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Video as Technology and Artistic Expression Medium O Vídeo Como Tecnologia e Meio de Expressão Artística

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This paper seeks to reflect on the emergence of video technology and its use as a medium for artistic expression. Focusing mainly on the period between the 1960s and 1990s, we analyse the relationship between television and other institutions within the cultural-artistic sphere and their role in developing artistic practices through video. Thus, we have established international and Portuguese examples for a plural and diverse analysis. Therefore, this work elaborates on some theories, main ideas and research concerning the role of video and television in late 20th-century society. Special attention is given to some ideological and philosophical traits transversal to the different artistic practices, authors and agents within the contemporary cultural sphere to reflect on some aesthetic elements of the works from this period. Based on a selection of works and artists, this study seeks to explore the social dimension of video, which has often operated as a democratic medium, an instrument of social and political contestation and a medium for the artist's personal reflection. In this way, an approach to the presence and representation of the body in video works and other technical and aesthetic elements is articulated to understand the theoretical dimensions involved in the imagery production of this medium.

Keywords: vídeo, television, video art, contemporary art

O Vídeo Como Tecnologia e Meio de Expressão Artística

O presente trabalho procura refletir sobre o surgimento da tecnologia do vídeo e a sua utilização como meio de expressão artística. Concentrando-nos, sobretudo, no período entre a década de 1960 e a de 1990, analisamos a relação da televisão e outras instituições com a esfera artística cultural e o seu papel no desenvolvimento de práticas artísticas através do vídeo. Com efeito, estabelecemos exemplos internacionais e exemplos portugueses para uma análise plural e diversa. Por conseguinte, este trabalho elabora algumas das teorias, ideias principais e análises relativas ao papel do vídeo e da televisão na sociedade do final do século XX. Confere-se especial atenção a alguns traços ideológicos e filosóficos transversais às diversas práticas artísticas, autores e agentes da esfera cultural contemporânea para refletir sobre alguns elementos estéticos que constituem as obras deste período. A partir de uma seleção de obras e artistas, este estudo procura explorar a dimensão social do vídeo, que muitas vezes funcionou como meio democrático, instrumento de contestação social e política e meio para a reflexão pessoal do artista. Desta forma, articula-se uma abordagem à presença e representação do corpo nas obras de vídeo e outros elementos técnicos e estéticos para compreender dimensões teóricas envoltas na produção imagética deste meio.

Palavras-chave : vídeo, televisão, vídeo arte, arte contemporânea

Introduction

On January 4, 1927, Boris Rtcheouloff filed a British patent application for a process of recording and reproducing television signals on magnetic materials. Rtcheouloff's apparatus was capable of scanning and recording pictures by means of photoelectric currents, converting the luminosity of various points in the picture into electric currents and recording them in magnetic materials (Nmungwun, 1989). That would be among the first and most significant suggestions for using the magnetic recording for image recording and preservation. The same principles and motivations would be used to develop equipment for recording and registering text, information and sound¹. Through the systematic advances in these areas of science and technology, from 1950 onwards, large and sophisticated magnetic recording equipment would be operated mainly in government institutions and television stations. These are the first contexts using what we know as video technology.

In 1952, the BBC developed the VERA (Vision Electronic Recording Apparatus) for recording on magnetic tape. That same year, Ampex manufactured one of its first video recording apparatus, operating with the pioneering "quadruplex" tape format. This phenomenon first meant the slow end of the film on television stations and allowed increasing sophistication and access to new equipment. It was not until the 1960s that the first independent and portable video equipment, developed especially by the Japanese industry, such as Sony and Panasonic, were

¹On sound recording and registration, in 1928, Luigi Marzocci, an Italian inventor, filed a patent application for a variety of rotary heads intended for sound recording (Nmungwun, 1989, p. 99).

introduced on the market (Bensinger, 1981). These early standalone, portable systems, commonly known as "portapaks"², would be the first portraits of home video. They allowed ordinary citizens access to such equipment for domestic use and the opportunity for artists to access and explore this medium in their artistic practices.

