



The independent Brazilian video: political criticism in the producer Olhar Eletrônico

*O vídeo independente
brasileiro: crítica política
na Olhar*



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Abstract: this is a historiographical study of video art in Brazil from the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of independent video. The study aimed to promote a dialogue with audiovisual works, which are part of political actions, which marked the critical and engaging stance in the 1980s and its insertion in commercial television aimed at the production of historical knowledge about the audiovisual in its interfaces with other fields of video arts. The producer *Olhar Eletrônico* is the object of study of this article and the corpus analyzed is composed of one of the experimental frame: Ernesto Varela, produced in 1984 whose irony and empathy are traces of his reflection and political criticism.

Keywords: independent video; video art; television in Brazil; Electronic Look; Ernesto Varela.

Resumo: trata-se de um estudo historiográfico sobre a videoarte no Brasil a partir de aspectos estéticos e conceituais do vídeo independente. O estudo buscou promover um diálogo com obras audiovisuais, integrantes de ações políticas, que marcaram a postura crítica e de engajamento na década de 1980 e sua inserção na televisão comercial visando à produção do conhecimento histórico a respeito do audiovisual em suas interfaces com outros campos das artes do vídeo. A produtora *Olhar Eletrônico* é objeto de estudo deste artigo. O *corpus* analisado é composto de um dos seus quadros experimentais: *Ernesto Varela*, produzido em 1984 e cujas ironia e empatia são traços de sua reflexão e crítica política.

Palavras-chave: vídeo independente; arte do vídeo; televisão no Brasil; *Olhar Eletrônico*; Ernesto Varela.

The independent video in Brazil

This article is the result of a historiographic study on video art in Brazil, based on aesthetic and conceptual aspects in counterpoint with models of the television system. The proposed clipping comes from the 1980s, when a group of artists, Tadeu Jungle, Walter Silveira, Fernando Meirelles, Marcelo Machado, Marcelo Tas, Renato Barbieri and Paulo Morelli arose in Brazil, more specifically in São Paulo, and explored the poetical assumptions of video to integrate into the system and make television, but also to take a critical stance before the contents of commercial television.

The text we present results from a research that emerged from the observation of two central elements for the understanding of video in this context: the action of subverting and hybridizing the audiovisual procedures and the fields of art and communication. The hypothesis is that these elements present in the art of video in Brazil in the 1980s, added to the interaction with television and the emergence of videomakers and independent videos, are one of the bases for understanding the uniqueness of audiovisual production and its history.

In the 1980s, video production in Brazil reaffirmed the criticism born in conceptual art: that the function of art is not linked to its sale as a product to be consumed by the mass, but to the result of an authentic idea that is free from the system of production and consumption. What is at stake is the intervention in the communicational space and the video as a poetic, hybrid and subversive language within the audiovisual or videographic system itself.

In 2003, Arlindo Machado points out that video stays alive and remains more present than ever: it has become a hybrid and is on the computer, on television, distributed among the most varied forms on the streets and on electronic panels.

In the early 1980s, video was an almost marginal activity, the forte was cinema, photography, television. Video was an emerging medium, people were beginning to experiment, few people understood what was new about it. [...] I would say that almost everything today is video. (30 ANOS..., 2003)

Bringing to the fore the memory of the art of video and promoting its history is to recognize that video art is a product of the complex visual and transnational contemporary culture and that, with each new intervention in the social, political and cultural context where it is constituted, it is also builds itself from the urban space and the confluence of the media.

This study, therefore, deals with the art of video in Brazil and its connection with the television medium, the process of experimental creation and the artistic interventions performed by videographers of the 1980s generation of the Brazilian video, a time that became known as the era of independent producers and which is currently reflected in aesthetic and media hybridism beyond television, on digital platforms and the Internet.

In this article we present a study of the experimental piece *Ernesto Varela*, made by *Olhar Eletrônico Vídeo* producer in the 1980s to be screened by commercial television, although other experiments have been carried out, according to Ernesto Varela himself:

After the premiere on TV Gazeta in the 1980s, Varela went through Abril Vídeo (TV arm of Abril group), SBT and Record. In the 90's, the reporter anchored the series *Netos do Amaral*, on MTV Brazil; and was inspiration for the creation of *Fora do Ar*, an attraction for *Fantástico* on TV Globo. In the 2000s, Varela went to the radio, the 89FM; and to the theater with the multimedia spectacle "The history of Brazil according to Ernesto Varela: how we got here". (QUEM É , 2016)

In this context, the study sought to promote a dialogue with audiovisual works as part of political actions that marked the critical posture of confrontation and political engagement in the 1980s, and its insertion in television, aiming at the production of historical knowledge regarding the audiovisual in its interfaces with other fields of video arts.

