

Interview of Dieter Meier

The interview took place in summer 2023. The questions were asked by François Bovier and Stéphanie Serra via e-mail, in English.

Beginnings: first tests, first experiences, first works

_ When did you start to get interested in video?

I started making short film (16mm) around 1967 that were shown on several festivals: Art Film Festival ICA, London 1969; 23rd Festival d'Avignon 1969; Aktionsraum 1, Munich 1969; Quinzaine des réalisateurs, Cannes 1969; Short Film Festival Oberhausen 1970 ; Tokio Film Festival, Tokio 1971; Film Festival Cultural Program of the Olympic Games, Munich 1972; Experimenta 5 (Competition), Knokke 1974; Cinema sperimentale europeo, Genova 1979.

My first video «One Minute» was a live broadcast on Swiss German TV on March 19, 1969. During a news program, the screen remained black for 15 seconds, then my motionless face appeared for one minute, then the screen turned black for another 15 seconds. During the entire time, the time signal from the Neuchâtel Observatory could be heard.

In July 1977 the video «Acrobatics, I – VII » (7 sequences, 26 minutes) was premiered at Galerie Baviera, Schulze & Baltensperger, Zurich. In October 1977, «Zauberspiegel» (Magic Mirror), (8 sequences, 27 minutes) was shown at the same gallery.

_ Were you interested in video as a specific medium or simply as a technical tool to record performances or other experiments?

Video was for me definitely a medium of its own. At that time, the available technology was very limited, so I preferred working with celluloid film.

_ Your first videos for Yello were realized in 1981 (*The evening is young*). Who made them and how where they produced?

I directed this video at the Rote Fabrik in Zurich, and Yello produced it.

_ How / with whom did you train or how did you learn to use video?

I liked to experiment, but had no formal training.

_ What did the video allow that could not be achieved with another medium?

Experimenting with film was unique, because you only saw the results, when the film came back from the lab.

_ Where you in contact with other artists making video in the German or the French part of Switzerland (Geneva, Lausanne, Luzern, Zurich, etc.) or abroad? Where were the dynamic places in the German part of Switzerland in the 70s' showing video? At that time, did you show video works in Festivals or Museums?

You met other artists at the few festivals that were showing short and experimental films.

Access conditions / Technical issues

_ How did you get access to the video technology in the first place: in Switzerland or in other places: art schools, museums, video shops, cultural offices?
I rented semi-professional video equipment at rental shops (uMatic format).

_ Did you acquire a portable video camera? And if so, with whom did you work?
No

Relationship to Broadcast TV

_ Did you seek access to TV studio facilities?
No

_ Do you remember if there were any experiments in TV studios at the time? Or open access to technical facilities?
I'm not aware of such experiments of facilities.

_ Were any of your works broadcasted on national TV?
"1 Minute" in 1969 (see above)

The choice of video as a specific medium or as one of several experimental tools

_ Have you ever used video as an archiving tool to performances or atelier work?
No

_ Why did you use video specifically? How does this technology relate to your work? In terms of identity, for example.
I used both video and film.

_ Has the tool of video changed your thinking about artistic practices?
Yes

Sound/Audio

_ How important was the audio track in your work? Was video, for you, directly linked to music?
Yes

_ Did you explore the potential of sound or the relationship of image to sound within your video work?
Yes

Influences

_ Have other artists (friends) influenced your switch to this technology? And more directly your practice?
Yes

_ Have other sources (newspapers, magazines, books, events, personalities, etc.) influenced your artistic practice at that time?
No

Collective

_ Could you tell us more about your work with other artists? Musicians, performers, visual artists. For example, did you make video works with Manon? Was it connected to a local artistic art scene or a specific city?

I always worked alone with my team.

The artistic scene: exhibition and performance venues (artist-run exhibition or off spaces, festivals, institutions, magazines). In connection with other places/cities?

_ How did information circulate between artists at that time? How did you hear about other artists? And whom?

I have seldom, and rather randomly met other artists.

_ Where you in contact with Urs Lüthi and David Weiss for ex.? Or other artists in Zurich or elsewhere in Switzerland?

Yes: Urs Lüthi and David Weiss were invited in the exhibition "Visualisierte Denkprozesse" by Christophe Ammann in Luzern, that I was also in.

_ Did you have a link to the French speaking part of Switzerland video scene promoted by René Berger (Jean Otth, Janos Urban, René Bauermeister, Gerald Minkoff and Muriel Oelsen, or Genevieve Calame and Jacques Guyonnet)?

No, I was rather alone at the time

_ What were the famous national or international places for the presentation or exhibition of video art?

The Museum of Modern Art, NY

Distribution

_ Could you precise us the function of P.A.P., and its link to video art?

They did show Video Art

_ Was the issue of distribution of your work important to you when you first began working with video? Off course