

## Historical Consciousness in the Video Works of Silvano Repetto

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(Translation: Paolo Jacomelli)

S.R.'s art production started with his studies in Florence, the home of renaissance painting and birthplace of the modern era, where art – through painting and its narrative aspects – records the passage of the inexorable movements of peoples and leaves an indelible imprint of human wandering. But the sign SR materialises in his work is not exclusively pictorial, static and unequivocally linked to gesture. His sign goes beyond, due to a contemporary device, the video. Using a television camera, S.R. intends to become witness to the stratification of centuries and continual synthesis, perpetual but variable between space and time. One could claim that for the artist, the video would not have been of value without his Italian pictorial training, which has in some ways led to his development as video artist; not as a normal stylistic or chronological consequence, but because of the demands of expressive continuity.

For a creator, the sign is important, and goes beyond the style and means of production the artist intends to make use of. S.R. has to and will always have to record the sign of the continual nomadism of mankind, races and ethnic groups; the perpetual kineticism, without friction, of life; his sign, his work is the result (if not a form of apotheosis) of the continual movement between past, present and future.

His video production began around 1994, with works which better reflect and in a specifically narrative manner the themes chosen by him. However, it was only around 1997 that his more mature works appeared.

The 1997 installation entitled *Il Soffio*, a video work presented at the Kunsthhaus in Zurich and the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt in the theme-based *Freie Sicht aufs Mittelmeer* exhibition supervised by Bice Curiger, is an important and mature work by S.R. A close-up of the artist which travels around the circumference of a circle, where the amplification of his own breath supplies the sound. A minimal work, it expresses the continual wandering of mankind in circular form, the obstinate succession of events and the bi-polarity of time. The sound element is apparently static. The 'noise' produced by his breath close to the microphone and then amplified insistently becomes in this context almost an all-absorbing prayer, beyond our cultural and spiritual parameters, a modern version of Om. In parallel, the author uses a television camera to gather, order and collect in either a narrative or symbolic manner pieces of the human story, which he enlarges, cuts, reduces to icons and thus fixes the signs: an eternal testimony to man's passage on earth and a desire to give a face and features to identity.

Subsequently, in 1999, S.R. produced two works inspired by his travels in Japan and completed them in the country which now hosts his first Japanese exhibition: *Presenze trasparenti e Torii*.

By incorporating photographs, an additional but necessary means of expression, in his following works, the Swiss artist reaches a new level of maturity in terms of means and

languages used with his photo-video installation entitled *Orizzonte video* (2000). This work is a documentary of a previous performance produced in February 2000 at the **Castello di Mesocco** (The Grisons), witness to many social and historical upheavals.

Formalising the performance in an installation for an exhibition space consists in illustrating both conceptually and in documentary form, the key moments of the performance. One can therefore claim that there exists the production process of the work (performance) followed possibly by its documentation. There is a renewed spatial-temporal stratification, which plays subtly with the past, the present and the future thus creating three dimensions which end up delicately overlapping. A colour photograph (180x285 cm), in which the author-protagonist holds a small monitor to indicate an electronic involvement in the natural landscape, represents the synthesis and the origin of the performance and it is accompanied by 4 monitors with the same number of films 6 minutes in length and which illustrate the four moments of the action: *place, position, performance, horizon*.

The action itself consisted in introducing into the horizon perspective of the mountain which towers above the castle a small monitor placed on its walls, within which the film was the missing wedge of the natural horizon from the spectator's point of view. The radical aspects of this sign, which attempted to reconnect in a sort of trompe-l'oeil the line of two horizons broken by a pass, is the result of a tolerant virtual connection between two natural perspectives. The mark, sign of the passage left by the artist and by peoples is the main thread of this action-work by S.R., which leads to a reflection on the three components of existence which are independent of individual will: time, place and social belonging.

*Orizzonte video* once again intimately researches past and present, where the speculative element is the spectator, who becomes the interactive bond with the present. The traces S.R. will leave behind to posterity is therefore an electronic and cultural document, a development of the natural world on a historic site – the Castle of Mesocco –, witness and protector of the metamorphoses of eras through the work of man.

A historical consciousness through the temporal and geographical stratifications – the continual search for an individual identity which meets up again and finally coincides with the collective one- is, not only important to the work and reflections of S.R. but is also an essential prerogative of mankind, until it leaves its final mark, that which remains from a human transhumance; not only as the dead body of memory and/or nostalgia but also as matter for speculation.

*To see or only imagine; the meeting between reality, imagination and memory creates an enigmatic situation, which itself marks the passage of mankind on earth.*

*With at its basis the hypothesis of human transit, the performance goes through an event that has already taken place, but which at the same time is taking place and will take place.*

*Passato, Presente e Futuro intercede at a sole point; what remains is therefore just an electronic memory, a universal document of a moment in history within time. (Silvano Repetto)*

Drawing on all that concerns man's memory, S.R. derives vital material for his speculative work: and from this synthesis between past and future, the artist himself, a living person, becomes a pathway and indispensable link.