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Niche Structures in Television: Video Poetry – Visually Reading the Reality

Abstract: Nowadays, there is an evident need for a visual culture, and this implies changes in the audiovisual field, beyond simply following TV schedule patterns that can create a target audience, and, at the same time, an anesthetized journalist. Changing the convention of declamation discourses and of TV formats can lead to an opening of the televisual field to complex types of communicators and schemes of communication, closer to art. This would establish an enriching formula to the audiovisual journalist's role, making him a creator, an author of a rubric generally referred to as visual essay, in which we can find the video poetry niche. Therefore, I will present an applied study of some personal verses. One of the conclusions will be the necessity to create new media pedagogies that can support a less aesthetically poor visual medium in TV formats and the raising of awareness to the danger of erroneous interpretations of the visual message.
Keywords: Visual Culture; Television; Video Poetry; Editing; Media Pedagogies.

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Television proposes a discourse of knowing the real based on mass communication. Not only this system, sometimes widely criticized, but also the audiences that rely on the fact that the simple distribution of information is synonymous with great culture. Televisual discourse has an appropriate ritual as a form of identifying the important parts of the world. It creates new types of communication, in which proximity is not necessary; therefore, from a psychological point of view, there can exist a separation from the group.

Personally, I do not fully believe that the press acts as an agent that transforms society, but rather as one that mirrors it. And re-seeing through the mirror, although it implies the search for a private space, is naturally followed by the turning of the head to the other side of the world.

More so, a TV producer has to have not only as a reflex, but as an assumed gesture, this turning of the head from his own mirror to the mirror of the world and, implicitly, to the sometimes unhealthy relation of a society that counts, in its power games, on manipulation, through the instauration of appearance as essence. Of course, this way of thinking and re-presenting the world is being used primarily

by news and tabloids, but its effects can be seen in cultural journalism too. This is an enormous challenge for cultural journalism and for the creators in the field.

The TV creator works as a cog in a system in which interdependencies are acutely evident, in which the primary function is that of informing, without violating the principle of truth, the right to an image and the freedom of speech. This pattern of a factory of images and imaginations of reality means that accessing the art factor and the sensitive proximity to visual art are not always possible. Television represents our collective egos, moreover the identification with the viewer becomes a goal and a target of program strategies.

Evidently, the audiences are those that have the voting right of the remote control, but, as Archimbald MacLeish says, the big journalistic revolutions reflect the manner in which public opinion is formed. The same happens in the case of TV cultural journalism and, moreover, in its aesthetic direction.

This means of visual communication can influence behavior and, therefore, in some circles it has been slighted, because people just stay and watch. The passive look and the lack of reflection can lead to the atrophy of the spirit, the viewer becoming an anesthetized consumer. Many theoretical voices conduct their discourses towards an association of television to an apocalyptic effect, through the roles that it can play in mutating social signs (Berger, Baudrillard, McLuhan). This can extend to any visual medium, not only as a Procrustean Bed measure, depending on whom the infovisual message serves to, or simply due to the lack of visual culture on the part of the transmitter or the receptor.

As A.N. Whitehead noted, referring to a different period (the nineteenth century), the biggest discovery was "the invention of the method of invention."[1]

For recorded audiovisual, news, reportage, documentary, essay and TV magazine (with their extensions) are the classic formats of television production. Each video is an archive of data from the real, for the moment, in a matrix given by the program schedule.

In *The Television Handbook*, written by Jonathan Bignell and Jeremy Oldebar, it is specified that "a central element of the study of TV genres are constituted by difficult to classify programs, because they draw attention to the conventional rules of TV genre, precisely because they undermine them and make them seem less important."[2]

Video poetry is rather part of specialized cultural TV stations (such as Arte, Mezzo or the defunct TVR Cultural) and it is perceived by the public as an authorial rubric, because they identify with a strongly individualized production, even though the verses do not belong every time to the same person that produces the video.

I propose an applied study on the reading levels of the real, through narrative-visual milestones of filmic construct and image editing. The presented material brings into attention a personal approach to televisual pattern compartments, with art being the common ground that reproduces, maybe ironically, the viewer-audiovisual media relation and sanctions the erroneous and far-fetched perception of our century, of myth creators, of newsmen, but also of passive viewers for whom program supply and demand is strictly cumulative and thus convenient.

The starting point is the applied study of personal verses *re-seen* through the stylistic force of the image, which conducts to new syntaxes.

