

CLASSIFICATION OF METHODS TO USE THE VIDEO IN ART

by Luciano Giaccari

For more than fifteen years after the first experience with the "video tape" there were still existing so many misunderstandings and uncertainties in order to presume that same in general has not been used in the right manner in the sectors of culture and art. I therefore return with pleasure to propose again after 10 years my "classification of methods to use the video tape in art", which was created due to the demand for a clarification on the level of the theory of video as well as on the technical-operative modality of the medium.

The classification was based on my experiences made until that day: the project "television as memory" of 1968, the multi-media catalogue of 1970, the small halls opened to the public of video vision in Milan in 1971 and 1972, the realization of video tapes made by myself and by other artists, the video show in the streets of Venice during the Biennale in 1972, the video documentation of the "Festival of music and dance in USA" in 1972, too, etc.

This complex activity, not limited to a single aspect of the video, allowed me to distinguish the different theoretical and practical tasks in order to assume respect towards objectives, also very differentiated, to reach by means of the medium television in art.

The first misunderstanding to remove was that one of video as fashion: i.e. on the basis of technological suggestion was operated a kind of "transfer" from the medium to the contents and it was supposed that whatever produced by this instrument - revolutionary, but on a technical level - would automatically have new and revolutionary results.

On the other hand, this misunderstanding existed at that epoch also in the political use of the medium and it was a period of "guerilla television", which had at least theoretical merits in the United States, where it was born, but in Italy and other countries of Europe gave place to an absolutely useless ideology of revolution made by video.

Another important fact, which has not been understood sufficiently especially in the beginning, was that the realization of a video tape remains in any case, fundamentally a process of television production.

4
The incomprehension in this point was due to an incorrect identification of the whole phenomenon by a simple instrument as it was the "porta-packe", rendered absolutely mythically for its qualification, which is without doubt very remarkable but certainly not thaumaturgical.

On this basis, the use of the video gave technical results, but also formal and really poor ones to often render useless, also completely, the work done.

As I lately finished the experience of a television transmitting station via ether, which I managed for 5 years, I must point out the importance of the production aspect with all the complex procedures which characterize same.

But also at the beginning of my video work I have always used complete television systems with more tele cameras, mixers and recorders with the possibility editing even manually, as I am of the opinion that maybe in another way it would not be possible to obtain results of a certain level.

Returning to my classification of 1972, the same was based on the distinction of two fundamental situations:

- The first in which the artist has a direct relation to use the medium television - which provoked the "video tape" - understood as a work, to the "video performance", to the "video environment".

- Contrary to this, the second situation is based on an indirect relation between the artist and the medium television: there are other persons which use the video on the work of the artist.

This second situation provokes various hypotheses, more or less leading to information, and especially to the "video documentation", to the "video criticism",

to the "video history of art", to the "video report" etc. ✓

Already 10 years ago I precised that the classification was a base to correctly plan out the work in video, but the various classes did not have an absolute value, so that it could happen cases of contaminations or interferences among same, as it happens particularly today. ✓

Video tape

In origin it constituted the main case of the direct use of the medium by the artist. With the video tape happens an identification between the medium and the work, and the magnetic tape constitutes the material support of the work itself, like the *canvas*, the stone, the photograph, the film etc.

↑
Regarding the video tape, already 1971 in occasion of the first video hall in the gallery of the graph in Milan, I draw the attention to the risk that it would become a "kind of middle-class culture", limiting in that way enormously the potentiality and the characteristic of an instrument of mass media as it is the television.

↑
In fact, there existed a considerable instance of galleristic matrix which tried "to can" in the tape an artistic product otherwise hardly to trade, as the land art, the body art, the art of behaviour etc.

↑
In this respect it is to say that the great American galleries, even if they produced good works, have more pointed to a cristallization than to a development of the video tape of the artist, also probably being afraid of loosing the exclusive right with important names of art, being attempted to realize video with external laboratories.

↑
No comment, on the undertakings of the Italian branches of these galleries, which try to realize supermarkets of video tape being soon **bankrupt** (unsuccessful?). ✓

With these limits of planning and also with the elevated production costs, the video artist has difficulties till today to find his own specific language

and probably, if the work of this first period must be selected, it would not be possible to save more than about 30 video tapes. ✓

With a little bit of courage it would be possible to say that "video art" is not existing and it would be more useful to look for it in the complexity of stimulus and motivations of artists, of origins now very different, to put oneself in various ways in relation with this instrument or to place it in a certain position of intergration/interference with other media.

✦
Probably the video tape - which we could also define negatively as a work of the artist not finalized to other situations (performance, staging, concert) but realized for a divers distribution - it will mainly precise its language really on the basis of a loss of specific as art work and in force of an approach to the macro-television in terms of performance. The methods in which this will happen constitute the real problem of the video tape and are to be put in relation with the always more rapid technological evolution and the probable new attitudes of the publishing trade on the television.

Video performance / Video environment

Always returning to the hypothesis of the direct use of the video by the artist and consisting in actions or preparations created by the artist with help of closed television circuits in direct or with registered tapes or both together.

✦
In the case of video performance, we have the alive presence of the artist, in the case of the video environment or installation, the artist is absent.

