Dott. Manuela Corti –

manuela.corti@passiopea.net

http://www.passiopea.net

Bologna 14 – 11 – 2001

Lecture 2 – Class Notes

Vaccari's (1996) and Grey Pink's (1995) experiments, to which I participated, although different, have something in common: the collectivity of operation and group experimentation (even though each of the participants remained faithful to his/her artistic principles).

First of all, let me clarify a concept. Some time ago I was asked what I meant by video poetry. If by video poetry we mean a poetic performance read in a theatre or similar place and recorded on video, we make the same mistake as when we think that Web art is a series of pictures shown online. There is no difference, and therefore, in the first case, I must speak of poetry shown on video, not video poetry. This distinction is very important, and I will never tire of repeating it. In the specific case, video poetry is poetry that can be communicated only with the aid of video, since the video becomes the natural support and habitat for reading that poem.

Let's go back to the example of the two works I was part of, coordinated by Vaccari and Grey Pink. The scenario proposed by Franco Vaccari was this: each invited artist was supposed to take a picture of his/her artist studio (the operational place) and send it to Vaccari who, as an example and project cover, placed online the studio of an English painter/poet, I believe from the Eighteen hundreds. The final result was a series of pictures of the many artists' ateliers and in this sense, although from a different starting point than a classical photograph of painting and sculpture, the result was not very different. What was different, though, was the *work in progress* aspect of the whole operation. It was, as I mentioned before, a collective work, a group work which was one of the first to point out the difference in making art on the Web. The work was later transferred to CD ROM. I must say that Web artists nowadays do not like CD ROM's

very much any more, because they are presumed to contain a finished work, and therefore a CD ROM should be used, at most, as a support of the online work so as not to create breaks in the work. Apart from that, however, Vaccari's work, which later became a show as well, gave the opportunity to those who did not know the Web or were approaching it with caution to see a work that had followed an opposite path: from the Web room to the exhibition room. I must add that Vaccari had always shown a great predisposition for considering art a crowd event. From serial photos of trucks shot all over Italy to bar codes, to photographs taken in booths that can be found in any street (the cheapest kind of I.D. photos), up to the bar-living-room, where one talks about the death penalty, Silvia Baraldini, and drinks a cup of espresso. I had fun working with him: Vaccari's need was always a need to point out the crowd, the songs of multitudes. Therefore, he is very close to seeing the Web under this light. It is important that I point this factor out, because those who did, and are doing, Web art possess a kind of calling for crowds, even though they are experiencing this vocation all by themselves. In the course of my lectures I will show, among other things, how Web art today is moving towards an emotional and playful approach, and how these emotions and games can be experienced by those who devote themselves to them.

Going back to Vaccari's project, I showed in my picture my computers and my monitors, after cleaning them well. After all, my operational place was my habitat; let us say the environment which, by chance, also contained a room.

Let's now examine the project created by Grey Pink. The occasion for the work was a request by Deutsche Telekom for designing a calendar. Joop Grey Pink imagined six meridians, crossing a great many countries. He developed a work for each of the meridians, and for each work he contacted five artists per meridian. Each artist, starting from Grey Pink's six different proposals for each meridian, had to manipulate the work of the previous artist. A catalog was made of the thirty works, while a total of twelve works ended up in the calendar: the first one, by Grey Pink, and the last manipulation. The artists were not allowed to erase any work done by previous ones; it was also forbidden to add one's name to one's contribution. The collectivity of the work (evident here too) is very different from the kind proposed by Vaccari. In his case there was a picture, in Grey Pink's case the initial work had to be modified. It is also interesting to

notice the difference in the colors chosen by the artists during their manipulations, and the representational sense of different figures. In addition, Grey Pink had inserted, with the initial work, a famous quotation that was supposed to inspire the artists, according to their culture and/or sensitivity. The work lasted for three months and, as I remember, it was not easy for Grey Pink to find so many artists in such a short time, and then to put everything together.

Roughly, one could say that, in those years, Web work had reached the stage of a multiple-hand intervention.

I think that group work was, even then, already coded in the DNA of the Web, as it is for theater and cinema. The difference was in the fact that, with the exception of a few isolated cases, artists were working alone. I also think that the study of new technical possibilities imbued each work with a state of suspension or anxiety, waiting for how much each individual's capabilities could improve if only he/she had better instruments to use.

To further prove what I am saying, I will give you two examples, which I find very significant. These I found again on the net after a few years, with different possibilities to approach them.

The first example refers to an important multimedia art show held in Hamburg in 1993, by the title of "Mediale". The spirit of that exhibition, under certain aspects, was reminiscent of the experiments in *Fluxus*. The difference was that multimediality was sought by means of instruments of new technology. What I thought was incredible and fascinating was, first of all, the financial support offered to the various laboratories, where events were held continuously. In that occasion I worked with microchips that sensed the presence of people in the dark, and gave their possible direction. To each motion corresponded musical notes whose harmonies reflected the fluidity of movement of a person's walk. In relation to this example, I remember that in Paris, at IRCAM, a program was developed, I'm saying three or four years ago, which translated into music notation and sound, rather into polyphony, any noise that was fed into it. As if the short circuit in "Mediale" had suddenly proposed or asked questions to which it was unavoidable to give answers. In the occasion of "Mediale" I also got in touch with

programmers who, already at that time, were trying to tweak the few existing programs into other forms or solutions, a sort of hackers before their time.

As a second example I would like to cite my experience during a one-person show I had in Paris in 1995 at the Donguy gallery, and in Bologna in 1998 at the "Interno e dum dum" gallery. The show was entitled "Les lamentations du mur". Inside a closed and dark room I set a video projecting towards the ceiling. In this video I showed rocks becoming wet, as after a thunderstorm. Then there was a noise suggesting that water was rapidly streaming away, and the rocks became dry for an instant. At the same time, from a hose I had placed around the area where the video was shown, water started dripping all over the room. In order to get into the room, visitors had to take partially transparent umbrellas, which I had someone make especially for this event. The only possibility the visitors had to watch the video and not get wet, was through the umbrella's transparent segments. The situation that was created had a hallucinatory character. Viewers were well aware of watching a video, and they also knew that the water was coming from a hose, but the simultaneous occurrence of the two events, together with the noise coming from the fake raindrops striking the umbrellas, mixed with rain sounds, real but recorded, made the room not quite surreal, but endowed with false reality and truthful effects.

When in 1998 I repeated this event at the "Interno e dum dum" gallery, I also added a sort of trip around the city on the Web. It was a trip to rediscover known places and look for the Rain House (this was the name I gave to the Web project). The similarities between the Web work that I was showing in the gallery and the damp environment that had been created by the fake but plentiful rain caused many visitors to open their umbrellas also outside the exhibit, as if they were convinced they were in the midst of a constant thunderstorm.

In the six years that followed my first Parisian exhibition, I noticed with satisfaction that the experiment of rain and umbrellas had been accepted both in institutional exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale and (lastly, as far as I know) by Web artists producing interactive art projects for big international contests, such as in Linz. In the latter case, through many sensors, and here I am reminded of "Mediale", the sound of rain tapping on umbrellas is synthesized and offered as different harmonies. And so it also happens that someone hears fake rain tap on the umbrella.