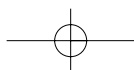
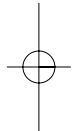
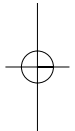


New-Media Technology, Science, and Politics



NEW-MEDIA TECHNOLOGY, SCIENCE, AND POLITICS

The Video Art
of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid

Edited by Marina Gržinić and Tanja Velagić
Translated by Rawley Grau

Löcker

Gedruckt mit freundlicher Unterstützung des Bundesministeriums für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur.

The publication of this book was made possible by additional support of the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia and the ZAK Publishing Society (Publicistično društvo ZAK), Ljubljana, Slovenia



© Erhard Löcker GesmbH, Wien 2008
Cover designed by Marta Popivoda
Herstellung: Gemi S.R.O., Prag
ISBN 3-85409-484-5

Acknowledgements

The book is a reader on the topic of video art as seen through the perspective of science, new media technology, and especially, the discourse, condition and perspective of politics. This politics is the political of theory, the emancipation of the social, and the deconstruction of aesthetics.

Video is rearticulated through the video work of the Slovene artists Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, who have been active in video since the beginning of the 1980s. The book, therefore, is also about a medium that was initially encompassed by the political reality of socialist Europe (until the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989), then passed through a transitional (post-socialist) period, and today is fully immersed in neoliberal global capitalism. The book aims to be a challenging theoretical, essayistic, and critical construction of the not so well-known history of a particular video art practice in the specific era of late Yugoslav socialism and ex-Yugoslav post-socialism, characterized by a powerful underground movement in the 1980s, the Balkan wars of the 1990s, and the capitalist reality of the new millennium.

We would like to thank all those who have contributed essays and interviews to the book: Diane Amiel, Gulsen Bal, Giorgio Bertellini, Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki, Birgit Langenberger, Mojca Puncer, Walter Seidl, Miško Šuvaković, Federica Timeto, Yvonne Volkart, and Ana Vujanović. We deeply appreciate their interest in analyzing a body of work that exists on the margins of many discourses.

A special note of thanks goes to Rawley Grau, who translated many of these texts from Slovene, provided substantial assistance with the translation of Diane Amiel's essay from French, and copy-edited the entire book. Without

his dedicated work, the book would simply not have been published. The publishing house, Löcker Verlag in Vienna, deserves all our admiration for its interest in the topic, as does, in particular, Alexander Lellek for his always open-minded readiness to present topics that reflect different and sometimes strongly marginalized interests.

Finally, we would like to thank the Ministry of Culture of Slovenia for its support of the translation of this book, and the ZAK Publishing Society (Publicistično društvo ZAK) in Ljubljana, in collaboration with which the book was originally conceived. ZAK was the publisher of *Trenutki odločitve: performativno, politično in tehnološko* [Moments of Decision: The performative, political, and technological] (2006), the first monograph in Slovene (or any other language) about the video art of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, and it is this work that provided a basis for the present book.

Marina Gržinić and Tanja Velagić

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MARIA KLONARIS AND KATERINA THOMADAKI

The Reconstructed Fictions of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid

At the 2003 International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen, Germany, a retrospective dedicated to the collaborative work of two artists from the former Eastern Europe, Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, gave us an opportunity to discover the full range of a body of work that impresses us with its commitment, disconcerts us with its language, and astonishes us with its method.¹

After two decades of a nearly total eclipse, the political question now returns to the foreground – in France. The resurgence of militant films from the 1970s sets forth struggles long overlooked – class struggles, political resistance, anti-colonialist and anti-racist struggles – which are currently being reactivated by the anti-globalist movements. In the meantime, these struggles have become inseparably linked with other, much less discussed, struggles associated with the politics of identity (or »de-identity« [*dés-identité*], as Claude Cahun would say), whether the identity is sexual (feminism, gender politics, the queer movement) or political (post-colonialism, Diasporas, multiculturalism, post-communism, post-nationalism). This present situation demands an expansion of what has classically been recognized as politically engaged film – and, more broadly, politically engaged art. Militant film is usually associated with a cinematic language that privileges commentary and message: the immediately readable »realist« language of popular or documentary film, a language that of course remains essential. But we must certainly not lose sight of the political film or political art for which the subversive

message must necessarily entail transgressions within the language itself. Hence the risk of visual inventions that break down established communication codes. In our opinion, both approaches to the political – the first, which uses an »accessible« language, and the second, which attacks »the medium at its roots« (to borrow a phrase from film theorist Jacques Aumont) – both viewpoints, though apparently opposed, are in fact complementary and should be able to stand in mutual solidarity.

With such a double expansion in mind, regarding, on the one hand, political positions, and on the other, the cinematic language, we now turn our attention to two artists who come from a political territory that is for us in France more or less a *terra incognita*: the former Eastern Europe.

Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid are leading figures in Slovene video art. They have been working together since 1982 and have co-authored more than thirty videographic works, short sixteen-millimeter film, a number of video or multimedia installations, and an interactive CD-ROM for the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany. Their videos (always short works) have been honored at many festivals and by a number of prestigious institutions (in 1994, the Museum of Modern Art in New York dedicated a retrospective to their work). They have also created a number of documentary videos and other works for Slovene television. Šmid is an art historian; Gržinić is a philosopher and media theorist, a cultural activist, and a freelance international organizer and curator of video programs, exhibitions, and symposia. Gržinić has published numerous essays and books, which have made her an internationally respected authority on Eastern European art.

The video art of Gržinić and Šmid developed in Yugoslavia in the 1980s, when government control over cultural production was relatively loose, a situation that allowed certain avant-garde trends to appear in art. As part of the gradual

disintegration of communism after the death of Tito in 1980 (though still a number of years before the fall of the Berlin Wall), dissident movements began to appear in Slovenia and video became one of their primary technological tools of communication (VHS in particular). Dissent was both political and sexual. It implied a critique of the methods and apparatus of power – a critique of propaganda and totalitarianism on the one hand, and the appropriation of pornography and the destabilization of sexual identities on the other. Gržinić and Šmid were part of the punk movement and the Ljubljana underground, which provided fertile soil for resistance. »We are not artists, we are activists,« the two often say. The politicization of art entails, among other things, a rereading of art history and an explicit critique of its authoritarian structure and subjection to power. Gržinić and Šmid have worked with such Slovene artist collectives as Irwin and Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK), who are known for their provocative actions. Gržinić and Šmid's work may be seen as belonging to a specific kind of conceptual art marked by the identity crisis of the »East,« a region devastated by brutal dislocation and seeking new ways to define itself. Their video activity represents one of the most powerful expressions of these shifts.

Using strategies such as appropriation, »the remake,« and quotation, Gržinić and Šmid combine literary, theatrical and visual-art references, film quotations, mass-media stereotypes, and sociological and philosophical discourses. Their critical art unleashes an enormous cultural reserve, reread and experienced through that *other* social and political reality, which today is represented by »post-socialism.« Here lies the source of that feeling of unfamiliarity and estrangement. Or, as philosopher Marie-José Mondzain might say, a *crisis of the gaze*. Their works demand that »Western« viewers relinquish many of their established criteria and gradually replace them with others. Gržinić and Šmid ask »us« to accept the fact that »our« referential matrices are not universal. They remind us that self-

proclaimed universality is nothing but a symptom of a centripetal colonial system (some colonialisms are obvious and stated, while others are hidden and deceptive). In short, our position of geographically and culturally conditioned subjects is underlined. We find ourselves facing a »difference« that questions us and broaches an issue that has today become of utmost importance: »How does one present and interpret the specific identity of other cultures and productions within the one-dimensional established framework of dominant Western culture?« (Marina Gržinić).

