

The Artist's Gesture. An initial approach to the cinematic representation of Vincent van Gogh's pictorial practice

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“Indéfiniment reprendre le trait, retracer sans effacer, cette opération de retouche ne relève pas réellement de l'attente mais elle est suscitée et guidée par la recherche d'une forme idéale. Comme si l'artiste était habité par l'idée de l'improbable et lointaine rencontre de la "bonne" et belle forme ... Repentir, geste d'inquiétude et d'espoir exprimant la tension de l'esprit vers le beau, le chemin vers la perfection”. Claudie Danzinger in the summary-introduction to an interview with Jean Clair in Various Authors. (1994,129)

The *gesture*, in the primary meaning of the word, refers to the movement of parts of the human body such as the hands, the arms or the head. That bodily movement, conscious or not, may be the main means of expression of thoughts and feelings, or give verbal language a greater expressive force. There is another way of understanding the *gesture*, a conceptualisation linked to a way of being and acting, *gesture* understood as attitude, act or intervention. An *artist's gesture* —artist here meaning painter— springs from extending the idea of *gesture* to artistic practice in general and pictorial art in particular. The artistic gesture of a painter is deployed in the work process and preserves the two original levels of gesture in the act of pictorial creation. The external level in the bodily aspect, the physical effect of the gesture, of the line changing the material, of the process and the technique used. The internal level related to conscious and unconscious thought with the postulates of artistic thought and the emotions, with the inspiration that produces the gesture and decides when it is complete. Both levels of artistic gesture, internal and external, flow together in the action that produces the work. The work has a continuous existence in time, the opposite of that of the gesture, impermanent as the artist and often fleeting in space as well, given the frequent search for solitude for the act of creation.

The Renaissance shaped Western aesthetics with the fundamental category of the artistic space and wrote a new statute for art and the artist that has survived down to our time. With the recovery of Classical thought and the decisive value of the freedom of man as the centre of the universe, the Renaissance movement consolidated the new paradigm of a single process of emancipation in four successive stages. *The autonomy of the artistic practice of cultural practices as a whole* —from the Greek period it

becomes a privileged practice and is more highly regarded than other productive human activities—; *the autonomy of the artist* —the “genius” departs from the commission and chooses the pictures he paints freely, the personality of the artist is valued as much as or more than his works—; *the autonomy of the object-work of art* —the work loses its relationship with the space that contains it, loses functionality and gains exchange value conveyed in transportable formats and sizes—; and *the autonomy of the language* —still subject to the representation of an exterior object until the coming of abstract painting, form and its constant evolution are conceived as an expression of the artist's personality (1). The specificity, exclusiveness and independence of *reborn* art is responsible for banishing the sacred nature of the pictorial image from our culture for ever.

“That is what Greek Classicism did with the ancient Eastern civilisations and the Renaissance with the Mediaeval ones. Their realism and humanism made them mobile, relieved them of responsibility, allowed them to follow time and the whims of men”. Ocampo, E. (1985,89)

In the development of our argument *the autonomy of the artist* and *the autonomy of the language* are especially preponderant with the union of the pictorial work and the person of the artist who has created it; one becomes an extension of the other, which enables us to suppose a mutual explanation. The idea was not new; it was retrieved from Plato's theory of art —he defined the work as the soul of the artist— and biographical tradition, which since classical antiquity had never ceased to have its echo. With the famous publication of *Le Vite de' piú eccelenti Pittori, Scultori et Architettori*, 1550, Giorgio Vasari brought the artist-work unit up to date: the essence of the work springs from the person of the artist and the character of the creator can be known from the work. Vasari's biographical account adapts to the cult of personality and *becomes* a historiographic method insofar as it analyses and assesses the works from their arrangement in a life's *career* (2). Thus the biography becomes the first instrument of approach to the works and by extension to the conception of the artistic gesture. And so we find that the notion of the artist's gesture at the moment of creation emerges originally from biographical, historical and literary narration all at the same time.

The history of painting is permeated by the continuity and evolution of pictorial styles. The search for a new style is inseparable from painting in Western culture; change is a fundamental value in itself, the constant renovation of forms conjures up what is new, originality as currency. The change of style appears to be a reflection of social change and the individual quest, immersed in the structured and decisive tradition of Greek Classicism for the notion of time, Aristotle's concept of quantitative, measurable time.

