

Wolfgang Lorenz

The gifted Viewer

Art explains the world to people in many languages, in many media, in many ways. At first, technology and art had drifted apart, alienated and finally drawn closer again. Technology has created a new relationship between art and life, has given it a new meaning. Video art has arrived riding on television's back, mutual influence, respect and contempt had been there from the very beginnings and are now in their third decade.

And McLuhan is still right: We all have become inhabitants of the "global village". What a village this is! One can hardly make out the village for all those houses. The artists have turned into social workers – socially determined and determining beings who guide us through the "global museum". Intermedia artists have brought an intermedia-audience in their wake. What you cannot beat you'd better join. The hunters of a codify have become the hunted, the artist is hardly able to evade public embrace, art tumbles into the crevices of society. We'll have to pull ourselves together in case everything dissolves.

Among the art forms, video art remains an unloved phenomenon: from the very beginning, it has controlled an entirely new medium, nevertheless unable to declare itself publicly in the media. A useless product of electronics and volatile form – art for this very reason, but difficult to grasp. Who shows it how to whom?

While commercial broadcasting stations try to reduce our wits to some few organs, the non-profit public networks find their most gratifying part to play: they can help to explain people's lives to them. Even to their smallest audience they still remain mass media. They can afford the predilections of individuals for individuals, taken together, the few are many.

In ORF, the "Kunst-Stücke" find themselves under a lucky star like that. For years, it has been a useless series of considerable use. The weekly horror of program economists – the cost/benefit calculation – a hopeless frustration.

In "Kunst-Stücke" the people responsible declare their responsibility in an alternating cold-and-hot of disgust and lust. And they all know exactly what they are doing.

This also goes for "Videonale": For one whole week, there will be unusual images on Austrian TV and via 3SAT – on European screens every day. Media-Europe rubs its eyes in disbelief. Will this turn out all right?

It cannot but turn out right: At least four continents of our world have shelves full of fantastic videos. Never before have they been viewed in our part of the world except in workshops, studios or galleries. They have been imitated, plundered and raped, the video clips of pop-promotion have been foisted upon video like cuckoo's eggs.

The television viewer as collector with his own eyes in his own gallery of senses. Together with several hundreds of thousands he is all alone in his democracy of taste. An anti-hermetic program of volunteers for volunteers.

Video art writes a frequently worldless cultural language of the second half of our century. The electronic national libraries of the future will be filled with volumes (tapes) of this international language by which humans try to explain the world. In a "Videonale" like this, television is able to utilize its technical talent as translator. And thus educating talented audiences that react to the institution television with something more than the pessimistic raising of an occidental eyebrow.