

Cécile Hartmann

Life's main medium is precisely repetition.

*Repetition is profoundly and courageously living in the present...he who does not grasp that life is a repetition and that this is the beauty of life has pronounced his own verdict and deserves nothing better than what will happen to him anyway – he will perish.* (Søren Kierkegaard)

Some things help to dodge the redundancy of time, for example death and madness, and love and beauty. Finite life is in fact relieved by the utter monotony of infiniteness.

Cécile Hartmann's show *Supra-continent* is installed in the church behind city hall in the town of Chelles, 15 minutes from Paris. In this town, *les églises centre d'art contemporain* is like the treasured 7<sup>th</sup> century golden chalice that disappeared from here during the French Revolution. A church-cum-exhibition space, it's a shift from one anthropological space to another anthropological space, from the proverbial body to the head. In some ways walking into Hartmann's exhibition is like walking into a head: dark and running, like an active mental machine, a repetitive fold that leans toward meditation.

Large images are set against the wall as you enter. *Variations* (2010) are pictures of precipitation but the size and their inversion from positive to negative, abstract the reading and they feel like paintings. In fact Hartmann is a painter and her work is an ongoing manifestation toward nature; she tends toward it like a cat. Her vision turns the things sideways, and her gaze is like poetry so the object comes back refracted. More than beautiful images, these are images of beauty where beauty is a bridge to knowing: nature and beauty are a means to precision.

In the late 1990's Hartmann was working on the *Orange Project* where she used the aesthetics of the colour of controversy as a form of seduction. Bodies carrying orange placards on their backs wandered into the metro, into the sea and into traffic at night. A provocative visual device and an ambiguous one. In her images of solitary figures beaten by the city in Japan, and those isolated in front of glowing screens, nature becomes antagonist in its absence. Hartmann is building a loose dramatic score that conjures a world full of signposts. In these current renderings of nature her aesthetics and politics visibly meet.

Toward the back of the space is *Manifest, versus vital* (2010), a captivating film loop. In the belly of the chapel, this graphic sequence is aimed at the gut. It opens on gushing water which tempers as expectations mount, and the film follows an ominous placid stream with cameos of foreign objects – a twisted metal bar, a gem, a *keffiyah* – into a brittle and brutal landscape. It's exciting when the water rages, and undeniably sad when things dry up. Finally we're staring at the embers of a fire. It's a compact and spectacular cycle, and somewhat uneventful, that manages to sustain a latent drama. As in much of Hartmann's work, the super-reality triggers an emotional reaction and we watch the film with our bodies.

Transformation buoys hope and desire even if nature's cycle is inescapable.

Eileen Sommerman

