VIDEO-DIARY LIKE AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY
A model for field research on the forms of self-documentation through audiovisual hand-held devices

1. RESEARCH PROJECT

Auto-ethnography as a method for qualitative research has always embraced multiple forms of self-narration. These forms do not share the same textual patterns (we can have poetry or reader’s theater, memoirs or fiction-stories, etc.) but they share a common intrinsic tension towards embedding the personal to the social. In this regard, during the last few years a connection has been sought between auto-ethnographic method and creative analytical practices (CAP)¹. The results of these studies are new forms of ethnographic writing that force field researches to pay attention on the one hand to their unavoidable auto-reflexivity and on the other hand to their performative quality. That is because through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study.

In this perspective the potential of new audiovisual media are left in the background, both in terms of openness to widen, diversify and modify self-representation and narration; and use of new research tools for auto-ethnographic method². The contemporary media landscape in fact forces us to keep in mind the variety of media self-models, soliciting an observation of cultural processes that innervate movement from what has been traditionally perceived as an accentuation of autobiographic impulse, to the formulation of auto-mediacy. Auto-mediacy is a concept capable to synthesize the extension of these processes of subjectification that are triggered and encouraged by new media. In fact, as Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seiers stated: «The increasing technologization of the media has not caused an impoverishment in subjective interiority, on the contrary it has generated a greater variety of self-referentiality»³.

Such a change has influenced all different kinds of self-perception and in particular has increased the consideration of media devices as self-expression tools, considering the “self” as an identity situated in a historic-cultural context. Nevertheless, the actual

* Although the essay was jointly elaborated by the authors, paragraphs 1, 2, 2.3 and 2.4 were written by Alice Cati, whereas paragraphs 2.1, 2.2 and 3 were written by Glenda Franchin.

¹ According to Norman K. Denzin, creative analytical practices are new writing practices that include a wide list of narrative forms such as autoethnography, poetry, performance texts, polyvocal texts, visual presentations etc. We aim to include as well some audiovisual texts such as the video-diary. N.K. D E N Z I N, Analytic Autoethnography, or Déjà Vu all Over Again, «Journal of Contemporary Ethnography», 35 (2006), 4, pp. 419-428.

² We follow here the double mandate of conceiving auto-ethnography on the one hand as a product and on the other hand as a process. Cfr. infra, p. 390.

penetration of this change has, until now, not been fully investigated. So, we started a pilot inquiry that has monitored, with a qualitative method, the self-representation practices of four subjects (2 men and 2 women) during the creation of a video-diary.

The research was composed of different steps and some specific surveying tools have been used.

The production of a video-diary. We chose video-diaries as audiovisual textual typology for two reasons. First of all, to intercept a contemporary tendency: we are witnessing an increasing proliferation of media productions focused on self-representation; in particular, several products have adopted a diary style and patterns (e.g. blogs and vlogs). Second, to institute a procedural and epistemological relation between the production of video-diaries and the writing of ethnographic diaries (the conventional field research tool in which data on observed subjects, on contexts and on researcher/interviewer’s experiences are merged). In other words, video-diaries have been considered a good source for regular documentation on a subject that offered himself and his daily life as object of research.

The compilation of a journal. The subjects were asked to write a personal journal during the entire video-diary production time. This instrument has been chosen to allow the registration of contextual references about the shooting (time, date, place), of personal comments, of objects testifying live experiences (pictures, tickets, photos etc.). Moreover this paper writing aimed to recover a traditional dimension of self-narration, to be compared to audiovisual production.

Reflective, dyadic interview. Before and after the in-depth interview, the subjects were involved in a confrontation through e-mails in which – following the auto-ethnographic method – we tried to establish a direct dialogue between interviewed and interviewer where to discuss personal motives for joining such a project, knowledge of the topics discussed, emotional responses to interviews.