✦
The original matrix of the phenomenon goes up to the "visual" artists which inserted the video together with other elements in their work. At the moment, however, the situation is enormously dilated to other areas of art, as the theatre, the dance, the music, and it is to state that really in these sectors is done the work most creative of the medium.

✦
Furthermore, this expansion is characterized by the maximum degree of crossed employments of various media and really by means of these techniques it is

probable to obtain a better definition of the video artistic language.

A
This may be facilitated by the fact that in these situations are often residuals of television languages and therefore, in the hypothesis of an opening of the macro television to these kinds of works, we assist to a continued feed back between macro and micro television.

Video documentation

It is the basic phenomenon of the hypothesis of the indirect relation between artist and video, in which other persons use the instrument on the work of the artist, and arises from the need/possibility to let a television memory of events like the performance, the concert, and other situations of which, otherwise, would remain no concrete trace. The video documentation constitutes more a forme of expansion of the original phenomenon, which could subsequently be viewed by a much more greater public than that really assisting the performance.

Technically, the video has opened, with the possibility much simplified to register in "real time", perspectives which were unthinkable using the film or the photograph.

A
Regarding the theoretical point of view, the main problem of the video documentation is that of objectivity, considering that the work of others must be "reproduced".

↑
The same problem existed already for the photograph and the film used for similar objects, and in front of aberrations, characteristic of these means, we can conclude on the impossibility of an effective objectivity: the photograph, which very often deceives and the cinema twisting the work with its own presence on the scene of the event.

Also for the television, which, ~~nevertheless~~ ^{nevertheless} is working in ^{difficult} light conditions, "obstructs" less than the cinema, permits to follow on the monitor the course of the work, there is no doubt that it could speak to us correctly of objectivity, due to technical or psychological facts.

4
Regarding the technical point of view, there is first of all existing the morphological refuse between the three-dimensional image of the reality and the bidimensionality of the television reproduction.

4
Regarding the "human" point of view it is clear how the vision of who is doing the video documentation forms a filter between the work of the artist and his television public.

These factors may tender to the cancellation first of all, if the person doing the television documentation has a profound knowledge of the technical means as well as the work of the artist, and secondly if it is allowed to him a faculty of "restitution" of the artist's work with a subjective refuse, which, however, must tender to the minimum.

4
In the impossibility of a real objectivity it is however obvious, that it must be recognized to the video documentation an autonomic character, and now is acquired that various documentary interventions can be made in respect with the characteristics of the work and the consignees. And these are just the various aspects of the classification as video criticism, video didactics and video report.

4
These diversifications have very important technical relations and in fact, in function of the various objectives, it is possible to make documentations with a single camera - fixed or in action - simultaneously directly by several cameras, with multiple registrations to mount in post-produced phase.

Finally, it has to be underlined the determinant importance of kinds of vision of these various "final products", really by the perspective point of view, due to the great excursion of the vision possibilities, which go from few inch monitors to very large screens for teleprojections.

Video report / video criticism/ video didactics

As the video documentation they concretize hypothesis of the indirect relation between artist and video and can be led back in various ways to the concept of information.

↑
They can realize themselves as an autonomous project as well as going out from a video documentation already made, as a phenomenon of post-production.

↑
The classic video report of an artistic event, as informative fact, is the service including passages of a performance and an interview to an artist.

↑
On the other hand, the video interview constitutes one of the instruments of the highest value of criticism, which could be applied to the analysis of a work, as television iconography of a spoken text is an instrument infinitely more significant than the photographic iconography - often only suggestive - of a written text.

↑
Finally the video didactics can become concrete on the basis of the elements already analyzed as well in autonomous courses for a direct profit as in supporting material for the work of the teachers.

As it may be seen, in these sectors it is only the embarrassment of choice, but here we return to the discussion regarding the television production and its costs.

3
When in 1972 I projected the "videocritica" ("video criticism"), an electronic magazine of art criticism and a "video story of art" I found the artists and the reviewer disponible, but it was not possible to find editors. In order to have more possibility to realize this kind of work, it is desirable that the new technologies will create more favourable economic presuppositions, but the terms are very short.

Distribution circuits

All the analyzed forms of the television product - and I therefore take it for granted that they have been realized with the solution of the relative problems - must necessarily circulate in relation to their respective objectives in ^{the} largest possible way.

↑
Otherwise, we would continue to assist to that what happened until today, i.e. to the contradiction. That is why works using the television instrument, which is the principal mass medium, have on the contrary a very limited circulation.

Without wanting to give a solution for that problem, I only like to indicate in which manner the same is tightly connected mainly with 3 elements:

1. first, the sure definition of adequate tariffs of renting and a control to respect the copyrights;
2. secondly, the installation as support of the usual work, of structure of standardized television vision at all museums, art galleries, universities etc.
3. thirdly, the opening to programmes, autoproduced by the artistic circuit, of the great national transmitters.

Without doubt, it is in this direction where national and international institutions will have to act, which set themselves the development of the use of the video in the world of art.

An example of these activities is the care of the "audio-visual artistic and cultural documentation center", presided by me, regarding the programme "ON AIR ART", transmitted by the television of our region (ETL VARESE VIDEO).

A programme of 6 hours, made by the artists, has been transmitted via ether in March of this year and it is foreseen to also transmit the same programmes by other Italian television stations.

Varese, August 1982