»It's Not Red, It's Blood.«

Gržinić and Šmid's political art addresses the medium of video at its multilayered roots and in its foundational interrelations with other media (Nam June Paik once said that video art represents the tangent of experimental film and television). In doing this, their work adheres neither to the »narrative« or demonstrative logic of the militant film, nor to the »structural« logic of the experimental film – including that branch of avant-garde film which uses quotation in the form of »found footage«; nor does their work operate along the lines of Duchampian conceptualism, which has become a cliché of globalized art.

Their videos are distinguished by an eclectic, discursive, and distanced cinephilia, one that exempts itself from fascination and empathy. Their quotations are layered within a complex conceptual and visual tissue that is dismantled and stratified. The stylistic effects clash; references to *auteur* films (Hitchcock, Eisenstein, Godard, de Palma) intermingle with literary, poetic, and theoretical references (Chekhov, Marguerite Duras, Roland Barthes, Slavoj Žižek, Peter Weibel, and Gržinić's own theoretical writings) as well as allusions to popular mass media – B-movies, TV shows, advertisements, and current political

events. From these remixed materials, strange »fictions« are reconstructed with a surprising disnarrative detachment and semantic multiplicity. These are fragmentary, suspended fictions. Phantasmic and critical situations are woven around political figures (e.g. Mao Zedong and his wife), art movements (Irwin and NSK), and cultural productions (e.g. František Čap's cult Slovene film *Moments of Decision* and Cindy Sherman's photographs). As stereotypes, masquerades, and reminiscences, the images re-perform fiction as a mask that is always being removed and put on again, in a constant transformation. Thus transvestism becomes a linguistic strategy. Gržinić and Šmid reread the Brechtian alienation effect via Godard and Fassbinder. Paradoxically, in the midst of this shattering of every continuity, this proliferation of quotations, and this denial of every identification attempt, what emerges is drama. Disillusionment breaks through the discourse and the irony, along with an awareness of belonging to the »inappropriate/d other,« to use Trinh T. Minh-ha's formulation. This sharp insightfulness endows Gržinić and Šmid's work with passionate tension. Political wounds are transmuted into physical, existential realities. Inverting Godard's comment »It's not blood, it's red,« Gržinić writes: »So it is not surprising that theoreticians have spoken of Eastern Europe as a generator of concepts in the field of art and culture that are connected with the traumatic real. 'It's not red, it's blood,' is the indivisible post-Communist remainder that is not (yet?) re-integratable into the global immaterial and virtual new media world.«²

This »remainder« becomes particularly felt when Gržinić and Šmid reinterpret that monument of our theatrical heritage, Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, in their 1992 video of the same name. Chekhovian resignation is pervaded and inverted by a masquerade of female/male stereotypes drawn from other media representations: sadomasochism (in a »remake« of the Charlotte Rampling character from *The Night Porter*), cross-dressing camp (Warholian imprints), military machismo, etc. Fragments

of the play's dialogues hover between characters gone astray, expelled into the time and space of acidic modernity. Now and then, we are shown scenes from the war in the former Yugoslavia. The phantasm is accompanied by its geographical and historical reality. The Chekhovian poetry (its fragments) seems even more melancholy, for it has become the sign of a shattered world strewn with the »ruins of history« (Walter Benjamin). This astonishing blend of cultural legacies and media echoes, of »high« culture and pop culture, of fragmented dramaturgy and narrative dissonance, leaves us ultimately with the taste of ruins in our mouth. Constantly oscillating between mockery and coalescence, this shadow of Chekhov's play allows us to see another drama unfolding, the drama of post-communist Europe, pulverized not only by nationalistic violence, but also by the violence of the West and the media.

At times, Gržinić and Šmid's videos assume an explicitly video-essay style and thus invent a unique formula for filmed theory. Pushing a Godardian attitude further, the artists stage characters who recite excerpts from Gržinić's theoretical writings in the form of declaimed or acted-out dialogue, performed in discordant settings. The video *Post-Socialism + The Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin* (1997), and especially the video *Eastern House* (2003), are typical examples. In *Eastern House*, we see two women who meet at the apartment of a man so the three of them can engage in a kind of *ménage à trois*, which develops through a stereotypical and elementary collage of a mundane topology: kitchen, bed, living room, street. But these are merely appearances; the video, in fact, consists of a string of quotations: references to the 1970s body art of the Belgrade artist Neša Paripović, »remakes« of Antonioni and Coppola, speeches by George W. Bush about the war in Iraq, and so on. Theory is woven into the whole as an impossible, inappropriate, and at the same time, solemn and improbable text. Sometimes through soliloquy, at other times through disputation, theory creates distance from the settings and the



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Post-Socialism + Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin*
/ *Postsocializem + retroavantgarda + Irwin*, video, 1997

portrayed characters in a most unusual way, just as these settings and characters create distance from the theory. The simultaneous fictionalization of theory and the theoreticization of fiction produce a paradoxical situation, a *clash*, as it were, between the two hemispheres of the brain. The viewer feels compelled to question her or his own position.

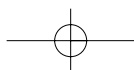
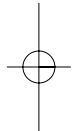
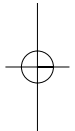
As a counterweight to this method of intellectual provocation, the 1993 video *Labyrinth* abandons dialogue and text altogether. In this regard, it is an exception in Gržinić and Šmid's videography. *Labyrinth* is a dance video. Here the body is all that speaks. The body and the music. Images of a Bosnian refugee camp on the outskirts of Ljubljana can be seen now and then in the background. But the dramatic intensity of the work is created mainly from the choreographed bodies that look as if they are emerging, trembling and convulsing, from the catastrophe. Shot during the time of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the 1990s, *Labyrinth* does not show the traumatic conflict itself, but rather, its mental echo and psychological imprint. Bodies meet and try to make love, but they cannot help echoing the violence they have absorbed.

Gržinić and Šmid confront us with the angst of the post-communist East, which they themselves experience from within, analyzing and dissecting it. They confront us with all the »inappropriate/d others,« all the suppressed historical traumas. They uncover the centrality of all that is »off-center.« They reveal how disillusion can give rise to an extraordinary dynamic of resistance.

Notes

- 1 This essay was originally published in French as »Les fictions reconstruites de Marina Gržinić et Aina Šmid« in *BREF: Le magazine de court métrage*, no. 59 (2003); it later appeared as the afterword to Marina Gržinić's book *Une fiction reconstruite: Europe de l'Est*,

- post-socialisme et retro-avant-garde* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).
- 2 Compare Peter Weibel and Timothy Druckrey, eds., *Net_Condition: Art and Global Media* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: The MIT Press, 2001).



MOJCA PUNCER

Moments of Decision: Rethinking Past Stories for the Future

In this essay I wish to analyze the video and media works produced by Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid in an intensive collaboration from 1982 to 2005; my aim is to explore the wider context in which they worked, which can be defined essentially by three notions: the performative, the political, and the technological. My reading, too, will be focused on these three aspects in the production and reception of their video art.¹

In 1982, Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, then part of the group Borders of Control No. 4, began making videos within the punk and the subcultural alternative art scene of Ljubljana. Since then, they have created more than thirty videos, which they have shown at numerous international video festivals and for which they have received a number of awards.