We stand before a changing world, surrounded by advances in science, technology and industry. Gene Youngblood (1970) has portrayed the influence and trail television leaves worldwide, in society, the artistic sphere and other contexts as the "videosphere" (p. 260). The term helps us describe a world in transformation: the increasing presence of television in the domestic space, a satellite system for transmitting information and video in the hands of the professional, the ordinary citizen and the artist.

Video Technology: Television and the Video Industry

To understand artists' relationship with video technology and how they used it to achieve aesthetic results, we must first understand how and what kind of access artists had to this technology. From the 1960s onwards, artists would find different institutions in the United States of America, such as television stations, active in developing programmes, workshops and artist residencies that provided a space to explore and produce using the new video equipment. The United States of America became a great example of the growth of television broadcasting networks and, consequently, a database of the repercussions video equipment had in the country and the world. Furthermore, they were responsible for manufacturing much equipment, despite being major importers of portable equipment made in Japan. From another perspective, new portable video equipment was also coming onto the market, accessible to the ordinary citizen and the independent artist who could operate it and obtain aesthetic and, subsequently, artistic results. Thus, there are two realities regarding access to video technology: access provided in an institutional context, namely by public television stations, and access allowed by the market.

North American television was geared toward news and entertainment during the first half of the 20th century. However, the 1960s brought new spaces for artists and their projects. Firstly, in 1967, television station WGBH (Boston, Massachusetts), funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation, developed an artist residency programme called "New Television Workshops". The programme implemented a partnership with artists enrolled at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies, an art and research centre created by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Huffman, 1990). Several projects and programmes

²"Portapak" is the common name for portable video recording systems. It is a portable video camera with an integrated microphone, an electronic viewfinder, a videotape recorder, and a monitor (Bensinger, 1981).

were consequently produced, such as *The Medium is the medium*, a television programme broadcast in 1969. About 30 minutes long, it was an anthology of works developed during these artist residencies (Meigh-Andrews, 2014, p. 297). This anthology of works introduced the names of artists who pioneered the usage of the medium of video for artistic creation, such as Alan Kaprow, Otto Piene, Aldo Tambellini, and Nam June Paik, among others.

Also, in the North American context, we highlight the importance of the television station KQED (based in San Francisco), where the Center of Experiments in Television was set up in 1967. Later renamed the National Center of Experiments in Television, the Rockefeller Foundation founded it as a research and development branch of the television industry (Huffman, 1990). In New York, unlike the case of the Boston and San Francisco television stations, WNET's relationship with artists was only consolidated in 1972, with the creation of the TV Laboratory. Led by David Lexton, the laboratory was inspired by the work of WGBH, with which it exchanged ideas, funds and equipment. It would be a space not only for work and research but also a centre for experimenting with artistic creation. The WNET facilities were where, like many other works produced, Nam June Paik and John Godfrey created the iconic video work *Global Groove* (1973; Chiu & Yun, 2014, p. 27; see starflyer2012, 2010). The TV Laboratory closed in the 1980s for lack of resources and funding.

Audiences in Boston kept seeing more experimental broadcasts well into the 1980s. The WGBH broadcast, a 4-hour special called *The Very First On-The-Air Half-Inch Videotape Festival Ever*, featured video work by various artists. Following this, Fred Barzyk, the station's producer, directed the "New Television" workshop leading up to the weekly *Artists Showcase* until 1982. It shows the importance of this transdisciplinary relationship between the television universe and the artistic sphere.

Thanks to large investments from private entities such as the Rockefeller Foundation or public services such as the PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, North American television stations provided an exploratory environment for experimenting and developing multiple projects (Huffman, 1990). As a result, several artists were even able to develop their own devices, which demonstrates the previous need for handling, exploring and controlling the technical components to achieve aesthetic results. Nam June Paik and Shuya Abe built their "Paik/Abe" synthesiser (Meigh-Andrews, 2014, p.136), with which they produced the programme *Video Commune - The Beatles From Beginning to End* on WGBH in 1970. That same year, Eric Siegel built his electronic video synthesizer device, and Stephen Beck created his direct video synthesizer at National Center of Experiments in Television (Sturken, 1990, p. 101).

