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THE ARTIST'S ROLES IN LITHUANIAN VIDEO ART IN 1990-2003

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The very first video art pieces appeared in Lithuania only around 1989. In early 1990s there were only two or three video cameras in Vilnius that were shared between artists who were keen to experiment with a new medium, and maybe one or two more in other places of Lithuania. However, by the middle of the decade, more and more painters, sculptors, graphic artists turned to making video art, and ultimately it became the most popular medium in contemporary Lithuanian art. In general, the decade was characterized by an intense search for new areas in art, as if rushing through western contemporary art history and trying all possible means of expression. Nevertheless, for most Lithuanian artists mechanical or digital reproduction turned out to be the most appropriate form for artistic activity. This can be explained by several reasons:

- 1) better accessibility of cameras;
- 2) importance of challenging the boundaries between artistic and non-artistic production (e.g. between moving images in art / in mass media and advertising / in home movies);
- 3) devaluation of the concepts of individual style and art as handicraft;

4) understanding of art as an instrument for research and turning its attention closer to the phenomena of reality.

Even in this narrow field artists use cameras in very different ways, consciously or unconsciously applying different strategies and approaches. In this essay I aim at determining what are the forms and functions that the figure of the author acquires in Lithuanian video art in the 1990s and how this reflects differing conceptions of the subject, of the artist's identity and of attitudes towards representation. These questions are tackled by invoking some contemporary theories centered on the issue of the subject. After doing research into numerous video works of the 1990s I have identified 6 different roles/strategies of the author and I have entitled them metaphorically: Narcissus, Challenger of Senses, Actor, Ethnographer, Contemplator and Dialogist. Most often artists use different strategies in their different works and only in exceptional cases one of these metaphors fits an artist as an accurate label. Nevertheless, the suggested analysis provides a lot of information about contemporary art in Lithuania today.

NARCISSUS

Analyzing early video works created in isolated situations with the only participant, the artist himself, Rosalinda Krauss claimed that the main driving force of video art was narcissism, because the work related to the specific psychological state of the artist, who communicated only with his double in the monitor (Krauss XXXX: 51). (The analysis was later criticized because of overlooking how important the relations of artists/viewers and provocations of audience were in those works.¹) Yet no matter how accurate or inaccurate was Krauss' analysis, the term narcissism in its broader sense is still applicable and useful while talking about video art. It is also used in cultural studies and sociological theory to characterize the whole 20th century. For example, according to sociologist Anthony Giddens "narcissism" best describes late modernity in its incessant search of personal identity, its concern with mostly personal matters, such as one's own perfection and authenticity (Giddens 1991: 171). I use the term narcissism to categorize those video works, where the artist observes himself, his own body, makes self-analysis, uses images to articulate and represent what he is, and thus to establish his existence.

As the relation between an image and a body is central to narcissistic art, one is prompted to invoke the Lacanian "mirror stage" theory. The influential theory of Jacques Lacan maintains that mirror identification is

¹ For example in Wagner Anne M. "Performance, Video and the Rhetoric of Presence", *October* 91, Winter 2000.

crucial to the formation of the “I” as a unity,² but it also foregrounds the essential split in the subject, because his wholeness is given to him only from the outside, by the gaze of the Other (Lacan 1977: 4). The unity of the “I” is never stable, it has to be recreated again and again. Lacan’s theory explains why self-representation is so important and why so many video artists create artworks centered on themselves. Yet one has to say that the tension between the “I” and its image is even more evident in contemporary Lithuanian photography. In Lithuanian video art self-reflective works usually leave the problem of self-image behind, by concentrating on other problems of the “I”. Narcissus is interested in personal identity in general, which, according to Giddens, is something that has to be constantly created and sustained in self-reflective activity – the “I” that is integrated into the personal biography, the “I” that is used by person in changing contexts (Giddens 1991: 76). The creation of an integral story about oneself is what helps the person to understand and present himself to the others. Lithuanian video art has a few significant diary/autobiographic works. One of the earliest is Karla Gruodis’ video “Unnamable Memories” (1995), a traumatic return to her childhood, an attempt to realise the dream that she gave up in the past – to become a ballet dancer in spite of her age, in spite of her bodily pain. This attempt means patching the holes of her biographic project. “Stenograms” (2001) of Evaldas Jansas combines the fragments of textual and visual diaries, reflections upon himself and his surroundings. Gintaras Makarevičius’ video piece “River” (1999) shows the artist sitting by the river, eating, wading and reading his diary, remembering painful episodes of his life. The artist exposes his deepest crises, despair, and failings to control his own life. The camera gives him the possibility of a therapeutic publicity through the transformation of these experiences into an image, an artistic reality distanced from the artist. Both Jansas and Makarevičius share the concept of “lifelike art” (or “art cum life”), where art and life are inter-related and inseparable, where art plays an important role in the process of constructing one’s “I”. Lithuanian art critic Erika Grigoravičienė says that their self-exposing works are grounded on the principle of subversive therapy, when weakness is being turned into advantage (Grigoravičienė 2001: 70). Jansas films himself as a victim or as a passive, obedient citizen also in his other works: “I Do not Fit the Bridle” (2000) and “Beurocratic Trilogy” (2001). Paradoxically, this overtly passive position of the artist articulates a suggestive critical message,