It should be emphasized that the objective is to broaden the understanding of the historical, social and cultural processes that involve the production of experimental and independent video, investigating its relations with the television medium in Brazil and the way in which techno-images – images produced by technological devices and cameras (photo, cinema, video and computer) – and the art of video combine with the field of communication from aesthetic hybridism, transforming TV into raw material for creation and vehicle of engaged and activist artistic expression.

The research methodology, applied to the study of a larger corpus composed of video productions of the 1980s and 1990s in Brazil and whose clipping in this article focuses on the production company *Olhar Eletrônico*, is exploratory and qualitative in nature and based on data collection and bibliographic review. The theoretical foundation is in dialogue with Brazilian audiovisual authors and researchers such as Arlindo Machado, Cacilda Teixeira da Costa, Roberto Moreira S. Cruz, Christine Mello and Yvana Fechine.

According to these authors' researches on the second generation of Brazilian video art, its production is marked by criticism to the mass communication medium that television is and by the insertion of artistic experiments in this medium. The independents generation, as it became known, features two groups: *TVDO* and *Olhar Eletrônico*. According to the researcher Walter Zanini – great promoter of video art in Brazil, who during his time at the Museum of Contemporary Art of São Paulo (MAC-USP) defended and promoted the video – the so-called independent video is the one:

That was recognized from the beginning in the groups “TVDO”, with videomakers Tadeu Jungle, Walter Silveira, recently graduated from ECA-USP, and Pedro Vieira, and “*Olhar Eletrônico*” with Fernando Meirelles, Marcelo Machado, Marcelo Tas, Renato Barbieri and Paulo Morelli, constituted an alterity of principles in relation to their predecessors, some of whom continued active and orthodox, while Otávio Donasci and Rafael França emerged, values again coming from art schools. It was the moment of the appearance of TV producers. (ZANINI, 1997, p. 241)

Researcher Yvana Fechine in her text “The Video as a Utopian Television Project” (2007) begins her argument using the metaphor of the character Hannibal Lecter and his story in the cinema to compare the relationship between independent video and commercial television in the 1980s in Brazil, with the reciprocities and tensions between the two historically. Fechine (2007, p. 86) asks:

How to incorporate into the list of these TV stations an independent production in video that, even if aspiring to find space in its programming, is defined, aesthetically, precisely by the contrast to its models?

Irony, criticism, and political intervention mark the engagement and action of the 1980s video artists in Brazil, who wanted to do television and realized the value of satirical productions, introducing them into the television routine through appropriation and the way they used the camera, through, e.g., interviews for reflexive entertainment of the audience, such as the irreverent Ernesto Varela, a reporter interpreted by Marcelo Tas, from producer *Olhar Eletrônico* (1981-1989).

The producer *Olhar Eletrônico*

In the text “My Story of *Olhar Eletrônico*”, Marcelo Tas (2007) describes the experience he lived with the other members of the independent production company *Olhar Eletrônico* in the early 1980s in São Paulo. Tas recounts the first time

he participated in one of the many multimedia events composed of book launching added to the reading of poetry, music show and debate on politics, which took place at the Lira Paulistana Theater, also called Lira Paulistana or just Lira, a well-known cultural center in downtown São Paulo located in the basements of a small building on the sidewalk in front of the Benedito Calixto Square in Pinheiros.

At the place, Tas describes, there was a TV on top of a crate, and what was being screened was really odd – it did not look like regular TV, newscast, soap opera, or auditorium show.

I spent more than an hour glued to the stories coming out of that TV set. Until the authors of the images arrived. They were kids like me, about 18 or in their twenties, undergraduates and new graduates. Finally they clarified what that thing was: video! (TAS, 2007, p. 210)

The boys Tas met at that party were the colleagues with whom he went on to compose the *Olhar Eletrônico Vídeo* (Figure 1), which he said was a kind of hectic multidisciplinary hippie community with people from Architecture, Physics and Philosophy from the University of São Paulo (USP), the Psychology of the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC) and Radio and TV of the Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation (FAAP). The company's headquarters had community cooking, tai chi chuan classes in the morning and aromatic herbs in the late afternoon.