In 1969, when *The Medium Is the Medium* broadcast on WGBH, Germany saw the first artists' television programmes produced. On April 15, 1969, the pioneering programme *Land Art*, curated by Gerry Schum, was broadcast on WDR 2 (Westdeutscher Rundfunk - West German Radio) (Meigh-Andrews, 2014, p. 20). The project involved artists such as Richard Long, Barry Flanagan,

Dennis Oppenheim, Marinus Boezem, Robert Smithson, Jan Dibbets, Walter de Maria and Mike Heizer. On the one hand, Schum maintained a close relationship with German television networks to keep this space open and accessible to artists. On the other hand, he created, still in 1969, the famous *Fernsehgalerie*³, which became a symbol of the perseverance of experimental disciplines and refuge as an alternative place to museums and other institutions. Schum's role as producer, curator, and cultural programmer fostered the increase of film and videographic works using television as an artistic medium and object and consequently allowed the progression of independent and artistic video practices.

Along with the German example, there was a noticeable growth in the relations between television stations and the artistic sphere in other European countries, such as England, Poland and Portugal.

Portuguese public television started regular broadcasts in 1957. It immediately became an essential instrument for political propaganda in which "the regime would strongly invest as a privileged vehicle for filling the free time of the population" (Cunha, 2015, p. 110). Despite Radiotevisão Portuguesa's vast production, the cultural production until 1974 focused essentially on documenting conferences, exhibition openings, international art festivals, biennials and tribute programmes to artists, such as the *50 Anos da Morte de Amadeo Souza Cardoso* (50th anniversary of Amadeo Souza Cardoso's death; Rádio Televisão Portuguesa, 1969)⁴ on January 11, 1969. Nonetheless, only in the revolutionary context of April 25, 1974, it was possible to rethink the production models to include artists and other cultural agents in the television sphere and, consequently, expand the use of this equipment for artistic purposes. In this revolutionary context, marked by the restructuring of the Portuguese political system itself, we also verified the growth and rehabilitation of Radiotevisão Portuguesa, which began updating equipment and its facilities. As early as 1982, the then Technical Director Franco Dias recalled that

in 1976 there was a need to implement a whole plan to replace the equipment (...) because they were obsolete and outdated, but also because there was a need to reconvert from black and white television to colour television. (Caio, 1982, 00:23:26)

Following the example of international television networks, this modernisation process allowed Portuguese public television to replace film equipment by gradually purchasing and using video equipment.

From data collected from audiovisual sources, namely the archive footage from RTP Arquivos (RTP Archives; <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/>), we speculate that Radiotevisão Portuguesa would already be using video equipment from 1972 to

³*Fernsehgalerie*, or *Television Gallery*, was broadcast support created by Schum to disseminate different video works (see Electronic Arts Intermix, n.d.).

⁴This and other programmes can be viewed at <https://arquivos.rtp.pt/>. Some of the references used here were later made available in digital archives, such as the Arquivo RTP and Arquivo Digital da PO.EX (<https://po-ex.net/>). In such cases, the reference provides the link so the reader can access it, even though it is not part of the original reference.

1973. In the 1973 *Meios Técnicos* (Technical Means), we observed two pieces of Ampex equipment in the station studios twice (Rádio Televisão Portuguesa, 1973, 00:00:57, 00:01:58), thus alluding to the use of video equipment by Radiotelevisão Portuguesa. However, the equipment may have been introduced before this date. On the other hand, these images also show a space operating essentially with film equipment, as we can see in the washing of the film or in placing the film on the reels (Radio Televisão Portuguesa, 1973, 00:00:24, 00:01:30). Other later audiovisual sources illustrate the development and modernisation of television stations. In particular, in the 1974 programme *Sabe Onde Fazemos TV?...* (Do You Know Where We Make Television?...), where it is already evident the wide use of video equipment, which the speaker refers to as the "videotape reels" (Ferrão, 1974, 00:35:00).

