Mirona Magearu
University of Maryland

Recovering Gianni Toti's Video-Poetry / Reading Its Video-Graphic Spaces

This article calls for a re-contextualization of Italian video-poetry performances from the 1980s within the United States digital poetry discourse. Although American scholars often acknowledge digital poetry's origins in Italian Futurism, no contemporary anthology addresses the development of this poetry in Italy from 1950s to the present. I review the works of the pioneering Italian video / digital poet Gianni Toti, and analyze how space in the video-poems *L'OrigInédite* (1994) and *Tupac Amauta* (1997) enables the coexistence of linguistic, acoustic, and chromatic registers. I argue that Toti's video-poems are performances written in a verbal-audio-visual language.

Introduction: Review of Three United States Anthologies of Digital Poetry

Electronic Literature Collection, *Media Poetry: an International Anthology*, and *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: an Archeology of Forms, 1959-1995* are three landmark anthologies of digital poetry published in the United States between 2006 and 2007. Content wise, these collections articulate the history of this genre in terms of emergence and evolution and reveal how the expressive power of poetry can be re-imagined through technology, programming, interactivity, networking, and other new media procedures. With regard to the literary legacy of this genre, one collection

underlines the connection between digital poetry and Italian Futurism[1], the avant-garde movement of the first half of twentieth century, while the other two do not. In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the present forms that digital poetry takes it is essential to reconsider Italian Futurism as a significant moment in the conceptual foundation of this genre and to re-contextualize its further evolution within the American discourse. For my specific purpose on how these United States anthologies speak of Italian digital poetry I do not adopt a chronological arrangement with regard to their presentation. Instead, my arrangement addresses the development of this poetry in Italy from 1950s to the present, and mainly of video-poetry in order to provide a global view of digital poetry outside the United States.

In 2006 *Electronic Literature Collection* (volume I) appears on the web and in CD-ROM format as the first online anthology that gathers contemporary digital writings[2]. Endowed with an intriguing, yet overwhelming visual interface, the collection displays screenshots from sixty works. The anthology situates digital poetry among genres such as drama and fiction, and defines it broadly as an intricate mix of constructions ranging from ambient poetry, concrete poetry, audio or sound poetry, kinetic poetry to procedural poetry, codeworks, database poems, hypertext poems, 3D poems, and instrumental texts. *ELC* calls for this inclusive definition which breaks the conventions of traditional lyric and opens up the space for wide-reaching pieces made with diverse digital

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[1]In 1909 the Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti issues the first "Futurist Manifesto," which lays the basis for the literary movement, Italian Futurism.

[2] The collection is edited by N. Katherine Hayles, postmodern literary scholar and electronic literature critic; Nick Montfort, poet, computer scientist, and interactive fiction author; Scott Rettberg, digital culture professor; and Stephanie Strickland, digital media poet and scholar. *Electronic Literature Collection*, vol. I, http://www.eliterature.org/collection/1/.

procedures. Despite its desideratum for the inclusion of a wide array of forms, the anthology lacks international diversity. Gathering electronic literature pieces predominantly from North America, its discourse is anchored in the United States literary canon. Only fifteen out of forty-eight authors are outside North America, and they bring contributions mainly from England, Germany, and France.

In 2007 Eduardo Kac[3] publishes *Media Poetry: an International Anthology*, which represents the revised 1996 *New Media Poetry: Poetic Innovation and New Technologies*, the first international anthology of digital poetry which collects articles from worldwide poets and artists. Kac revises the initial collection given that the intellectual curiosity in the production and scholarly research of this genre increases substantially. The 2007 enhanced edition contains three core chapters: "Digital Poetry," which introduces a wide typology of new media poems based on close readings; "Multimedia Poetics," which addresses the technique of making such poems; and "Historical and Critical Perspectives," which combines historical overviews and critical insights on how such works are valuable from technological and literary viewpoints. The addendum, "Media Poetry—A Chronology from 1921 to 1996," lists important periods from the international history of this genre, without being comprehensive, as Kac concedes [4]. Vis-à-vis the origins of this new media poetry, the introduction to the first edition of *Media Poetry* concisely acknowledges

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[3] Eduardo Kac is an American artist and writer who, in 1983, creates holopoetry: poems organized in an immaterial 3D space and biopoems: poems written with or within living beings. The 1996 edition comes out «as a special issue of the journal *Visible Language* (vol. 30, n. 2)». Eduardo Kac, "Introduction" in *Media Poetry: An International Anthology*, ed. by Eduardo Kac, Intellect, Bristol, 2007, pp. 7-12.

[4] «The geographic diversity of this small sample of new media poetry—from Argentina and Brazil, to the United States, and to the Netherlands, France, Portugal and the United Kingdom (via Canada)—is a clear indication that this is an international phenomenon» . Eduardo Kac, "Introduction" cit., p. 11.

the literary contribution of Italian Futurism alongside other avant-garde movements such as Cubism, Constructivism, Dadaism, and Lettrism, without receiving any further consideration in its next edition[5]. Similarly, the addendum does not go beyond the mere recording of two names, Filippo Marinetti and Nanni Balestrini[6].

Same year 2007, Christopher T. Funkhouser[7] publishes *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: an Archeology of Forms, 1959-1995*, the first book on the history of digital poetry. Funkhouser approaches digital poetry as a subject of academic study, and creates a historical and chronological framework necessary to establish a literary canon. This is an anthology and archeology which contains an impressive genealogy of works from 1959 to 1995, an era which the scholar labels «pre-history» because it is anonymous or less known to a wide audience. In contrast to *ELC*, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry* dedicates space to more Italian poets when tracing the genealogy of digital poetry. For instance, Funkhouser contextualizes Nanni Balestrini's 1961 "Tape Mark" poems within the early computer-randomized poetry in alignment with Theo Lutz's 1959 analogous experiments at Stuttgart computer center, Germany, and with

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[5] «From the rational and anti-rational approaches of the avant-garde movements of the first half of the century (including Futurism, Cubism, Constructivism, Dadaism, and Lettrism) to the print-based directions of the second half (including Spatialism, Concretism, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E, Beat, Visual Poetry, Fluxus, and Process / Poem), experimental poetics has seen a relentless exploration of the verbal sign in 'codexspace', to use a term introduced by John Cayley», *Ivi*, p. 11.

[6] «1933—Filippo Marinetti and Pino Masnata publish the 'Manifesto della radio,' or 'La radio.' Five poetic / conceptual radio works are signed by Marinetti and Masnata, although quite possibly they were created by Masnata alone. On 24 November 1933, Fortunato Depero and Marinetti made the first Futurist transmissions over Radio Milano», «1961 The Italian poet Nanni Balestrini creates his first computer poem, 'Tape Mark I'», «1963—Balestrini creates 'Tape Mark II'» *Ivi*, pp. 273-278.