In-depth interview. Open and non-directive interviews highlighted the interrelation between: a more or less dormant creative intent; a media practice limited to moving images production; an aware self-shaping. The interviewed subjects have in fact rebuilt the video-diary experiential dimension as a visual auto-documentation project about their daily lives, linking together their media habits and their living contexts, both private and relational. Moreover about this practice, the processes of meaning assignment showed different degrees of familiarity with the elaboration of images and discourses about one’s self as a subject and an identity socio-culturally connoted. The interview moderation guide followed the following structure:

– Technologies of the self. Video cameras, smartphones and web-cams can be used in video-diaries. That is not only the simple use of tools capable of subjectively bending contents and neo-medial languages. These are practices, in Foucauldian terms, through which individuals, alone or with the help of others, act on themselves to fix, to maintain and to transform

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5 About diary methods see M. Bloor - F. Wood, Keywords in Qualitative Methods, Sage, London 2006; pp. 50-53.

6 We gave the diarists just one direction: they were bound to realize at least three or four videos per week. In this way we obtained a significantly regular production. We never asked or suggest anything about the video-diaries contents.
their identities. These procedures are linked to specific self-comprehension, self-knowledge and self-care techniques.

– From diary to video-diary: poetics and practice. Following Blanchot, we identified some recurrences in writing processes, confronting paper and audiovisual diaries (diachronic narration, fragmentary and open structure, mastering of intimacy and privacy). Specifically, recovering the canonical distinction between film diary and diary film, we introduced a reflection on composition practices that on the one hand inscribe the shooting process in real time through a direct contact with reality, and on the other hand plan a process of rewriting and rereading of the past through editing.

– Addressee. Video-diary form imposes its author to think about issues of secrecy and intimacy about diary contents. Following this, video-diary is partially or totally open and definitively untied from its papery counterpart that affirmed instead the concurrence, in different moments, of narrator and addressee (auto-destination or pseudo-destination)

– Self-image and Self-narrative. To document themselves subjects elaborate formal strategies of self-inscription that show a complex dynamic between showing and hiding. We investigate correspondences and discrepancies between the instituted linguistic-visual trace and the narration through personal and experiential networks images.

– Retrospective revision and introspection. The level of symbolic meanings regarding diary writing and self-narration implicates a dialectics between past and present, between memory and introspective inquiry, both subject to an emergent reconfiguration through audiovisual mediation.

**Video-diary semiotic analysis.** The videos produced by the users have been analyzed following experiential semiotics parameters. In this way it has been possible to define a pragmatic, perceptive and emotional orientation system born from an «I real enunciator».

2. SAMPLE SPECIFICITY

The sample search has been very sensitive on issues specific to auto-ethnographic researches. In particular the question of showing and sharing – even if free, partial and graduated by subjects – of private contents. For this reason we decided to involve people from our close circle of acquaintances, to preserve a familiar atmosphere and to prevent any feeling of undue exposition.

Each subject created a different video-diary, in which the multiple modes of

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auto-referentiality/self-reflexivity generated different auto-mediacy practices that
would surely need a further study. Anyway, here we will analyze the collected materi-
als keeping in mind three pivotal points: how is a diary practice conducted through a
mobile device different from previous forms of self-narration with other media? Which
part of their living experience the diarists show and why? Can we talk about forms of
socio-cultural grounding that emerge from processes of self-writing through images?

2.1. VD1. Mirror and family root

G. loves to tell stories. He never abandoned this part of himself, as if inventing worlds
was the only way to live in his one. G. is trying to overlap his storytelling ability with
his work and, even if he never realized a video-diary, he tried to write about himself and
about his life many times.

«I write everywhere [...] I love very much to find things written by me, to retrieve them to
reread them. I liked to write, my mother kept many things of mine, tales, compositions... 
sometimes I like to go find them to reread them because I think that’s important to recover
what you have done in the past».