Regarding the relationship between Portuguese public television and the artistic sphere, besides relevant transmissions on contemporary arts and culture, we highlight the program *Obrigatório Não Ver* (Mandatory Not See). Directed and produced by Ana Hatherly, this programme was broadcast weekly, late at night, between 1978 and 1979. The broadcast involved contact with different avant-garde disciplines (film, performance, video, etc.) and contemporary artists such as Fernando Calhau, Salette Tavares, Melo e Castro, Ernesto de Sousa, Emília Nadal, among others (Hatherly & Melo e Castro, 1981). How important are these elements? These elements demonstrate the growing proximity of independent artists with the universe of national television and some results obtained through this interaction.

However, a crucial moment before 1974 should be considered in this relationship between Portuguese public television and the artistic sphere. In December 1968, Eduíno de Jesus, invited Ernesto Manuel de Melo e Castro to participate in a literature programme on the Radiotelevisão Portuguesa with an "experimental poem". *Roda Lume* (1968), the artist's first videopoetry work, originally 2 minutes and 43 seconds long, stemmed from this invitation (António, 2014). The artist's work displayed already interactions and productions in the different disciplines of poetry and critique and avant-garde fields such as performance, visual poetry and kinetic poems. He began working with video technology during the making of *Roda Lume* (1968) on the premises of Radiotelevisão Portuguesa, which was broadcast in January 1969. The original work disappeared, and the available copy, restored in 1986, was given the name *Roda Lume Fogo* (Melo e Castro, 1968). This work demonstrates the essential role of television in the growth of artistic production through video technology. In fact, in the Portuguese context, this is evident in the special case of videopoetry, which emerges from the exploration of visual poetry and new technologies, such as video and computing, as instruments for artistic creation.

Let us go back to the access to video technology and the second given context. Access to video technology is also possible through the wholesale market of equipment provided and manufactured by the Japanese industry. While the North American and British industries developed large and compact devices

used in high production and broadcast studios, the Japanese focused greatly on manufacturing portable, independent and economically viable video equipment for the market. Unlike the sophisticated devices requiring large expenditure, the equipment designed by the Japanese industry would be affordable and thus capable of being marketed on a global scale (Bensinger, 1981).

The Japanese portable recording systems also brought new operating forms to the television universe but essentially meant a great innovation for a society undergoing political, social and cultural transformations. Thus, we will first look at political contexts from different relevant geographical points and analyse certain ideologies, philosophical traits and social contexts that triggered a vast and particular artistic production.

Video as a Medium of Artistic Expression: Ideological Notes and Aesthetic Elements

The great revolution of the video medium proved to be extremely promising given the growing interest and curiosity of the ordinary citizen for the various types of equipment. By the late 1960s, video technology was growing exponentially in the different production fields. However, this change and technological growth atmosphere is also explained by an ideological ramification in society at the time. Marita Sturken (1990) refers to the desire to capture "real-time" (p. 101) and the growing fascination with capturing events and moments with the camera, not only by the individual but also by public and private institutions and corporations. On this basis, video technology was explored and operated by a society fascinated by its potential. That is how the medium expands into different social and political niches, largely through television image broadcasting networks and a growing global communication network. Marshall McLuhan (2006) develops the idea and concept of the "global village" to refer to a society of consumption and sharing of information in its various forms (image, sound, text, etc.), linked by that same global communication network. According to the author, these media technologies have compelled a new assessment and restructuring of the social interdependence patterns and the rethinking of all aspects of social (collective) and personal (individual) life.

In the artistic domain, we pay attention precisely to the development of artistic practices through the use of new technological media, as is the case of video. However, how can we relate certain ideologies and philosophical traits inherent to the cultural and artistic context with the new social paradigm of a certain technological and image invasion? Consider the following: in the wake of great upheavals and turmoil caused by the events of May 1968 in Paris, a large number of artists directed their artistic activity toward social and political issues, documenting these ruptures and disorders, towards creating a political, activist and catalytic medium for social change and transformation. As for the role of video in this context, it is worth mentioning its integration into the

artistic practices of different artists such as Jean Luc Godard, Chris Marker and Alain Jacquier. There were also collectives emerging in this period, namely, the Immedia group, the Vidéo Out group, the Video OO group and the SLON (Service of Launching of New Works) group established by Chris Marker and André Delvaux (Meigh-Andrews, 2014, p. 28).