“After Aristotle time ceases to be a category intimately and harmoniously linked to divine progress to become a neutral element which merely constitutes the channel through which actions occur. In the spheres of both philosophy and art time abandons the gods and becomes a mathematical entity which runs in a straight line for all eternity”. Ocampo, E. (1985,135)

The Judaeo-Christian tradition theologically perfects the idea of linear, historical and

irreversible time; time had a beginning and will have an end. The definitive step is taken by Christianity with a God who comes into the history of men. With the human incarnation of God on earth, time loses its sacred character and the calendar of the world becomes fully historical. The Renaissance inherits and ratifies a notion of time which is free of fundamental, metaphysical values, an oriented time, always different, in which the events of humanity are inscribed in orderly fashion (3). Later the ethic of capitalism and Marxist messianism were to broaden the cumulative idea of time from their postulates, an idea which is alive and broadly shared in our Western society, which believes in a revelation which is the result of progress, of unstoppable change and forward movement in time. That concept of time, impregnated with the progressive thought of the Christian model of salvation—the idea of offence, repentance, redemption and salvation—brings out a particular aesthetic and practice.

"... une esthétique du repentir et de la perfectibilité. Je ne dis pas de la perfection mais de la perfectibilité. Cette visée religieuse et forcément éthique a été renforcée par l'éthique protestante. À partir de la Réforme, le problème de l'accroissement des richesses, la capitalisation des choses, vécue comme une capitalisation de l'espace et du temps, n'a fait qu'accélérer l'idée que l'on puisse aboutir à la perfection en accumulant, en quantifiant, en numérisant les biens de ce monde ... Tout ceci déboutant, pour évoquer Max Weber, sur le capitalisme au XIX siècle, capitalisme qui, lui-même, n'a fait que souligner, accentuer, aggraver l'idée du repentir, de la nécessaire reprise, reprise à la hauteur de la créance, de la dette, ce qui a entraîné ce phénomène très étonnant qu'est le romantisme". Jean Clair in Various Authors. (1994,130)

In the book-magazine *L'Attente* from where we have taken that quotation, a number of authors take different approaches in terms of themes and disciplines to the idea of the *wait*. In the chapter on creation, Jean Clair sets up artistic practice as the exact opposite of the *wait*. The action of a painter in the work process *puts an end to the wait and it is the work that waits*, the dream, the absence transformed into presence. In the interview Clair sets out a hagiographic conception of the gesture—in pictorial practice—which we share. Related to and inserted into the Western notion of time as straight line, the gesture participates in the cultural, social, religious and economic context of the time and is a reflection of it. The artist's work process is a proclamation of the limited, isolated duration of human existence, it occurs in a time directed towards the creation of a work, in a time whose model is the onward movement of the journey of eternal religious salvation, of repetition—themes, versions, copies, touching up the same canvas, the very process of material amalgamation—in an idea of the *perfectibility* of the work through the practice of repentance. The engine of repentance understood as anxiety, dissatisfaction, perplexity, doubt, hesitation, indecision, tension... takes up the artistic action time and again in a series of repentances to reach the creation of a work. Clair's thesis, which also touches on the accumulation of works in museums as containers of repentance, takes shape at the moment when aesthetic practice and the Western value of time are being made relative as universal systems of thought and related to those of societies governed by a cosmogonic vision, societies that conceive the cosmos as a living unity, bridging the gap between men and gods.

In a sacred, cyclical time of unity with the gods, with an indefinitely repeatable present, form does not change, it is perfect from the outset. Qualitative time is a time that distinguishes between the profane duration of everyday activities and the sacred time of transcendent ones that are part of an indissoluble Whole, the fruit of a vision of the cosmos which does not attribute any autonomy, exclusiveness or privilege to aesthetic activity. The aesthetic form is a symbolic form, with mystical contents, governed by tradition and enduring. The creator does not have the specialised role of the artist nor is he excluded from the group the work is designed for, according to Lévi-Strauss (4). His act is part of an event that *embodies* rather than *represents* and where the object has a ceremonial or everyday use value, but always an integral part of a symbolic ritual that renews Unity (5). The creative gesture of the aesthetic of the cosmic vision is the experience that renews the creation of the world, union with the gods; its divine dictate has no meaning independent of the intrinsic experience. There is no search, no change of form, only repetition without variants, rites. Artistic practice as an experience of Unity occurs in cultures such as those of pre-Colombian America, survives in Chinese Taoism, Tibetan Buddhism or Japanese Zen and in countless archaic societies in black Africa or peoples and tribes who live closed in on themselves. Estela Ocampo calls those practices of societies imbricated in symbolisation, in the totality of the culture's knowledge, *imbricated aesthetic practices*.