Figure 1: Logo of the producer *Olhar Eletrônico*.
Source: <https://bit.ly/2E2TCmM>. Accessed on: 8 Aug. 2018

The producer of independent video *Olhar Eletrônico* (Figure 1) was created in 1981 by the newly graduated architects from the Faculty of Architecture of USP Fernando Meirelles, Marcelo Machado, Paulo Morelli e Beto Salatini, and marked the history of video art in Brazil in the 1980s. Later, the artists Dario Viseu, Marcelo Tas, Renato Barbieri and Tonico Mello joined the group. Initially,

the production company aimed to promote the study, production and placement of videos. Some of the videos produced by Olhar Eletrônico, such as *Garotos de subúrbio* (1982), *Brasília* (1983), *Tempos* (1982), *Ali Babá* (1984), *Tragédia São Paulo* (1986), *Expição* (1989) among others, are key to understand the ways of documentary, music video and fiction born of the experiences in videos in Brazil.

Around 1983, *Olhar Eletrônico* starts to make interventions in commercial television and this is the moment that interests us especially since it has been very little researched, although it has an experimental and innovative aspect that engages in dialogue with both the field of communication (journalism and entertainment) and art (aesthetics). The programs of the video production company *Olhar Eletrônico* were produced for TV networks *Gazeta*, *Abril Vídeo*, *Manchete*, *Cultura* and *Globo*. According to Mello (2008, p. 102):

It is in this context that the most varied and unprecedented experiences in television media appear. One of them, unforgettable, is the priceless character reporter Ernesto Varela, created by Marcelo Tas who, along with his cameraman Valdeci, created by Fernando Meirelles, addressed serious situations with a mixture of critical acidity and good humor.

Another totally experimental exercise when the subject is art on television was *Aquário*, a program screened in 1984 on TV Gazeta at the invitation of the presenter and communicator Goulart de Andrade. The experience consisted of displaying the image of a beautiful aquarium to the sound of Brian Eno. At every minute the phone number of producer would be shown on the image. In the middle of programming, the TV monitor was imagedically converted in an aquarium displaying fish, landscapes and aquatic plants and, in the end, the phone number of *Olhar Eletrônico*, which prompted people to call up the producer almost unconsciously.

People called the producer wondering what was going on. After writing down the caller's phone number and profession, and before he/she hung up, the call was passed on to the previous caller. So viewers were put in contact with each other, promoting an unusual chained connection between them. After a few days, the calls were still coming and the reports of the strange experience continued. This experience transformed the television media into an interactive communicational object and, above all, into a subjective-interactive space of exchanges and dialogues in networks, guided by the order of the unforeseen and chance. For Christine Mello (2008, p. 102), "this work was an absolutely experimental exercise in terms of art on

television” that caused strangeness, curiosity and a behavior that would induce people to a communication process mediated by television and art.

The experiences of the video art pioneers have broadened the discussion of audiovisual language, commercial television and poetic processes in the art of video. In recent years we have seen a growing body of research designed to promote memory and video art historiography in Brazil – one of the aims of this research.

Ernesto Varela

Today we can consider that such productions became classics of the television of the 1980s. But the current generation knows little about some video productions like that of reporter Ernesto Varela and his cameraman Valdeci and is surprised to discover that in some more current Brazilian television productions (*CQC*, *Tá no ar: a TV na TV*) have been influenced and retain some aesthetic features of those programs, such as critical irony, acid humor, and intervention in political and cultural affairs).

Ernesto Varela was created by Marcelo Tas and Fernando Meirelles around 1983. Together with the reporter, the cameraman Valdeci was born, who was personified by Meirelles himself for a long time. Together, Varela and Valdeci, fictional reporter and videographer (Figure 2), interviewed people who were not characters but actual interviewees.

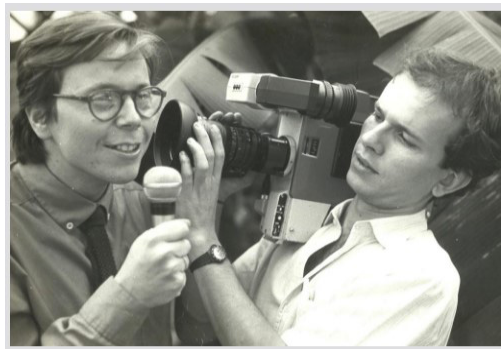


Figure 2: Ernesto Varela and Valdeci (Fernando Meirelles and Marcelo Tas).
Source: <https://bit.ly/2SopQ4V>. Accessed on: 8 Aug. 2018

If reporter Varela became known for his silly and straightforward questions, cameraman Valdeci was also unconventional, because during interviews he kept intruding on the conversation, directing and at the same time talking to the reporter. The man behind the camera was always a presence that made himself noticed.