The analysis especially reports the valences developed by the logic of the image (camera movements, framings, visual composition elements) in finding/completing/transforming the lyrical message.

Also, the project aims at new approaches to media practices that can reconnect contemporary art – but not limited to it – with a cultural broadcasting that not only promotes, but also captures the creative act as a defining knowledge power.

Therefore, a valorizing formula can be instituted to the journalist's role as creator in the audiovisual field, as an author of something generally referred to as visual essay.

Verses:

Sometimes the birds within us
claim their abducted sky back
forgetting to also take their cloud
(the one conditionally attributed to the
blue patch)
They gather like crazy, but quickly learn
the lesson of the queue
and ask for the sky on debt.
Once they fill their looks with it
they remember the cloud
and try to dunk it
in the rainwater of obedient thoughts.
But the clouds, younger ogres,
wallow at their will
and fall dismayed at the sunset,
when the blue gets darkened
and the fowls selvage
vigil trees' shade.

Fig. 1 – Snapshots of video poetry

The video poetry refers to gaze's trap, to the modern human flaws in a globalized media. The TV construct is that of image and sound, word and image, with an emphasis on images. This is suggested by the lack of a *voice*, and by the use of sign language.

Sign language is filmed alternatively in a reflection on water and in a park landscape on a rainy autumn day.

Opting for this time of the day was not a random choice, because it meant opting for a slightly hazy, natural light, given by the cloudy sky. The fog favored expressiveness and conducted to an overlapping of reality with the set, one that is scattered, untapped by the resources of the light and the foreground. Apparently, the set, the context is not manipulative, it does not create false realities, precisely because it does not focus, visually, on the protagonist, the media's function, especially in the cases of tabloids, is being sanctioned, the attempt to divert focus from reality to the one who is transmitting it, which is evident on TV.

The *sky* (everyday reality permanently above our sight) is, in this instance, an act of self-identification and identification of the birds (people, the consumers of coverage in the media of this reality). The fowls cross over it from one way to the other, just to find out later that they cannot understand or grab hold of it. The blue patch stamps the entry in the pattern, as acceptance and use of the press recipe, conducting the information to the cloud (a passive element that accepts the media injection).

One must be the owner of the remote control, thus tamed and re-tamed/anesthetized by a baptism in the water of *obedient thoughts*, the victim of conventions that become behavioral standards. Once the lesson of *the queue* has been learned, it brings, for the fowls, the only understanding of reality: they can only grasp the sky with their sight, in their rampant run for sterile information, lacking the potential to form a way of thinking of the reality. Instituted triumphantly at the same hour, through loyalty marketing strategies for the public, the passive look becomes the only form of knowing the world.

Paradoxically, mass communication becomes a danger for masses. I start from this interpretation the narrative-visual approach.
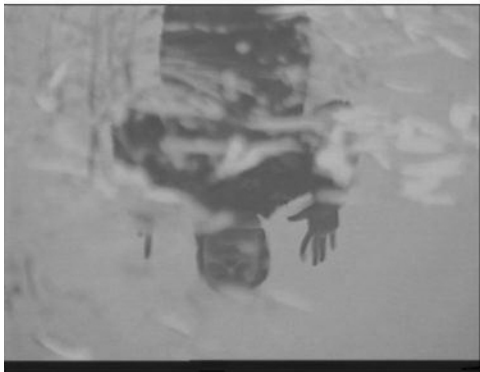
Fotograma 2
Reflexie mâini 00:00:04:19

Fotograma 16
PI întors 00:01:04:01

Fig. 2 – Snapshots 2 and 16

Fotograma 4
Amorsă copac
00:00:12:15

Fotograma 7
Amorsă copac
00:00:30:08

Fotograma 20
Amorsă copac
00:01:15:04

Fig. 3 – Snapshots 4, 7 and 20

Snapshots 2 and 16 visually identify a world that only the angle of sight (shooting/ editing) can rotate up and down, changing its role/ understanding, but also alone, by each one's perspective: both snapshots contain another human presence. The subject's positioning on the side of the frame makes the background and the edge of the world visible. In the sixteenth snapshot appears the blurred physical image of the author – counter-framed – as part/ figuration of the world, and in the second, the confessor/ journalist-hearing and speech impaired girl interface.

The sign language is only seen, not understood – if one is not familiar with it –, the same as a simple transmission of information that reflects only the sometimes meaningless professional scheme of the five, six journalistic questions – who, what, when, how, why.