[7] Poet and scholar Christopher T. Funkhouser is Associate Professor of Humanities at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Brion Gysin's 1960 computerized poems created in the United Kingdom. As the scholar points out, unlike Lutz's and Gysin's works which rely on passages taken from only one text origin, Balestrini's program is more complex because it combines and constructs words in Italian from three different source materials[8]. In this way, Funkhouser does not only underscore Balestrini's particular contribution to this early stage but he also reintegrates a post-Futurist Italian work within a wider creative history of digital poetry. Also, in the "Visual and Kinetic Digital Poems" chapter Funkhouser devotes one paragraph to Caterina Davinio's[9] *Tecno-Poesia* assessing it as «the most useful catalog of video-poetry.»[10] He also extols Davinio's contribution to video-poetry in that she introduced new video-artists who employ works by established poets in their video-poems, but provides no further substantial examination besides a listing of few names. Although the scholar briefly summarizes the lines of continuity between avant-garde videos and video-poetry, the chapter lacks further references to Italian video-poetry tradition. In this respect, my specific analysis of the Italian pioneering video-poetry fills in this gap and calls for a re-contextualization of this form within the United States digital poetry discourse. Because I strongly believe that it is essential to enhance the sense of origins by reconsidering the significance of Italian Futurism as

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[8] «Balestrini's 'Tape Mark' poems (1961) recombine passages in Italian from three different writers. The program combines and constructs chains of words from these passages, ultimately and unavoidably portraying a scenario of nuclear disaster as a result of the inclusion of Hachiya's text ». Christopher Funkhouser, "Origination: Text Generation" in *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archeology of Forms, 1959-1995*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2007, p. 41.
[9] Caterina Davinio is an Italian computer artist, writer, and curator who has published essays about new media poetry, the novel *Color, Color* (1998), and the anthology *Techno-Poetry and Virtual Realities: History, Theory, Writing Eperiences, Visuality, and New Media*. Davinio also writes print poetry and creates video- and net-poetry.
[10] *Ivi*, p. 92.

part of the early history of digital poetry, I examine these anthologies in conjunction with Davinio's *Tecno-Poesia e realtà virtuali: storia, teoria, esperienze tra scrittura, visualità e nuovi media.*

Italian Digital Poetry, a Form of Video-Poetry

Caterina Davinio's *Tecno-Poesia* (2002) is not only a theoretical study but also a landmark anthology in Italian digital poetry. It features one hundred and thirty entries of digital media works from worldwide artists, and is also a noteworthy study in the formation of this genre. Based on a typology of works that she creates, *Tecno-Poesia* contains three core chapters: "Computer Poetry, Ipermedia e Internet", "Performance e Performer" and "Video"[11]. The anthology contains a theoretical essay, "Techno-Poetry and Virtual Realities", which overviews the evolution of this genre in Italy since 1990 and reveals Italian scholars' primary concerns of how the electronic medium changes the quality and typology of images which leads to «the hypertrophy of the image generated by technology itself.»[12] From Davinio's viewpoint, computer poetry belongs to video-poetry as the image goes through a process of elaboration, «the image [is] completely obtained by synthesis, in a progressive way going away from the referent as shot from the reality.»[13] Her constant emphasis on the digital processing of the image enables her to associate computer

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[11] Davinio explains the difficulty of a strict classification of these authors and differentiates between works made of and for the net and works born in other contexts and documented in the net. In the former category the net is intrinsic to the existence and emergence of the works because it is part of the works' making. In the latter the net is used as a medium for the presentation of the works. Caterina Davinio, *Tecno-poesia e realtà virtuali: storia, teoria, esperienze tra scrittura, visualità e nuovi media*, Editoriale Sometti, Mantova, 2002.

[12] *Ivi,* p. 265.

[13] *Ivi,* p. 275.

poetry with computer graphics and to conceive images and videos as key features of digital poetry. That is why, for Davinio, digital poetry is video-poetry.

Moreover, her own experimental video-poems focus on unconventional interactions between words, images, sounds, and digital installation, lacking any external references. Based on an abstract theme, idea, or text she creates images and words or images without words. In so doing, her images are poetry concepts. In this way, she employs digital imaging to question the mysterious substance of language, in which image is language. Also, Davinio's training in art and video-poetry explains why she approaches Balestrini's first literary attempts in electronic literature such as "Tape Mark" poems as ready-mades and not as algorithm-based poetry as Funkhouser catalogues them in *Prehistoric Digital Poetry*[14].Whereas Funkhouser's classification focuses on the technical methods of poetry-making, Davinio's approach carries on the Italian video-art tradition. As a video-poet, Davinio recognizes Gianni Toti as the father of Italian video-poetry and continues the tradition that he initiated. In the 1980s Toti creates the first video-poems using video as the appropriate medium for language exploration. Toti's video-poems unveil one of the forms that digital poetry takes within the Italian literary landscape, reflect the 1980s literary and technological poetic experimentations, and enhance the link between video-poetry and digital poetry. Furthermore, his works deserve not only legitimate literary appreciation alongside the already acknowledged visual and kinetic works but also a particular assessment vis-à-vis the wide and diverse proliferation of digital poetry works.

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[14] *Ivi*, p. 283.

Gianni Toti's Video-Poetry and «the Poetics of Transformation»

Gianni Toti is not only the first Italian video-poet but also one of the most important figures of Italian post-World War II literary avant-garde. Connoisseur of various cultural fields and endowed with multiple talents and creative skills, he professes as journalist, novelist, poet, essayist, translator, film critic, film director, editor of a magazine, publishing expert, and video-maker. It is undoubtedly impossible to describe his prominent personality in one word, condense his lifelong prolific activity to one particular genre, and associate him with only one historical period[15]. In the 2007 homage edition of Pesaro Film Festival, journalist and film critic Bruno Torri notes that despite being «a highly original artist and intellectual,» Toti «enjoyed a position that was both anomalous and prominent within the Italian cultural landscape, deserving more than one international award.»[16] Torri eulogizes especially Toti's contribution to film criticism and desideratum to reduce the gap between the advancement of "new cinema" and the theoretical backwardness of film discussions, and regretfully admits that his «pioneering activity in the field

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[15] All quotations in Italian and French will be followed by my translation in English. According to the critic Marco Maria Gazzano, «Toti appartiene a un'altra epoca—la quale tuttavia non ha storia perché non è storica ma ultra-storica; come la 'realtà' che cerca Toti è sempre un 'di là dalla realtà' fenomenica e apparente: l'epoca del rigore, del coraggio estremo per una verità intesa». Marco Maria Gazzano, *Gianni Toti. Il tempo del senso*, in *Il cinema dalla fotografia al computer*, Quattroventi, Urbino, 1999, p. 311. «Toti belongs to an era—which does not have a history because it is not historical but ultra-historical; just like the reality that Toti always looks for is 'beyond' the phenomenological and apparent reality: it is the era of the severity, of the full courage for a desired truth» (my translation).
[16] Bruno Torri, *Gianni Toti*, in *Quarantatreesima Mostra Internazionale del nuovo cinema 29 Giugno 2007*, p. 92.

of electronic art was more appreciated abroad than in Italy.»[17] In her recollection of Toti of the Pesaro Film Festival, it is video-art theorist Sandra Lischi who situates his works from the 1980s between cinema and electro-poetry explaining how, throughout his creative arc, «he does not 'pass' from one medium to another, from one kind of writing to another. [...] Literally and metaphorically, the page is one and only one: a white sheet and the blank screen, surfaces of film screenings and the monitor.»[18]

By mixing cinema, poetry text, and electronic images, Toti starts creating his first video-poems[19] in the late 1980s. In this way, he gives birth to a new genre «poetronica», and describes himself as a «poetronico» (literally, «electro-poet», his neologism)[20]. He is a video-poet conscious of the power of language, and his video-poems are explorations of and about language. As Lischi explains, Toti inserts video

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[17] *Ivi*, p. 93.

[18] Sandra Lischi, "Between cinema and electro-poetry (and beyond): The writings of Gianni Toti" in 43. Mostra Internazionale del nuovo cinema 29 Jugno 2007, p. 96.