Varela's most frequent Valdeci was Fernando Meirelles, also Tas's partner in the creation of the fictional reporter. The filmmaker Toniko Melo took the role in important series, among them Cuba and Mexico's Cup/86. Among others Valdecis, Henrique Goldman took over the camera in New York; and in the series *Netos do Amaral* (MTV), artist Eder Santos played the role and shared photography with Adriano Goldman. (QUEM É..., 2016)

It should be noted that the image and costume of reporter Varela also departed totally from the stereotype of the journalist who, wearing a suit and tie with sober colors, did not draw attention to the scene. On the contrary, Varela wore a blue blazer, or a very dark tone, and a tie, but with blue jeans worn by young journalists of the time and red glasses, which became the mark of his provocative irreverence.

Varela's themes of journalistic coverage involved behavior, sports, culture, politics, and economics. Like the episode in which Varela visits Rio de Janeiro in 1985 on the occasion of *Rock in Rio* and talks with different people to learn their typical behavior and ways so as to pass for an authentic *carioca* – a guy from Rio. In a very intelligent and insightful way we get to know unique aspects of the customs and habits of life in Rio (Figure 3).



Figure 3: *Ernesto Varela in Rio* (1985).

Source: <https://bit.ly/2TINC8n>. Accessed on: 8 Aug. 2018

In *Ernesto Varela no Rio*, the framing of scenes is intimate, marked by closes that bring us both to the journalist and the interviewees and also put us, spectators, inside the scene. In the background we see children playing in the sand and women sunbathing and, in the frame closest to us, Varela approaches the people and fits the interviewee so that we can see their humor expressions and reactions before the

journalist. The natural colors of a sunny day on the Rio beach give the tone, and the skin texture of the girl interviewed in one of the scenes contrasts, for example, with the dark and classic suit of the fictional journalist. The realistic aesthetic employed by the natural and casual record generates empathy and identity with the public. Similarly, the sound is captured from the natural environment.

Such aesthetic resources can be found in the series composed of two or three programs on the 1986 World Cup, Cuba, New York, Serra Pelada and gold extraction in Brazil, each giving ambiance and framings from the local landscape and local situations, whose visual and sound experience is a result of documentary records, albeit of an experimental bias.

In the series of news reports on the communist island of Fidel Castro in 1985, Ernesto Varela gets around the permanent surveillance of a Cuban government agent to question the people on the streets and even invades a TV show to reveal what the lives of young people under the socialist regime look like. (QUEM É..., 2016)

About *Olhar Eletrônico* and *Ernesto Varela*, considered as the apex of the production of the group, Yvana Fechine points out:

At the height of the production of *Olhar Eletrônico*, a character created by the group, and who was there in every program he collaborated with, synthesized the producer's entire proposal of intervention in television broadcasting: reporter Ernesto Varela. Interpreted by Marcelo Tas and leading character of numerous attractions directed by him and by Fernando Meirelles, Ernesto Varela epitomized the TV anti-reporter. Awkward, clumsy, silly-faced, and seemingly naive, Varela embodied parody in the form of conventional television journalism. Although he was not a "real" reporter – because Marcelo Tas was, most of all, a performer – Ernesto Varela never participated in fictional situations. On the contrary. His news stories focused, in a critical-satirical perspective, controversial themes of the time, such as the Brazilian external debt (*Dívida Externa*, 1983), the gold rush in Serra Pelada (*Varela in Serra Pelada*, 1984) or the voting of Dante de Oliveira amendment, which provided for direct elections in the country *Varela no Congresso*, 1984). (FECHINE, 2007, p. 92)

In the episode *Varela no Congresso* (1984), the reporter is wearing his red glasses and holding a green microphone in his hand, something that reminds us of the color of the national flag or nationalism. Once again, the creative and multiple aesthetics that explore framings, textures and colors constructed from the

real environment is mixed with video documentation and recording of scenes whose scenarios are real, although the journalist is fictional (Figure 4).