G. is a skilled media and social networking user, who lives the video-diary experiment
like a new way to explore what lies around him. April is almost entirely a work-free
month for G. He shoots a simple daily life moment on the first day. Framed from the
bottom, headphones on, G. walks and tells that he went out to go to pharmacy and su-
permarket (he shows us the shopping list). He shoots the goodies as he picks them up,
while in the background an hypnotic electro-rock song grows in volume; G. closes his
shooting session framing himself in an elevator mirror. He tells himself: «First day of
video-diary done, I hope that went well. Hi to everyone!».

«I liked the bottom up shot because I had to show myself in some way and with that I could
also hide myself. With the phone right in front of your head everyone notice that you are
shooting, from bottom instead, turned to the little camera dot that is shooting your face [...] 
you can also hide yourself».

The vacation time allows G. and his family to spend Easter holidays in Andalusia, where
G.’s brother is spending his Erasmus program. This trip is a strong narrative unit in G.’s
video-diary: the videos from April 6th to April 11th are both a travel book and an affection
map. Here the video production is focused partly on testifying visits to monuments, to
other tourist places or to characteristic restaurants; and partly on G. narrating his family
bonds, parents, brother, girlfriend, interrupting – so to say – his self-narration.

The core of this video-diary so emerges: the presentation of family and friend-
ship network, to which G. is constantly referring, even during the in-depth interview,
presenting the root of his personal identity, something not very much considered so far.

13 We refer to a research line well exemplified in the studies of R. Holliday, We’ve been framed: visu-
14 The video-diary realized by G., m. 27, is composed of 19 videos. Among these, 7 are put together in
a single unit about a trip to Andalusia.
15 He owns a Canon camcorder but for the video-diary he only used an i-Phone. He has a Facebook
profile, a Twitter profile, two YouTube channels, a blog and a political satire website shared with friends.
«I surely didn’t tell very much about me. I told what was happening around me and [...] just a moment, a lived one about me. In my video-diaries I’ve never spoken directly to the camera about my behavior, myself, my thoughts... about me as a way of being or about my way of doing things, that’s it».

In the video-diary he shows a dinner with colleagues, books he purchased, a friend that has visited him, a rainy afternoon spent on an exercise bike, a brief glance on the office, but the core of G.’s representation never moves from his relations with friends, loved ones and relatives.

If the formal criterion that G. uses more often is based on spontaneity and documentation of lived moments in their ephemeral significance, a fine work on shot materials (selection, editing, joining, adding sound) emerges, most of all in the travel section of the video-diary. The presence of the self is left to G.'s voice, always present (G. uses very often meta-narrative), and to the use of ego-tropic and semi-ego-tropic first person shots, or to interpellations, frames that explicitly consider an external audience. The process of self-putting-in-text often prefers subjective forms. However they are not used to create a first person self-narration, but to build an other-than-self horizon, as accurate as possible, that represent the self-real substance. Anyway, G. finds in his shooting device a mean to control and unveiling:

«The video-mobile-phone gave me something, it’s like a mirror where you don’t reflect upon immediately, as you’re used to, in the bathroom, when you put makeup on or you dress yourself... it gives you the joy of hearing your voice, something we’re not accustomed to [...] you are linked to yourself directly, as you never actually see yourself in real life, you don’t have a projection of yourself in front of your eyes, video-diaries allow you to recount your face changing, your eyes observing».

The video-diary ends with a brief shot (a shopping mall: G. and a friend pretend to be surprised and fascinated by shop windows) that testifies the casual and fragmentary process of encompassing details – uncertain/ephemeral – in the pattern of shot memories.