[19] He works predominantly as an artist-in-residence at the International Center for Video Creation, at Montbéliard—Belfort, France, as well as at Montréal, Canada, and is helped by editor-directors to create the video-poems.
Here is a selective video-biography:

1991	*Monteveritazione, op.000?*	17'
1994	*Planetopolis*	126'
	L'OrigInédite	17'
1997	*Tupac Amauta*	53'20"
1998	*Acà Nada*	27'
1999	*Gramsciategui*	55'
2002	*La fine della morte del trionfo*	27'

[20] In "Poesia elettronica," Lischi differentiates between the more generic use of the term video-poetry and Toti's specific "poetronica," explaining how the former one designates either a more or less creative documentation of the poets' performances or the visualization of text in the medium of the video whereas the latter one references the combination of poetry and language articulations in video. Sandra Lischi, *"…e poetronica"* in *Visioni elettroniche. L'oltre del cinema e l'arte del video*, Marsilio, Roma, 2001, p. 71.

into literature, «He did not 'go' from literature to video, he introduced video into his 'tote bag' made of music and words, he added some poetry and sensed the combinations, the changes, the effects, the language tricks, the similarities (in diversity) in his attempts and dreams of literary, cinematographic, artistic and musical avant-gardes.»[21] Fascinated by the hidden nuances that language has in an electronic image, Toti embarks on the investigation as a new way of thinking of and through language. Through the exploration of these complexities he repositions language within a larger setting. He fuses words, sounds, and images and institutes networks among verbal, acoustic, and chromatic registers[22]. What is essential is that writing remains Toti's fundamental endeavor independent of the medium in which he creates because as Maria Marco Gazzano remarks, even in his video-poems «Toti continua a scrivere.»[23] That is to say Toti writes by substituting words with images and sounds. He explores the connotative rather than the denotative power of the words. And the connotative meaning of words stems from images and sounds. In this respect, for him, creating video-poems equals writing poems.

Toti's pioneering video-poems are distinctive creative exercises about what poetry is in a video-graphic space. That is to say his video-poetry speaks about a poetry which makes its own video-graphic space and is simultaneously an image of that space. Thus, Toti's video-poetry is both act of making and image. For him, the video-graphic space is creation and to create means to write. Thus, the space-making emerges out of the

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[21] Sandra Lischi, *Gianni Toti's think tank* (trans. Xavier Fayet). in *Hommage à Gianni Toti, 22ème manifestation internationale art video et nouveaux medias Clermont-Ferrand,* Mars 2007, p. 58.
[22] As Marco Maria Gazzano explicates, Toti discovers language in images and sounds, endows it with chromatic and acoustic nuances, and returns it to the verbal register. Marco Maria Gazzano, *Gianni Toti. Il tempo del senso* cit., p. 318.
[23] *Ivi*, p. 323. «Toti keeps writing» (my translation).

writing with this space. As a result, the video-graphic space is text in which the video-poem emerges just like the video-poem is the context in which the video-graphic space emerges. In making this space he makes his own language in which words, images, and sounds inhabit this space. Although this video-graphic space is not self-transformative because it does not transform itself, it transforms the text it contains in the sense that text borrows the visual and aural qualities of this space. In addressing Toti's video-poems, I use critic E. M. de Melo e Castro's terminology «poetics of transformation» and contend that the video-graphic space enables their performance to originate in fusions of verbal and non-verbal registers. Both registers are language registers because Toti's image is chromatic language and Toti's sound is acoustic language. Given the orchestration of these registers, his video-poems are performances written in a poetronic language which is essentially a verbal-audio-visual language. This language enables Toti either to re-construct the origin of Creation and writing anew, as he does in *L'OrigInédite*, or to make history alive in *Tupac Amauta*.

While acknowledging experimental poetry of the 1960s as a paradigm for the emergence of video-poetry, the visual poet Melo e Castro perceives video as a medium capable to produce a new form of reading pleasure[24]. It is a reading experience endowed with an aesthetic value which emerges out of «the intimate relation of space and time, the rhythm of movement and the changing colors, all pointing to a poetics of transformation and to

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[24] «Reading a video-poem is a complex experience as different temporal modalities of perception will coincide with moving and changing images. Thus we are confronted with different times and rhythms: a) the time belonging to the videopoem as one of its variables; b) the movement of our eyes, trying to find a way to read the signs; c) the time of our own decoding and understanding of what we are actually seeing». E. M. de Melo e Castro, *Videopoetry New Media: An International Anthology,* ed. By Eduardo Kac, Intellect, Bristol, 2007, p. 178.

a grammar of integration of verbal and non-verbal signs.»[25] As he further explicates, this poetics of transformation takes on multiple dimensions: phonetic from oral poetry, scriptural from written poetry, and visual from visual poetry so that during the watching of a video-poem «text (verbal and non-verbal) is not still.»[26] Thus, the significance of video-poetry as a genre consists in the conception and reliance on text as a combination of verbal and non-verbal registers simply because it engages in «the most elementary meaning of the word experience,»[27] in Melo e Castro's words. In this respect, he synthesizes the complexity of the reading process in the following lengthy hyphenated phrasing which incorporates the range of registers, «on the whole, a verbi-voco-sound-visual-color-movement complex and animated image is created calling for a total kinesthetic perception.»[28]

L'OrigInédite, «a Trans-livre» in a Video-Graphic Space

Philosophically and theoretically complex *L'OrigInédite* (*The Unseen Origin*) (1994) is a seventeen-minute video-poem which speaks about

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[25] *Ivi*, p. 177.

[26] *Ibidem.*

[27] *Ivi*, p. 176.

[28] *Ivi*, p. 179. With regard to Toti's video-poetry, Lischi beautifully synthesizes his intricate use of language, «Toti lavora con la poesia a vari livelli: il gioco del linguaggio scardinato dal significato usuale (neologismi, danze di lettere e parole, giochi con la grafia), la poesia detta dalla voce dell'autore, la citazione poetica (da Shelley a Majjakovskij a Chlébnikov) e la "poesia" nel senso della creazione di opera svincolate da un impianto tradizionale, sia esso documentario o di finzione». Sandra Lischi, *"... e poetronica"* cit., pp. 71-72. «Toti works with poetry at different levels: the game of language disturbed by the usual signification (neologisms, dances of letters and words, graphical games), poetry expressed by the author's voice, quotations (from Shelley, Majakovskj and Chlébnikov) and 'poetry' in the sense of creation of works deprived of a traditional structure, either documentary or fiction» (my translation).

scripto-genesis: the origin of Creation overlaps with the origin of writing. This correlation with the divine act of Creation situates the quest for the understanding of the history of writing among existential dilemmas. As a whole, the video-poem is a trans-livre, a virtual book written in a video-graphic space. This means that its content crosses the verbal register and draws on an audio-visual language. As Lischi notes, just like the Spanish poet Pedro Salinas, Toti believes that «only poetry can name things properly» and that «a complete reflection on the whole universe requires all kinds of arts»[29]. Although the video-poem makes use of external references to literature, music, and art it does not focus exclusively on them. Toti carefully selects and re-elaborates these references and in so doing, multiplies the layer of their perplexity[30]. As a result, *L'OrigInédite* does not seek to document the origin of Creation and writing in a different medium; instead, to create it anew. The content of the video-poem takes shape precisely in between two instances delineated by Toti's brief discourses: at the beginning when he references the Book of Creation and at the end when he speculates on the future of writing. He institutes an intriguing correlation between poetry as an act of creation and the Bible as the Book of Creation. In creating the poem in a video-graphic space Toti re-creates the origin of writing anew. And so, the poem as an act of creation is itself a book of creation, a new book which comes into existence in that it originates in a video-graphic space.