Figure 4: *Ernesto Varela in the Congress* (1984).
Source: <https://bit.ly/2tgDqIt>. Accessed on: 8 Aug. 2018

It is worth noting the aesthetic treatment of the colors of aircraft seats in tune with the green microphone and the landscape frames in other scenes of this episode of *Ernesto Varela* that show how realistic aesthetics engages in a dialogue with video art, whose intervention occurs through the ironic narrative and criticism to the situations experienced by the journalist himself and his interviewees.

Returning to the episode *Ernesto Varela in the Congress* (1984), Varela is on his way to Brasília in a plane and interviews the passengers who are also going to the capital of the country. On the ground, we see Varela walking and, in front of him, local police men are walking as well, while he comments on the fair weather of the day, with a temperature of 20°. In the next scene, the reporter states that after making that opening, he and the cameraman were invited to enter a room where almost everything they had filmed was erased. Varela appears upside down, holding his green microphone, and says that it seems now things were already normalized in Brasília. He talks to the audience saying he's going to the National Congress to see what's going on there, and heads for Congress. Varela enters the national plenary session in the midst of the vote on the Dante de Oliveira law and interviews the deputy of the same name, responsible for proposing *Diretas Já*, a civil movement to claim direct presidential elections in Brazil in 1983/1984.

Halfway through the interview the journalist is surprised by security guards who say he could not remain there, while in the background we can hear the vote in progress. The video puts us on the spot and brings us to the very moment of voting. The reporter feigns surprise and claims he did not know he could not be

there. After a while he leaves, very embarrassed, and we overhear the Brazilian Flag Anthem while Varela is being withdrawn from the grounds. The scene cuts and goes to an external one, where we notice a modernist architecture in the background. Varela comments that since the vote was too long, they decided to visit some of the main tourist attractions in Brasília, such as the *Palácio da Alvorada*, the official house of President João Figueiredo, who did not like to live there and chose to live in a farm (*Granja do Torto* in Brasília). The landscape is “very pretty,” Varela says, but a few heavily loaded clouds hang over the *Alvorada*, the reporter adds, pointing to the modernist building in the background. The cameraman shoots Brasília’s overcast sky and we can hear the sound of rain and thunder.

Next, Varela is inside a car and seems to follow another, in which, he claims, Vice President Aureliano Chaves is. Looking out the window of the car and with his green microphone in hand, Varela calls out to the vice president: “Hello, how are you? Where are you going in such a hurry?” (VARELA..., 1984). In the video, we see Aureliano Chaves saluting Varela as the car moves on swiftly. Varela returns to the parliament and interviews Fernando Henrique Cardoso, then a senator of the republic elected in 1983 for the state of São Paulo. Varela asks the senator about his opinion on how the world will be like in 1988. Fernando Henrique Cardoso affirms it will be very hard, because of the very difficult world situation, the menace of war, an economic crisis whose end nobody knows, and affirms that the world is undergoing a historical change. In the video we see the plenary and several politicians surprised with a deputy that was finishing his speech: the deputy Mário Juruna. Varela waits to interview him and asks him what an Indian can teach white men, giving voice to the indigenous people’s leader.

In the sequence, we see some deputies that Varela describes as being dictatorship supporters and many empty seats, since they were not voting in order to obstruct the workings. Varela suddenly appears before a house and says that he left parliament to go and call Deputy Paulo Maluf, who at the time stated that he would not vote unless he was called and Varela says he is providing a public utility service. To the sound of an instrumental music of trumpets, much like fanfare, the reporter gets at the door of the house and is greeted by his security guards and drivers. The ironic and good-natured tone, although the question is straightforward, becomes clear in the scenes in which Varela disingenuously asks one of Maluf’s adviser if he is going to work today in the Congress and the answer is “yes”. Varela thanks for the information and the video cuts to a scene in which military soldiers march holding their rifles and in line to the sound of drums and fanfare.

Different metaphors are built between the documentary record of the scenes produced in front of Maluf's house and the criticism the episode wants to promote. Then, the scenes go back to the parliament full of people and deputies and Varela talks to a mocking deputy that tries to shift the reporter's focus by talking to him about a woman. While interviewing a deputy who would vote against direct elections, Varela faces the camera grimacing and mistrusting the answers he heard there. In 1984, for 34 years and under full military rule, Varela asks a deputy what he thinks about the fact that politicians are losing credibility and listen as an answer that one must trust in democracy. In the following scenes we see Brasilia and its buildings in the upside-down video with a speech by a politician in the background who talks about the Brazilian people to the sound of instrumental music in a hilarious tone. Once again, we see a group of military soldiers marching towards Congress, and back in the plenary, we hear a voice in the microphone naming deputies and their votes.

