



<http://tiliaamericana.otdac.org>

Opening Times: The title for your commission is *Tilia americana*, what does this represent for you?

Megan Rooney: *Tilia americana* is the scientific name for the Linden tree, native to North America. It's a deciduous tree with grey to light brown bark, roots are large, deep and spreading. It flowers in early to mid summer, the fruit is small, hard with a dry, cream-coloured nutlet. There's a mall I know well, that's close to where I shot most of the footage, with the same name.

OT: *Tilia americana* is a dispersed narrative that on each viewing appears to have a different reading according to which element is given attention. What is the thinking behind that?

MR: The narrative presents multiple time and places, and multiple points of view simultaneously. When Joyce wrote 'A portrait of the artist' he was experimenting with all of the internal language one has, as well as a colloquial forms of speech. What thought looks like from the inside. I think today that following a similar approach necessitates an even more fractured narrative, and of course this incredible density of things that sound like corporate slogans or watered down mantras on health and spirituality. Our media experience of globalism creates an amazing and horrific soup of ideologies that all support its aims in various ways. In effect, the orders of speech here are less important than the free floating contents. There's a well known linguistic theory called the Empty Category Principle (ECP), which in an overly simplistic description, is a function of Universal Grammar which governs the 'trace' function of syntactic tree structures in the production of meaning. For example, you could ask the question 'Can eagles that fly swim?'. This is one of Chomsky's favourite examples and a perfectly reasonable sentence, but the meaning can't be resolved because there's an ECP violation with regard to the trace between 'can' and either 'fly' or 'swim'. I think a lot of advertising and interpersonal language today exploits these types of gaps to evade meaning or allow subjective emotional choices to fill in the gaps, ultimately giving the impression that one's desires have literally established the social meaning. So to get back to Joyce, I think if one was to write something today that attempted the same type of expression, directly as possible, of what's behind the eyes of ones experience, it would have to account for the ubiquity of this type of structure. Experience becomes the empty category in that sense. It makes it both the freedom and the responsibility of the reader. This

does not negate authorship, but rather structures a different kind of relation. Perhaps one where these subjective distinctions are broken down in their relation to time.

OT: Writing is an important part of your practice and you self-reflexively experiment with distributing content across different platforms. Often your texts are recited and feed back into the work, immersing viewers into multi-layered environments. What is the role of the text in this commission?

MR: The text in my work is often, and I think here too, a kind of bones for a ghost, a kind of script that gets used not so much for all its details, but for general direction. The texts are a certain way of working for me. Very personal and solitary. As close as a form of output could be to what's going through my mind. They're very exposed in that way. So they also naturally attract things to them as they move out into the world. Whether that's objects, places, video. These later additions can also come to challenge or expand the text. That's ideal even. What gets called 'the work' is the final form, but in my process, its more like a collection of works that add up to a *form*. That's how this form can take all these different skins and manifestations. Its also essential to how all these works build into an even larger narrative, that again is driven by the texts. So they feed back into each other. I stand somewhere above them, like a director, but one who might change their mind at the last minute -- turn the musical into a minimalist drama! The unreliable narrator is a figure within us that's constantly under management by cultural expectations and systems. I'd prefer to give her a public holiday.

OT: In *The Politics of the Aesthetics*, Jacques Rancière affirms that “the equality of all subject matter is the negation of any relationship of necessity between a determined form and a determined content.” In the commission, form and content are layered together visually and formally, a textural mix reinventing new links across platforms, where each element is correlated to the other.

MR: The larger quotation within its context is:

“[Flaubert's] very refusal to entrust literature with any message whatsoever was considered to be evidence of democratic equality. His adversaries claimed that he was democratic due to his decision to depict and portray instead of instruct. This equality of indifference is the result of a poetic bias the equality of all subject matter is the negation of any relationship of necessity between a determined form and a determined content. Yet what is the indifference after all if not the very equality of everything that comes to pass on a written page, available as it is to everyone's eyes? This equality destroys all of the hierarchies of representation and also establishes a community of readers as a community without legitimacy, a community formed only by the random circulation of the written word.” (14)

With regard to Flaubert's so called 'perfectionist style' in his writing, where he claimed to always be looking for the 'right word', I believe I follow nearly the

opposite course. I drink in a lot of content, as well as process that which has been washed over me in the course of life, and kind of throw it into the text. It's here that a kind of aesthetic tweaking can begin. As well, I would say that I disagree with Rancière's general position that 'Aesthetics is Politics'. I think this distends both terms to the point of meaninglessness. One might as well say, 'sex is god', or something equally loaded. These French intellectuals are specialists in setting up a infinitely discursive loop for themselves to occupy, while all the while claiming that its marxist and revolutionary to proselytise about it for €100,000 a year at Paris VIII. To me this is anti-intellectual, and what's anti-intellectual is anti-life, as intellect is what allows us to frame life as such. This quotation we are discussing is a criticism that Rancière levels at Flaubert, equating his 'realism' with a withdrawal from political subjectivity. This begins to be an issue I can relate to, even though in the late 19th century, the social experience of the petit-bourgeois from which Flaubert sketches his archetypes, is most essentially different from today in terms of the total breakdown of cultural restriction, and its replacement with capital and policing. So while I might arrive at the same view on society's amorality which Rancière does, I don't in fact see it as an issue of aesthetics. I think in relation to a Nietzschean power (which today has become bio-power as Foucault describes, or perhaps simply BIO), aesthetics names a certain realm of visibility (and by implication what is not visible), but itself is not generative of power. This is why art can so effectively escape moralism. It's these types of autonomies I'm interested in. These withdrawals from subject as an accumulated essence of our culture, which are manifested in a million flashing projections. Everyone seems today to withdraw from the attempt at a coherent cultural picture. The hyper-fragmentation of lifestyle choices, personal ideologies, and information sources has led us to an epistemological crisis. I'm there with you.

OT: You talk here about your interest in autonomy, the hyper-fragmentation of lifestyles, and the bourgeois visual and social experience. These elements emerge directly from the work, how its sequential narrative is constructed into autonomous chapters as well as the diverse elements that come up to create multi-faced environments. I feel the work has a sense of escapism created by the animated cursor, an opted way out, or a narrative in continual formation. Does it relate to issues about fragmentation and coherency?

MR: Escapism perhaps is how it occurs to the viewer within the system. I think for me the question of the style of relating has a correct/deviant binary built right into these experiences. For example if you go to this Lafayette mall in Paris, everyone is walking around taking pictures on their phones, of their friends, themselves. That today is correct behaviour. But I was doing almost the same thing - taking videos on my phone - but it was filming the shoes and faces of strangers, the bits of corporate architecture that are crammed into the beautiful cupola with huge logos on them. That's seen as deviant behaviour, and you can feel people looking at you. They know. But the action of filming is really the same. So a very slight thing becomes the point of difference. I want the person who experiences my work to be invited into this same kind of

deviance. To be free to move within it, or take it the wrong way that's the right way for them. Wear sandals in the winter. Drink a latte after dinner.