2.2. VD2. Little daily worlds

April 1°. G. shows us the brief journey to the supermarket with her family. G. is on the back seat with her daughter while her husband is driving: the shot opens with a close up of the child that looks towards her mother and, just for a second, towards the objective. The frame then broadens, it moves slowly to the left to shoot the inside of the car and the external urban landscape and ends on the driver’s shoulders and on his eyes reflected in the driving mirror. Just before the closing, G.’s hands holding the device are visible, just for a moment, in the driving mirror. It is the iPhone that, the diarist said, enhanced her

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16 We refer here to a peculiar subjective shot that suggests that its sight is proper of a body-machine handled by a subject that actually moves inside the diegetic space. In ego-tropic mode the diegetic creation of space and time is related to this subject’s self that ‘enact’ the sight; the semi-ego-tropic mode is instead a metonymic subjective shot. See R. Eugeni, Le trasformazioni dell’inquadratura soggettiva tra cinema, media e videogiooco, in E. Mandelli - V. Re (a cura di), Fate il vostro gioco. Cinema e videogame nella rete: pratiche di contaminazione, Terra Firma, Crocetta del Montello (TV) 2011, pp. 21-22.

17 G. chose to publish on his blog all the video produced during the research, just as they were realized.

18 G., f. 35. The video-diary is composed of 19 segments of variable length: from a minimum of 29 seconds (April 1°) to a maximum of 2 minutes and 46 seconds (April 27°). The total length is 21 minutes and 37 seconds.
chance of shooting meaningful moments in daily life («Film Segments of a minute and a half or two… things that you never know if they’ll come back»). The diarist chooses not to edit any shot material except for assigning a title, opting for a final result in which spontaneity and objectivity are as much emphasized as possible.

The shooting modes chosen underline the intention of hiding author’s presence: G. never frames herself directly, there are no close ups and her reflected image appears only in two cases: on a mirror and on a train door. She uses the device only as a moving hand-held camera, shooting what happens around her and never turning the objective towards herself. The video suffers from strong body movements that are inscribed in the shooting space; it gains instead stability when the objective follows other bodies to which the narrating sight turns. The ego-tropic and semi-ego-tropic first person shots reveal the diarist presence even if there isn’t any meaningful meta-narration:

«My subjectivity enters indirectly in what I’m shooting, I’m making you understand what gives me emotions, I don’t know how to say it, it creates something in me because I chose to frame it, I’m not interested in being in the shot because in my opinion I’m already there, in my choice of framing exactly that. […] I know very well who I am, I don’t need to explain that to myself, to shoot myself in order to do so: I just need to recount myself through what I’m shooting».

During a month, we can see journeys through urban space (where the dynamic dimension prevails: walks on platforms to reach the train, trains where to get to reach the station – leaving the reflection of her on the door –, walks to reach the working place) and family moments (mostly shots inside the house, with her daughter – dancing, playing, pretending to clean the house – as protagonist; a dinner preparation; trips – a lunch in a farm for tourist or some time spent in a house in the mountains.

The planning behind G.’s narration, both of herself and of her «little» world, is explicated through a representational space in which the mise-en-scene of the self-removes from the frame the image of her face/body, deleting all traces of auto-exposition (both visual and verbal). This practice is reflected also in her choice not to fill the paper journal, perceived as unnecessary and breaking the directness of the shooting, underlining the absence of auto-reflexivity and meta-narration, recursive elements in the narrative strategy adopted instead:

«The shot was talking, I didn’t need to explain anything, it was crystal clear, at least in my opinion, I didn’t feel to say anything. […] as I was living that moment, my inner status, words didn’t mean anything, I felt like I was pretending if I’d have write anything».

The last video (April 30th), takes us back to the domestic space, in the family intimacy. G.’s daughter is at the piano and tries some chord hitting the keys. Soon she is replaced by her father that starts to play, asking her to accompany him as the great dancer she is. G. follows the movements of father and daughter focusing on her, that tries some step, comes close searching his mother’s leg and then goes again away attracted by other objects. The shooting stops, G. regains possession of that affection space handed over for a short time to an external sight, and we are outside the house door, gently but firmly closed.