Their video *Moments of Decision* was presented to the general public in 1985. In this work, Gržinić and Šmid present a new treatment of war, post-war history, and the alternative and the political in art through a strategic and politicized reading of František Čap's 1955 film about Slovene Partisans, *Moments of Decision* – especially the film's censored segments, which ended up in a bunker. Gržinić and Šmid's video broaches the delicate topic of wartime collaboration; similarly, their video art as a whole can be seen as an attempt at resituating the history of Slovene and international video, film, and art through the performative gesture of reinterpretation.² Through their specific reading of Slovene film history, Gržinić and Šmid at the same time ask about the causes and conditions of their own involvement in the medium of video.

In the international history of video, the Korean artist Nam June Paik is viewed as the pioneer of video art. A member of the Fluxus movement in the 1960s, Paik brought together conceptual film experiments and video (as, for instance, in his groundbreaking »video sculptures« in the mid-sixties, which used specially prepared television sets). The beginnings of video as an art form were very much connected with the rise of television, as it attempted to oppose the use of television as a tool for mass manipulation. It hardly needs saying that this »established« history of video is quite different from what happened in Slovenia: the first Slovene art video is considered to be the 1969 work *White Milk of White Breasts* [Belo mleko belih prsi] by Nuša and Srečo Dragan, artists who at the time were part of the Slovene conceptual-art movement known as OHO.

But the real flowering of video in Slovenia came in the mid-1980s as a vibrant urban culture developed in the context of decaying socialism. Now videomakers were asking new questions about the discursive potential of the technology, and they were supported in their art-making by a number of important independent spaces of production and presentation: in particular, the Ljubljana's Student Cultural and Art Center (ŠKUC) with its gallery and video production facilities (ŠKUC-Forum); the club subculture; and the alternative underground scene (which in the 1990s, was centered in the Metelkova squat).³ By the 1990s, this explicit link between video and the social and political contexts could be seen in the videos (made with nonprofessional VHS equipment) that documented Slovenia's Ten-Day War of independence in 1991 and the squatting of the former Yugoslav People's Army barracks on Metelkova Street (in Ljubljana) in 1992. Despite a certain delay, it did not take Slovenes long to realize the significant democratizing effect of this new home video technology. In the 1980s, VHS video recorders were used both to document what was happening in the alternative underground scene of

Ljubljana as well as to create art and music videos. In Slovenia, the rebirth of video art in 1980s (after the conceptual experiments of OHO) is linked to both the subculture scene of punk and the pop-music culture of MTV.

The extensive video production in the 1980s that developed as part of Ljubljana's alternative subculture scene – in tandem with the remarkable »retro-avant-garde« Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) movement of Laibach, Irwin, and others – was in its beginnings associated with both mass culture and certain theoretical practices (notably, structuralism and psychoanalytic theory). As they deliver their messages, the videos of this period lead us through the specific relationships between the very form of the employed media and the social context, especially with regard to the new socio-critical discussion of marginalized and taboo topics, going even so far as to expose the ideological mechanisms of the socialist state. It was, in fact, the social and political context of socialism that provided video art with a new form in the 1980s, and this form, in its turn, addressed this underground content and context. In the 1990s, during the transition of the post-socialist period, it became clear just how much the independent scene and its material well-being were dependent on economics (commercialization) along with ideology and aesthetics. What we see today, as a result, is a two-track development: on the one hand, alternative experimental videos co-opted by the art gallery system, and on the other, video production being redirected into commercially more lucrative music videos and advertising.

It should be mentioned that the national television company, Television Ljubljana (renamed Television Slovenia after 1991) – the only television production house in Slovenia – played a significant role in the 1980s by ensuring the necessary conditions for video production. By including art video in its production, TV Slovenia made it possible for artists to experiment with the medium, testing and pushing the borders of television and video technology. An important role was also

played by the International Video Biennial at the cultural center Cankarjev Dom from 1983 to 1989; this event gave Slovene video art the opportunity to establish itself in an international context. In 1987, video was introduced as a discipline at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts, where it soon became a regular and independent subject in the study program. Only later did the first extensive and systematic documentary and discursive studies appear,⁴ along with wider recognition in the media (e.g. reports by the national television).⁵ Private professional video studios, such as Kregar Video Productions, also deserve credit for democratizing video and winning it recognition, from the 1990s on, as a full-fledged art medium.⁶

Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid have indeed proved themselves to be »chroniclers of history,« for through their unique visual/discursive language – composed from documentary, filmed, and manipulated material (an encrusted visual texture obtained, in particular, through the blue-key technique)⁷ – they point to the hidden layers in the existing relations of power. In conditions of democracy, moments of (self-)censorship are not only a matter of the past (e.g. demonizing the question of national reconciliation), but also summon us to reexamine the possibilities for resistance under the conditions of the globalization of capital. In their videos, Gržinić and Šmid create works of consistent reflection, where among other things, it is important to de-psychologize the characters on the screen – for ruling structures often use psychologization as an effective (if surreptitious) way to promote their ideologies. To juxtapose different layers of reality, Gržinić and Šmid use documentary footage from TV Slovenia's archives and scenes staged for the camera (with both professional actors and dancers as well as nonprofessionals), which are transformed through specific techniques made possible by video. When war broke out in the Balkans in the 1990s, the question was raised again about the social and political commitment of artists vis-à-vis the war; it often looked

as if there were no critical discourse happening at all, as if art was producing mere aesthetics without the least reflection. A few theorists from »outside,« writing about specific works of art, analyzed the situation with remarkable precision through the lens of theory (an eloquent example is Giorgio Bertellini's text, written in 1994 on the occasion of Gržinić and Šmid's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York).⁸

As chroniclers of the time, Gržinić and Šmid strive to use the documentary material in meaningful ways while providing a broader contextualization for the recreated images (from the turmoil of Kosovo at the end of the eighties to the war in the former Yugoslavia). If, instead of treating their videos as if they were merely some boutique production for galleries, we read them from the perspective of theory and the present globalization, a space opens up for reflection and social criticism. This tendency, this accent, is entirely confirmed by Gržinić's own »theoretical desire« with regard to new media technologies and, especially, to the medium of video during the period of the collapse of socialism and the post-socialist transition. Here Gržinić's theoretical gesture constitutes itself as a reading of video within the conditions of »post-socialism« – a more suitable designation, it seems, than the geographical term »Eastern Europe,« which places the socio-political context more or less in brackets.⁹

The Performative

When attempting to contextualize contemporary forms of the performing arts (including performance as a borderline form between the visual arts and theater, e.g. performance installations), the obligatory theoretical source is the theory of the performative, which derives from linguistic theory (especially that of John L. Austin); this is true even for Slovene studies of performativity in the theater and other scenic arts, as

well as in the visual arts and other creative practices. Of particular interest is the notion of erasing the boundary between art and life through certain actions, statements, and gestures in a given cultural milieu. This is the principle the video »eye« of Gržinić and Šmid follows as it constructs an alternative view of social reality so as to lay bare its clichés, taboos, and conflicts.

