place of functional political iconography. Rist's exploration of her foundational subjective processes in this work opens a discourse of the affects of subjectivity, such as Rist's nationality as a Swiss citizen. In demonstrating Swissness as decidedly masculine in its politically neutral, ideological construct, Rist's artwork demonstrates that ideological construct is superficially tautological in its reification. Rist's artwork is an admonition to the cursory acceptance of ideology's Platonic Ideals that claim a noumenal purity of wholeness as they exist perfectly, or without corruption, in the spirit and mind. Political iconography attempts to organize society around these whole, or pure, Platonic ideals of democracy, equality, fraternity, and so on; into non-egalitarian representations of political identity that are inherently biased toward the masculine as such political iconography is demonstrate to originate from historical, patriarchal structures. Rist calls attention to feminine subjectivity as a process in time, inverse to the repetitive forms of masculinity attempting to keep society in stasis against an ethical plurality of subjectivity.

Endnoten

1. Hans Kohn, *Nationalism and Liberty: the Swiss Example*, London 1956, p 24.
2. Johannes von Müller, *Sämtliche Werke*, Munich 1831-1835, p. 28.
3. Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Another History of Philosophy and Selected Political Writings*, Indianapolis 2004, p. 136-137.
4. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York 1982, p. 13.
5. Kristeva 1982, Powers, p. 11.
6. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality. The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, New York 1998, p. 69.
7. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, New York 2005, p. 154.
8. This paper will define as subjectivity as the individual's regulative psyche, influenced by the unconscious Erotic and Thanatopic drives, and willful choices in a relationship with the external environment of other individuals and things. Objectivity is defined as the individual's norming of people and things into static concepts and values, or forms.
9. Rose 2005, Sexuality, p. 51.
10. Rose 2005, Sexuality, p. 94.
11. Rose 2005, Sexuality, p. 51.
12. Rose 2005, Sexuality, p. 57.
13. Rose 2005, Sexuality, p. 180.
14. Rose 2005, Sexuality, p. 183.
15. Rose 2005, Sexuality, p. 51.
16. It is necessary for the energies (between the Ego, the Id and the SuperEgo) subverted by the repressive place and structure of the masculine neutral to eventually rebound, especially the energy of the Id, from which the Ego and SuperEgo are fractured and filter the intuitiveness of the unconscious' relation and reaction to the world.
17. Kristeva 1982, Powers, p. 28.
18. Kristeva 1982, Powers, p. 132.
19. Kristeva 1982, Powers, p. 129.
20. Kristeva 1982, Powers, p. 131.
21. Kristeva 1982, Powers, p. 29.
22. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, Cambridge 1995, p. 152.
23. Foster 1995, *Compulsive*, p. 275.

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Zusammenfassung

In her 1995 video *I'm a Victim of This Song*, Swiss contemporary video and installation artist Pipilotti Rist re-situates the absolute neutrality of Swissness, a neutrality naturalized as absolute by its routinized, political iconography correlating Switzerland's association with the Alps with a Rousseauian notion of natural, organic unity and identity. Popular imagination and normative rhetoric understands Switzerland as a coherent nation founded on its monumental, breathtaking, natural (non-man-made) thus neutral geography, which is accepted as giving Switzerland a national character of neutrality despite her pronounced cultural differences, accentuated by geographical dif-

ferences, between its Swiss German, French, and Italian, and Romansch constituencies, and the regions where each group tends to be demographically dominant. In challenging the putative absolute neutrality of Swiss national identity, Rist also challenges the association of political identity with an exclusively male solidarity, and so the effacement of gender difference in what Lacan would call a purely phallic signifying economy, as embodied by the Swiss founding myth of the Eidgenossen. Rist situates the feminine as an equitable alternative to systems, arguably those of Europe and Western patriarchal discourse. Rist's video reassesses Freudian hysteria, the canonical treatment of feminine neurosis, and evokes the Platonic chora, a connection to a pre-Oedipal Ur-state of the psyche.

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