² Paul Valery states that there are three bodies. The first body or *My body* is the experienced body, which does not know what is the body as a whole, as a form, it is “a strange, assymetrical space in which distances are exceptional relations. <...> My right hand is generally unaware of my left. To take one hand in to the other is to take hold of an object that is *not-I*.” The *Second body* is the one which others see – an image, a portrait. The *Third body* has unity only in thought, as a combination of its anatomical parts and pieces. (Valery 1990: 399).

and this is a posture typical of the artistic anti-hero of the second half of the 1990s. Camera becomes not only an instrument for the formulation of his own history, but also a weapon against others, against the anonyms that are on the side of discipline and control. The personal attitude of Jansas and Makarevičius might be described by the term “beyond the biographic project”, which is formulated by Latvian art critic Kaspars Vanags and means the conscious attitude of a loser. Both artists recoil from active gestures, do not analyse their aims, do not think of themselves in the future. Their passive self-reflection is directed only to the failures of the past or to the momentary present. Vanags claims that this is not an expression of personal failure, but rather a critique of the consumer society with its imperative of personal success (Vanags 2000: 41).

Conscious passivity of the artist and the new possibilities granted by video camera lead to a new type of auto-portrait, which is indirect, phenomenological and does not show the image of the artist. Preconditions for such a portrait have been formulated in the cinematographic conception of Jean-Luc Godard (he started creating self-researching films around 1994). According to Godard, the autoportrait of an artist must show not the artist himself, but rather what he perceives, receives, notices; it leads to the formulation of the concept of *artist-as-receiver*. Godard uses Heidegger's understanding of being, which comes from the German language itself: instead of “there is” Germans say, “it is given” (“es gibt”). This means that the artist is not really a creator, but rather the site where words and visual forms install themselves. Kaja Silverman says: “Godard suggests <...> that the seen precedes the seer – that our perceptions are gifts from elsewhere. Extraordinarily, he also maintains that the seer himself emerges out of what he sees: that the visible worlds not only gives *itself* to him, but gives *him* to himself” (Silverman 2001: 29).

The role of the artist-as-receiver is exceptionally passive, it seems as though the artist does nothing at all, merely lets the camera follow the direction of his look. This strategy is characteristic to many of Jansas' works, where absolute naturalism of filming is legitimated – the camera accepts and expresses all the artist's movements, swings and hand-shakings. His video “The Way Home” (2000) is a real phenomenological auto-portrait, which shows the drunk artist going out of a bar back home. The camera itself creates an expressive portrait of its master without filming him as the camera's rapid movements, strange positions and darkness in which it is sometimes left reveal the physical state of the artist. The surroundings accidentally caught by the lens and automatically recorded sounds tell about his favorite places and companies he spends time with. Phenomenological auto-portrait is also created in Laura Stasiulytė's work “Everyday Speech” (2000), where she

films her day starting from the walk with a dog and ending with shopping. The camera shows what she sees herself (always at the level of her eyes as if becoming the substitute for them). But she also makes a step from narcissistic self-reflection to inter-subjectivity, as the film's soundtrack is her everyday speech sung by a little boy in plainsong manner. Her self-reflection here is supplemented by the Other, who gives new intonations and connotations to her own words and her own routine.

According to Sigmund Freud, narcissism is the state of ego-libido, to which everybody returns each night while sleeping. The self-representation through ego-libido is necessary if one wants to be able to approach the Other and be capable of object-libido, interpersonal relations and love (Freud 1994: 414). Narcissistic auto-portraits reveal the closest link between art and life; Narcissus often uses art as auto-therapeutic media.

