

Giacomo Verde's Archive

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The I_PAD Project

Scholars of the I_PAD project (*Italian Performance Archive in Digital*) units from two Italian universities (University of Milan and Link University-Rome) and from CNR Institute-ISTI (Pisa) with different skills in the field of cultural-heritage digitization have been and will be involved in different stages of the work from 2023 through 2025. The I_PAD project is winner of the competitive call, PRIN 2022–Research Projects of National Relevance, and receives funding from the Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR).¹ It is coordinated by a “principal investigator,” the State University of Milan. It was established to recreating and disseminate a specific artist archive through the rigorous development of high-resolution recording and re-materialization techniques.

I_PAD is ongoing and focuses on the archive of the Italian artist Giacomo Verde (1956-2020),² who worked in the field of video art, performance, and sensory and interactive installations as an author, actor, performer, video-set designer, and director. The aim of the project is to demonstrate the importance of documenting, monitoring, studying, safeguarding, digitizing, promoting, and disseminating the memory of Italian video theater and video art of the 1980s and 1990s starting from the Giacomo Verde Archive.³ The collection is a testimony to the extraordinary value of the reconstruction of Giacomo Verde's life and work. His continuous creative

¹ PRIN is the program of the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR) that supports research projects proposed by universities. Projects can be presented by different research units of one or more universities,

² From the 1980s, Giacomo Verde produced works through the creative use of “low” technology. He is the inventor of “tele-narration,” a technique also used for creating live-video backdrops for concerts and poetry recitals. He was one of the first Italians to create interactive art works and net-art. He worked with several different artistic teams. Reflecting on and playfully experimenting with the latest techno-anthropological developments and building bridges between different art genres was his artistic constant.

³ For the next two years, the project envisages three research grants and a series of collaborations with professionals and companies in the audiovisual and digital-archiving sector.

research in the field of electronic images (as demonstrated by the work *WDR mari*, a tribute to *TV Candle* by Nam June Paik), the unexpected artistic solutions together with his intellectual legacy, all oriented toward reminding the “viewer” how important critical thinking is and questioning the image presented to us by the mass media, are valuable records (Pittaluga 2023; Donati and De Pisis 2023).

The video archive was well organized but not easy to access: The I_PAD project proposes a new framework and a model for storage, an innovative approach to conservation and restoration in the form of a free-access repository online based on the Giacomo Verde Archive so as to remain in long-term memory. The main purpose of digital archives is to preserve a shared value, bringing to life and making visible the creative spirit of each design project.

The I_PAD project is split in two interrelated and parallel paths:

1. A theoretical one: documentation for a series of artworks will be selected and analyzed to highlight specific artistic work methods.
2. A practical one, based on the development of online repository for data sets and metadata, gathering and storing audiovisual material.

In the main, the process has become identifying a cataloguing methodology, a taxonomy for organizing findings and relative protocols, and models of digitization suitable to the inherent complexity of video works.

The goal is to valorize and enhance Verde’s artwork and to provide a reference model for other video theater archives in Italy. Verde’s archive is characterized by a plurality of documentary typologies and by specific requirements for their description. It consists of a large photographic collection, a vast catalogue of drawings for projection and notebooks, in part unpublished,⁴ and more than 600 cassettes and approximately 1,200 hours of video recordings (Monteverdi 2024; Brunetti 2022).

Documents stored in the archive come in various sizes and formats: books, magazines, posters, catalogues and audiovisual media. Verde’s archive has been deemed of “national interest” by the Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities (MIBAC).⁵ The project has two different

⁴ Cf. A.M. Monteverdi, *Giacomo Verde Installazioni, TV Interattive, Net Art, Tecnoteatro* (1992-2002), Milano University Press, 2024; A.M. Monteverdi, D. D’Amico, and V. Sansone, *Giacomo Verde. Attraversamenti tra Teatro e Video (1992-1986)*, Milano University Press, 2022.

⁵ The Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities (MIBAC), in cooperation with its central and local institutions, is in charge of the protection of historical, artistic, and ethno-anthropological heritage. MIBAC promotes the knowledge and the preservation of cultural heritage and the contemporary spread of new forms of artistic expression, in

but interconnected uses: The first consists of a creation of a repository online of thematic paths for didactic and research purposes, while the second is a creative exploration of alternative datasets in the form of re-enactment, as an immersive and participatory environment.

Gabriella Giannachi in *Archiving Everything* (Giannachi 2018) asserts that archives, as places of living memory, relational objects, and cultural devices, must be continually revisited and reactivated. The mechanism for doing so can only be the practice of reenactment, which allows us to make them present to us and, at the same time, to inscribe our presence in them. Following this theoretical approach, the project attempts to extract Verde's documents from historical time to reintroduce them into the flow of life in different modes of exhibition or on the Web. Many of these works can be re-performed and re-staged (Baldacci 2016).