19 «[Using the video-mobile-phone] let me realize a true directness, as doing that thing in that moment, a concept that the paper journal do not possess… maybe you have to recreate the moment to write it down. […] besides, images tell much much much more than words.»
2.3. **VD3. Retrospective introspection**

A rippling sight runs on a fabric with an oriental aquatic pattern: printed gold fishes are followed and accompanied by Charles Trénet’s *La mer*. It is April 1st and this first video takes shape from an idea, a *work of connections*, born from a daily cue. The following videos are shot daily – except for the Good Friday – and are born in a more unrehearsed way. The diarist explains that with an emotional status of general demotivation or, more directly, with the fact that she is a newbie of moving images.

Realized using an iPhone and in some cases a webcam, M.F.’s video-diary is put like an experimental research about the framing of daily objects (a blanket chest, a bookshelf, an Easter carillon, etc.); about short urban reportages; about pop self-portraits and live experimentations with Photobooth (April 15th and 22nd); about meeting and dialogues with acquaintances and friends. The focus is always on the iconographic rendering of the subject shot, as if the eye of the shooter – forged in the art galleries of Milan – could unveil or enhance the aesthetic potential of reality surrounding her. In this way, the lines of the Metro platform become continuing lines that plays between fixity and movement, as they are walked back and forth (April 14th), or the train’s linoleum motive becomes a metaphor of the monotony of the outliers traveling (April 10th), and so on.

In a path designed between not knowing the device used and the desire of finding new creativity stimuli, the diarist chooses not to consider any self narration or direct recount of her experiences. The space is anyway filled with a soundtrack – a song listened that day – or with the dialogue happened with some people (April 24th and 28th).

«I liked this idea of mise-en-abyme, like at the theater. So in the video-diary I tell it to the people I meet. [...] It was the reflection on auto-reflection, or the auto-reflection on the reflection!».

About the building of a subjective sight, we can see some kind of agility in assuming different point of views, working most of the time with ego-tropic or semi-ego-tropic first person shots, with interpellations and feigned objective shots, where a latent direction impulse, rather than self-representation, emerges. It’s the April 20th video that collects this kind of sights. M. F. moves in front of the objective some wooden figures that represent the three generations (grandparents, parents, grandchildren) of *Progressive Family*, a designer toy by Rihard Funts, Rijada. The ix frame reunites in a few seconds hidden multi-ethnic desires, fingers like self trace, sympathy between ludic activity and filming.

With soft touch M. F. disposes her auto-referential signs as a palette, coming to terms with the visual qualities of each one (face, body, clothes, situated sight, loved objects), except for her voice. This fact induces her to prepare for the last video (April 30th) a real performance in which in a bust shot writes and shows to the objective her message in fieri: «Hallo! I don’t like very much the sound of my voice. I write. On the contrary. I was not very brilliant with these videos. It’s been a dificult month but fortunately it’s over [...]».

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20 This video-diary has been realized by M.F. and it’s composed of 29 videos of variable durations.
21 «I don’t know how much converged in the videos, but I remember that at some point I thought that, as I can’t fully dominate the video medium, I could have use it as a continuing image and I focused on lines. I remember doing this video in Metro, where there’s this yellow line on the platform. Back and forth, back and forth. [...] a movement, but also something still».
22 «I found myself like that because... the video is a summary of... something related to the image, simply that. It would have been too reductive, too pleonastic to be in front of the camera and talk. It would have been also not very much interesting...».
With the help of the written word, by the end of the project a reality more intimate than images emerged. Images need in fact the author’s decoding to be understood. Or at least not professional ‘auto-biographical’ videos like these seem to be bound to this condition.

«To reach the same deepness of writing, a video maker has to be very very good in shooting himself in the best way and in showing exactly what he wants to show and not something else. So the more you become good with the device, the more you actually build it. But if you build it too much, it becomes fake. So you loose its documentary quality».