"In fact, just as science and magic are different ways of approaching knowledge, art and imbricated aesthetic practices are different ways of approaching the production of images, of developing the sensory capacities, of categorising space and time, of using the imagination".
Ocampo, E. (1985,50)

To the idea of the gesture of the post-Renaissance artist we can add the Romantic concept of happiness in the future. This is the gesture of the freedom and solitude of the artist—separated from the gods, the patrons vanished, with the constant search for an original, exclusive style, deeply dyed with individualism, a searcher for essences, sometimes tragic—which guides pictorial practice towards the future. The artist sees himself at the boundaries of human existence, in the passion and grandeur of *pathos* and art renews its essential tragic dimension in the West. If in imbricated aesthetic practices the gesture is an act of union with the gods, the post-Renaissance artistic gesture is an act of duality, of separation from God. However, the religious model flowed into the Romantic interpretation of the figure of the artist and his creative gesture, follower *in extremis* of the rules of the lives of the saints, the Christian model of salvation. The mediation of the 19th century artist's gesture, also rewritten by the 20th century's reading of the 19th century, is crammed with the anecdotes of the biographies and the attributes of the work generated by pictorial criticism from the moment it appears. If Vasarian biography was the first instrument for approaching the artist, the gesture and the work, exegesis of painting poured out the specific details that tilted towards the person of the artist through the biographical genre. And moreover, besides the content—a follower of the hagiographic repentance model in the stories of the lives of certain paradigmatic artists—the narrative form can also be imbued with the strategy of hagiographic narration.

The representation of the gesture of pictorial creation

If from the Renaissance the artist and the work are laicised, the ethical, religious, ritual connotation still remains in artistic practice today, in the gesture. The creative gesture belongs to God, the act of creation remains the most sacred of our concept of art and an indelible memory of the *primaeval* world, of when the whole and the content of the practice of artistic creation were sacred. That spiritual aura of the act of creation is what cinematic representation never ceases to conjure up. Cinematic representation of the artist's gesture is condemned either to the ethic of *truth*, which only the true artist can summon in front of the camera, or the verisimilitude of Western culture, expressed in the fireworks of fiction with multiple solutions of representation and simulacrum, including strict renunciation.

The documentary eye of the real living artist at the height of his pictorial practice preserves the *truth* of creation, the genuine ritual of the artist's work process. The gaze of fiction distinguishes between the gesture of the artist from the history of art, no longer alive, from a more or less distant past and the artist invented by fiction itself. The staging of the imaginary artist's gesture which only exists on screen plays at confusing the boundaries of the *sacred act of creation* and may paradoxically come to be the attribution of the creative act of an artist of the real world: gesture, work and style. For its part, the creative act of a painter who existed in the real world and is part of the history of art bears the seal of the *sacred*, of the highest truth. The impossible cinematic gaze, however, demands verisimilitude —the appearance of truth— in the representation of the artist's gesture. It is obvious that in the films where the model is the odyssey of the artist's life, a model that travels with total freedom from historical data to total invention, from the history of art to the novelised life and where the work is often complementary and the artistic gesture residual. When the life of the artist is performed, when his incarnation and probably the vision of the authentic works is falsified, impotence in the face of the unattainable representation of the *truth* of the artistic gesture is prolonged in gesticulations, the hands of a copyist and a plethora of the stylistic figures of cinematic representation.

The cinematic view of the artistic gesture of Vincent van Gogh

At each moment of history groups emerge from society to cohere and structure different forms of singularity: the saint, the genius and the hero in the past, the missionary, the artist and the champion today. Vincent van Gogh is the best example of the notion of artistic singularity that 20th century society has had of the 19th century artist. The Van Gogh phenomenon has become a synonym for the legend of the artist, destined to be wrapped in a public affection nourished by a host of variables in the treatment, and also destined to be critically reviewed by the social sciences as well as art history and anthropology, which make values spontaneously perceived as absolute, timeless and universal relative.