CHALLENGER OF SENSES

The Challenger of Senses belongs to the tradition of performance and body-art; he is concentrated on his bodily sensations, seeks extraordinary experiences and arouses psycho-physical reactions of viewers. He aims at reaching more authentic states of the subject and experiencing what happens to the rationally and socially constructed "I" when it finds itself in extreme situations. This strategy exploits the materiality of body, various conditions of trance, phenomena of illness and madness, pathologies, shamanistic practices etc. – anything that denies rationality, language, social order and representation itself. But this search for authenticity does not necessarily mean that there is a belief in a substantial essence, to be reached by pulling off the veil of ideology, language, power, social structures etc. Quite often this strategy leads to the condition of non-identity, where the subject is transitional, where the "I" disappears in unarticulated, unspoken experiences.

Post-structuralist theories deny the possibility of going beyond representation, beyond the Symbolic. Jacques Lacan affirms the power of language, which is our unconsciousness, over the subject, but he also claims that in some aspects the pre-Symbolic also participates in the formation of the subject's identity. The pre-Symbolic is also called the Real, which is the unrepresented reality and is mostly related to the sensual experiences of the subject. As philosopher Audronė Žukauskaitė puts it: "the subject can be interpreted insofar as he is symbolized in the system of significations <...>, but the act of symbolizing can never be total, because it rejects or denies some unrepresented residual. This residual, though rejected in the subject's formation process, never ceases to determine the subject" (Žukauskaitė 2001: 74). This pre-linguistic residual is a determining negativity interpreted in terms

of materiality, corporeality, and sexuality. The breakthrough of the Real in the subject manifests itself in disorders of speech, loss of self-identity, mental derangement. The post-modern thought kills the normal, healthy and self-sufficient subject and poses instead a 'schizo', a totally free individual, deconstructed subject, who is not afraid to go insane anymore. But The Challenger of Senses is not destroyed by the Real, nor does he want to go mad for the sake of freedom. He rationally builds the frame of his work and has at least a hypothesis of what will happen during the event he has planned. This is a self-conscious throwing of self into the environment close to the Lacanian Real for the sake of reversing and recreating the order enforced by the Symbolic. The Challengers of Senses seek the Dionysic subjectivity, "the madness with the possibility to go back, transgression pierced with eroticism and fear of death" (Ališanka 2001: 64).

Gintaras Makarevičius in his video "Position and Strategy" (1998) puts himself in absolute darkness that eliminates any possibility of spatial orientation. He blindly tries hitting the punch ball, desperately stabs at the void and gradually loses the sense of his own body limits. In the situation all the learnt subject positions lose any sense, thus fresh experience of self becomes possible.

The video performance of Evaldas Jansas "An Anthology of Meaningfulness" (2003) shows the artist, with a rope tied to one of his legs, running and painfully hitting the ground again and again as the rope stops his movement forward. It is the metaphor of a bonded person, but the bodily experience of these bonds is central for the work suggesting that comprehension of meaningfulness or meaninglessness is unreal until the body itself does experience it in categories of pain, not words.

In her piece "To Overcome Shame" (2002) Eglė Rakauskaitė transforms language into the plangent scream. It is the scream of the body, which is marginalised and denied by the Symbolic. In the description of her work Rakauskaitė declares the rehabilitating attitude towards pathology: "they say that modernisation and industrialisation made us psychically insensible. While evaluating psychic disorders skin-deep we can determine disbalances of mind expressed in exterior and behavior. We have to be careful asserting some behavior as pathological only because we ourselves are too silly to understand its logic ..." (Jablonskienė 2002). The author challenges rationality equating it with narrowness and searches for repressed truths revealed in pathologies. Shame expresses concern about inadequacy to some social norm or image of the self. The artist overcomes it by screaming out the pre-social depth, which is probably not her personal depth, but the depth of human nature common to all subjects. The theme of scream is repeated also in Jurga Barilaitė's works.

The antirational strategy and search for authenticity by the Challenger of Senses is closely related to the feminist critique of visibility. Visibility, which connotes the oppositions of subject and object, the observer and the observed, clear limits and distance, is challenged by tactility. The traditional patriarchal subject is perceived as having clear, solid, Apollonic form, while the woman is associated with formlessness, liquidity and abjectness – aspects that are impossible to perceive with the ‘objective’, rational sense of vision. The woman’s comparison to liquids is partly related to her biological specificity, but it also condemns her to the imprint of corporeality and non-identity: “Body fluids attest to the permeability of the body, its necessary dependence on an outside, its liability to collapse into this outside (this is what death implies), to the perilous divisions between the body’s inside and outside. <...> They attest to a certain irreducible ‘dirt’ or disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable that permeates, lurks, lingers, and at times leaks out of the body, a testimony of the fraudulence or impossibility of the ‘clean’ and ‘proper’” (Grosz 1994: 194). According to Luce Irigaray, the reason for the disfavor of liquids is the fact that they are culturally unrepresented in the existing ontological models, which subordinate everything to entity, integrity, solidity and self-identity (Grosz 1994: 135).