The team was previously engaged in the exhibition *Giacomo Verde: Set the Artists Free from Art* (La Spezia, CAMeC, 2023): a selection of works from the artist's own archives that had not been exhibited on display together with works that had not been seen in public for many years. The exhibition illustrated Verde's first "techno-artistic phase" (Monteverdi 2023b), a well-documented and creatively rich period when he arrived in 1983, self-taught, from popular and street theatre to video art, presenting works and installations whose characteristic feature was the craftsmanship of a "technological artifact," the use of low technology, and the addition of humble materials. Thanks to the curatorship of the exhibition, interactive installations and works that were no longer active were found in the warehouses of museums in Northern Italy and put back into operation. This experience was useful for the research work undertaken for the I_PAD project because we perceived the problems we would face when dealing with material from the 1990s that had been created with now-obsolete technology.

The team also engaged in four meetings at the Cini Foundation in Venice (2023) in the context of activities organized by the ARCHiVe Centre (Analysis and Recording of Cultural Heritage in Venice).⁶

connection with the restoration and protection actions carried out by other central and local institutions of the ministry. It ensures documentation, preservation, and promotion of art, artists, and authors.

⁶ <https://www.cini.it/en/institutes-and-centres/archive-analysis-and-recording-of-cultural-heritage-in-venice>.

Video Art/Video Theater in Italy in the 1980-1990s

In our first contact with the materials, we immediately noticed the risk of a dispersion and disappearance of the materials (analog and digital works), originally deposited in the artist's home in Lucca and subsequently scattered in various sites and houses. There is neither an official cataloging nor a detailed inventory of the materials.

With the possibility of financing by MUR, the two partners, University of Milan as principal investigator and Link University-Rome, immediately determined the main archiving phases. The first step taken was the cataloguing of the audiovisuals, the selection of a group of the most significant video works from the period 1983-2003,⁷ and decisions as to the conservation treatment for them.

A true relic found in the archive is the videocassette *Sun Treatment*, a video work from 1983 derived from the performance *Video Tanning* and never digitized by the artist. The video was selected for the Ferrara Videoart Festival curated by Lola Bonora, together with the works of talented and famous artists such as Fabrizio Plessi and promising young artists in the field of video art and independent cinema: Giuseppe Baresi, Maurizio Camerani, Paolo Rosa, one of the founders of Studio Azzurro, and Giancarlo Cauteruccio. It was the second edition of the festival and Verde was presented at the conference *Tendenze del Video Anni Ottanta*, scheduled at the festival. There are rare catalogues, brochures, and posters of the video-event in the archive.

The Giacomo Verde Archive, in the plurality of its contents, has proved to be an extraordinary forge of "stories," as well as evidence of networks of collaborations and areas of experimentation that take the documentary issue far beyond the biographical question of the artist, providing a precise and original key to interpreting the themes of the time and a direct profile of its protagonists. The archive also contains material relating to the history of Italian art by artists, arts organizations, national events, and traces of socially engaged practices associated with activism because Verde's artwork

⁷ Some video masters from Verde's early period are deposited in the Blow Up audiovisual archive of Gabriele Coassin, who began producing the artist's video works in 1986, thanks to a friendship and assiduous frequentation because of their residence in the same city, Treviso (Monteverdi 2023a). Comparisons with the files hosted in that archive have made it possible to identify and locate the masters (first copies), even determining the generation of duplicated copies made by the artist in other formats. The deposits are also scattered among Treviso, Bologna, Empoli, Padua, and Ravenna in the headquarters of the theater companies with which Verde had collaborated.

often deals with political issues (Monteverdi, D'Amico, and Sansone 2022; Monteverdi 2024).

The Phases of the I_PAD Project

1. Identifying the location of materials
2. Making the first summary survey of the formats
3. Distinguishing videos as master, dub or copy
4. Making a selection of:
 - a. unpublished/audio-video materials never digitized by the artist
 - b. videos requiring treatment (mechanical restoration/restoration)
 - c. old-format videos (BVU; Betacam; U-Matic)⁸
5. Creating an inventory
6. Making a comparison with materials
7. Cataloguing the materials
8. Preparing an analytical description of the content
9. Metadating
10. Creating a common online platform where information can be shared and implemented
11. Digitizing from the master (first copy)
12. Implementing a plan for long-term platform preservation and metadating

Online Platform and Virtual Environment As Archive

As soon as these previous phases have been completed, it is possible to start the creation of new formats to host single items of the Archive. These are the different units of the archive with autonomous functions:

⁸ U-Matic is an analog recording videocassette format first introduced by Sony to the market in September 1971. It was among the first video formats to contain the videotape inside a cassette, as opposed to the various reel-to-reel or open-reel formats of the time. Sony later introduced the High-Band Broadcast Video U-Matic (BVU) format. The BVU format had an improved color-recording system and lower noise levels. After decades in storage, many of the videotapes now have sticky-shed syndrome, a condition in which the oxide that holds the visual content becomes moist and gummy in texture and flakes off the polyester tape base. A high-quality videotape technology was introduced by Sony in 1982. Initially an analog format and later digital (Digital Betacam), Betacam was designed for professional TV recording.