From this excerpt it is clear that M. F. considers the process of documentation of her daily life as an activator of authenticity and objectivity. The aim of video-diaries, or of diary writing in general, is to fix a fidelity criterion between life and its representation. M. F. affirms that a real video-diary cannot end with the shooting, with some reality sampling, but always needs a further memory work.

«Introspection is... retrospective in this case. You will see it later, when you are not shooting».

Shot materials can be seen again sometime later, or rewritten through editing. But in this case more knowledge is needed.

2.4. VD4. A door that opens and closes

After an unsuccessful try, the video-diary starts on April 2nd: early morning, smart phone laid on the PC monitor to frame R.’s face that looks into the camera and talks about himself and a girl. On the background Noemi’s song Sono solo parole. The first day of shooting already marks two traits of this video-diary: on the one hand an alternation of confessional and reportage styles, allowed by the portability of the device; on the other hand a fragmented writing style, with pieces that multiplies in the same day, sometimes sharply cut off.

«I tried to shoot the video again, [after a break]. But something was missing, the moment was missing. That is, re-telling yourself after a break was like pretending. So I decided to take what happens as it is, and drop any further thought! Let’s close it like a window that suddenly slams».

The window/door metaphor well represents the diarist’s bias to choose an open form, typical of diary poetics, as a way, both narrative and symbolic, to describe the exchange and intertwining between real life and shot life, between real moments and screen moments.

«Maybe with paper diaries there’s more work on memory. Not with video-diaries. You have to work on moments, on seconds. It’s about thought fluxes, not real memories, something like reflections».

23 The video-diary has been realized by R., m. 31 and it’s composed of 18 videos variously distributed during a month, with concentrations of 2 or 3 videos in the same day. Moreover the diarist created an appendix on May 2nd to conclude his work. The paper journal, even if perceived as redundant with the shooting, punctually contextualizes every video.

24 During the in-depth interview the subject affirmed that this configuration (frontal close-up), typical of YouTube video-blogs, seemed to him the best to make a video-diary, even if he didn’t refer to a precise model.
The moments inserted in the video-diary are the most disparate: from the football match Barcelona-AC Milan (April 3rd) to the backstage of a performers’ company (April 12th); from a group conversation on Skype to define the opening of a small film production studio (April 17th and 28th) to the narration of a button sewing to a shirt (April 14th) or of a skateboard repair (April 17th); from a ludic appropriation of working space on a rolling office chair with the boss missing (April 13th) to the small reportage of a travel home on foot with his brother at night, beyond the end of public transportation services (April 25th). In each one of these videos, the private dimension is present or at least intentionally marked. To do so the diarist turns the objective to his face, even after an exploration of the surrounding space, tracing a trajectory of sights balanced between ego-tropic and semi-ego-tropic first person shots. At home then, on sedentary shots, he privileges direct interpellation of the addressee, to whom he directs his words.

«I chose to show my face and not only the space around because I wanted to tell something. It would have been silly if I were there and out of sight. It would have been a simple reportage but [showing my face] was something more personal».

The image of the self – never subdued to camouflages or mise-en-scene – is put in a situation of moderate intimacy, perfect setting for a self-narration that involves sentimental traits, comments on current events, professional aspirations and frustrations, literary and musical preferences, hobbies and distractions. A thin narrative tension remains perceivable during all the shooting, looking for some sort of continuity between the fragments that, even if separated, often return on the same topics to reach a good shooting end. The appendix, on May 2nd, has been necessary to show R. with his new girlfriend. That is to present this lived and filmed month as something intrinsically inclined to ‘closure of the circle’, from solitude to a real happy ending. Again, the sight is turned to the camera to break any barrier between narrator and addressee, thanks to a partial openness that defines the video-diary as some sort of testimony of your presence to anybody who will come in the future.

R.’s video-diary seems to encourage the process of self-attestation, because the moving image permits a fixation of present time, absorbing many elements from daily life:

«With a paper diary I would have been forced to write: I’m here, in front of the PC, smoking with background music... with a video-diary I’ve already told everything, and most of all I didn’t have to select anything. I shot everything and never canceled what didn’t work».