Here we see a key qualitative difference from the media spectacle of the capitalist First World: namely, a conscious process that, rather than simply creating media effects and affects, draws attention to the organizing moment. As video artists, Gržinić and Šmid step out from behind the given power relations to engage in a virtual dialogue with the viewer's consciousness, a dialogue that, despite the temporal stratification »present/absent,« occurs within the present of the viewer's perception of cinematic time, rendered in specific terms by the video-vehicle of moving pictures. The influence of film is particularly strong here: the video art has done the extremely intensive work of research and development (through special procedures by which the film actors enter the space of the video, and so on). No longer is the space of the video tied to the rules of perspective or to the dichotomy of inside/outside; rather, it becomes a virtual or potential space that destabilizes the existing spatiotemporal coordinates and the place of the subject within them (the chroma-key technique, a variant of the blue-key technique, creates a space that is increasingly unreal, especially inasmuch as the video image loses its depth and exists entirely on the surface). A similar purpose is served by the imaginative use of audio-visual media, from photography and film to video and computer graphics. Such balancing of performance, dance, theater, film, and media art stimulates new reflections on the identity of the subject of the staging.¹⁰ This has much to do with the deconstruction of the power of the media image (the power of fascination): the sounds, movements, and images are electronically blended into something more than an aesthetic »structure«; rather, they seek to convey something from beyond the visual experience per se.

The video registers a staging for the camera in which the body speaks of its fate not narratively but gesturally; these records, meanwhile, are juxtaposed with documentary records from crisis points and war zones. What is at work, then, is a unique use of filmed sequences, quotations, and documents, and a fragmentation of these images achieved through special procedures of collage and montage. The video thus transforms our usual orientation in space and time. But one of the main goals of this way of handling the video process is also to demystify, hybridize, and resuscitate censored or suppressed content. In this way, artistic performativity is made all the more political through video.

The Political

Gržinić and Šmid's videos are expressly dedicated to the examination of the (media) presence of the »Other« – the war refugee, the person with AIDS, the female – and thus raise interrogate the role of representation. When they create works that introduce feminist perspectives into a given socio-political context, they employ a tactic of reappropriation, by which images are isolated and recontextualized so as to reveal the dominant myths encoded in the media, especially the myths promoted by television as the most influential mass medium. In this sense, video's role is to interrogate the hegemony of television, which, at the same time, is a representation of the dominant ideology; at work is a multidimensional dehierarchization, which is, to be sure, encoded in both the employed modernist iconography and in contemporary iconography.

Gržinić believes that that the political aspect of the medium is inscribed in the process of encrusting the video images (which is also a process of condensing and emptying them). In this regard, her theoretical/artistic commitment should be understood especially as a summons to that part of

contemporary art that has made do without the political subject. Her most recent theoretical studies have been devoted to questions of the political (especially, for instance, the repoliticization of art through contamination, with the Brazilian theorist Suely Rolnik serving as an important touchstone). In the context of the present book (as an attempt to resituate Gržinić and Šmid's video art), such questions acquire a new significance in thinking about contemporary art practices under the conditions of globalization and the »virtualization« of the world, when grand narratives take the place of smaller ones, which supposedly no longer contain anything »personal« (for according to this view even the most personal thoughts are in themselves the reflection of a certain ideology, the collective unconscious, etc.). Any attempt to demarcate an »authentic I« from a given discourse must on principle fail, for this »I« is thoroughly saturated by the everyday world of the media, and ordinary behavioral patterns, gestures, and facial expressions turn out to be portrayals of images from the realm of the media. Thus, efforts to find various alternatives and intensities in the radical identity of the physical or media world are, more often than not, questionable and risky.

If, as Gržinić (following Homi K. Bhabha) argues, the »not-quite/not-right« status of queer bodies must be a key concept for any consideration of contemporary national and personal identities, then perhaps it is best embodied in migrants, aliens, and monsters. Under the existing economic–technological and political conditions of the globalization of capital and the virtualization of the world, such figures move, live, and create in areas »in-between« cultural loci, practices, identities, and objects. Gržinić rethinks this »in-between« through queer performance and feminist staging (here the queer activist Beatriz Preciado provides an important theoretical reference) on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Today queer theory and creativity has shifted from the gay and lesbian theories of the seventies and eighties – a move that implies a transition

from a socio-sexual to a political interrogation. This is a step forward, or perhaps backward, into the margins, which is the only place they can survive, inasmuch as certain positions will never be truly embraced by the dominant culture.

A special segment of her work is devoted to the issue of feminism in Slovenia, where there is no real feminist tradition and, consequently, such tendencies have usually been demonized.¹¹ Like feminism, video, too, has had no real tradition of reception in Slovenia and has to a large degree been neglected: in the 1980s, when it emerged as a significant experimental form, it was contextualized by a productive wave of theory, which, however, eventually ebbed. The media and social spaces that opened up in the eighties – thanks to the Ljubljana alternative movement and the widespread use of video, photocopying, and other »direct« technologies – are today being subjected to ever greater limitation and are even threatened with elimination (a prominent example, among others, is the uncertain fate of the Metelkova alternative culture scene).

Gržinić and Šmid clearly delineate both feminist and war issues in several videos that register the penetration of the sexual in the political; in the 1993 video project *Labyrinth*, for instance, this is done by means of the dancing body. The dance performance in the video (by dancers from Ljubljana's contemporary dance scene, an important movement that emerged in the 1980s), is ultimately a Brechtian »wake-up slap,« for it shows how people (and in particular, women) who flee war and other kinds of violence must sell their bodies to survive. At the same time, the artists' intention is to discover, in the very form of the medium, a way to critique existing political and institutional structures (e.g. the ultimate ineffectiveness of such humanitarian organizations as the International Red Cross).

The question Gržinić and Šmid face, then, is how to make visible this Foucauldian (and perhaps also Sadian) moment of sexual and political *jouissance*. *Eros* and *thanatos*, sexuality

and death, are constantly intertwined in their works. They seek to suspend and, consequently, arouse emotions in the viewer by directing our attention to the (still-unburied) corpse of history: their focus on the body causes the body to speak for itself through whatever strategies of portrayal it possesses in the totalitarian context, where it becomes the site of the most diverse claims of ownership (to this end, for example, the expertly choreographed dance/movement is deprived of all emotion expression and shows no psychologizing of the characters). The video image is not paralyzed with information but rather becomes a bodily surface. The point of intersection between dance and the new media is the image of the body, in which human skin acts like the surface of a screen, a space available for every kind of projections (here bodies are typically segmented by frames or screen sections and accompanied by a non-dramatic narrative structure). The video representation of the body in communism, meanwhile, acts as something traumatically real in the field of visualization; for this reason the cracked membranes of the images are – to invert Godard’s well-known phrase – bleeding, and not merely red.¹²

In Gržinić and Šmid’s video *Three Sisters* (1992), the 1901 Chekhov play of this name has undergone a videographic re-appropriation: it has been transferred to the contemporary socio-political context of the collapse of communism and the post-socialist transitional period, which is permeated with the atrocities of the Balkan wars, racism, nationalism, and questions about the position of women. In the video, a stage set constructed for the Chekhov play (built for a 1992 production by the Mladinsko Theater) and the fictionalized Chekhovian dramaturgy are encrusted with videographic reconstructions from the cinematic heritage that similarly refer to historical eras: Sergei Eisenstein’s *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and Brian De Palma’s *The Untouchables* (1987). One of the video’s three sisters is portrayed (by Olga Kacjan) as a »remake« of Catherine Deneuve’s iconic character in Luis Buñuel’s *Belle de jour* (1967),



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Three Sisters / Tri sestre*, video, 1992

a figure who encapsulates the dualism of the erotic ideal and, its opposite, the victim and deceiver. Buñuel's beautiful young heroine is unable to enjoy physical relations with her husband, so when her fantasies are not enough for her, she starts working as a prostitute in a high-class brothel during her free time; there she gains a reputation for satisfying even the most bizarre desires of the clients. A second discernible source in Gržinić and Šmid's video is the controversial film *The Night Porter* (1974), by the Italian director Liliana Cavani: one of the Chekhovian sisters (played by Marinka Štern) is portrayed as a remake of the Charlotte Rampling character in Cavani's film – a Jewish woman, a former victim/lover, who years later meets the man who tortured her in the concentration camp; despite the horrific nature of their former »relationship,« their sadomasochistic sexual bond is soon revived. As a sign of decadent Nazi culture, this bond is conveyed to us through an image well established in the media, namely, the transvestite body, now presented, however, by a new type of film heroine. The third sister in the video is a black woman (played by the black actress Metka Trdin), a character who has no corresponding cinematic parallel and thus embodies an »abject« and extreme reduction to a stereotype (blackness linked to sexual servitude, on the one hand, and to the threat of AIDS, on the other).