In some of Eglė Rakauskaitė’s works liquids become the main challengers of senses. In video performances “In Honey” (1996) and “In Fat” (1998) the artist’s body is dipped into thick sticky material, which not only wreathes her body, but also seeps into it through her skin eliminating boundaries between inside and outside, and because of difficulty to breathe through small pipe turns the performance into a test on survival. Liquid destroys definite subjectivity and a body as a visually perceived form (as warm fat gets cold, it hides the body from our eyes and buries it). Experiences with liquids also dominate Karla Gruodis’ video “X Beats Per Minute” (1996), where the images of her pregnant body in water interchange with images from echoscope. Liquids, matter, disgust, mother’s body, prenatal or posthumous conditions are discussed in the theory of the abject formulated by Julia Kristeva. “In Honey” imitates the return to a womb, while “In Fat” has the liquid material gradually turning into a solid coffin. These are abject or liminal states beyond the opposition of subject/object and beyond any social descriptions. The subject is constructed socially through repression of the abject. Some contemporary theories turn to the zone of disgust, dirt and horror regarding it as a locus for the recreation of the traditional subject. Disgust is the result of Apollonic culture, it is fear to lose clear boundaries that builds the order, but Dionysic postmodern imagination tries to incorporate everything that exists and scorns visual sublimation.

Many of Evaldas Jansas' video works show a living, suffering body and abject matter. In a three-cycle work "Image as Auto-Portrait" (2000) he tries to get closer to 'authentic' reality through illness and the abject. The first part shows a true-life situation where his body is attacked by a fit of epilepsy. In the second part he transfuses his blood from one part of his body to another as if aiming to experience the usually insentient circulation of blood, which makes us alive, but usually arouses our disgust or fear of death. In the third part the artists urinates into plastic cup and voids into a plastic bag, confronting something terribly ugly coming out of him. It is the conscious act of self-cleaning, which does not deny the experiences of the dirty sphere, but reflects the influence of waste on the subject as a system. Jansas deliberately regresses to the organic and stresses the narrowness of cultural subject defined by sterility.

While Narcissus uses camera as an instrument for self-articulation, Challenger of Senses needs the apparatus only to document what is hardly representable – the bodily experiences.

ACTOR

Actor is an artist, who while filming himself in some specific role takes a deconstructive position. This is a strategy, which also prolongs the tradition of performance, but rather than searching for authentic experiences it means playing with non-identity, wearing different roles in order to declare critical positions. Actor's strategy is the reaction to the factors of ideology, power, unconsciousness etc. that destroy the notion of classical, humanist subject. In postmodern theories the subject is described in negative terms (Michel Foucault and Judith Butler relate "subject" to "subjection"). Postmodern theories of the subject are exhaustively analysed in the works of Lithuanian philosopher Audronė Žukauskaitė, who links together arguments of deconstruction, psychoanalysis and critique of ideology. In those theories the subject is said to be incapable to determine either the meaning of his affirmations, or his psychic of social identity: "all these disciplines share the critique of integral and self-identical subject – <...> the notion of subject is related not to the inner thought, but to the external textual, psychic of social actions" (Žukauskaitė 2001: 9). In the deconstruction theory, the subject is determined by coincidental junctions of meanings in the sets of significant; in psychoanalysis, by desire and the unconscious Other; in critique of ideology, by various forms of power. According to Louis Althusser, ideology is effective as long as it is unseen, unrecognised as compulsion and is regarded as a natural, 'innate' order or a person's own choice. The appearance of Actor means that ideology has lost the appearance of 'natural

order' and that subject positions proposed by it are not conceived as innate. The Actor is always ambiguous: though he fulfills his role, he knows he is acting, which enables him to appear in the meta-position to ideology. He accepts the state of non-identity as self-identity; this strategy is subversive and allows him at least not to become the locus of enforced identity.³ While *performing* somebody (a woman, a father, an artist, a tourist), he refuses to simply *be* somebody, equally criticising himself, the role he plays and the system, which creates that role.