Many early users saw themselves taking on profound social criticism, specifically directed at the domination of groups and individuals typified by television broadcasting and perhaps the whole of institutionalised, industrial and technological western culture. This act of critique was accomplished through a technological medium whose potential for interactive, multi-player communication seems ironically unlimited. (Sturken, 1999, p. 454)

Again, the North American context suggests multiple relevant examples within this perspective. Between 1968 and 1972, various collectives and associations interested in new technologies and other avant-garde media emerged and provided an extensive artistic activity in the country. Thus, we can highlight the Ant Farm group (founded in 1968), Videofreex (1969), the Raundance Corporation (1970), TVTV (Top Value Television, 1972) and Video Free America (1972; Rush, 2007). These groups sought to establish an alternative to commercial television. Hence, their interest lay not only in the medium's technical and aesthetic exploration but also in its possibilities as a catalyst for change in community and society. Political revolutions, wars, and armed conflicts deeply affected the western and eastern cultural fabric. Also worthy of note are anti-racist marches, demonstrations and struggles for civil rights and gender equality, thus essentially humanist and social struggles. Therefore, similar to Canada's Challenge for Change project (Meigh-Andrews, 2014, p. 37), essential for the research and production of video works dedicated to Quebec communities, these North American groups operated from a social improvement and evolution perspective. For example, the Videofreex group focused on documenting counterculture, producing videos about anti-racist movements such as the Black Panthers, anti-war videos and other aspects of social protest and protest against the system (Sturken, 1990). From his extensive work, we can highlight video works such as *Fred Hampton: Black Panthers in Chicago* (1969) and *Curtis's Abortion* (1970). The first is an interview with Fred Hampton about 1 month before his murder by the Chicago police. The second is a video in which [Mary] Curtis Ratcliff describes her first abortion after its legalisation in the State of New York in 1970.

In 1970, Frank Gillette, Paul Ryan (McLuhan's assistant at the Free University in New York) and Michael Shamberg (Meigh-Andrews, 2014) founded the think-tank Raundance Corporation. As a collective, the Raundance Corporation has grown substantially in tandem with Marshall McLuhan's ideas about technologies and their relationship to society. Supporting a community dedicated to video as an experimental art form, this collective provided for the dissemination of new creative forms and pioneering authors. It stemmed notably from publications organised and edited by the group that explored exactly their main concerns

and philosophies. The first publication was *Radical Software*(<https://www.radicalsoftware.org/>), aimed at reflecting on counterculture ideas and the need to disconnect the Medium of television and the Medium of video from large corporations and institutions, also creating an area of knowledge about technology as a "cultural force" (Meigh-Andrews, 2014). In 1971, Michael Shamberg further developed these ideas in a new publication *Guerrilla Television*⁵.

The concept of *Guerrilla Television* became a reflection of the times and social upheavals of the late 20th century. Marita Sturken (1990) notes that *Guerrilla Television* consequently became a term that "(with its implications of aggression and subversion) meant a specific creation of video activism — activist videotape — which functioned as an ironic observation of folly and a stylistic revolt against the conventions of television" (p. 121). Like the medium of video, these philosophical traits and ways of operating the technology spread across the globe through political and social upheavals bursting at different intensities in this period. The activist role assigned to video and contemporary artistic practices essentially seeks to reformulate the medium, ensuring its decentralisation and democratisation. Actually, over time and with technological developments, the increasing accessibility of the video medium has allowed its very omnipresence.

As mentioned, video technology appeared in Portugal in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, as far as independent artistic production is concerned, we note a low number of video works that only consolidated from the 1980s onwards. Nevertheless, in the first decades, the peculiarities of the video medium generated interest and a certain growth among the common citizen and artists, such as Melo e Castro and Julião Sarmento, mentioned earlier, who began working with video in 1977. Like other international examples, video production in Portugal has demonstrated an interest in the representation and enclosure of the body and a particular interest in using the medium to record and document performances and events, as in the case of Helena Almeida and Ção Pestana.