L'OrigInédite opens up with a black screen and with Toti's voice who philosophizes on how things are now on the point of disappearing and explains that only poetry can recapture their content. With regard to the beginning of the poem, Toti takes readers by surprise who, at first sight,

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[29] Sandra Lischi, *Gianni Toti's think tank* cit., p. 61.
[30] The video-poem references Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (*The Origin of the World*) (1866) which is known as a provocative painting because of the display of nudity at the time when it was painted.

do not conceive the black screen as part of the video-poem. In displaying the black screen for a while he purposefully calls attention to the video-graphic space of the poem which is complemented by his brief discourse. This three-minute statement in French translates the video-poet's unyielding belief that only poetry may convey certainty and grasp the unnoticeable nuances of things. So far, Toti explains, humans have unsuccessfully explored and exhausted all possibilities in search for an understanding of the divine act of Creation: they have read books and agonized over image interpretations. And now they face an even more intricate stage of illegibility since they confront themselves with a virtual book in which pages move away, words simply fly, and images no longer convey clear messages[31]. Following Toti's brief speech, a fragmentary motto from Paul Cézanne's statement «Tout est an traîn de disparaître: il faut se precipiter si on veut voir encore de choses...» and Gustave Courbet's 1866 painting *The Origin of the World* gain centrality for the next thirty seconds[32]. Immediately after that, an image of white dots invades the black screen for one minute and the title of the video-poem, *L'OrigInédite ou le femminitif,* appears on the screen. In his general considerations on Toti's video-art, cinema critic Jean-Paul Fargier provides a visually detailed description of the beginning of the video-poem,

Originally, you have the primary elements, the basic shapes such as the dot, the line, the page, the circle, the fold. Multiple folds, torsions, rips. Nothing remains as it formerly was. The image comes from the core of abstraction. The line undulates, the

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[31] «But what book? Is the book of the word or of the image or of the human beings? […] the trans-livres of the computer are already transparent in the silent universe» (my translation).

[32] «Everything is on the point of disappearing, so we have to speed up if we want to see things» (my translation).

dot invades the whole space, the screen crumbles, the circle distends and, all of a sudden or little by little, here comes the real. The representation takes place, the figures dance. But soon, it's all over again. The visions fade away into magma of dots, lines and colors. Abstraction strikes back and turns into the end instead of the origin[33].

Unquestionably overwhelming, the intriguing multi-layering which prefaces the title synthesizes verbal, acoustic, and chromatic registers.

«The poetics of transformation» which the video-graphic space cultivates enables the emergence of a trans-livre which holds a non-narrative configuration. As a trans-livre, *L'OrigInédite* emerges through the ongoing fusions of verbal and non-verbal registers. In fact, as a genre, Lischi spells out, video-poetry is closely related to historical avant-garde and for that reason it cultivates this emphasis on the act of seeing, on the non-narrative and non-descriptive representation as well as on the utopia of conveying a total work which gathers and supplies multiple visions[34].

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[33] Jean-Paul, Fargier, *Toti: one name, one word, one whole world*, (trans. Xavier Fayet), in *Hommage à Gianni Toti, 22ème manifestation internationale art video et nouveaux medias Clermont-Ferrand*, Mars 2007, p. 40.

[34] «Risulta subito evidente, a chi studia e analizza le reazioni videoartistiche dagli anni '60 a oggi, un forte legame non solo con la produzione, ma anche con le poetiche delle avanguardie storiche. La riflessione sull'atto stesso del vedere e l'indagine su una rappresentazione non descrittiva, non naturalistica, non narrativa, sono alla base di questo legame; ma anche le utopie sul superamento dello schermo, della visione frontale, delle modalità standardizzate di visione e l'auspicio—e la ricerca—di una polivisione o multivisione, il desiderio di opere d'arte totali, sinestetiche, vere e proprie macchine teatrali-ottiche-sonore per audiovisioni sempre più complesse». Sandra Lischi, *Immagini Oltre* in *Visioni elettroniche* cit., p. 13. «For the one who studies and examines the video-artistic works from the 1960s to present what immediately stands out is a powerful connection not only with their production but also with the poetics of the historical avant-garde. What they share is the emphasis on the act of seeing and the investigation of the non-descriptive, non-natural, non-narrative representation as well as on the utopia of moving beyond the screen, beyond the frontal vision, beyond the standard modalities of vision, and the desire to convey

Indeed, a sequential analysis of the internal structure of *L'OrigInédite* is not impossible, but simplifies its content and reduces it to a rigid formula. This explains why to explore Toti's video-poems as rigorous constructions means to disregard "the poetics of transformation" on which they rely and by implication, any further considerations on how their performance originates in the untranslatable fluidity among registers. Lischi's ongoing struggle to capture in her video *PlaneToti-Notes* the quintessence of Toti's fluid composition from *Planetopolis* further validates this consideration[35]. Although she initially plans to follow a script, she realizes that it does not render visible the "dance of gestures," as she describes the internal fluidity that particularizes Toti's video-poems suggestive of his expressive freedom of language[36].

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multiple visions and complete works of art which would synthesize and produce theatrical-visual-audio works for complex audio-visual purposes» (my translation).

[35] In 1994 Toti makes the video-poem, *Planetopolis*. In 1997, Lischi makes *PlaneToti-Notes*, a thirty-seven minute audio-video, which speaks about Toti's video-poem. In 2002 she publishes the book *Un Video al Castello: Diario di incontri e di lavoro*, in which she details all stages and struggles she faced in the making of *PlaneToti-Notes*.

[36] From the exchange between Lischi and Pierre Bongiovanni who helps her with the video-making: «fare un video su questo artista bisogna usare un linguaggio consono alle sue poetiche, un anti-linguaggio, e non il solito modello del documentario o del ritratto […] certo potrò fare un lavoro corretto, diligente, esplicativo, ma […] Toti si merita uno sforzo di linguaggio supplementare, un sovvertimento delle regole». Sandra Lischi, *Il diario*, in *Un Video al Castello* cit., p. 38. «To make a video-poem about this artist requires the use of a language appropriate to his poetics, an anti-language; and not the common documentary or portrait model […] of course I can make a correct, thorough, explanatory work, but […] Toti deserves an additional language effort, a subversion of the rules» (my translation).

And so, Lischi restarts working on the video-poem, «per questo ho cominciato questo nuovo turno di lavoro montando la 'danza dei gesti', la musica delle mani. […] Concetti che diventano forme nell'aria che diventano immagini». Sandra Lischi, *Il diario* cit., p. 40. «that is why I started everything from the beginning and assembled 'the dance of gestures', 'the music of the hands'. […] concepts which become forms in the air and which turn into images» (my translation).

From a different angle of interpretation, in an article on choreography in video space, video artist Douglas Rosenberg reads the absence of a script in video as an expression of an apparently abstract construct[37]. It is a non-narrative framework envisioned to foster a stimulating present experience. That is to say the video-graphic space calls for more engaged readers capable of making their own connections among seemingly disconnected registers. «The viewing of the video-poem always happens in the present regardless of the passage of time from its creation», Rosenberg explains, and as a result, «the medium of video requires the viewer to participate in re-imagining the nature of dance itself»[38]. Toti's predilection for minimalist syntactical links also echoes Marinetti's quest for an economy of language and the desire to leave aside any syntactical connectors among words[39]. Their absence also signals the opening of a space for readers to re-create the syntax. In fact, Philippe Dubois identifies this quality of presence that the video conveys in the precise etymology of the word "video"[40]. As a verb, "video" is the first person

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[37] Douglas Rosenberg, *Video Space: A Site for Choreography*, *Leonardo*, 33, n. 4, Aug. 2000, pp. 275-280.

[38] *Ivi*, p. 278.