Vincent van Gogh died eight years before the birth of the cinema. His life was not

contemporary to the cinematic gaze, which in any case would not have taken him as a subject, since in life he was not at all what he would become after his death: a paradigmatic figure of a new model of the artist who would be turned into a popular symbol over the 20th century. The cinema discovered Van Gogh and his work once he had already become famous through exhibitions and publications. The first documentary dates from 1948 (6) —on the occasion of an exhibition at the Orangerie in Paris in 1947— and the first fictional work about his life is from 1956 (7) - a literary adaptation of a best-selling commercial biography. After the celebration of the centenary of the painter's death in 1990, we can count —including cinema and television in all genres— a total of 88 works over the last decade of the century. Of those 24 are works of fiction—5 docudramas between cinema and television—, 10 television fictions and 9 cinema fictions. A new total of 22 (8), of which 8 are full-length features, propose a face, a body, a life and an artistic gesture belonging to Van Gogh (9).

But the first and most obvious hypothesis concerning the cinematic representation of Van Gogh's artistic gesture is that there is no such thing. The second part of the hypothesis rests on Roland Barthes' idea of the *open existence* of public figures who are the object of appropriation by intellectual and popular discourse. Just as the person and the life of the artist have been essayed by the hagiographic biography, the character and emotions by exegesis of the pictures, the diagnosis of the illness by psychiatric and artistic studies, the existential anguish and the social criticism by literature, the motifs of his paintings by modern philosophy... Van Gogh's artistic gesture has been essayed by cinematic fiction. We believe that Van Gogh's artistic gesture is taken from the artist's legend and from that legend the representation of the gesture inherits and recreates given forms and commonplaces.

In this study we propose to frame the research in the broad territory of cinematic biography, the natural framework for representation of the artistic gesture, which includes everything from an exhaustive vision of an artist's life or career, by way of *slices of life* —a few years, months or days— down to a *life flash*. To mark out the boundaries of the body of the study, the second step is to focus the investigation on films that were conceived by directors with an artistic training, who have spent an earlier period as painters in the classic meaning of the term, or who have practised visual plastic art in some way before becoming film-makers. That demarcation would confine the investigation to the work of film-makers who share an affinity for the practice of art —who have been painters like their subject— and who in some way, we suppose, arouse a particular feeling of closeness to the artistic gesture, creative yet within the bounds of verisimilitude.

Those two premises describe a classic work of the American cinema, *Lust for Life*, 1956, by Vincente Minnelli, and two modern ones, one with Japanese lineage and American production and the other French: *Crows*, episode 5 of *Akira Kurosawa's Dreams*, 1990, by Akira Kurosawa, and *Van Gogh*, 1991, by Maurice Pialat. Of the three, Minnelli is the director with the most eclectic and varied past as an artist, an apparently endless career: drawing student, water colourist, window display designer,

book illustrator, costume designer and set designer before becoming a stage director. Kurosawa was a painting student and intended to be a painter, but after spending a few years at it he gave up because he was afraid he was not good enough. Pialat studied Decorative Arts and Fine Arts; he was a student of Brianchon, Oudot and Descroyer and showed at the Salon for the under thirties from 1945 to 47.

Lust for Life, the first in time of the biographical fictions, became an irrevocable reference and model for later biographical films about Van Gogh, beside being one of the most important vehicles for the popularisation of the artist's legendary image in the second half of the 20th century. Minnelli cleverly used Vincent's letters to Théo with a certain bias as the guiding thread of the film, indulged in an extreme iconographic density and the physical appearance of the actor Kirk Douglas, who bore a strong resemblance to the image in the painter's self-portraits, one of the factors that enabled the director to cut neo-Platonic and Mannerist capers. In the style of the spirit of Jacques Aumont's *oeil interminable*, in *Crows* Akira Kurosawa established a simulation of a journey through the evolution of the image in the 20th century, from analogue to digital poetics. The Japanese director's testamental work follows the model of Minnelli's Van Gogh, played here by Martin Scorsese, and exhales the mystical breath of Zen Buddhism, which allows the director's *alter ego* —the young art student— to go in search of the source and, when he is unable to pin the master down, to melt into the painting, into the landscape of the canvases painted by Van Gogh as if they were the real landscape, in a similar way to the cinematic treatment of painting by Resnais and Hessens in *Van Gogh* in 1948, a metaphor for the artist's life after death. Maurice Pialat's film *Van Gogh* is permeated with the texture of the audiovisual documentaries of the time and by the director's aim to humanise the legend of Van Gogh: focusing on the man over the artist, the person over the character, which leads to a new stylisation of Van Gogh embodied by the actor Jacques Dutronc. The painting, the artist's gesture and sex are the three images denied in the film. The first, changed back into the image of the real nature motifs that inspired Impressionist painting —the cinematic revelation of the very spirit of Impressionism—, the second and third totally expelled, because the director systematically shuns any *mise en scène* or vision of the creative gesture or of sexuality.