Reporter Varela, whose face framing takes on the whole picture, appears in the screen saying: "here in the Congress, men have not yet decided whether Brazilians will be able to vote for president of the republic" (VARELA, 1984) and explains what happened, the cause: non-attendance of some deputies and their parties, naming them. Varela asks in an ironic tone, looking directly at us, spectators: "are you going to say yes or no to these guys" (VARELA..., 1984). Varela leaves the scene and we see the audience in the plenary shout, in chorus, slogans against the political party that has reportedly organized to obstruct the vote, calling for the arrest of a politician that we all know who it is. After 13 minutes, the video ends.

The experimentation in the videos of *Olhar Eletrônico* brings us to a creative use of video language that causes strangeness although it reveals a field of quite direct and powerful aesthetic dialogue with the public and generated by empathy. Strategies such as flipping through head-on scenes, exploring visual rhythms in sync with sound, changing textures and colors in a natural way, blasting light or even post-production, and furthering the construction of meaning through non-linear editing, whose deconstructed narrative breaks with the reporting genre, gives the video a questioning, inquiring, and guerrilla tone, as were the videos of some American video artists in the 1970s. According to researcher Sarzi-Ribeiro (2017, p. 55):

At the beginning of its recent history, video art will be recognized by two types of video practices: first, by documentaries directed by activists linked to alternative television news and, second, by artistic videos developed as continuity and extension of the plastic production of fine artists. Of the first group, we should highlight the videos of the American painter and

filmmaker Frank Gillette and the Canadian Les Levine, full of political content that earned them the nickname of guerrilla videography.

Cacilda Teixeira da Costa on the occasion of the exhibition “Vídeo de artista & televisão: a televisão vista pelos artistas do vídeo”, held in 1986 at MAC-USP, comments that in the 1970s, the first video generation refused TV, fully standing against its power. But she warns that TV already attracted the next generation of the 1980s and, in a text in the catalog of the aforementioned show, Costa advises artists to be careful not to lose specificity when entering television (COSTA, 1986).

Similarly, research on the history of video art in Brazil makes little mention of these productions of the 1980s, as if they were much more of the scope of communication than of the video arts. With regard to memory and archives, it is worth highlighting the official sites of Marcelo Tas (QUEM É..., 2016) and of Associação Cultural Videobrasil (OLHAR..., 2013), which maintains a rich collection of images and texts on *Olhar Eletrônico*.

In Aguiar, we find a comment that reinforces our idea that it is necessary to recognize the subversive and experimental character of the 1980s video art, whose motto was to enter the commercial television system:

Less than ten years after its appearance, video art began to influence and gain space within the stations, leaving aside the challenge to TV that marked its first phase. This incorporation took place mainly because of the presence of small independent video producers, whose examples of *Olhar Eletrônico* (in which the presence of Marcelo Tas and Fernando Meirelles, still working in the medium) and TVDO stand out, due to the various programs produced by them broadcast on medium and large stations. (AGUIAR, 2007, p. 78)

Among the most creative features of the experimental video format produced by *Olhar Eletrônico* are some elements described by Fechine that reaffirm aesthetic but also operational aspects that point to the way the creative counter-model they put into practice worked.

In the most diverse situations, Varela not only returned the word to the people but also strove to adopt their perspective. As if he did not even realize what he was doing, the bumbling and shameless reporter raging against hierarchy: between interviewer and interviewee there was no relationship of authority. All the critical power of Varela's news stories came precisely from the apparent naivete with which he showed,

whether in a conversation with an illiterate street vendor or a renowned USP sociologist, the contradictory aspects of Brazilian reality. (FECHINE, 2007, p. 92)

It would be naïve to think that we chose by chance to present the study carried out on *Ernesto Varela* to describe its criticisms of Brazilian politics and economy at the time. On the contrary, if we have done so, it is because we understand how this video, which has become a historical and political record, is current, having been produced by a group of videomakers who, although their weapons were irony and dissimulation, demonstrated engagement and activism.