Regarding the ideas of subversion and contestation that marked the period, we should note the artistic production generated in the revolutionary environment of April 25, 1974. No video works stand out in this context, and there are essentially different aesthetic proposals in the field of plastic arts. Nevertheless, we believe Ana Hatherly's symbolic work *Revolução* (1975) is extremely important. Although recorded in super8 (film), it already shows a concern with documentation as a subversive act and recording technologies as political instruments. This same irreverence emerged later, from the exhibition "Alternativa Zero" in 1977

⁵The official Raindance website addresses *Guerrilla Television* in the publication's history: "*Guerrilla Television* outlined an alternate media philosophy and practicum, an instructional text with essays, illustrations, and practical advice written in language appropriate to young activists. Although the exact distribution figures are not known, it may have sold 25,000 copies, perhaps more. Designed by Ant Farm, a west coast video and design group that Shamberg had contact with through his college friend, Allen Rucker, *Guerrilla Television* was divided into two sections: 'Meta Manual', which consisted of a distillation of the ideas of his associates transmogrified by Shamberg, and 'Manual', which contained more practical information" (Gigliotti, 2003, Section "Guerrilla Television").

to the work *Merda* (2006) by Alexandre Estrela.

By 1980, the wave of artistic production through video had grown significantly, mainly from the practices of artists such as Ernesto de Sousa, Helena Almeida, João Vieira, António Palolo, Leonel Moura, José Vasconcelos and Cerveira Pinto. The group videOporto, a pioneer in the collective practice of artistic production through the medium, emerged that same year. It was founded by Ção Pestana, Silvestre Pestana, Henrique Silva, Abel Mendes and, later, would include artists and cultural agents such as Adriano Rangel, António Barros, Borges Brinquinho, Fernando Ribeiro, Rui Orfão and Mineo Aayamagushi (Dias, 2015, p. 290).

Let us look back to the French example. Three women in the 1960s and 1970s had a vocation for activism through video, Carole Roussopoulos, Delphine Seyrig and Ioana Wieder, founders of the Simone de Beauvoir Audiovisual Center in 1982. For Roussopoulos and Seyrig, the potential of video technology as a political and social instrument for their work on behalf of the feminist movement became clear. Back in the 1970s, from their collective Les Insoumuses (Defiant Muses), they made different works such as *SCUM Manifesto*⁶ (1976) and *Maso et Miso Vont en Bateau* (Maso and Miso Go Boating; 1976). For the artists, video became a crucial technology to make the complexity of women's experiences visible, to document and share their reflections, demands and issues (Pretesin-Bachelez & Zapperi, 2019). These acts, shares and documents embody the idea of *Guerrilla Television*, which emerged then as a force to combat conventions and the social and political conservatism that refused any progress.

Given the example of video as a form of subversion, and protest, for its role in the struggles for civil rights and gender equality, it is important to mention some names of independent artists and their contexts. Starting with examples of oriental production, we highlight the practices of Japanese artists who, despite a deep interest in the possibilities of video as a documentary medium, also resorted to it to work on their social concerns, including concerns about the role of women in society. In 1973, Kyoko Michishita, the author of a vast body of video and film work, created *Being Women in Japan: Liberation within My Family*. Her works showcase an irreverent approach against social conventions and archetypes created about women. The artist focused on the challenges of exploring the woman's role and society's perception of her, which articulates with other creations from the time, namely the works of Mako Idemitsu. Two works by the artist stand out, *What a Womem Made* (1973) and *Another Day of a Housewife* (1977-1978; see The Museum of Modern Art, 2020). In a scenario alluding to a kitchen, the female character in *Another Day of a Housewife* focuses on her household chores in a tiring, repetitive routine. We find these same elements in Martha Rosler's work *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975; see Everything has its first time, 2017), where the artist, comically satirising social