Shooting elements around him and himself in precise moments, even without a parallel personal tale, has become a new habit in the diarist daily life, even after the end of the project.

3. FIRST READINGS

Although it is not possible to draw a definitive conclusion of a pilot research, starting from diarists’ productions, we would like to focus on three possible questions that could orient next analytical directions:

25 «There must be a start and an end. Because that was not a diary that would have ended there, a personal diary. That was something to be delivered to someone else». 
• Values of videos used for self-representation: why making a video-diary?

The first direction is about the passage from traditional documentation forms, used in ethnography, to auto-documentation with hand-held devices. All the diarists possessed, for variable periods during teen years, a paper diary. Each one of them noted, during the realization of the video-diary, some functional qualities for the self-expression. These features are about to two kinds of upgrades. On the one hand, advantages about the device: practical, handy, easy to find, a tool that can be used almost everywhere and at any time. Having always at your disposal a device like that consents to overcome the gap between real time potential openness and segmentation of real life in different filmed moments. On the other hand, advantages about the expression of values thanks to the device: immediacy, objectivity, authenticity. More than a remembering and reworking of the past instrument, more than an introspective exercise, the video-diary has been appreciated for the chance granted of shooting a moment in its realization, as something that signifies inside the space and temporal perimeter in which is happening. This explicit remembering/reworing of the past, this self-reflexivity, didn’t emerge frequently in the studied cases. More often came out the idea that a video-diary could be used to produce memories for a future familiar use, for a replication of a lived moment in a different time, to see one’s face and listen to one’s voice (gaining awareness of one’s exposing to others or to the world). Some of the diarists noted that the traditional paper diary is limited only to an interior vision of one’s self and others. The shooting process seems instead to guarantee values of authenticity and testimony, revealing an inclination for catching moments, as in the dawn of photography. From the gathered data it seems useful, in conclusion, to proceed with a deep overview of the device functions that encourage identity performances and multifaceted presentations of values.

• The moment between contingency and history of the self-life story

It is in the themes and forms chosen to catch lived moments that emerged all the different kinds of diarists’ creativity: something linked to the image of the self as a representation; something that has to be investigated. Single choices about the shooting have changed in relation to various factors: what seemed meaningful about ‘my’ story, ‘my’ desire, ‘my’ goal, based on a psychological state, a contingency, or something one must do. Beyond personal choices, we can see a pattern about sights that leads to an amplification of points of view on the real and on its subjective reflections. This is achieved through shooting devices, as if the self wouldn’t vanish in the moment framed but would acquire presence and strength becoming discourse. In the process of «picking any moment», the diarist builds a sight that recalls astonishment because it lets the proper being something of something to come out: a face, a place, a detail, a movement, a word, covered with history and significance.

26 «I would like to emphasize the importance of the video diaries in capturing the performativities of identity», Holliday, We’ve Been Framed: Visualising Methodology, p. 509.
27 Another level of analysis for the materials could obviously come from psychoanalysis, to investigate the connection between self-expression and self-removal.
The third node is strictly connected with the correlation between the represented moments and the grounding of the subject on a precise socio-historic-cultural context. It is in this evidence of salient themes and shooting styles – more or less conscious – that the self-grounding forms emerge – more or less explicitly. The inscription of one’s body/voice/face, the constant and deep call to personal family histories, the Other exposed and presented in video like a projection/mirror of the self, are all different forms of anchorage that have to be deepened and, maybe, catalogued. We, for now, can agree with Holliday:

Whilst the diaries clearly do not present a unified ‘truth’ of selfhood, then, they record experiences and their interpretations from specific social and cultural positions. It is this element of the social (position in the world) which pervades all of the diaries and thus prevents them from interpretation as purely individualistic representations.