[39] «By wireless imagination I mean the absolute freedom of images or analogies expressed by liberated words, without the conducting wires of syntax and without any punctuation.» Marinetti, *Futurist Sensibility and Wireless Imagination*, in *Selected Writings*, ed. by R. W. Flint, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1972.
«Syntax has always embodied a scientific and photographic perspective absolutely contrary to the laws of emotion. In words in freedom, this photographic perspective disappears and is replaced by the emotional perspective, which is multiform,» *Ibidem.*

[40] «*Video* è anche un verbo coniugato: è la prima persona singolare dell'indicativo presente del verbo vedere. In altre parole, *video* è l'atto dello sguardo nel suo costituirsi, compiendosi qui e ora (un processo), un agente all'opera (un soggetto) e un adeguamento temporale al presente storico (*io vedo*, è in diretta, non è *io ho visto*—la foto, passatista—né *io credo di* vedere—il cinema, illusionista—né io potrei vedere—l'immagine virtuale, utopista). [...] *Video*: un'immagine-atto indissociabilmente. L'immagine come sguardo o lo sguardo come immagine [...] Il video è ben il luogo di

singular of the present tense of the Latin word "vedere". Thus, "video" does not send to a past or future action; instead, it speaks of a sense of actual happening, of a "here and now" presence. When it is translated as "I see", "video" refers to the act of seeing in the process of creation and to the image that takes shape.

The video-graphic space of *L'OrigInédite* contains neither striking images nor disturbing sounds. It essentially relies on ongoing transitions from the reiterative image of white dots on a black screen and Courbet's painting to fragments of music combined with moments of silence. Toti selects simple elements, and explores them from various angles in order to disclose their intricate nuances. In this way, he calls particular attention to the image of the dot and reveals it as a mathematical symbol which designates the sphere both as a geo-shape and as a nucleus, the human primary cell. He thus captures the actual dance of the dots in playing with their chromatics: at times dots are black or white and these contrasting colors point to dualities such beginning and end, clarity and opacity. Out of the blue, from the irregular black dots which invade the white screen, one is singled out in how it struggles to change its circle-like shape and expands as a geometric shape. In so doing, Toti reveals that even a well-defined geo-shape might lack certainty. Although unpredictable, these transitions are smooth and pleasingly surprising because they convey a

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tutte le fluttuazioni.» Philippe Dubois, "Video e scrittura elettronica. La questione estetica" in "Il video è tempo?" a cura di Sandra Lischi, *Visioni elettroniche* cit., p. 8. «*Video* is a conjugated verb: it is the first person singular of the indicative present of the verb vedere. In other words, *video* is the act of looking in its moment of creation, in its here and now formation (a process), an agent of the work (a subject) and a temporal addition to the historic present (*I see* is at present. It is neither at past, *I saw*—like in a photo so that it is not backward-looking, nor *I think I see*—like in cinema, signaling an illusion, nor *I might see* like in a virtual image, marking a utopia) […] *Video*: an inseparable image-act. Image as act of looking or act of looking as image […] Video is the place of all these variations» (my translation).

sense of fluidity. Meaningfully, the dot as a sphere also operates as a frame for the entire video-poem. From this viewpoint, the last minute of *L'OrigInédite* is seminal because in a backward movement it revisits significant scenes displayed throughout the video-poem so that the work as a whole has a cyclic structure. It is a technique which translates Toti's conviction that everything, including the composition of the video-poem, has a spherical configuration.

In this trans-livre, video-art continues the creation of the world: the origin of the world combines the history of Creation mediated by a woman with that one mediated by a video-poet as artist[41]. To create such thematic connections Toti itemizes and proliferates objects with easiness. Above all, he explores the interiority and exteriority of an object perceiving it simultaneously from inside and outside. In coming close to it and distancing from it, Toti singularizes the object reducing it to its essence. In distancing from the object, he conceives it within a larger setting as well. For instance, he initially displays Courbet's painting *The Origin of the World* and zooms inside the painting; then reveals this image as a page in a book; later on multiplies this page and places it inside the image of the globe. Thus, the video-poem resembles a trans-livre in that it references all these changing locations of the image from painting to page and globe. In this way, the theme of Creation also moves beyond the field of art and religion, and becomes a universal quest. These visions from

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[41] Also, as Gazzano remarks, *L'OrigInédite*: «è un invito a ricordare che l'arte è solo una *techné* (mai una *tecnica*) della *facitura*, ovverosia della continuazione della creazione del mondo, produzione e aggiunzione di cose d'arte, di realtà nuove sulla realtà originaria». Marco Maria Gazzano, *Gianni Toti. Il tempo del senso* cit., p. 316. «It is an invitation to remember that art is essentially *techné* (and not *technique*) of making, or rather a continuation of the creation of the world, product and supplement of art things, of new forms of reality added to the actual reality» (my translation).

distance and proximity make Jean-Paul Fargier describe Toti as atomic and cosmic at the same time,

His name is just like his work. A touch of letters, one consonant, two vowels and there he is: Toti. His creations are like he is, atomic and cosmic. [...] At some point, a Totian opera always refers to the sky, to the stars and to the galaxy. The void meets the completeness of the infinite space[42].

Lischi also explains, to focus on details means to offer one vision of Toti's personality whereas to take distance means to portray a different or, at least, another perspective[43].

Video-poems such as *L'OrigInédite* validate Toti's endless quest for a totality of vision, which is difficult to grasp and explain even through the exploration of verbal and non-verbal registers. The video-graphic space enables Toti's video-poetry to be always in-between verbal, acoustic, and chromatic registers. It celebrates the exploration of these limits and therefore substantiates Melo e Castro's conviction that «poetry is always on the limits of things. On the limit of what can be said, of what can be written, of what can be seen, even of what can be thought, felt, and understood.»[44] In fact, Toti and Melo e Castro share and explore assumptions vis-à-vis humans' partial vision on things[45]. Humans live with the illusion that they can see everything but, in reality, «we see much less

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[42] Jean-Paul, Fargier, *Toti: one name, one word, one whole world* cit., pp. 39-41.

[43] Sandra Lischi, *Un Video al Castello: Diario di incontri e di lavoro* cit., pp. 48-50.

[44] E. M. de Melo e Castro, *Videopoetry*, cit., p. 174.

[45] Melo e Castro «what we actually see on the screen are images representing only a part of the total reality of the scene. However, the images of the videopoem are completely generated or transformed by electronic devices or digital functions. These images do not exist outside the apparatus that produces them and have no outside reference». E. M. de Melo e Castro, *Videopoetry* cit., p. 179.

than all that we believe to see,» ponders Toti in *Invideo*[46]. Emerging in between these registers, Toti's video-poems compel readers-viewers to think poetically[47]. In this respect, critic Marc Mercier rightfully acknowledges the impossibility of following the movement of images and of concentrating on words as well. If you try to focus on how images move, their significance disappears. If you concentrate on the ideas they express, then you miss their flow. Through fusions of verbal, acoustic, and chromatic registers Toti poeticizes language fully convinced that only a poetronic language may supply a global vision. As Lischi rationalizes, for Toti art is reduced to poetry, and so every genre: music, prose, etc. can be understood with the use of the language of poetry[48].

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[46]In the seven minute clip *Invideo*, Toti confeses his philosophy on the impossibility of defining seeing with preciseness. He challenges the common belief in God's omnipotence to observe everything rationalizing that God cannot be present simultaneously inside and outside the humankind / world in order to provide that totality of vision. Furthermore, he considers that with the word "invideo" the definition of seeing gets even more complicated because the prefix "in" has a privative connotation: it points to a lack, negation, or absence. As a result, "invideo" holds the paradox of seeing and not seeing things. Video seeks to widen humans' vision, but, in so doing, it makes them aware of this impossibility. Gianni Toti, "Invideo", http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYUzch6uMBM.