Along with the »remakes« of the bourgeois woman in a game of unbridled sexual fantasy and the Jewish victim/lover trapped in a sadomasochistic »relationship« with a Nazi concentration camp guard, we also have, then, the threat of a deadly disease. This is a way of externalizing our deep-seated stereotypically racist views: the black woman as the agent of lethal sexuality (without any corresponding reference from the history of Western film). Even when she is transformed into a Catholic nun, in a scene where she bestows a kiss of blessing on everyone without distinguishing between »good« and »bad,« she presents herself as an alien and deeply racialized body. This sequence reconstructs a Benetton advertising



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Three Sisters / Tri sestre*, video, 1992

campaign, famous at the time, but because it inverts the positions of the one who kisses and the one on whom the kiss is bestowed, it points to the global capitalist ideology's blatant exploitation of multiculturalism for commercial ends.

After this point, with the help of a sequence dedicated to Karpo Aćimović Godina's 1980 film *The Raft of the Medusa*, the feeling of being closed within a world constructed by media technologies now opens up into the contemporary social reality, and in particular, the political context of the fall of Yugoslavia and the war in Croatia. But if film is the medium of illusion and television the medium of reality, then video is the medium of metamorphosis,¹³ juxtaposing the (media-constructed) illusion and the socio-political reality in a completely new way. Godina's film, one of the really remarkable works of the 1980s, today might be called a »fictional documentary,« for it was itself based on quotations from the historical avant-garde movements of Yugoslavia; thus, these quotations are doubled in Gržinić and Šmid's video.

Clearly, there is always a well-crafted concept at work in the videos of Gržinić and Šmid, a concept that requires a very precise script and storyboard, which does not mean, however, that viewers who lack a detailed knowledge of the context are unable to garner any meaning on their own. But it does raise the very pertinent question about the contemporary viewer's visual literacy (the ability to recognize quotations from art history, avant-garde films, etc.), which is only a step away from asking about the kind of content being taught in today's educational system.

The Technological

Increasingly, art is assimilating information technologies and tapping into the accelerated flow of images, copies, and simulacra. From the most radical performance art all the way to the big established art institutions, one sees the use of electronic

and digital media becoming ever more routine. In our media-obsessed society, avant-garde art trends aim at the analysis, contemplation, and deconstruction of perception. On the other hand, television brings the fragmentation and fast-action »zapping« of images into our everyday lives, not only by means of the remote control, but also by demanding the fast-action »zapping« of our perception and emotions. Video art tries to subvert these processes by asking for a critique of the productions of the television and film industries. While it may seem that Gržinić and Šmid's videos operate on the level of dreams and the unconscious, they are in fact political/historical journeys from crisis point to crisis point. These crisis points map a word we know by heart: Kosovo and the war zones of the crumbling Yugoslavia, the Nazi era, the present time, and the historical memory of the once-shared Eastern European and post-socialist transitional space in relation to the capitalist First World.

The use of media technology, then, does not necessarily mean that one is simply inspired by an aesthetics of media (the rapid pace of changing images, pulp entertainment, the power of celebrity, pop-culture quotes, etc.). By quoting heterogeneous motifs, a video is not so much interested in constructing a coherent narrative dramaturgy, but rather uses these quotations as rhythmic phrases or as elements in a visual collage that present a dramatic break with their original (pop-culture) usage.

Gržinić's thinking (which also sets the guiding philosophical note for this book) derives from her reading of new media and virtual reality in relation to television, while her concern is not so much the aesthetics as the politics of the new media, especially video and video art, and how they function in the Eastern European space vis-à-vis the »West.« The commitment to technology, which looks like a reading »from the outside,« in fact explicitly demonstrates, through the precise awareness of its own logic and presuppositions, that such a reading is always



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *The Sower / Sejalec*,
video and video installation, 1991

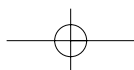
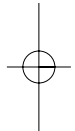
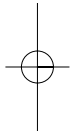
»internal.« Video appropriates not only the identity of the cinematic tradition; it also appropriates the future of the virtual: by digitalizing the recording it acquires a certain maturity as a medium. With the advent of the computer generation and the manipulation of images, the video medium, as a specific technology of presentation, opened a new and important chapter in its development. But video works also unite the performance arts of dance and theater with media art and other new genres. Reflections on the electronic image, then, are linked to both visual-art references as well as to other performative and creative practices, all of which are increasingly being influenced by computer technology and new ways to manipulate images. A picture can be recorded on film, edited on a computer, and then projected into a space as an installation – which says quite a lot about the tendency toward media hybridization, which is something intrinsic to video.

But the new media technologies can also prove quite adept at purging sexual and other identities, and not just making them visible. The usual consumption of electronic pictures reduces communication to the predictable model of receiving and sending signals, free from any accountability. Technology can be a source of limitless manipulation, but it can also be a means for looking clearly into the future. The medium of video owes much of its power to its multilayered nature; for this reason, not even an individual body of work can be presented in linear and definitive terms (a fact that has been incorporated into the very concept of the present book). In this regard, the proper place of video must be on the margins of official aesthetic and political acceptability, for this alone will enable it to assume a position of resistance outside the world of mainstream art and culture.

Notes

- 1 »The performative, the political, and the technological« is also the subtitle of the major work on the video art of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid that was published in Slovene in 2006: *Trenutki odločitve: Performativno, politično in tehnološko: Umetniški video, filmska in interaktivna večmedijska dela Marine Gržinić in Aine Šmid* [Moments of decision: The performative, political, and technological: The art video, film and interactive multimedia works of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid], eds., Marina Gržinić and Tanja Velagić (Ljubljana: ZAK, 2006). Many, but not all, of the essays in the present book were also included in this Slovene publication.
- 2 The stance Gržinić and Šmid take in their work is not one of cynicism, which explains why Društvo ZAK, whose acronym stands for the study of history, anthropology, and literature (*Društvo za proučevanje zgodovine, antropologije in književnosti*) and which is the »successor« of the Partisan publishing house Borec – should be interested in publishing a book about their work. Like Gržinić and Šmid, Društvo ZAK is committed both to analyzing the errors of socialism and to fostering a critical awareness of (post-)socialist and capitalist authoritarian appropriation and its abstraction.
- 3 See, for instance, Marina Gržinić, »Galerija ŠKUC Ljubljana 1978–1987,« in Igor Španjol and Igor Zabel, eds., *Do roba in naprej: slovenska umetnost 1975–1985* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2003), 164–183; as well as her article »Punk: strategija, politika in amnezija« in Peter Lovšin, Peter Mlakar, and Igor Vidmar, eds., *Punk je bil prej: 25 let punka pod Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2002), 66–85.
- 4 See the two volumes – the first consisting of essays, the second of documentation – published in 1999 by the Open Society Institute – Slovenia under the title *Videodokument: Video Art in Slovenia 1969–1998*.
- 5 See Saša Šavel, »Televizija in video umetnost v slovenskem prostoru,« master's thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2005.
- 6 Kregar Video Productions has supported the making of art videos since 1991.