⁶*SCUM Manifesto* is a work based on the feminist manifesto of the same name by Valerie Solonas, published in 1967. Carole Roussopoulos and Delphine Seyrig sit face to face. One reads the manifesto while the other writes. Simone de Beauvoir Audiovisual Center database provides access to a digital copy of this work (Roussopoulos & Seyrig, 1967).

conventions, encloses her body (again) in a domestic setting (the kitchen). As Mako Idemitsu describes:

I started using video to record women's daily routines. I began dealing with women's daily lives, including non-routines. In this way, video became a medium I used to explore women's conscious and unconscious behaviour. *Another Day of a Housewife* follows a housewife in her daily activities while an ever-present eye, pictured on a portable television set, observes her routines. I leave this open for the viewer to interpret. What I found interesting was to explore the notion of observation. (Idemitsu, as cited in London, 1979, p. 14)

These works display a certain performative act, given the recording and observation of her body, routine, movements and activities. The presence of the body suggests closeness and intimacy between artist, camera and observer. We then observe an aesthetic element transversal to these works: the body or its representation.

The camera as confessional allowed a space for the vocalisation of ideas, restlessness, satire and everyday portraits that would work as a collective mirror. Many video works, created especially in the 1960s and 1970s, reflect the search for a kind of "humanisation" of technology against its robustness and coldness through these reflexive conceptual and aesthetic concerns. From a western perspective, these traits are evident in the artistic practices of various artists, such as Joan Jonas, John Baldessari, Bruce Nauman, Sanja Ivekovic, Martha Rosler, and Vito Acconci among many others. Let us look at some of the aesthetic elements underlying the works of these artists, and we shall focus on *Left Side Right Side* (1972; see Chymefti Bozini, 2012) by Joan Jonas and *Violin Tuned D.E.A.D.* (1969) by Bruce Nauman.

The small screen appears as a confessional, an intimate space for the artist, their body and their analyses. In Joan Jonas' work, the artist encloses her body in a claustrophobic space where she explores the extension of her skin while explaining (to the viewer or herself) the bodily traces and contours within it. "This is my left side. This is my right side" (00:01:44), the artist says as she touches the two halves of her face. The explanatory process, which takes about 20 minutes, varies between eyes, face, neck and is frequently interrupted by other actions or images such as spiral drawings that the artist makes on the floor, aided by other objects such as the scratching material or the mirror. Such performative and exploratory interplay between body and space is also featured in Bruce Nauman's work. Again the enclosed body, in *Violin tuned D.E.A.D.* (1969), Nauman makes a long, repetitive and exhaustive exercise. For approximately 1 hour, the performative action is the slow and lingering tuning of a violin. Our look recognises this space, the artist's studio, from previous works like *Playing A Note on the Violin While I Walk Around the Studio (Violin #1)* (1967-68), in which Bruce Nauman repeatedly plays a single note on his violin.

Among Portuguese artistic practices, the work of Helena Almeida, in which video appears in a documentary or recording form, stands out. Let us look at her work *Ouve-me* (Listen to Me, 1979; see *Esquizofrenia das Artes*, 2021), which originally started as a sequential photographic work and transformed into a performative moment captured on video. *Ouve-me*, produced with Artur Rosa, shows the artist's body, which, hidden and captured by a white canvas, tries to escape and scream through the textile layer. The aesthetic elements previously mentioned are perfectly reflected in this work that encloses the body aware of itself and its condition. The enclosure and the body are evident traits in Helena Almeida's work, as well as the elements of identity exploration and self-representation that so many other artists explore in different fields. The representation of the body, the scream, and certain anguish are also part of Cristina Mateus' video works, namely in *Grito* (Scream, 1997), featuring a close-up of a mouth cut off from the rest of the body. In this work, where the shrill screams are interrupted by brief moments of silence, the loop works as a mechanism that allows for immediate and constant repetition, making this a repetitive and disturbing exercise.