Therefore, the overturning of the idea that the *center* – being at the scene, that *now* and *here*, but also the false closeness/ proximity to the event – is suggested, respectively these leading goals of mass communication are the only ones capable of bringing in ratings, seen as restoring and consolidating the truth.
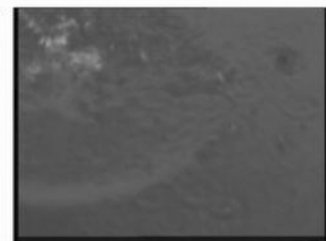
The tree trunk in snapshots 4, 7 and 20 builds a metaphorical curtain on/ distance to our proximity as parts of the visual communication. Because it is a fixed frame, the viewer's eye needs to take the stylistic
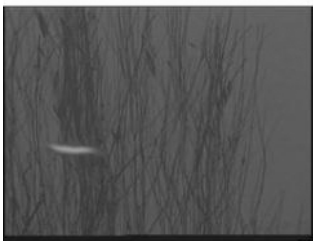
Fotograma 8
Frunză pe apă
00:00:35:02
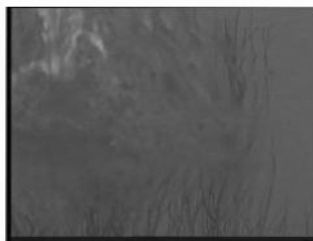
Fotograma 12
Picătură apă 1
00:00:47:18

Fotograma 17
Picătură apă 2
00:01:06:12

Fig. 4 – Snapshots 8, 12 and 17

function of the bigger picture, of discovery movements. This can happen only by giving up on inertia, on immobility and on the psychological comfort given by watching TV from one's home chair.

Snapshot 8: *Leaf on water*

The leaf floating horizontally – a simple frame that outlines the flow of information according to the expectations of the sample target audience by the subsequent investigation of cultural marketing.

Snapshot 12: *Water painting 1*

In this more aggressive, vertical frame, a drop of rain water disturbs the water's tranquility and restores the buildup of false tensions.

Snapshot 17: *Water painting 2*

The second water drop suggests the unethical weariness of emotional images – by slowing down and inverting the frame – precisely to construct a commodity-subject that brings in the ratings. The image composition requires a frame editing that substitutes a mounting trope of a juxtaposition of images capable of creating new Eiseinsteinian sense, that is a way of thinking visually. There is excessive use of dramatization through simple effects on the editing table, where the process becomes more technical and standardized.

In extenso, I refer here to the famous teddy bear type of frames, that is the image of a toy at the site of a tragedy, repeatedly detailed or long shots of watery eyes, in slow motion, all serving as an escape from the rhythm of informational flow of the editing and the imprinting of a certain image in the viewer's mind. This intentionally dramatic and artificialized frame

is unjustified and unfinished, it truncates speech and thus communication.

Inserts such as those from snapshots 8 and 12 were positioned in the clip to bind, in appearance, the focal point of the content – the surrounding reality. The use of frame rhythm in the broken shot – snapshot 17 – serves only to remind of the norm, resulting a reverse reaction to the expected one (that of artificiality, not of impress).

The voice being absent, the sense is not decipherable by the rules known to the masses; therefore, this forcing of rhythm and the accidental exiting from the manipulative classic TV construct can give a chance to the birth of a new mental image, capable both of forming and informing. All these make possible a positioning beyond the typical TV development that is *seen/ heard*, adding what is *felt* – a *profound psychological sensation*, issues noted by Deleuze[3] in his book and analyzed by Eisenstein in *Le film: sa forme, son sense*.

The water symbolically represents filming and, *in extenso*, television, which can only catch the image of the world by reflecting or mirroring it. A type of *no comment* program, but which does not have the chance to be a source of truth, being paralyzed with simulacrum type communications and commutators. The poetry is told through the girl's sign language, which tells us the story of the birds that learned an initiatory lesson about the world, and that of the *younger* ogres – the clouds – which instinctively knew to wait for the right time in the game of appearances, when the sky *gets darkened/ and the fowls selvage/ vigil trees' shade* – a possible prime-time airtime.