Audiovisual representation of Vincent van Gogh displays a triple mythical character in its mediation: as an *exemplary model* of biography or narrated slice of life, as the *concentrated time* inherent to cinematic narration —both examples of mythical behaviour today according to Mircea Eliade (10)— and in the protagonist as artist wrapped in legend. The impossible representation of Van Gogh's original artistic gesture brings the works to an illusion of representation through the fleeting *mise en scène* of the gesticulation of an actor, the product of a hagiographic conception, where above all other possible ones the gesture of effort, of tension, of anxiety stands out. In short, the importance of the belief in linear time as a road forward to change and progress, on which there is no wait or rest, only possession and excitement. Different forms of staging, a use of the resources of the language and the cinematic eye reveal impotence when it comes to conjuring up the *sacred truth* of Van Gogh's artistic gesture, and mask —in an extension of an idea of Steiner's— *the real absence of that*

presence (11): we are referring to the constant of the eye in motion, distant, to the small surface of the cinematic image impressed in the illustration of the creative gesture and the short or non-existent interval of time to look, together with the preponderance of the image of the pictorial model of the real and the work.

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Appendix 1: Cartography of productions about Vincent van Gogh

Vincent van Gogh on Film and Video, a review 1948-1990, is a catalogue of the works produced on the figure and work of the Dutch painter, published by the Vincent van Gogh Filmfestival in June 1990. The Filmfestival was held in Amsterdam and organised by the Van Gogh Foundation and the Holland Festival on the occasion of the events to commemorate the centenary of his death. The search for the materials, carried out by Kees Pinxteren and Lidwien Ponsioen, is a chronological catalogue of a total of 84 works including the credits and a short synopsis, of which we have made an initial list in broad generic sections, with some new inclusions and one exclusion which we shall discuss.

Documentaries/Cinema-Video

1948. VAN GOGH, Alain Resnais, Robert Hessens, France, Films du Panthéon. Prize at the Venice Biennale in 1948 and Hollywood Academy Award for the best documentary in 1950