Actor's strategy is the key to Dainius Liškevičius video-performance "30 Times" (1995). Wearing a black suit and black sunglasses suggests the artificiality of his symbolic action (he crawls around the carpet counter-clockwise as if going back in time) and refers to the performativity of any subject's actions. In the video "Don't Beat Me" (1999) the artist couple Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas divide between the roles of the observer and the observed, the punisher and the victim. In the first episode we see the man writhing on the floor, beaten with a belt and kicked by a woman's foot. The camera in woman's hands captures and fragments the man's body; it is also the instrument of punishment. In the second episode the observed man-victim attacks the observer-viewer. With this work the artist couple analyses, illustrates and reverses panoptical mechanisms as well as traditional gender roles.

The critique of dominant gender order is present in several works of another artist couple Aida Čeponytė and Valdas Ozarinskas: in the video installation "Red" (1997) and video piece "A Man and a Woman" (1999). In the latter the artists remake the love scene from Claude Lelouche's film of the same title: they impassively perform the ritual of heterosexuality in slow motion, monotonic loop. The original film proposes an interpretation of sexual stereotypes, but the video takes it to a much more extreme version.

Kristina Inčiūraitė is an artist continuously returning to the theme of femininity and gender in general. In her video "Downstairs" (2000) she embodies the bride and exploits the act of repetition, which is central to ideological subject – by repeating again and again the same role or behavior the subject comes to believe that it is natural and substantial. Since ancient times the wedding ritual is one of the most important instruments of normative control and forms of a subject's socialisation. Here the artist descends the stairs of a wedding registry office in celebratory manner four times with different bridegrooms and uses repetition to subvert the ritual instead of maintaining it.

³ Lithuanian writer Eugenijus Ališanka relates the figure of the actor (performer) to the return of dionysic element to the contemporary culture. The return of Dionysus means that identity is now understood as the illusion of Apollonic authoritarianism. The figure of the actor is a figure of dreaming author or critic, who exists and does not exist, who is split and unite at the same time (Ališanka 2001: 23).

Strategies of Actor might also be traced in those pieces, where artists themselves do not act, where other persons perform some role stressing the artificiality of a situation. For example, in Nomedas and Gediminas Urbonas' video "Karaoke" (2001) pedantic, tidy 'bank officials' sing the "Abba" hit song "Money, Money". Ironic and mocking gestures are also characteristic of the works by Academic Training Group.

Actor criticises by demonstrating the artificiality of things, copying, re-making and playing with different identities and denying their substantiality. Actor destroys illusions, but usually builds nothing on these ruins.

ETHNOGRAPHER

Hal Foster uses the term "artist-ethnographer" in contrast to Walter Benjamin's term "artist-producer." Ethnographer transforms the concern with class and capitalist exploitation into concern with race and colonial regimes, and tackles cultural/anthropologic issues rather than social ones (Foster 1996: 174). In white and culturally homogenous society of Lithuania neither race nor cultural imperialism are important, thus the term of Hal Foster is used in much wider sense here. In Lithuanian art criticism artist-ethnographers are not so much romantic revolutionaries as attentive researchers sensitive to local contexts. The research itself, no matter what is researched, is the main characteristic of Ethnographer. In this essay artists who investigate themselves or something else through themselves (through their personal experiences or performed roles) have already been named as Narcissuses, Challengers of Senses and Actors. The specific aim of Ethnographer is investigating other persons, histories, social issues etc. But these artists-researchers also differ from each other in the methodologies of observation and involvement. The relation of the researcher to his object is a very problematic question, which was given special prominence in the feminist critique of dominant visual regimes. The problem of representing the Other is also very delicate in the cases when not-white, not-heterosexual, foreigner, psychotic, abnormal persons are researched and shown. In relation to these questions I divide Lithuanian artists-researchers into three groups. The very term "ethnographer" shows that it is the most 'scientific' position, which keeps the biggest distance between the author and the character. As Jonathan Friedman puts it, "ethnography renders the Other's identity to ourselves and, via the conditions in which it is executed, back to the Other. By speaking of him, or for him, we ultimately force him to speak through our categories" (Friedman 1992: 332). In the artworks of Ethnographer the ethical problems of representation stay behind the scene, the relation between the artist and his film characters is minimal, because his aim is only to identify, name and show.