- 7 This process is a method for layering live-action scenes onto a given background. First, instead of any actual stage set, small collages are filmed that then become background for live scenes performed by actors when they are edited into the basic video image in place of the entirely blue space (the blue box) used for the actors' performance.
- 8 Included in the present book.
- 9 On the new media, see, in particular, her books *V vrsti za virtualni kruh: čas, prostor, subjekt in novi mediji v letu 2000* [Standing in line for virtual bread: Time, space, the subject and new media in the year 2000] (Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1996) and *Estetika kibersveta in učinki derealizacije* [The aesthetics of cyberspace and the effects of de-realization] (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2003); on the role of video (and art in general) in post-socialist society, see her *Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-Socialism and the Retro-Avant-Garde* (Vienna: Selene, 2000).
- 10 For an elucidation of the relationship between video and theater, see Hans-Thies Lehmann's discussion of the theatrical use of media in his *Postdramatic Theater*, tr. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge), 167–173.
- 11 It should be noted, however, that beginning in the 1980s, the Ljubljana underground scene and, since 1995, the annual City of Women Arts Festival have played important roles in the emancipation of women in Slovene art and culture.
- 12 See Marina Gržinić, *Rekonstruirana fikcija: novi mediji, (video) umetnost, postsocializem in retroavantgarda: teorija, politika, estetika: 1997–1985* (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 1997), 102.
- 13 See Marina Gržinić, *V vrsti za virtualni kruh*, 54.



MARINA GRŽINIĆ

The Video, Film, and Interactive Multimedia Art of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, 1982–2008

How should we understand this essay about the video art of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, an essay that is, moreover, written in the first person singular? My introductory discussion of this body of work is neither a personal history nor, maybe worse, a hermeneutical/archeological gesture that challenges some mythical beginning and tries now to fill it with documents – which does not mean, however, that a certain beginning did not take place or that we did not choose video from the start. Even so, this is not an effort to recuperate this origin or an attempt to establish the »definitive« history of our video art production.

Everything written here is already an interpretation, something that might be called already »second-hand« material; innocent descriptions do not exist. I am interested only in possible interpretations of our video history, in its construction. I am interested in how such construction takes place by means of a certain suspension; this interpretation is a suspension within an insistently continuous but hitherto unreflected history – unreflected on the part of the wider Slovene and international cultural space (»The two of you have been making videos for more than twenty years? We thought you'd stopped!«).

I am not particularly concerned with the opposition between the act of decision (the »why?«), which anyway is suppressed in the unconscious, and the logos that should allow me to read our video art as the remainder of something else. What interests me more is, as Slavoj Žižek notes, how »to translate the madness of the act, the decision, into rational necessity.«¹ As Žižek would

say, the final act of contingency – after taking the decision, this act of madness, to step in front of and behind the video camera and to keep on doing it for more than two decades – is to find a rational necessity for this madness, the necessity of creating videos and making art. To take a decision means, then, to immediately suppress it in the unconscious, for it is not possible to constantly reflect on the origin of the decision, in the sense that, to put it simply, what we do is what we always also desired to do; but of course, this must be retroactively constituted and only then we can say, »This was exactly what we desired.«

In the 1980s, we attempted to find out if we could apply our ideas about art and politics to a critical interrogation of socialism and its ideology. At the time, underground art, no less than alternative culture and politics, was under the constant surveillance of Yugoslavia's socialist state apparatus and its repressive institutional structures. Phenomena such as body art (notably in Belgrade) and radical conceptual art (in Zagreb) had never really thrived in Slovenia – the conceptual art group OHO, in Ljubljana in the early 1970s, was an important exception to this rule, but although the group achieved a certain amount of international recognition, no wider movement had ever developed from their work in the Slovene context. The reason why radical movements had failed to take hold can be explained by Slovenia's strong tradition of formally modernist art as well as the state's support of the »official« institutions that promulgated such art. As a result of this background, the key themes in our work in the 1980s and early 1990s were the highly taboo topics of sexuality, history, and politics. With regard to politics, our goal was to define the political subject and radical political art. In the Ljubljana underground of the eighties, this kind of radical art was linked initially to the punk movement, and later associated with the band Laibach and the Irwin art group (both part of the umbrella organization Neue Slowenische Kunst, or NSK); in the 1990s, such art also characterized, and developed in relation with, the groups

involved in »Metelkova City,« an »autonomous zone« in Ljubljana. The complex of buildings on Metelkova Street (*Metelkova ulica*) in central Ljubljana had served as the barracks of the Yugoslav People's Army; in the early 1990s, these buildings were taken over as a squat by post-punk, alternative, and activist cultural and social nongovernmental organizations. They were able to do this because in June 1991, Slovenia declared its independence from Yugoslavia – a declaration that was followed by the Ten-Days War (Slovenia's War of Independence), after which the Yugoslav army (which in the higher ranks consisted mainly of Serbs) was forced to withdraw from Slovenia, leaving behind a number of well-built facilities, with good equipment and a well-maintained infrastructure, including the Metelkova Street barracks. The alternative scene has doggedly staked its claim on this space as an independent center for alternative culture, renaming it »Metelkova City« (*Metelkova mesto*) to parallel the City of Ljubljana. Despite repeated battles with local and national authorities, which have been going on ever since the squat began, the legal status of Metelkova City is still in doubt.

In the 1990s, our work evolved into a strategy of actions interrogating the transition to post-socialism and the global capitalist system of aesthetics, ethics, politics, and visual culture, as we sought to continually highlight and rearticulate the Eastern European conceptual tradition (which is also our own tradition). At this time, the wars in the Balkans became more than a metaphor in our video art, for we used the medium to illuminate every stage in the development of the conflict, beginning with the riots and brutal suppression in the 1980s in Kosovo, which anticipated the horrific wars that would later spread throughout the former Yugoslav territory in the 1990s (in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, and again in Kosovo), with greater or lesser degrees of cruelty and insanity. In our video *Bilocation* (1990), Šmid and I predicted, almost prophetically, the collapse of Yugoslavia and ensuing Balkan wars.

Since the end of the nineties, we have been primarily interested in developing a critique of neoliberal »turbo-capitalism,« exploring processuality and performative politics, and undermining (and opposing) the notion of culture as merely a utopian site of (bourgeois) freedom and creativity. It is becoming, after all, increasingly obvious that today, thanks to neoliberal »normalization« processes, which ensure that citizens themselves contribute to and enforce their own self-censorship by internalizing and normalizing forms of control, culture has become, in its official institutions, production, and discourses, the most repressive level of contemporary capitalist society and, indeed, since Slovenia is now a part of capitalism, of contemporary turbo-neoliberal Slovenian society.