1952. LA FOLLIA DELLA NOTTE, Gian Luigi Rondi, Italy, Documento Film

1952. VINCENT VAN GOGH, Jan Hulsker, Holland, Profilti. "Certificate of Merit" in

Edinburgh in 1953

1961. PRESENCE PROTESTANTE:

1. VAN GOGH, L'EVANGELISTE

2. VINCENT AU BORINAGE, J. Cabriès, J. l'Hôte, Marcel Gosselin, France, SFP/TF1

1961. VINCENT VAN GOGH, A SELF-PORTRAIT, Ray Garner, USA, NBC News

1964. VAN GOGH, Michael Gill, UK, BBC TV

1965. BONNES ADRESSES DU PASSE, VAN GOGH, R. Bernard, France, INA

1969. DANS UN TRAIN POUR UNE ETOILE; VAN GOGH, Y.A. Hubert, France, INA

1970. LES PRECURSEURS, P. Alibert, B. Dorival, France, INA

1971. LES LUMIERES ET LES ROUTES, P. Brunet, R. Motte, France, INA

1971. CANVAS, Michael Dibb, UK, BBC TV

1971. VINCENT, Dick Riley, USA, KRON TV

1972. VINCENT VAN GOGH; HET AVONTUUR VAN EEN VERWOEST LEVEN, Renaat van Dessel, Belgium, Renaat van Dessel

1973. VINCENT, Ian McMillan, Holland, Forum Filmmakers BV

1973. EEN ZEKERE VINCENT, Wim Smits, Holland, Theater Klanken Beeld

1974. WÄRE VAN GOGH HEUTE HEILBAR?, Ernst von Khuon, Germany, SWF

1975. L'AVENTURE DE LA LUMIERE:

1. LA TERRE DU NORD

2. LE FEU SOLAIRE, Max-Pol Fouchet, France, RTF

1975. JE SUIS VINCENT LE HOLLANDAIS, Maurice Failevic, France, INA

1975. VINCENT'S FOWLER, Jean-Olf Lammers, Holland, Anthony van der Putten

1975. SECOND HOUSE; VAN GOGH IN ENGLAND, Edwin Mullins, UK, BBC TV

1977. VINCENT, Richard Hock, Holland, Cinecentrum Holland

1977. VINCENT'S OTHER POSTMAN, Keith Spencer Felton, USA, Cinema Dix Frانس

1978. EEN VAN GOGH AAN DE MUUR, Digna Sinke, Holland, NOS TV

1979. FAIRE GOUTER L'ART DE VAN GOGH, Daniel Hameline, France, INA

1979. THE VIEW FROM THE EDGE, David Cheshire, UK, BBC TV-Time Life Films-RM Arts

1980. A SHEER SUN, Samuel Ivaska, Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak TV

1980. LIRE C'EST VIVRE; LETTRES A THEO, Pierre Dumayet, Hervé Baslé, France, Antenne 2

1980. ONE HUNDRED GREAT PAINTINGS: OUTDOOR CAFE AT NIGHT, Peter Adam, UK, BBC TV-RM Arts

1980. ONE HUNDRED GREAT PAINTINGS: A SELF-PORTRAIT, Peter Adam, UK, BBC TV-RM Arts

1981. PROVENCE ET PEINTURES AU SOLEIL, J. and N. Rouzier, France, INA

1983. KEATING ON PAINTERS: VAN GOGH, Richard Fawkes, UK, Channel Four-Moving Picture Co.

1984. MODERN ART AND MODERNISM; MANET TO POLLOCK: VAN GOGH, Fred Orton, Griselda Pollock, UK, BBC TV

1984. IN A BRILLIANT LIGHT: VAN GOGH IN ARLES, Gene Searchinger, USA, Equinox Film

1985. VINCENT VAN GOGH 1853-1890; EIN LEBEN IN BILDERN UND BRIEFEN, Franz Baumer, Germany, Bayerischer Rundfunk

1985. VAN GOGH, Y. Nakamura, Japan, CBS

1985. A DUTCH NATIONAL PARK, John and Douwe Fernhout, Holland, Chanovski

1985. VINCENT: A DUTCHMAN, Christopher Higham, USA, Home Vision/

Metromedia Inc

1987. DE VERDWIJNING, Hans Keller, Holland, NOS TV

1987. VINCENT IN BRABANT, Jellie Dekker, Holland, NOS TV

1988. WARUM ERSCHOSS SICH VINCENT VAN GOGH?, Harald Hohenacker, Germany, Bayerischer Rundfunk

1988. VAN GOGH A PARIS, André Labarthe, France, Art Productions/Musée d'Orsay/La Sept

1988. VAN GOGH A ROMA, Lino de Serriis, Renato Marchitelli, Italy, Studio Universitario "La Sapienza"/ISEF

1988. DREAMS OF BEAUTIFUL JAPAN, Hideo Kado, Norihiro Nishimatsu, Japan, NHK

1989. VINCENT VAN GOGH; DER WEG NACH COURRIERES, Christoph Hübner, Gabriele Voss, Germany, Christoph Hübner Filmproduktion

1989. UN ARTISTE ETRANGER, Maité Beauquis, France, Ad hoc Productions

1989. VAN GOGH, LA REVANCHE AMBIGUË, Abraham Segal, France, Video 13 / CNRS Audiovisuel. First Prize at the International Documentary Festival in Nyon, 1989

1989. VINCENT VAN GOGH, Paul van den Bos, Holland, Signum Productions

1989. VINCENT VAN GOGH; AN EXPLOSION OF COLOURS, Ludy Kessler, Switzerland, Rincovision

1990. VAN GOGH, AN EXHIBITION, René van Gijn, Holland, NOS TV

1990. VINCENT TERUG IN ARLES, René van Gijn, Holland, NOS TV

1990. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF VAN GOGH, Harry Pot, Holland, Video International Projects