[47]«À chaque fois, je me heurte à une résistance du langage. Si je me concentre sur le mouvement des images, leurs significations m'échappent. Si je reste attentive aux idées qui s'expriment, je fige leur élan. Toute interprétation rationelle est *impoésible*, voire *imprévisible*. Toti nous 'condamne' à penser poétiquement ses images». Marc Mercier, *La liberté asympTOTIque de Gianni*, in *Bref, le magazine du court métrage*, Mai-Juin 2007, p. 16. «I always come across the resistance of language. If I concentrate on the movement of the images, their signification moves away. If I pay attention to the ideas that they express, I miss their fluidity. A logical interpretation is impossible and unpredictable. Toti asks us to think of his images poetically» (my translation).

[48] «Ancora più radicalmente, Gianni Toti, poeta e videoartista, riconduce tutta l'arte alla poesia: 'la scrittura e la musica sono completamente libere dal significato e dal contenuto codificato, fisso, in fondo morto, cadaverico […] la scrittura è musica, la musica è scrittura, la musica e la scrittura sono poesia. La prosa non esiste. È tutta

The creative potential of this video-graphic space enables words, sounds, and images to co-exist so that a verbal-audio-visual language inscribes the content of this trans-livre. Toti artistically maximizes and minimizes the effects of these registers so that moments of silence become spaces of «optical pleasure» which call attention to imagery just like abstract images are «thinking spaces» which invite readers in spaces of reflection[49]. When defining video-poetry as a personal practice Melo e Castro also explains how his interest in this genre comes from his desire to allow words gain movement, «A sense of fascination and adventure told me that the letters and signs standing still on the page could gain actual movement of their own. The words and the letters could at least be free, creating their own space.»[50] From his viewpoint, words appropriate this video-graphic space by making it integral to their making.

In the end, Toti speaks about the emergence of a new vision on the future of writing which introduces humans to new ways of listening, thinking, and understanding[51]. He believes that the understanding of language was, is, and will always be a challenging endeavor which keeps provoking questions because of its intriguing dimension. Language holds manifold nuances and is ambiguous because of its inherent duality: language is simultaneously transparent and opaque. Interestingly, Toti leaves the video-poem open without providing an answer for the search of meaning with which it engages. Although *L'OrigInédite* lacks a sense of

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poesia l'arte». Sandra Lischi, "*… e-poetronica*" cit., p. 70. «Even more radically, Gianni Toti, poet and video-artist, brings all art back to poetry: 'the writing and the music are completely free of signification and codified content, which is fixed, dead, and devoid of life […] writing is music, music is writing, music and writing are poetry. There is no prose. Everything is poetry» (my translation).

[49] Sandra Lischi, "Gianni Toti's think tank", cit., p. 61.

[50] E. M. de Melo e Castro, "Videopoetry", cit., p. 176.

[51] «the new origin of the language has started to take shape for a computer as a reader» (my translation).

closure, it visually signals an end. In one minute the video-poem gathers significant moments and continues the quotation from Cezanne's statement, «et si tout est en traîn de reapparaître, nous nous poetisons pour voir encore des choses? quelles choses? choses?»[52] In this respect, it is a story which reflects Toti's ongoing struggle to see, understand, and even grasp what exists beyond the visible. Indeed, Toti's poetronic language reduces everything: art, history, and culture to poetry.

Tupac Amauta and the Re-writing of History

If with *L'OrigInédite* Toti re-creates the origin of writing, with *Tupac Amauta* he creates history anew. The audio-visual language of *Tupac Amauta* (1997) crosses cultural continents thematically. Along with *Gramsciategui* (1999) and *La fine della morte del trionfo* (2002), *Tupac Amauta* belongs to Toti's trilogy on the planetary holocausts and «reves-évolutions» of Latin America, to use Lischi's phrasing. Centered on the fight for freedom, the video-poem contains Ancient Mayan symbols and re-elaborations of legends and prophecies of liberation. It takes its name from Túpac Amaru, the Inca leader killed by Spanish authorities in 1572, and Túpac Amaru II, who commanded the indigenous rebellion against the Spanish oppression in Peru in 1780[53]. The second video-poem,

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[52] «And if everything might reappear? we then have to poeticize things in order to see them. What things?» (my translation).

[53] As Lischi explicates, in *Tupac Amauta* Toti recreates «gli atroci sistemi di supplizio cui intere popolazioni furono sottoposte dai colonizzatori e la figura mitica di Tupac Amauta, divenuta simbolo di resistenza e riscatto: fino a José Carlos Mariátegui (leader politico peruviano, morto nel 1930, uno dei più lucidi pensatori dell'America Latina), fino alle immagini del Subcomandante Marcos, fino ai nomi dei militanti uccisi.» Sandra Lischi, "Gramsciategui ou les poesimistes—Deuxième cri", in *Visioni elettroniche* cit., pp. 118-119. Toti recreates «the atrocities of the tortures of the entire populations done by the colonizers and the mythical figure of Tupac Amauta becomes

Gramsciategui, made of unpredictable word associations, references two major thinkers: Antonio Gramsci, Italian philosopher and theorist, and Jose Carlos Mariátequi, intellectual and political Peruvian philosopher[54]. Here, Toti raises the question of the crisis of contemporary language through the signs of the Mayan people and those who are injured in the years of the holocausts. *La fine della morte del trionfo* is a revolt against death and ideologies. Macabre dances, grotesque parades, the figure of the cosmic thinker and poetic texts accompany the song of life against the triumphs of death of every era. In this Trilogy, Toti identifies significant historical moments, re-writes them in his verbal-audio-visual language, and turns them into performances in order to offer a poetically-articulated vision of history.

    Tupac Amauta (53'20") opens up with an abstract image: a series of two dots on a string which move horizontally as if sewing the screen. The first seven minutes focus exclusively on the dynamism of the dots, on their constant onward and backward movement in connecting with one another. They gradually multiply and, all of a sudden, invade the screen. For less than one minute, the screen gets black, and then another series of two dots comes into sight. It is an intriguing contrast between the dot invasion and their transitory absence. This time, the acoustic register changes and a mourning sound is heard; red slowly invades the initial white and black-screen. Three minutes later, imagery changes again as various colors fuse into one another. Instantly, Toti's voice is heard

a symbol of resistance and redemption up to José Carlos Mariátegui (Peruvian political leader, dead in 1930, one of the brightest thinkers of Latin America), and the images of the commander Marcos and the names of the killed militants» (my translation).

[54] Both Gramsci and Mariátequi are political and social thinkers. Gramsci (1891-1937) advocates for cultural hegemony in order to stimulate social classes take attitude and claim their own equal ruling rights with the proletariat. Mariátequi (1894-1930) counts among the most important Latin American socialists who advocates for the socialist revolution as an appropriate solution for Latin America to evolve.

prophesying about latent changes and transformations in the world, «il mondo dell'immagine non e più l'immagine del mondo»[55]. In this brief yet difficult to comprehend discourse, the video-poet coins intriguing word combinations from languages such as Italian, French, English, Spanish, Latin, and Quechua[56]. The separation of words into syllables and their recombination enables him to blend past and present histories and invites readers to explore their connotative rather than denotative meanings and to construct their own associations. Just like his creative word combinations, the transitions from abstract to concrete images are smoothly and poetically configured. Thus, after this « minimalist prelude», the abstract image of the dots gains specificity through references to the image of Túpac Amaru II on the cross which ultimately overlaps with the picture of Jesus Christ's crucifixion[57]. This is a visually complex and powerful parallel which evokes the episode of torture and signals out Toti's predilection for religious threads. Similarly to how *L'OrigInédite* calls attention to the origin of Creation, *Tupac Amauta* alludes to Christ's crucifixion[58].