Fotograma 3 **PM fetiță** 00:00:09:18	**Fotograma 9** **PM fetiță** 00:00:36:18	**Fotograma 11** **PM fetiță** 00:00:44:00
Fotograma 13 **PM fetiță** 00:00:51:02	**Fotograma 19** **PM fetiță** 00:01:13:20	**Fotograma 23** **PM fetiță** 00:01:27:16

Fig. 5 – Snapshots 3, 9, 11, 13, 19 and 29

In snapshots 3, 9, 11, 13, 19 and 29, the medium shot is the prevalent framing, so that the sign language can be easily seen, and a fixed station is used, the angle being at eye level, so not to create dramatizations in the frame composition – allusion to the filming pattern of news. Globalizing mass-media does not allow the affect, empathy (see the use of close-up images), maintaining the reporter's false objectivity and reporting him sometimes, spatially, to the surroundings, as data of the event.

Compositionally, the *reciter* is placed to the right, and, on the left, in the background, hangs a curtain of willow branches, and in the deepest background can be seen the shape of some trees. Chromatically, the subject is a splash of color, highly visible in a milky set. Complementary colors red and greed are exploited, colors found in the RGB input. The floral pattern on the jacket substitutes the lifeless natural surroundings. The medium shot avoids psychological individualization.

The frames are fixed, and only two camera movements exist, left-right panning or vice versa, to introduce the nature, the branches of the weeping willow, the water. Human presences are filmed without tracing their movement in the frame. Therefore, the camera does not become an attendant, rather a passive witness.

The central position of the subject in the composition is taken only in the frames that are filmed overturned, in fact being mirrored in the water, four times, somehow canonically, opening and closing the visual discourse, pointing out the return to the subject followed as an immediate insertion to the written text or as an alternative to the reality-set.

Fig. 6 – All the 26 snapshots

The editing used is a classic one, with cut and mix transitions, the last effect being used for the in-out transitions through the background for the written text of the verses, which breaks the filmic route by four insertions of 4 to 5 seconds. Only one of the text insertions being followed by another one, with different positions of the text in the frame composition.

In fig. 7 (snapshots 5, 14, 15, 18, and 25), a background that points to the beginning of cinema is being used, a blurred, black and white image of a scratched film. The interstitial image of the intertitles leads to the departure from the seriality the human eye is familiar with. It does not serve as punctuation, but as an independent valence of translating the image into words, filling in the lack of a voice.

The rhythm of the editing keeps the consistency of the 4 to 5 seconds frames, with the exception of the panoramic inserts (2) and the 2 second frames that capture the nature/ reality-set.

The sound is comprised only of the ambience, easily perceptible, footsteps, leaves rustling, arms moving, a chirp, a sneeze, indecipherable urban noises. The sound editing follows the allowed parameters of TV broadcasting (12 dB), without complex sound effects.

Of course, the distancing from the creative zone, as it is normal, is signaled with precision in news reports, a fact that makes the sound and image to mutually support each other, without working within Bresson's relay formula from his studies on cinema.

The unheard is Silence, a challenge to search for the unspoken Sound in the clouds.

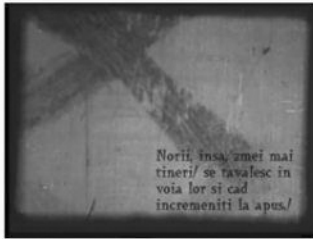The shooting of the mirroring in the water, a frame that opens the movie,
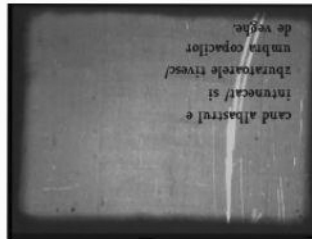
Fotograma 5
Text pe background
00:00:14:03

Fotograma 14
Text pe background
00:00:53:24

Fotograma 15
Text pe background
00:00:59:05

Fotograma 18
Text pe background
00:01:07:09

Fotograma 25
Text pe background
00:01:36:18

Fig. 7 – The background

restores the same dimension of depth vision, of appearance negation and descending towards essence that must be clarified through re-seeing the scratched movie between us.

Changing the declamation and the TV format convention means television has to be open to new types and complex schemes of communication, closer to the artistic act, but not alienated to a large audience.

Television has in the structures of visual essay the capacity to re-see its own world. The alterity vision, not the technological pattern or the standardized TV format, will be the keystone to such a construct.[4]

Conclusions

The terminology changes, and the boundaries between +art and -art need themselves to be discussed in the light of new dictionaries.