1990. VAN GOGH; EEN MUSEUM VOOR VINCENT, Elias Marroquin, Holland, La Linea Corporate Communications BV

1990. ANALYZE LOVERS; THE STORY OF VINCENT, Les Levine, USA, Les Levine/Mickery

1992. *J'ACCUSE VAN GOGH*, Gary Johnstone, UK, Channel Four

1993. *PALETTES: VINCENT VAN GOGH. LA HAUTE NOTE JAUNE*, Alain Jaubert, France, La Sept Arte/Delta Image/Musée d'Orsay. Best Creative Documentary, Scam, Paris 1994

Docudramas

1972. *VINCENT THE DUTCHMAN*, Mai Zetterling, UK, BBC TV / NET USA

1980. *MON CHER THEO*, Max Gérard, France, SFP

1987. *VINCENT: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF VINCENT VAN GOGH*, Paul Cox, Australia, Illuminations Films

1988. *LES IRIS DE SAINT-PAUL*, Renée Darbon, France, FR 3/RTBF

1990. *A MAN HEADING FOR THE SUN; THE LIFE OF VINCENT VAN GOGH*, Toshikazu Tanaka, Japan, TV Asahi

Fiction/Cinema

1956. *LUST FOR LIFE*, Vincente Minnelli, USA, MGM. Hollywood Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor, Anthony Quinn

1981. *LE VOYAGE DU HOLLANDAIS*, Charles Brabant, France, ORF

1985. *BESUCH BEI VAN GOGH*, Horst Seemann, Germany, GmbH/ZDF/DEFA Film

1985. *LA COULEUR ENCERCLEE*, Jean and Serge Gagné, Les Films du Crepuscle

1990. *VINCENT AND ME*, Michael Rubbo, Canada, Les Productions La Fête

1990. *MEMORIES FROM THE GARDEN OF ETTEN (LA VEILLEE)*, Samy Pavel, France-Belgium, Heliopolis Film/Triplan Production/Alain Keytsman Productions

1990. *VINCENT AND THEO*, Robert Altman, Holland (film and TV series in four chapters), Central TV/La Sept/Vara TV/Sofica/Valor

1990. *CROWS - AKIRA KUROSAWA'S DREAMS*, Akira Kurosawa, USA, Kurosawa Productions/Amblin Entertainment/Industrial Light and Magic. Honorary Hollywood Academy Award, Akira Kurosawa

1991. *VAN GOGH*, Maurice Pialat, France, Erato Films/Studio Canal Plus/Films A2/

Films du Livratois. César for Best Actor, Jacques Dutronc, 1991

Fiction/TV

1973. VINCENT, DE EVANGELIST, Ruud Schuitemaker, Holland, IKON TV,

1981. VINCENT; THE STORY OF A HERO, Leonard Nimoy, USA. The Guthrie Theatre/ABC Video Enterprises Inc. (theatrical monologue)

1983. UNDER THE HAMMER, Richard Wilson, UK BBC TV

1984. VINCENT, Terese Panoutsopoulos, Austria, Sammlung Friedrichsh of Production

1989. VAN GOGH, Veli-Matti Saikkonen, Finland, Yleis Radio/Finnish Broadcasting Co.

1989. PROYECTO VAN GOGH, Zbyszek Olkiewicz, Carlos Sarrio, Spain, Cambaleo Teatro (video recording of a theatre play)

1990. BY THE ROADSIDE (VINCENT VAN GOGH EN DE ANDEREN), Jan Keja, Holland, NOS/BRT/RM Arts, (series of four chapters)

1990. VINCENT, Rob Prass, Holland, NOT Production (series of three chapters)

1990. VAN GOGH, Anna Benson Gyles, UK, BBC TV

1991. *VINCENT 2, LE RETOUR*, Xavier Coton, France, La Sept Arte. Grand Prix Festival de Prades 1991 and Label et Prime à la Qualité du CNC