The legacy

It is noteworthy that from the bibliographical review and as we advance in the research, we find few studies about the production of independent Brazilian video relating the decade of 1980 to the history of video art in the country. And even less, studies on the aesthetics of *Olhar Eletrônico* videos and their relation to the art of video.

Yes, there is a record of the presence of the independent producers, especially those from São Paulo, and these include *Olhar Eletrônico*, in the studies by Arlindo Machado, Christine Mello and Yvana Fechine, which are our main sources. However, we do not find more in-depth research on the work done by these artists-communicators, their aesthetics and/or creation process and their political engagement, whose content underscores their political-cultural verve within the video art scene both in Brazil and in the world.

Many of the productions of these groups are only cited or commented, but not analyzed from the point of view of the audiovisual language and its political intervention in the commercial television of the time, except to relate the production of videomakers with the festivals that arose at the time.

Some of the most potent elements of the audiovisual production of the 1980s were present in the productions of *Olhar Eletrônico*. Aspects such as collective creation, alternative formats and experimental aesthetics, added to the dynamic and hybrid audiovisual language that combined the documentary with the experimental, and even the public empowerment, can be described to make us understand how we came to the use of video as a vehicle for activism and political action, now so fashionable in social networks.

In productions like *Ernesto Varela*, TV is surrounded by experimentalism and engagement that springs from the critical stance and apparent naivety that unfold in potent articulations of the television medium.

As we have seen in the *Ernesto Varela* episodes analyzed in this article, when he approaches the people in the streets, on the beach, inside the plane, inside a session in the National Congress or even through a question to a security or police officer, his attitude reveals two unique traits of video art: empathy and confrontation, because he criticizes a situation while at the same time he gives voice to the people. He invites the spectator to speak on the microphone in a time of great tension and clenched fists, when the Military Dictatorship was in check and democracy shouted for freedom, voice and expression, and the TV was the closest vehicle for such a call. Similarly, the experimentalism of art, the language most explored by these artists-communicators. *Ernesto Varela* called the public to reflect on political, economic and cultural issues operating an artistic language format that can be observed today in the phenomenon of activism, engaged or activist art, through irony and political criticism in comedy programs within a communication system.

Our objective has always been to broaden our understanding of these videographic collectives and not just to mention the works of. What we sought was to approach critically the experiences of the 1980s and the way they integrated into television without creative concessions. Current generations are often unaware of the pioneers of aesthetic experiences involving art and humor, for example, in social networks and/or commercial television, that emerged with the critical positioning of video artists from the 1970s and 1980s in Brazil and the world.

Today we can consider that what the guys of *Olhar Eletrônico* did with *Ernesto Varela* and his sarcasm full of acid criticism of the political and economic systems, or even the generous manner in which they gave voice to the public in creative and relaxed dialogues to get their testimony of customs, habits and cultural traits, is already incorporated and has become a model of humor or even part of the style of current programs in the Brazilian media.

In the 1980s, and even today, irreverence, irony and sarcasm were the weapons with which independent producers made engaged art and took their criticism to the Brazilian television system, from a direct aesthetic and guerrilla, causing strangeness and rupture of Brazilian commercial TV's schedule models. So much so that most of the innovations and experiments performed by *Olhar Eletrônico* were not harnessed by television, which quickly excluded or absorbed them, massifying many of the aesthetic and experimental issues proposed at the time. In fact, we argue that this is a sign of the innovation and discomfort that only artistic productions provoke.

It has historically been known that artists from different countries promoted experiments with the television medium between the 1970s and 1980s, such as the

experience of North American artist Peter d'Agostino, who produced *Teletapes* in 1981 at the Television Laboratory at WNET (WNET), incorporating card games, visual tricks and a wide variety of television effects, to confront the viewer with “experiential reality” and “television reality” (RUSH, 2006, p. 86). Such a production turned out to be a critique and analysis of the influence of television in everyday life and culture, exploring the content and structure of time of open TV.

In this context, an essential feature of the second generation of the Brazilian video is revealed in the action of independent producers and their respective videomakers, artists and communicators, who wanted to make television in Brazil in the 1980s, since for them, and also for artists from around the world, everything was television, any format or content could turn out to be television, in which creativity and challenging and intelligent criticism could participate in the televisual experience.

For that, they achieved artistically and collectively by engaging and inserting in the television system for at least one or two decades, which meant to know from within the mechanisms of the system or the ecology of the televisual medium in order to promote changes from the inside, or reflect on the video medium itself. And so they did, for a short time, indeed, but they did it!

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