It is necessary to rethink visual literacy as a pedagogical strategy, especially in the medium of mass communication, such as television, which operates with facts and can serve as a testament over time. Otherwise, the risk of *retouching* according to misunderstood and wrongly acquired artistic canons, which depart from and, moreover, distort the reality, their spread *reading* and *quoting*. One such issue (both aesthetic and ethic) is discussed by Georges Didi-Huberman in his book, *Images malgré tout*, bringing into attention, as unfavorable examples, press releases in negative of four images from the Auschwitz-Birkenau

Museum, shocking photographs captured by an anonymous photographer, testament of the infernal conditions of Nazi concentration camps.[5]

Still, television, neo-television more so, gives up its old habits and, on the go, changes codes with other visual arts. Format/message binomial systemizes the TV production process without restricting it. Hybrid formats are being developed, which facilitates the journalist's originality, but also requires his specialization.

The introduction of video poetry generates controversy, because it departs from classic cultural journalism and invites the viewer to analyze and to search within himself, opting for the visual thinking formula, not for that of simply consuming information, like cultural agendas propose. Public opinion consumes information and symbols, perceive what they are prepared to perceive, therefore the debate over the issue of taste as a form of social censorship is both bold and cautious.

In a beneficent civilizing utopia, we would gallop towards a society devouring not only of entertainment, be it a refined one, so that the media market can require new complementary cultural positions.

Until then, we role the same tape passing through revolutions, rather visibly technological than cultural.

The televisual environment remains lacking of aesthetic value, as Douglas Keller noted,[6] but has the chance to develop it by associating itself with visual arts. Even one of the television's toughest critics, Marshall McLuhan,[7] sees the medium functional and generating mutual benefits in the TV-Art-Consciousness triad.

This perspective makes the development of media pedagogies that can influence for the better the image culture even more necessary.

Therefore, framing and the study of visual essays and their extensions, video poetry, for instance, could be a subject of some more documented cultural studies found in schools of the field, at a course on TV experimental formats. Going outside the norm discourages the dominant discourses and images, according to which we form our audiovisual rhythm, but also the rhythm of our free time.

The television-art partnership can only be beneficial to both parties, imposing different audiences, those that think the image, not only see it.

Notes

1. A. N. Whitenhead, *Science and Modern World*, New York, Macmillan, 1926, p. 98.

2. Jonathan Bignell, Jeremz Orlebar, *Manualul practic de televiziune*, translated by Carmen Catană, Iaşi, Polirom, 2009, p. 68 (personal translation).

3. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II, Imaginea-timp*, translated by Ştefana and Ioan Pop-Curşeu, Cluj-Napoca, Tact, 2013.

4. In the rating strategies, this *Videopoezie* rubric was schedule horizontally (stripping), at the same hour, in the cultural TV program "Cap de afiş," on TVR 3 and TVR CJ (partially repeated on TVR International), to encourage loyalty, the target audience being an informed one. Also, the visual essay was presented in 2013 in New York, at the UN headquarters, as part of the Nation-Water-Cultures/ The Intercontinental Mail Art Exhibition.

5. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 2003, p. 225: "Imaginer malgré tout, donc. Pourquoi malgré tout? Cette expression dénote la déchirure:le tout renvoie au

pouvoir de conditions historiques contre lesquelles nous n'arrivons pas encore à trouver de réponse; le malgré résiste à ce pouvoir par la seule puissance heuristique du singulier. C'est un éclair qui déchire le ciel quand tout semble perdu. Et c'est bien la situation qu' exemplifie, me semble-t-il, le geste du photographe clandestin d'Auschwitz. Ne méritait-il donc pas cet hommage minimum: que l'on se penche un moment sur l' objet de son risque, ces quatre images arrachées à l'enfer? (...) Nous vivons l'image à l'époque de l'imagination déchirée."

6. Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 235: "[C]ommercial television is predominantly governed by the aesthetic of representational realism, of images and stories which fabricate the real and attempt to produce a reality effect (Kellner 1980). Television's relentless representational realism has also been subordinate to narrative codes, to storytelling, and to the conventions of highly coded genres. [...] This aesthetic poverty of the medium has probably been responsible for its contempt by high cultural theorists and its designation as a 'vast wasteland' by those who have other aesthetic tastes and values."

7. Marshall McLuhan, Eric McLuhan, Frank Zingrone (eds.), *Essential McLuhan*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 210: "The next medium, whatever it is – it may be the extension of consciousness – will include television as its content, not as its environment, and will transform television into an art form."