All of this is related to the understanding, or rather, the definition, of the political subject – the moment or force that brings change not only within a given art practice (which video certainly is), but also within the wider social and political project of contemporaneity. Consider in this regard the difference between the thinking of Alain Badiou and that of Slavoj Žižek, to take two of the most prominent strains in contemporary philosophy. For Badiou, the question is whether the object that provokes resistance – that revolutionary *X*, which produces change – is a subject (or force) *external* to the truth process and unable to be fully integrated. In Žižek's understanding, however, this inexpressible *X* is an absolutely *internal* act, which places itself in relation to this naming as excess.² Given that the repressive processes at work in art and culture are today so normalized, the only possible choice is, unquestionably, *extimacy* – a neologism coined by Jacques Lacan (*extimité*) by combining the words »exterior« (*extérieur*) and »intimacy« (*intimité*) to express the notion of the Other as being »something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me.« The center of the subject is outside: the subject is ex-centric.³

I. »How Do You Wring Out the Body and Fill It with Acid?«: The Body in the Works of Gržinić and Šmid

The history of the video art Aina Šmid and I create is linked to the broader socio-political and historical context of the late 1970s and early 1980s. First, there was the socialist system in Yugoslavia – a clear ideological context that was, on the one hand, repressive and totalizing, but on the other, stimulating and challenging. This situation, where there was virtually no possibility of the social space opening up to international contemporary art, a situation, in other words, without perspective, proved extremely germinative for the rise of radical contemporary art. If anywhere was ripe for a postmodern art able to radicalize the techniques of pastiche and reappropriation (through quotation, copying, adoption, encapsulation, etc.) in a fundamental emancipatory gesture that rearticulated the space of contemporary art, then this was in a socialism that had – as a result of the punk experience and, in 1980, Tito's death – already become post-socialism. For only in post-socialism could postmodernism discover its radical nature.

Here, too, we must consider the history, or the genealogies of the history, of Eastern European video art, the media culture, political activism, and the women's movement, in the »Second World« beyond the boundaries of the capitalist First World. In this regard, the key questions have to do both with the way these genealogies, histories, and parallel maps are included or excluded in the Big History, the Grand Narrative, of the capitalist First World, and with the consequences of these processes as expressed in radical art and theory. These histories have not yet been accorded serious discussion, not even in the countries of transition, and certainly not in Slovenia, where they are only occasionally recalled in very narrow cultural, artistic, and critical circles.

In order to understand the artistic and cultural processes at work in the introduction of video, new media, and later, the Internet, and how these media functioned in the socialist space

of the former Yugoslavia and in post-socialist Slovenia, we must decode the intersecting cultural, political, and theoretical strategies that lie beneath the forms of presentation. In my discussion of the videos, films, and interactive media works we made, I will focus on the political body, which is the topos of various transformations and appropriations. Today, the body is like nature: it is a common space and an influential discursive form. The body is topos and tropos, figure, construct, artifact, movement, and site of transposition.

I'll go even further: let us consider the body as a paradigm or model through which we can rearticulate political practices and activist tactics within an Eastern European context – a context, moreover, that should not be thought of solely as some sort of historical »mistake« that was »corrected« in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In Slovenia in the eighties, the medium and art of video received new life in the punk culture, the subcultural underground, and the alternative movement.⁴ Punk and its artistic offshoots brought about radical shifts in art and culture. For the new punk and rock generation of the eighties, video established itself, in fairly short order, as the ideal medium for social and political expression. Its popularity was due primarily to the fact that VHS equipment was so easy to use. Today known mainly as equipment for »amateur« or »home-video« use, VHS was the only kind of equipment available to the general public at the time. VHS equipment made it possible to create video artworks with extraordinary speed, works loaded with political and social messages, and then show them *right away*. The rebirth of video art in Yugoslavia (and Slovenia) owed much to the VHS format – a home video system that eluded socialist censorship. For video of this sort was freed from immediate censorship: it allowed you to record and, more or less simultaneously, edit and play back the recording. Postproduction was now possible without the interference of any third party, whether mechanical or human. This meant not

only greater independence in temporal and artistic terms, but also, and primarily, independence from the censor. Every video work is at the same time a conceptualization of the conditions of production and the conditions of the »apparatus« – the video camera and the videocassette recorder, or today, the software on the computer, which provide absolute and total control over the work. But this freedom must necessarily be utilized, reflected on, and materialized.

The revival of video art in the eighties – its second, *political* birth – did not take place outside the ideological, political, and aesthetic framework of socialism, but rather video artists such as myself took this framework as our innermost parameters, within which we produced and reflected on video and contemporary art in new ways. In the »leaden period« of the late 1970s, Slovene film production was much too inert to perceive and represent the main aesthetic and political issues of the day; it is fair to say that, as a result, video art assumed this role. If there was a hiatus of the political in Slovene film in the 1970s, then in the 1980s the political was reinvented in the art video. Slovene videos were shown at numerous video festivals abroad; even in the early 1990s, when there was no longer any distinction being made between experimental or documentary short films and video, it was the art video that for a number of years represented Slovene film production, until Slovenia produced a new and more robust generation of filmmakers later in the decade.

Sex and Rock 'n' Roll

The first artwork that was framed by the new conceptual horizons of the 1980s – that was, in other words, suffused with the ideology of the underground, and with politics – was *Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death*, a video Šmid and I created in 1982, when we were working as part of the group Borders of Control No. 4.⁵

In this video the phantasmic world of a woman, a fashion model (performed by Marina Gržinić) is set in contrast to her friend (performed by Aina Šmid), a person whose (dual) gender is fully revealed at the end of the video when we see a phallus between her legs. In the meantime it is clear that this model is, at least, a transvestite, who easily changes her gender in her speech. This change, however, is accompanied by a neurotic tic: she constantly puts her hand up to her face. As an archetypal image that is both comic and tragic, this performed tic creates a certain distance between the body and the speech act, pointing to our constitutive double nature: the distinction between what we are and what we say. This neurotic tic also suggests certain other dislocations, with regard to the setting of the video as a whole, which was shot in a private apartment, as well as the basic disorientation in the life of the main character. Because of her tic, she continually causes interruptions in the narrative action, which is in itself already quite painful: both characters are remembering their childhood, their school years, and their first experience of masturbation.

The visual narrative shows the fashion model confronting her own photographs and slides; she reenacts the poses and situations depicted in the photographs and slides »live« for us, the viewers, in front of the video camera. We find ourselves in something like a peep show. As she strikes her poses, we listen to the song »The Model,« written by the band Kraftwerk and performed by Snakefinger.⁶ Through the repetition (of a body double) and the posturing for the camera, the video narrative as a whole makes deliberate reference to the aesthetics of the German and American avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s, in particular, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Rosa von Praunheim, and Andy Warhol. The reenactment in front of the camera is strengthened by both the light of the slide projector and artificial lighting, as well as facial close-ups. Video becomes a conscious means for examining the politics of female pleasure.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death* /
Ikone glamourja, odmevi smrti, video, 1982

What is more, *Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death* can be seen as one of the first videos from the socialist world of the eighties to present and dramatize, conceptually and politically, the institution of masculinity; this it does by introducing the *drag king*, i.e. a woman who publicly dresses and speaks like a man. The model's friend, who displays a phallus between »her« legs at the end of the video, and the model herself, who talks like a (gay) man, both represent precise drag king positions in the video. Transgression of social gender binarity is here created through the relationship between language and gender, and reveals the construction of gender through language. While studies on masculinity in the eighties dealt for the most part only with male masculinity, a decade later discussions about gender as a social category, i.e. »gender as performance,« offered a rethinking of forms of female masculinity. At issue is a radical shift: from parody to the *dramatization* of gender through the performance of power relations – specifically, relations of class and patriarchal structures – in front of the camera.