Deimantas Narkevičius presents a historical-social study of the diminishing industrial community of a small Lithuanian city Elektrėnai that was built in Soviet times and represented Soviet utopia (“Energy”, 2000). He composes the many-sided ethnographic portrait of the city. Eglė Rakauskaitė researches disparate social groups: street musicians, Vilnius’ beggars, market people. Representation as violence is analysed in video by the artists Aida Čeponytė and Valdas Ozarinskas “White” (1997), where they expose an old sick woman lying in bed. The observation lasts few hours and reveals the weakness of the Other and the cruel power of the observer. In his video “Hot” (1999) Gintaras Makarevičius shows the meeting of an ex-factory’s staff, which the artist himself initiated, aiming to document the old Soviet communication habits of the diminishing community. Ethnographic attitude is obvious in Darius Žiūra’s video “Gustoniai” (2001) showing the portraits of village people. They face the camera silently for one minute each, obviously shamefaced, feeling uneasy. Nomedas ir Gediminas Urbonas’ complex video and media installation “Transaction” (2000) is a penetrating research on questions of femininity in Lithuanian society: they exploit the knowledge of psychologists, academic discourses of humanitarians and display fragments from Lithuanian films that represent traditional roles of women-as-victims. Audrius Novickas video „V.I.P. Tour in Vilnius” (2002) uses someone else’s footage, which is in many ways similar to newsreels, and changes nothing, leaving us with this ‘objective’ document. Artūras Raila creates the compilation of archival films on Lithuanian history in “Forever Lacking and Never Quite Enough” (2001). Kristina Inčiūraitė’s video “Voices” (2002) and other videos from the cycle “Scenes” are investigations both of female self-perception and of institutions obviously in decline after the Soviet regime has changed into the state of wild capitalism.

But even in some ethnographic works one can feel the participation of artist. It reduces the distance between the author and the characters and slightly changes the situation of representation. For example the video by Evaldas Jansas “Dujis” (2001) shows radically marginal images: the process of making drugs, pricked bodies and drug taking. But the generalising voice of the author is often replaced by a woman’s private stories, and there are so many close-ups and the characters behave so naturally that the viewer feels the artist is really participating in the situation. Similar traits are typical of some of Gintaras Makarevičius’ videos. It might be called the strategy of the participating observer. Sometimes Makarevičius shows his own face as if to prove he is there *with* the characters (“Relatives”, 2000, “Pit”, 2001). His “art cum life” attitude softens the violence of representation, but the characters of his works are still easily classified by particular social categories.

Ethnographer is a socially engaged artist, archivist, publicist, who represents different social groups and their problems. This social/documentary attitude is very typical of Lithuanian video art.

CONTEMPLATOR

The term Contemplator does not describe a specifically contemporary artistic position. On the contrary, non-critical contemplation of the world is quite typical of the romantic conception of art and of the majority of Lithuanian traditional artists. Contemplator observes without analyzing, classifying and generalizing. I borrow the term Contemplator from the dialogic philosophy of Martin Buber who uses it in contrast to that of the observer (or ethnographer), who acts in search of knowledge. Buber's observer aims to memorize the observed, to note as many traits as possible, and in this way he reduces the observed into the sum of features. Contemplator, on the contrary, does not take any effort; he calmly waits for what will be given to him. Some intention exists only at the beginning, but later on everything happens by itself (Buber 1962: 150-151). The observer aims at some 'objective' knowledge, while Contemplator only wishes to be enriched by experiences of otherness, to extend the field of his perception. If it were possible to differentiate between "traditional" and "contemporary" contemplators, I would say it is the difference of attention to the object of contemplation and contemplation as an experience itself. It might be said that the latter attitude is possible only with cameras, because the experience of contemplation and recording is simultaneous. The passivity of Contemplator reduces the violence of representation, the artist's gaze accidentally stumbles upon some object in the aimless wandering of his eyes rather than depicts or represents something.