Diarists built an hybrid representational scenery, nor completely private nor totally public, a living place where identity shapes itself, in a dynamic between manifestation and removal that would be a rich object of analysis for the researcher.

Anyway, underneath these three directions, it is important to enlighten the constitutive role assumed by the new technologies, above all by mobile phones which can be used not only to make moving images, but also as tools for self-representation. What this phenomenon could imply in terms of self-documentation and autoethnographic inquiry? In our contemporary visually based culture, pocket images or films have transformed our way of looking at the world around us and at ourselves: concerning contents, the possibility of self-filming and everything which is connected to everyday life, even what is perceived as trivial; concerning aesthetics, shooting with the hands is completely different from shooting with the eyes. This is symptomatic of a new configuration of the gaze, increasingly linked to an embedded and embodied vision. Moreover, the logic of happenstance (being in the right place, at the right time to catch the significant instant) affects both the contents and the aesthetics of the self-images. Paradoxically, such a rootedness or situatedness must be read in connection to the physical mobility of the subject, engaged in the filmic/audiovisual practice. The subject is always able to attest her/his repositioning and displacements in the space.

Few years ago, John Thompson argued that «lived experiences» is entangled with «mediated experience». In this sense, mediation involves not only the media devices we employ in the private domain but also the active choices of individuals to integrate parts of culture into their lives. Experience is neither completely lived nor entirely mediated, as the encounter between the two is a continuous developing life-project to delineate the self in a larger cultural context. So, the increasing availability of mediated experience creates «new opportunities, new options, new arenas for self-experimentation».

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29 Holliday, We’ve Been Framed: Visualising Methodology, pp. 515-516.
30 «All diarists have an imagined reader for their work, even if that reader is a facet of her own self. If no diaries are truly authentic in this sense, then, it seems misguided to look for comparative degrees of authenticity between ‘public’ and ‘private’ diaries» (ibid, p. 515).
32 R. Odin, È giunta l’ora del linguaggio cinematografico, in Id., Il cinema nell’epoca del videoonino, p. 8.
34 J. Thompson, Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media, Polity Press, Cambridge 1996,
If the new forms of self-experimentation correspond with what at the beginning we have called ‘automediality’, at the same time we cannot overlook the complexity of the choices offered by hand-held audiovisual devices for self-documentation. More than a camera, a smartphone is a shooting tool, as well as a reception and communication device. In this sense, it is naturally disposed to capture on one hand the relation of continuity between lived or factual experience and mediated experience, on the other the relation between the self and the other (other individuals and the life context).

As Roger Odin suggests, smartphone can be an important driver for the construction of the Self (I film, thus I am), as well as a device which allows a way of opening to the Other. Finally, basing our analysis just on the first step of longer observation, we can assume that all these elements confirm the production of a video-diary as a suitable method for an autoethnographic research.

**SUMMARY**

The essay aims to illustrate the results of an exploratory research conducted to understand if the production of a video-diary is a suitable method for an autoethnographic research. In particular, the inquiry has monitored, with a qualitative method, the self-representation practices of four subjects (2 men and 2 women) during the creation of a video-diary, mainly made through hand-held audiovisual devices. From a methodological point of view, the different steps of the research need to adopt a trans-disciplinary approach, integrating a visual-ethnographic perspective with the theory of film and audiovisual media, as well as a philosophical account on self-representation. How is a diary practice conducted through a hand-held audiovisual device different from previous forms of self-narration with other media? Can we talk about forms of socio-cultural grounding that emerge from processes of self-writing through images? Pushed by the new rising drives of immediacy, objectivity, and authenticity, thanks to the digital technologies, the author of a video-diary seems to have definitely left on the background the diary writing as a tool of introspective exercise and reworking of the past. In this sense, the video-diary has been fully appreciated for the chance granted of shooting a moment in its realization, as something that signifies inside the space and temporal perimeter in which is happening.