Animation

1988. GALAXIES, Eric Reyner, Jocelyn Gómez, France, Eric Reyner, Jocelyn Gómez

1989. THE BEDROOM, Maarten Koopman, Holland, Maarten Koopman. Prix du Jury, Cannes Festival 1990

1989. STARRY NIGHT, Vera Vlajic, Yugoslavia, Vera Vlajic

1990. VINCENT, Bruce Gray, Holland, Bruce Gray

Concert recordings

1978. VAN GOGHIANA, Wilhelmina Hoedeman, Holland, NOS TV

1986. LETTERS TO THEO, Anne Makower, Ireland (opera), RTE

1986. THE YELLOW HOUSE, Leonard Shapiro, USA (theatre musical), The Shaliko Co.

Dance recordings

1985. VAN GOGH; THE ARTIST IN LONELINESS, Shizumi Manale, USA, Shizumi Manale

1988. VINCENT; AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE ARTIST IN MUSIC AND DANCE, Karel Braun, Holland, Peter Dekker Audiovisuals

To the total of 84 works included in the search —dated June 1990— we have added 5, in bold and italic. One from 1990, the *Crows* episode from *Akira Kurosawa's Dreams*, Maurice Pialat's *Van Gogh*, 1991, *Vincent 2*, *Le retour* by Xavier Coton, also 1991, and two television documentaries, *J'accuse van Gogh* and *Palettes: Vincent van Gogh. La haute note jaune*, 1992 and 1993 respectively. The two films were shown all round the world, the television fiction was broadcast of Theme Night on the Franco-German channel Arte devoted to Van Gogh on 4 October 1998 and among the documentaries the first one appears in the IMPUT 1992 collection and the Van Gogh chapter in the *Palettes* series, broadcast to a large audience on French television, won the Scam Award for Best Creative Documentary, Paris 1994. From the original search we have cut out *Oviri; the wolf at the door*, 1986, by Henning Carlsen, a Danish film whose subject is Paul Gauguin; Van Gogh appears episodically as in other films (12). By adding the 5 and removing this one, we have a new total of 88 works. In statistical terms, from 1990 the percentage is not real, since it is not based on systematic research as up to that date.

Notes:

(1) The expression of the four autonomies is from Ocampo, E. (1985,25-45)

(2) Ocampo, E. and Peran, M. (1991,15)

(3) Vasari's biographies and his thought ratify this at the beginnings of the history of art. "Vasari thinks of the guarantee given to a specific present by the ability to start from antecedents which are gradually perfected and the importance of the historical medium and framework in which each practice is resolved. Vasari's fascination with Michelangelo already shows that the accumulation of original contributions creates a basis from which the possibility of attaining the ideal becomes gradually less distant. In that way progress towards the peak is guaranteed by the passage of time itself. Of course that primitive idea of evolution continues to be effective only in periods when the projects of a majority of artists come together in similar aims. Moreover, that

reflection introduces us to the second element that resolves the causes of the historical development of art, since the immediately preceding style is part of the framework in which each new production unfolds.” Ocampo, E. and Peran, M. (1991,19)

(4) Lévi-Strauss, C. (1975,51-55)

(5) “The symbolic is not a concept or an instance or a category, nor a “structure”, but an act of exchange and a *social relation that puts an end to the real*, which dissolves the real and at the same time the opposition between the real and the imaginary (...) The symbolic is what puts an end to that code of disjunction and separated terms. *It is the utopia that puts an end to the commonplaces of soul and body, of man and nature, of real and non-real, of birth and death.*” Baudrillard, J. (1980,153)

(6) *Van Gogh* by Alain Resnais and Robert Hessens.

(7) *Lust for Life* by Vincente Minnelli.

(8) The person of the artist is not portrayed in two of them: *Vincent: the life and death of Vincent van Gogh* by Paul Cox and *Memories from the garden of Etten (La Veillée)* by Samy Pavel.

(9) See Appendix I: *Cartography of productions about Vincent van Gogh*, pp. 13-16.

(10) Eliade, M. (1957)

(11) “We seek the immunities of indirection. In the agency of the critic, reviewer or mandarin commentator, we welcome those who can domesticate, who can secularise the mystery and summons of creation.” Steiner,G. (1989,39)

(12) John Houston's *Moulin Rouge*, 1952, and Roger Planchon's *Toulouse-Lautrec*, 1997. In the former Seurat and Anquetin also appear and in the latter, apart from Van Gogh, Degas, Émile Bernard and Renoir also appear in one of the episodes.

