

BIOGRAPHY

Alain Pelletier's work is a multidisciplinary exploration of videography that combines theatre, dance, literature, music and the visual arts. His singular process stems from the tension created by his desire to remain objective in the face of extremely visceral themes. This dual impulse is the basis of his creative process, the groundwork for his research into the synaesthetic possibilities offered by video. In his work, the interplay of textural, visual and sonic elements results in an ongoing cross-pollination. Pelletier's works have been widely exhibited and have received numerous national and international distinctions.

Constantly shifting between media, Pelletier's atypical, multi-faceted approach responds to a twofold inner need. On the one hand, there is the wish to be the very object of the creative process, in effect, *to be* its medium – the reason for his attraction to the stage. On the other, there is a strong need *to control* the medium, maintaining the detachment of the visual artist. This polarity of desire – the insistence on both medium and messenger – is the crux of his video work.

Pelletier trained as an actor at the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Montréal before going on to explore the visual arts. He first exhibited as part of *Montréal-tout-terrain*, a group show that marked a defining moment in the 1980s visual arts scene. This led to an invitation to take part in the 1985 exhibition *La peinture au Québec; une nouvelle generation* at the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art.

The duality intrinsic to his creative process became more pronounced when Pelletier began studying the Japanese dance form of Butoh. He first performed with choreographers Tedi Tafel and Jocelyne Montpetit before going to Japan to dance with Min Tanaka. Upon returning to Quebec, he embarked on his first video project. Entitled *Faux Fluides*, the piece led to an artistic residency at the Centre International de création vidéo Pierre Schaeffer (France).

This proved to be the first of a series of sojourns in France, culminating in a joint residency at the CICV, the Centre National Chorégraphique de Belfort and the Théâtre Granit Scène Nationale. Here, Pelletier staged *Fils de chien (panopticon-circus)*, a multidisciplinary show inspired by Vladimir Slépián's short story about a man who decides to become a dog. In Pelletier's performance, the character acts increasingly submissively to the audience in the hopes of being fed. That same year, Pelletier moved to London to collaborate on *Faust is Dead*, a theatre production in which he played the role of Faust. He also created the video imagery used in the play. *Faust is Dead* was a public and critical success, reviewed in *The Times*, *The Financial Times* and *The Independent*, among others.

The first cycle of Pelletier's video work centres on a near-obsessive exploration of one theme: the incarnated reality of the body. His approach reflects the fundamental conflict between corporeal finitude and vulnerability and the force of individual will and agency – a clash that generates both attraction and repulsion toward one's own body. The cycle consists of the works *Faux Fluides*, *Faust Médusé*, *Die Dyer* and *Persée.id.Méduse*.

Drawing on the work of Antonin Artaud, *Faux Fluides* explores the sense of paranoia that comes from perceiving the body as a means for social interaction. *Faust Médusé* deconstructs the Faust myth by confronting insoluble metaphysical questions and the cruelly finite nature of bodily existence. Inspired by the life and work of Francis Bacon, *Die Dyer* is a clinical observation of narcissism and the death wish.

The video installation *Persée.id.Méduse*, exhibited at the Montréal Museum of Contemporary Art, is a reflection on the absolute otherness of death and the quest for

immortality. Human figures are projected onto a 'screen' of aquariums containing pig organs, replacements for those of humans. *Persée.id.Méduse* freezes time to capture the instant before the fatal moment when Perseus and Medusa exchange glances. The confrontation between ephemeral video imagery and carnal reality provokes anxiety and perceptual vertigo.

Inspired by *The Divine Comedy*, *World Trade Opera (WTO)* was intended as a modern-day retelling of Dante's journey through hell. The September 11th events pushed Pelletier in a new direction. Setting aside the poetic and emotional dimensions of his work, he focused entirely on the objective, using figures as a means to describe the world. Starting from an absolute zero of time code, the video's running time underscores the speed with which global processes threaten the planet and humanity as a whole. A narrator presents statistical data such as *Every 12 minutes, 2.5 square kilometres of forests disappear. We should have spent 150,000 dollars to prevent deforestation.* This first documentary work again reflects Pelletier's dualistic creative process: his quest for detachment, represented here by the use of numbers; and his emotional urgency, expressed through the visual treatment of the images.

Pelletier's next work, the interactive multimedia installation *strat*, builds on the social and environmental concerns, urgency and temporality explored in *WTO*. It puts the body back at centre stage by presenting an audiovisual character controlled by real-time information streams. Data originating both from biochemical sensors placed in vivariums and from the Internet (the stock exchange, seismic and solar activity, etc.) determine the ambient sound, visual aspect and selected texts that are read by the character, as well as the texture of his voice. The texts are variously scientific (cloning and bioethics) and religious (various creation myths). A work in progress, *strat* has been presented twice, at Daïmon (Gatineau) and at Concordia University's Black Box (Montréal).

Pelletier also created a video installation as a stage design for lyric creation company Chants Libres, whose opera *L'Archange Opér'installation* is a reflection on the notion of evil. Pelletier's work consists of 42 video screens spread over three sculptural modules overhanging the audience, fed by eight computer-controlled video sources.

L'Archange Opér'installation led to Pelletier's most recent work, *La reconstitution*, a posthumous portrait of his mother. Using footage of her shot for the opera, the video marks a return to Pelletier's primordial creative impulse. This 'impossible' project sets out to convey the artist's close relationship with his mother while presenting her through images that evoke a distressingly clinical coldness. Naked, wrapped in transparent plastic, his mother appears in an abstract space reminiscent of a morgue. The video, which foreshadows his mother's actual death eight months later, chronicles a kind of rehearsal of the events to come. This ongoing project reaffirms the fundamental ambivalence and inner violence that are at the root of Pelletier's art. Objectivity and subjectivity, fiction and documentary, life and death: all come together to spawn a unique body of work, intimate and autobiographical.

Demanding and incisive, cerebral and instinctive, Pelletier's work is testament to an artist living on the edge, motivated by an insatiable desire for creative freedom.