1. Twenty video capsules (Link University-Rome) created with the open-source software MemoRekall⁹ to combine heterogeneous materials (drawings, photographs, storyboards, video fragments) into a single video time-line for teaching and educational purposes and academic use.
2. Video essay (University of Milan) for broadcasting purpose.
3. A virtual environment (designed by the CNR/ISTI, Pisa)¹⁰ for a restitution of the archive in a creative and immersive virtual environment, as well as designing a digital-twin Web site.
4. A YouTube channel for sharing low-definition videos from the archive open to all. The channel could be used to house a special video channel for recording or streaming interviews and new materials.

Since October 2023, it has been possible to activate an internship at the CNR/ISTI in Pisa to experiment in a playful dimension of the archive that can be visited in a virtual environment, based on a user-experience-oriented approach. The internship involves the creation of a demo of the I_PAD project. Specifically, a virtual city named “Giacomo Verde” was designed, and some videos were inserted within some areas with the addition of graphic elements. The metaphor of the archive as a city allowed intuitive access to the materials (in demo mode) to organize information and illustrate relationships. Each urban square determines specific thematic areas and the reproduction of various types of multimedia content is activated near monuments and buildings. The city can be visited via PC, with the first-person screen perspective and via a VR head viewer. The graphics engine used was Unreal Engine 5.2.

⁹ MemoRekall is a free and open-source Web app to explain and annotate video, created by a team led by Clarisse Bardiot. The main aim was to build a tool to explain the video-recordings of the performing arts. The videos are enhanced adding notes, documents, or Web links. The result is called a “capsule.” MemoRekall is an operational scholarly environment, used by researchers from several humanities backgrounds (Bardiot 2015)

¹⁰ ISTI-CNR, founded in 2000, is the largest CNR (Italian National Research Council) institute active in the field of computer science. It develops scientific research of excellence in the field of computer science and is active in many different areas of research within the field. ISTI is actively involved in collaborations with many universities and research centers, both nationally and internationally. It actively participates in research consortia and research projects, carrying out infrastructural support activities for research and technology transfer to the business world and public administrations.

Arkive: The Long-Term Archiving System for University of Milano Research Datasets

For the project, it was necessary to identify where to reliably store long-term the large amount of material obtained after the high-definition digitization of the archive. Digital data are fragile to preserve in the long term. Data retention means that data should remain accessible and reusable for several years or indefinitely, ensuring:

1. Interpretability of the content
2. (Technical) readability of the file
3. Integrity of the file and its contents

It was essential to identify a large and secure archiving system, a reliable platform over time: Arkive infrastructure inaugurated in 2023 within the computer and information technology center (ICT) of the University of Milan¹¹ was chosen, based on the OAIS digital-archiving standard. As a project born within the University of Milan, it was important to create an archive that would preserve the research data within the university itself.

Using Arkive, the work with I_PAD will be divided into three phases:

1. Entering data
 - Evaluation and selection to determine which data should be designated for long-term retention or deleted, for how long, with what metadata, in what format and where.
 - Definition of insertion procedures (such as checks, rejects, corrections, and transformations).
2. Management of data in the archive
 - Data care, periodic integrity checks, reporting on the status of stored data.
3. Export or publishing of data
 - Definition of technical specifications for export and publication.
 - Transfer protocols.
 - Formats (e.g., image scaling).
 - Metadata.
 - Access policies and use licenses.

¹¹ Giorgio Bagnato, network and system administrator; Luca Ferrar, UX designer; Loredana Rollandi, application and research data administrator; Michele Sciarabba, developer, analyst; Federica Zanardini, project manager; Matteo Zoppi, system administrator. The description of the Arkive project is taken from the official website. <https://progetto-arkive.unimi.it/il-progetto/>

Conclusions

Without the I_PAD project financed by the MUR, Giacomo Verde's artworks risked being dispersed because of the absence of a catalogue of the various materials contained in the archive, which are significant for an entire generation of Italian video art and video theater of the 1980s and 1990s.

Currently, the archive is undergoing reorganization, classification, and digitization of all its documents. The audiovisual materials require high-quality digitization and, in some cases, conservation and restoration. The enormous number of versions and copies generated from analog videos made it necessary for the I_PAD team, to primarily identify the master, i.e., the original format, so as to preserve the work digitally in the best quality. A careful examination of the overall audiovisual production (which also includes the documentation of digital and interactive installations and technological performances) is leading to the definition of an exact videography divided thematically and chronologically, which will be available for consultation on online platforms. The connection with the ICT of the University of Milan and the use of the Arkive infrastructure will enable a collection of materials for a long-term memory.

The design of a shared virtual-reality environment will ideally serve to open up a more participatory approach that will increase the content, and become a place of collective and sharing knowledge, focusing on the social potential for the community to re-use documentation that would otherwise be considered inactive, keeping the memory and the spirit of the performance alive.

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