Because video had emerged with little aesthetic heritage and few narrative constraints, it was a favoured medium for personal and confessional works and explicitly political in decluttering the body. Moreover, the flexibility of the video camera, the fact that video cassettes were inexpensive (unlike 16mm film) and the possibility that video offered artists to view the image as they recorded it all contributed to experimental work on the body. (Sturken, 1999, p. 557)

The technical potential and aesthetic possibilities of video technology have thus allowed the artist to take a new look at themselves and their bodies. The experimental work on the body emerges from exploring the video's properties. These are long and repetitive actions of exploring the body, so they contemplate performative and documentary elements. Furthermore, these actions are a particular aesthetic element of the moving image: duration. The multiple video systems and formats allowed the creation of works with different durations. Video then imposed rigorous attention on the spectator, demanding their attention and response based on time. While duration emerges as a challenge to the pace of television stations, video length also allowed the exploration of its materiality, allowing the artist to take into account, or completely refuse, the time constraints of tape and cassette or the attention of audiences (Sturken, 1999).

Another aesthetic element we must consider, and articulates with duration, is the rejection of narrative. The conventional structure of telling a story was largely ignored or subverted by video artists, who sought alternatives for exploring the moving image. In fact, the visual arts were already questioning the traditional narrative mainly related to theatre and cinema. Thus, besides the work on the body, video also enabled the exploration of abstraction in the moving image and the very issues of image and sound perception, as is most evident in the work of Anthony McCall, Michael Snow, André Sier and Alexandre Estrela, among

others. Thus, duration and the rejection of narrative, whether in its abstract image forms or repetitive actions and bodily movements, have been transformed into aesthetic elements emerging as a matter of the real, monotonous, repetitive and fleeting life.

Finally, let us consider the referred aesthetic potential of video and the fact that, as described in the first part of this paper, video technology has proved extremely promising and economically viable. That enabled its expansion to new formats and media through the growing interest of the ordinary citizen in the medium. Globally traded, video technology has remained on the rise in the domestic and social spheres. It seems, therefore, reasonable and important to relate this aspect to the *modus operandi* in the artistic sphere. The artist uses video and the body to present their reflections, thoughts and discourses, either political or personal. The inclusion of the body and the representation of routine and daily life suggests a growing interrelation between artistic practices and the practices of ordinary people (domestic practices). That partly reflects the democratic and social nature of the medium. As McLuhan and other theorists anticipated, the technological media have forced the restructuring of social relations and numerous aspects of collective and individual life. In such a way that, like the various emerging technological media of the last decades, video has become a fully present and essential element in 21st-century society.

Final Considerations

When considering production in the artistic sphere through the video medium, we observe particular elements suggestive of a complex dynamic where the medium emerges as an instrument for various usages. Video, which has spread internationally as a commercial product, has played a substantial role in movements of contestation, primarily of political systems and social archetypes. A simple factor contributed to this: video, whose technological advances made it accessible and cheap, became a medium aimed at the masses. Thus, the concept of home video revolutionised how image and sound were recorded and consumed, largely made possible by the videocassette (introduced in the 1970s) and its compact and portable structure. In fact, this accessibility also allowed for the expansion of contemporary creative activity. For artists active from the 1960s onwards, video emerged as an experimental medium with which they could challenge the canons and traditions of the image and the moving image.

It is also worth highlighting the role of institutions and television networks in developing video as an art form. These structures made room for exploration and creation. They established forms of disseminating the works produced, recognised as important steps towards developing this medium's historiography, based on knowledge aggregation and sharing. That shows a certain ambiguity and paradigm: Although independent art production is an extremely important source for these studies, video will attain a new social and artistic status due to the institutions. Rosalind Krauss (1976) believes that, for the generation

that has matured with this medium since the 1960s, the media has become the only means of validating works made on video as art. Thus, ambiguity emerges through the institutionalisation of video by macro institutions that have cast an immense shadow on independent artistic production. Hence, many independent artists and collectives would be known as system contestation artists or groups, not necessarily opposing production in the television world but opposing the extreme devaluation of independent production. Despite this apparent opposition, we observe the natural contagion and intersection between these two realities. Nevertheless, whether in its institutional form, integrated into the television universe, or independent and artistic form, video has proven to be, as Rancière (2014) states, "an infinitely malleable matter" (p. 119).

Translation: Anabela Delgado

Biographic Note

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