The most consistent Contemplator is Darius Žiūra. The looking itself is his method and his aim. The video "Milky Way" (2001) is a view of Vilnius' panorama monotonously twisting around. The piece "Palanga" (2000) is made out of more than 40 hours of filmed material, which illustrates the artist's mania of filming. Its montage does not offer any narrative, any hypothesis, any generalization; it is simply the document of contemplative observation or filming without any aim. A similar stance is evident in Darius Mikšys video "Focus on the Girl" (1997), where he films only faces of many different girls in the street. Even the title suggests that the aim is only to focus the lens at faces, nothing more. One could say it reminds of fetishist phallic gaze, but the object of observation is the face, which is the surface of personality (while fetishist gaze fragments and concentrates on some special parts of body). Emmanuel Levinas says that the face is exactly what resists turning the Other into an object, what constitutes the irreducible

otherness. “I wonder if one can speak of a look turned toward the face, for the look is knowledge, perception. I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical” (Levinas 1985: 85). Thus the artworks of Žiūra and Mikšys are the results of observation, which do aim neither at knowledge, nor at the expression of a particular idea. The radically anti-artistic emphasis on looking itself is evident in video installations by Linas Jablonksis “Ambience. Fembience. Shitbience.” (2002) and “Mezzo vs. National Geographic Channel” (2003). In the latter we see several hours’ recordings of the artist’s favorite television programmes. As he says, they are “without beginning and end, without meanings, without intention to say something, without artistic aspirations and any authority. To be, to look, to listen.”⁴ Such tendencies are also noticeable in the works of the younger generation. For example, Laura Garbštienė simply films a beautiful trace of the plane in the sky in the video “Trace” (2002).

The Contemplator does not really care either about the Self or about the problems of others; he is a disinterested observer of the environment. Most often he is interested only in his own experience, not in the artistic result of it.

DIALOGIST

Rephrasing Buber we might say that the passive observation of Contemplator begins and ends with himself. It is a non-communicative strategy. The Ethnographer communicates with his video characters no more than is needed for the collection of research material and its final generalization, inevitably objectifying filmed persons. By contrast, Dialogist is essentially open to relations with the Other, allows the film character to act and even to create on his own; the author sometimes nearly disappears in that relation. His works are based on the dialogical conception of an artwork (as explicated by Mikhail Bakhtin), where hierarchic relation between the subject and object is replaced by the communication between the equals. In the dialogical artwork the character talks for himself, the author lets him speak and does not take the privileged position, which might allow him make judgments and draw conclusions. The author is only the voice among other voices, the medium, through which the character can speak (Bakhtin 1994: 270). Video media are very suitable for establishing the independence and autonomy of characters. In the dialogic artwork it is much more important *to listen* rather than to see. In Lithuanian videos of late 1990s characters speak much more than before, there are many interview works and sometimes the visual part of works is reduced to a minimum.

⁴ From the archive of the exhibition “Parallel progressions 3: etc.” held in the Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, 2002-2003.

The content of “The Legend Coming True” (1999) by Deimantas Narkevičius seems to be ethnographic, as it is a research into the genocide of Jews. But in this film the main aim of the artist is to let the Jewish woman tell her story and make us listen to her. She is even not shown (not objectified), but acts as an independent, individual, live voice. The artist illustrates her story by subtly filming landscapes or leaves the viewers with absolute darkness, to concentrate only on listening.

Dialogical artworks are created when the author directly communicates with the characters, whose individual experiences inevitably influence him. Mikhail Bakhtin says that dialogue can turn against any of its participants at any time. Alfonso Lingis concurs: “To set oneself forth as a subject of discourse is to expose oneself to being contested and discredited” (Lingis 1994: 87). Very often the artist does not hide his participation in the dialogue, leaving his image, questions, laughter, remarks after montage. In his video “Mania: Wishes” (1997-1998) Jansas asks his friends to wish him something on the occasion of Christmas and New Year. He finds out how others disclose themselves while at the same time revealing him: the wish demonstrates the values of the well-wisher, but is also formulated having in mind what the other person might want. The interview method is vital to Irma Stanaitytė (“Privacy” (1999), “Interventions”, 2001).

“The Father’s Film” (without date) by Artūras Raila is about the relation of father and son, with the relation itself being the main theme. In comparison with the scientifically ethnographic or the distanced contemplative observation the look radically changes its violent, appropriating nature; here it is identical to care as the father’s camera follows the little boy’s journey through the crowd with concern and pride.

Dialogist often raises fundamental, existential questions. In his work “Body-Soul: Each in Other” (2000) Evaldas Jansas provokes other people to explain how they relate themselves to the categories of body and soul. He finds really extraordinary answers and stories, thus a polyphonic space of dialogue is created, which expands the artist’s own understanding. Video by Eglė Rakauskaitė “Other Breath” (2001) shows old people who talk about and evaluate their own lives, analyze their relation towards age and towards approaching death and remember the most difficult experiences they have passed through.