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[55] «The world of the image is no longer the image of the world» (my translation).

[56] Here are two examples of such word combinations: "la imagie-strophe" ("image" + "strophe") (my translation; "il principio antro-poetico" is made of "anthropology" + "poetry" (my translation).

[57] Túpac Amaru (1545-1572) is the last leader of a small Inca state. In 1572 Francisco de Toledo, Spanish viceroy of Peru, declares war against Amaru considering that he is in rebellion with the Spanish authority and does not obey to their power. Toledo conquers the Inca state, and sentences Amaru to be beheaded. Túpac Amaru II (1742-1781), by his real name, José Gabriel Condorcanqui, takes the name of the leader Túpac Amaru whose descendant he is. He is considered a central figure in the history of Peru's struggle to gain independence. In 1780 he leads the rebellion against the Spanish authorities who exploit the natives. The rebellion is not successful, and Túpac Amaru II is quartered and beheaded.

[58] Marc Mercier describes the beginning of Tupac Amauta as «a minimalist prelude;» Marc Mercier, *La liberté asympTOTIque de Gianni* cit, p.15.

Although visually minimalist, this preface is theoretically intricate in how it alludes to Toti's philosophical viewpoints and practice of and with language in a video-graphic space. In this respect, the historical reference to Amaru as the last Inca leader ultimately entails further allusions to Quechua, the natives' official language. According to chronicles, in its oral stage, Quechua was devoid of a written alphabet and Inca people used khipu as a writing system[59]. Visually speaking, khipu resembles a series of knotted cords in which information is numeric: each cluster of knots is a digit. From this angle of analysis, the opening image with the network among dots on strings evokes Incas' writing system. In this way, the very beginning the video-poem draws attention to a video-graphic space in which Toti decodes and encodes historical facts in order to create history anew. This explains why *Tupac Amauta* does not consist in a recording of historically significant episodes; instead, chronicles become poetic materials written in an audio-visual language. That is to say the video-poet turns them into sounds and images in order to articulate a larger sense of his vision of history[60]. In this sense, Fargier makes an intriguing

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[59] Spanish chronicles define khipu as an encoding system used mainly to store numerical information. Inca historians, for instance, utilize khipu as a device to communicate and document particular significant events of the time. The latest research shows that khipus are used to count many units of things (men in the armies, women of a certain age, crops stored in storehouses, etc.). Jeffrey Quilter, G. Urton (eds.), *Narrative Threads: Accounting and Recounting in Andean Khipu*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2002.

[60] Lischi rightfully acknowledges that in his video-poems Toti rewrites history in his poetronic language. She describes them as «un discorso sul mondo fatto di immagini potentemente articolate, fino ai limiti estremi delle possibilità dei linguaggi elettronici […] Non documentari, quindi; non opere classicamente narrative; non saggi sociologici, didascalici, dimostrativi. Ma pensieri formati da e per immagini e suoni, construzioni da guardare-capire-rielaborare (lavorare) per leggere in modo diverso, necessariamente diverso, il mondo». Sandra Lischi, *Gramsciategui ou les poesimistes—Deuxième cri* cit., pp. 117-118. «A discourse about the world made of images

observation when addressing the relationship between Toti's video-poems and Marcel Duchamp's concept of the ready-made, «Toti is not an inventor either. Toti finds everything back, just as it had never been made before […] This is not new, he re-arranges it and turns it into something brand new.»[61] As a result, although Toti uses ready-mades, his video-poems center on the process of making because «the work [is] not as something ready-made but as something in the making.»[62] In Lischi's words, he avoids the obvious and incessantly aims to reveal the complexity of language in a video-poetic fashion[63].

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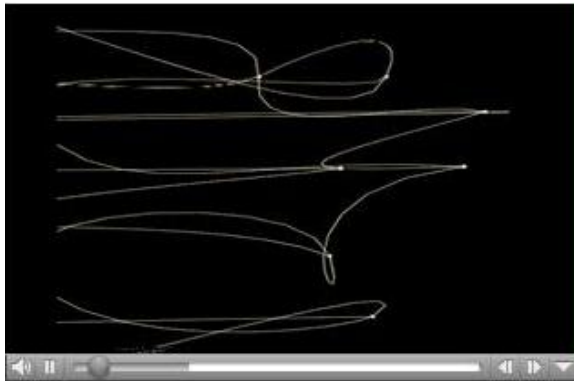
powerfully articulated testing the extreme limits of the possibilities available in the electronic language [. . .] In this way, his works are not documentary, or narrative in a traditional sense, or sociological, didactic, or demonstrative essays. Instead, they are thoughts created by and for images and sounds, they are constructions envisioned to be watched-understood-re-created (made) in order to read the world in an inevitably different way» (my translation).

[61] Jean-Paul Fargier, *Toti: one name, one word, one whole world* cit., p. 44.

[62] *Ivi*, p. 45.

[63] «…was a journey made of voices, of memories, of books, of music but most of all of reflections on how to 'shape' our thoughts, how to create 'thinking' images, revealing and complex, always in avoiding what was obvious, too directive, too easy, too sociologic», *Sandra Lischi, Gianni Toti's think tank* cit., p. 61.
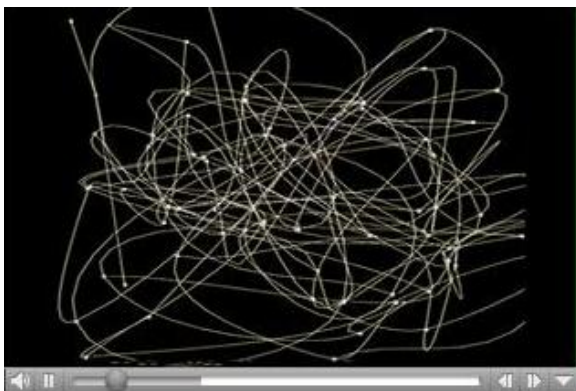
Fig. 1 The evolution of the initial series of knotted cords

Toti makes history alive in how he thematically connects two significant episodes from the local history of the Inca people with other global events so that past and present reunite and speak to each other. Thus, the video-poem introduces the legendary figures of the two Amaru leaders and moves to the two political figures of Antonio Gramsci and José Carlos Mariátequi. Eighteen minutes later after the beginning of the poem, Toti announces its title and describes it as a dedication to the worldwide revolutions of which all these central people are part. Of particular significance is how the video-poem displays the image of a room, of which the four walls contain large paintings with the two Amaru leaders and Mariátequi and two depictions of other people involved in the events during that period[64]. Progressively, these drawings appear macabre and convey a feeling of violence as the two paintings are replaced by walls in fire from time to time. Nothing is static. Everything exists in an ongoing state of transformation. Furthermore, the dramatics of those moments are rendered alive as on the red floor of this room Toti overlaps the images of

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[64] In 1926, Mariátequi founds *Amauta*, a really influential literary magazine on issues related to art, culture, and socialism in Peru and Latin America. The word "Amauta" means teacher in Quechua, and was almost a nickname for Mariátequi. Mariátequi favors a return to the Incan past, to a period of socialist care of the population.

