



SALON 94

Felix Ensslin on 'Lulu'

<http://www.zkm.de/betweentwodeaths/en/art/ruilova.txt.html>

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With *Lulu*, a project realized for *between two deaths*, Aïda Ruilova is taking another step in shaping her main trope—repetition—with the material of existing figures of cultural imagination while continuing this trope's rhythmic and musical extension into the filmic technique of montage. Of course, montage is, by its very dependency on intervals, rhythmic in itself and thus points to a dimension which, while not “pre-discursive,” as, for example, Julia Kristeva would have it, certainly always opens to the poetic and the less orderly. In fact, Ruilova often doubles the range of montage by the very way in which she arranges various screens or monitors in a room, forcing the viewer to “cut” with the direction of his or her attention just as -associations are both stopped and set in motion by the montaged sequences showing on the screens themselves. Thus, with Ruilova, the viewer always becomes a collaborator—after the fact, as it were—just as she herself become a collaborator of Jean Rollin's *withlife like* (2004) by retroactively inscribing herself and her work into his vampire-girl kingdom, transforming it by receiving it. Similarly, with *Lulu*, by repeating not only a *sujet*—the *femme fatale* in Wedekind's play of 1915—but various historical adaptations of it, Ruilova radically transforms a figure that seemed locked in an image with little variation, thus opening it up for a different reception by both herself and the viewer.

But the invitation extended to both her living and dead artistic collaborators and the viewer is not an innocent gesture. Rather, just as in the famous Lacanian technique of “scansion”—in which the analyst stops the session at a seemingly random moment to shake loose the analysand's complacent, imaginary certainty—Ruilova sometimes simply cuts off the encounter she so elaborately has created. She does this by various means, whether it is by obscuring the viewer's own certainties of interpretation with references either so random (Hey, 1999) or so obvious (Untitled, 2002) that they leave you working on the powerfully sequenced images long after you have left the gallery, or by jump-cutting a sequence so sharply that it is over before one can get any illusions of comprehension, only to start again (Countdown, 2002). If the process of invitation and withdrawal described here sounds like a kind of seduction, well, that's because it is. Seduction, with its clichés and, even more, the power it projects and grants, is never far from the works of Ruilova. However, once one has entered her world of enigmatic signs, ambiguous gestures, and erotic signifiers, Ruilova then cuts the viewer off from any affirmation of the culturally processed schemata by which the games of seduction are supposed to be played. There is no object which one can explain away or over which one can feel power, nor is there any acceptance of roles as the scripts of gender or sexuality assign them. By moving to adapt *Lulu* to her artistic strategies, Ruilova develops this aspect of her work further. And, true to her strategy of unsettling certainties once she has invited you in, she starts by changing the biological sex of the figure, thus highlighting the construction of a gendered role.

With *Lulu*, Ruilova also stays true to what one could call her musical eye, and not only because Alban Berg's opera is just as important a source as the original *Wedekind* play. She does so much more through her trademark editing, which operates exactly in the split between the audio and video levels of the work. If she doubles the process of montage by the way in which she installs her work, she also doubles the rhythmic and musical aesthetic level by creating a consciousness of the gap within it. As her montage—like the heritage of B-movie camerawork—serves to break the harmonizing, narrativizing, and domesticating impression we associate with commercial Hollywood films, so the rhythmic and repetitive audio levels, while instantly bypassing our conscious mind, serve to break any harmonizing or romanticizing identification with subject or visual object. Thus, repetition—historical, visual, and auditory—produces a confrontation with *jouissance* or enjoyment that is not inscribed into accepted, or

even defined roles or modes. As she has done in visualizing the jouissance of sounds outside or before any signification (Ah-Ahh-Ah, 2001), so she does with all the material, visual or auditory, with which she confronts the viewer: she refers it to a dimension that is beyond control, which is, for exactly this reason, a dimension of possibility, where something new can happen.

F.E.