Sometimes Dialogist not only encourages characters to speak, as the dialogic situation can also be expressed in bodily relations. In the contemporary ethics built on the conception of radical otherness of the Other, non-verbal connections are very important, because it is at the bodily or material level that otherness manifests itself in the strongest way. In the video by Ginataras Makarevičius “The Same Breath (Oral Interview)” (1999)

the distance between self and the other is made absolutely intimate. The characters approach the camera, open their mouths and blow hot breath. When the lens gets clear again, we see another person doing the same, including the artist himself; all the characters and the author share something from inside their bodies. The structure of video installation "Sighs" (2000) by Laura Stasiulytė is similar, but the breath of the artist (shown in one monitor) and other people (in another monitor) are synchronized so that while one blows out, another breathes in, as if sharing the same air. In the video "Counting of Plaits" (2002) Stasiulytė's hands count hundreds of plaits on her black friend's head; she does it so carefully that the friend drops off, thus expressing her full commitment and trust in the artist. The artwork helps to reduce the distance between persons and realizes the most intimate dialogue of touch.

Dialogist films the others not as members of some class, age or gender groups but as personalities. This is why the majority of such works is about issues common to all members of mankind and about the relations between persons. Dialogist constructs the initial situation, but later on many things escape his control. Dialogist thus approaches the model of artist-as-initiator, which is best expressed in other media than video (he offers the idea and gives it for others to realize). Possibly the most radical strategy of an artist-initiator in Lithuanian video art is Artūras Raila's video project "Video of Painters" where camera goes from hands to hands from one painter to another making the artwork of shared authorship.

None of these artistic characters is dominant in contemporary video works, though in the middle of the 1990s there were more Ethnographers and Dialogists. The project by Raila mentioned above may be the beginning of a new artistic role in Lithuanian video art.

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 MENININKO VAIDMENYS
 LIETUVOS VIDEO MENE 1990-2003

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje, pasitelkiant psichoanalizės, poststruktūralizmo, feminizmo ir kitas teorijas analizuojamas Lietuvos video menas. Išskiriamos ir metaforiškai įvardijamos kelios pagrindinės autorinės strategijos arba menininkų vaidmenys, atspindintys, kokios temos ir kokie reprezentacijos metodai aktualiausi jų kūryboje. „Narcizas“ filmuoja save patį, rašo video dienoraštį, mėgina kurti savo „aš“ istoriją. Narcisistiniuose darbuose labiausiai išryškėja meno ir gyvenimo sąryšis, menas suvokiamas kaip savotiška autoterapinė priemonė. „Pojūčių bandytojas“, tęsdamas performanso ir kūno meno tradicijas, sutelkia dėmesį į savo kūno potyrius, nekasdienius, kartais šokiruojančius išgyvenimus, kurie leistų perkurti socialinės tvarkos primestas nuostatas, ir siekia būsenų autentiškumo. Tuo tarpu menininkas „Aktorius“, filmuodamas save tam tikroje rolėje, užima dekonstruktoriaus poziciją – jis kritikuoja, demonstruodamas visa ko teatrališkumą ir dirbtinumą, deklaruoja savo poziciją, demaskuoja, griauna iliuzijas, kopijuoja, perkuria, parodijuoja. „Etnografas“ programiškai domisi kitoniškumu, antropologija, užsiima stebėjimo, tyrinėjimo, įvardijimo, klasifikavimo veikla. Tarp menininko ir kūrinių herojų ar vaizduojamų objektų išlaikomas akivaizdus atstumas, hierarchinis stebėtojo ir stebinčiojo santykis. „Kontempliuotojas“ taip pat stebi aplinką, kitus asmenis, tačiau jis ne analizuoja, o užsiima neklasifikuojančiu ir neapibendrinančiu žiūrėjimu, tai nekritiškas, pasyvus stebėjimas. „Komunikatoriaus“ darbai atsiranda, kuomet menininkas atsiveria dialogui - lygiaverčiam santykiui tarp autoriaus ir jo filmo herojų, kai filmo herojams leidžiama patiems kalbėti už save, o autorius siekia neprimesti savo pozicijos, maksimaliai sumažinti vaizdavimo prievartą. „Komunikatorius“ inicijuoja bendravimo situaciją, tačiau toliau jau daug kas yra ne jo valioje, taigi, jis savotiškai dalijasi autoryste su video darbo veikėjais.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: videomenas, autorinės strategijos, menininkas-narcizas, menininkas-pojūčių bandytojas, menininkas-aktorius, menininkas-etnografas, menininkas-kontempliuotojas, menininkas-komunikatorius.