Jesus' and Amaru's crucifixion. The entire episode inside the room resembles an installation in the virtual space of the video-poem. The walls can be also read as pages which re-write the history of the grand revolutions. The overlapped images are always in focus whereas the wall drawings are disclosed as if in a carrousel movement. What immediately follows is a new series of images accompanied by a story-teller's voice articulating the story of Amaru's accession. He thus chronicles significant episodes from Amaru's enthronement, reign, imprisonment at Francesco di Toledo's command, his holding in chains, execution by Spaniards, burial, and reincarnation.
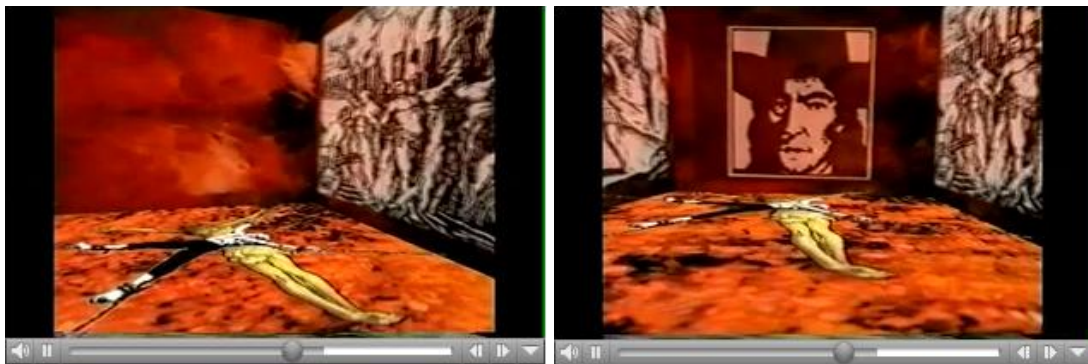

Fig. 2 The image of a room in which Toti overlaps the images of Jesus' and Amaru's crucifixion

In the video-graphic space of *Tupac Amauta*, Toti re-writes history relying on a new textual syntax. This syntax draws on metonymy as a prevalent rhetorical device used for the organization of virtual images[65]. In contrast to traditional or verbal poetry which habitually relies on

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[65] As the American artist and critic Richard Kostelanetz points out in *Literary Video: A Manifesto*, «literary video should transcend the conventional syntax of familiar literature and other constraints of subject, theme, and truth». Richard Kostelanetz, *Literary Video: A Manifesto*, in *Performing Arts Journal* 1, n.1, Spring 1976, pp. 62-64, p. 63.

metaphor, critic Melo e Castro explains why it is important to conceive the image dependency as an idiosyncratic feature of the video-graphic space, «[these] images are more of an iconic character rather than a symbolic one.»[66] This means that certain images substitute for certain words or histories such as the images of Amaru which are iconic figures of the local and worldwide revolutions. Thus, Toti alludes to the recycling of indigenous leaders to combat the oppressive forces as these leaders appear over and over. He includes the Mayan insurrection as part of this mythical yet contemporary history. In order to write and convey a large-scale overview on history Toti uses «the poetics of transformation» by replacing words with images and sentences with fusions of verbal and non-verbal registers. And yet, it is challenging to establish with precision how he carries out this image-word relationship. As Fargier also explains, Toti transforms words into images and images into words, «the words originate the images, they create them, they precede them and survive them. But the exact opposite also works: New, unknown or old, the words come from the images.»[67] Relying also on sounds, his works reveal not only what language says or how language looks like but also how language sounds. In so doing, these works are journeys back to orality and toward

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[66] E. M. de Melo e Castro, *Videopoetry* cit., p. 179. «Video has its own identity and that it is a suitable medium for the production of images of its own having no existence outside the system», *Ivi*, p.181.

[67] Jean-Paul Fargier, *Toti: one name, one word, one whole world* cit., p. 46.

«secondary orality.»[68] As Lischi explicates, such fusions are possible because both poetry and music are images devoid of significance[69].

To complement this episode Toti also calls attention to Incas' miserable faces revealing the painful suffering they go through on the battle field. The imagery is not static: pictures seem alive as they move; various incantations and screams render people's grief acoustically while colors change into reddish and yellowish flames to intensify the overall depressing feeling. In this episode, both sound and color are «fundamental grammar elements», to use Melo e Castro phrasing. In video-poetry, color «is an orientation element of the movement of verbal and non-verbal elements. It is also a driver of the reader's eye movement acting as a semantic and emotion generator», as the video-art theorist particularizes its aesthetic and semantic value[70]. Equally significant is the presence or absence of sound in how it functions as counter-point to

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[68] Here I borrow Walter Ong's phrasing. In *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, new media theorist Ong identifies three stages: oral culture in which sound is primordial; print culture which calls attention to visual dimension of writing, and secondary orality which references the present culture and its return to and regain of the oral dimension of words. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Methuen, London, 1982.

[69]Sandra Lischi, "*... e poetronica*", in *Visioni Elettroniche* cit., p. 73.
«Quella che interessa a Toti non è la dimensione 'illustrativa' del verso (o del testo) da parte delle immagini (o viceversa), né un uso della musica come «avvertimento sulla natura delle emozioni», ma la poesia e la musica come immagini svincolate dall'obbligo del significato, e l'immagine come poesia e musica altrettanto libere da quella che chiama «effettistica semiotica, segnalativa, che aiuta a penetrare nei linguaggi,» *Ivi*, pp. 70-74. «Toti is interested neither in the 'descriptive' dimension of the verse (or of the text) which comes from images (or the other way round), nor in the use of music as «sign speaking about the nature of emotions;» instead, he is interested in poetry and music as images devoid of signification, and in image as poetry and music free of what is known as «semiotic effect which enables the understanding of language» (my translation).

[70] E. M. de Melo e Castro, *Videopoetry* cit., p. 178.

visual images. This means that sound does not only facilitate a harmonic orchestration among these registers but it also retains its individual value[71]. Thus, acoustically, the mourning sound with which *Tupac Amauta* opens is counterbalanced by the celebratory sound of victory with which it ends. Visually, the end of the video-poem returns to the primary abstract imagery of dots and strings. This time, the strings from the initial background are replaced by ropes and pillars referencing the struggle Amaru II goes through. Now Toti condenses the key moments in a backward movement. His final words, «the death will die,» carry out an optimistic vision regarding the future. Although Toti's video-poems are about powerful past heritage: ancient civilizations, medieval pictures, they always look toward the future or to what the future could be[72].

Conclusions

Toti's video-graphic space does not reproduce the origin of Creation or history in the medium of the video. Instead, Toti fragments space and time and re-creates them anew. In so doing, he re-inscribes a poetronic aura to his video-graphic space. Their re-creation is not a representation; but a presentation in his poetronic style in which readers-viewers have a "here and now" experience, a feeling of a live history akin to performance. Also, Toti's video-graphic space does not speak about the graphical representation of language; instead, his works are thematically complex as they draw upon many philosophical, theoretical, religious, political, and cross-cultural references. From this viewpoint, Toti's video-poems deserve extensive consideration and appropriate placement in

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[71] «Sound as music or human voice or even noise, is also part of the videopoem. It is used to make a counterpoint to the visual images and to create an atmosphere that facilitates the reading. But silence as a musical element is also important», *Ivi*, p. 179.

[72] Sandra Lischi, *Gianni Toti's think tank* cit., p. 58.

alignment with the worldwide video-poetry experiments. Vis-à-vis the Italian digital poetry and avant-garde tradition, the analysis of Toti's works reinforces the sense of origins and provides the historical framework for future Italian and worldwide video-poetry works to be contextualized within a wider creative legacy. As a subgenre of digital poetry, video-poetry speaks about the technological expressions of the 1980s and it is therefore fundamental to re-cover the Italian pioneering video-poetry endeavors within the history of digital poetry because it provides a more comprehensive understanding of digital poetry's evolution.

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