For Šmid and me, the rock music scene, punk culture, the Ljubljana gay movement, and anarchist politics were our home, our mother, our aesthetic language. From 1982 on, we openly performed a string of non-heterosexual roles for the camera and assumed unmistakably lesbian and (as we would say today) *queer* positions – every form of non-heterosexual positioning we understood, exclusively and entirely, as a *political stance*. This *queerness* – and the word *queer* means literally »not right/not quite« – demands, of us and of the viewer, a rethinking of the conditions of life, work, and possibilities of resistance. This means, in addition, that we do not situate ourselves in some abstract, academic mode of high modernist (but empty) art, but on the contrary, that we demand a clear political stance. In the early 1980s, the enactment of lesbian positions in front of a video camera, »queer linguistics,« and the use of pornography (as an attack on the socialist high-art formalist modernism that



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *The Threat of the Future* /
Grožnja prihodnosti, video, 1983

enjoyed the approval of the authorities) constituted a specifically *political* positioning.

In the 1983 video, *The Threat of the Future*, also made by Borders of Control No. 4, the song »Pinball Cha Cha,« by the band Yello – »Come, come closer to me / I tell you, man, you will see . . .« – summons viewers to watch a dance being performed for the camera. The relationship between the viewer and the dance is the same as in a peep show; it implicates both the pornographic eye of the audience and the obscene appropriation of our bodies by the socialist totalitarian (and totalizing) politics and the mass media. In contemporary society, which can no longer be reduced solely to the Foucauldian discipline society, social control is carried out by the media messages and spectacles that consume our lives, (re-)shape our needs, and stimulate our passions, as Guy Debord says. In *The Threat of the Future* we are given a double presentation: two women (Gržinić and Šmid) are talking to each other in front of the camera, in a kind of *cinema vérité*, about their sex lives and their lesbianism, while at the same time we can see them also as striptease artists: they perform in a late-night show that is being screened on the television behind them. The music that accompanies this erotic late-night TV show is a song by Raid at the Mercator Clinic, a band we started in the early 1980s and one of the first all-female (post-)punk bands in Yugoslavia.⁷ In addition to the music, the late-night show on the TV in the video has subtitles: »D'ya think I'm sexy?« (»Misl'š, da s'm seksi?«); »You lost your loving feeling« (»Izgubil si svoj ljubeči občutek«); »Take me, I'm yours« (»Vzemi me, jaz sem tvoja«). The video concludes with the words »Capital's punishment« written across the entire screen, and with the two women talking in the bathroom about police harassment (this was in connection with the arrest of some punkers in Ljubljana in a »showcase« incident known as the »Nazi punk affair.« Punks were also harassed by socialist party authorities because of their production and distribution of fanzines.⁸

Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death and *The Threat of the Future* were milestones in the history of political video precisely because of the nature of our performances. By adopting the stigma of lesbianism and sex work, we entered territory that was forbidden and taboo under socialism, and even interrogated the borders of the underground in the West, where such topics were still kept strictly apart from »serious« art, and in so doing, we demanded of viewers a radical reflection on the conditions of contemporary art and politics. The 1990s, by contrast, commercialized sexuality and the naked body to such an extent that pornography became the normalizing standard of contemporary neoliberal capitalist society. As a result, in order to understand the strategies we used in these two videos, they must be properly situated in their historical, political, and artistic contexts.

The relation between recording and performing was for us one-to-one; at the moment of filming – on the spot, as it were – we were creating something that had, before that moment, been only partially reflected on and considered. At the same time, our bodies were like cameras, for they were producing the code of the countercultural milieu. This was not about being a director of an experimental format in any classic sense; rather, our experience of observing, of living life on the street, of reflecting on the information we were receiving and that was already partly coded in our image and relation to the world, erupted in a kind of metastasis in front of the camera. The person who was shooting the video and simultaneously editing it in the camera (Dušan Mandič) was also a »performer«: not only did he record what was happening in front of the camera, he used the camera to literally construct the performative space. And it was all linked to rock music and the formation of Ljubljana's underground scene, which provided the crucial context for working in the video medium as the social and political tool of the period that made it possible to radicalize visual art outside any formal aesthetic or academic framework.

The video medium was seen as a parallel world for the expression of political views, for politicizing the image, and for including or shaping the world as a total socio-political and aesthetic, yet fully constructed, entity.

The crucial theme of our video work was the creation of spaces that would allow us to deconstruct the hegemonic regulations and police control of the socialist state – a ubiquitous hegemony extended to sexual and political rights, as well as civil rights. In other words, video was a way to create new spaces where differing opinions and tendencies could meet and confront each other. By filming in bedrooms and private apartments we were trying to set up private spaces as autonomous zones of political action that would be exempted from state control and censorship, if only temporarily. Undoubtedly, this was also a way to underscore the contingencies between (new) technology, place, and the freedom of expression. The new technology, at the very least, helped us realize that it was essential to create such spaces, for any new development in technology entails as well a redefinition of both the conditions of art and the spaces of action.

At first technology seemed to play only a marginal role in this redefinition, but in fact, the opposite proved true: by making video in private and underground spaces, we were able to claim ownership of politics and fictionalize our responses to the two most important political questions: Who is the political subject? And what can this subject do? All we needed for expressing our alternative views on the politics of history and sexuality were a video camera, a playback machine, and a TV screen. Basically, this was about being able to work autonomously while claiming ownership of technology, art practices, and art institutions.

Because the socialist authorities had effectively made it impossible for people to demand access to the public space, which had been appropriated by the political and party elites, there was an urgent need to develop an alternative space of action. Sites of resistance to the ideological/political,

patriarchal, and institutional authorities developed, in part, by rejecting the notion of a single history and claiming ownership of an alternative sexuality. Many of the settings in which we shot our videos carried questionable connotations, for these were the bathrooms and bedrooms of private apartments, which in the structure of the social system were virtually invisible.

On the other hand, let me put forward the following thesis: every new development in communications technology – from radio to television to multimedia and the Internet, all of which strive for a greater degree of potentially reliable communication – offers art a truly powerful medium for social and political action precisely in the ability to produce subversive disruptions in the established normalizing modes of public communication. This is the only possible way to break the hold of one-way state-controlled channels of »reliable« communication. By this means we highlight the fact that the media and the new media technologies are entirely artificial creations. In the context of the capitalist First World, such a disruption occurred in 1938 with Orson Welles's radio adaptation of H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which provoked widespread panic in the United States among people who truly believed the country was being attacked by Martians; or in 1975, with the video performance *The Eternal Frame* by the group Ant Farm, who went to the scene of the crime in Dallas to film a faithful simulation of the assassination of John F. Kennedy; or in the 1990s, with video recordings of racial conflict in the United States, such as when George Holliday, using his own digital video camera, filmed white Los Angeles police officers beating up the African-American Rodney King and then sent this footage to TV news stations, thus triggering discussions about the importance of amateur photojournalism; or with the art collective Jodi.org's exteriorization of internal computer programming language as the only possible Web-based artwork. Such artists and artworks undermine the ideological structures of both old and new media technologies from within; in other words, they are doing something more than simply providing an alternative.

In the context of socialism and post-socialism, we can trace a similar series of disruptions, although in a much more condensed, if no less momentous, historical timeframe. During the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina, radio was used as a »weapon«: with their direct reporting for the main television news, ham radio operators represented the most trustworthy form of broadcasting and their voices created the most compelling picture of what was happening. With the flowering of Russian Internet art in the mid-nineties, works by Olia Lialina and Alexei Shulgin clearly exposed a global »collapse« in the supposedly total exchange of data, as well as the censorship involved in distributing art information over the Internet. At the same time, this Internet boom paved the way for Lev Manovich's theory about the World Wide Web being the only technologically perfect medium for the old Futurist and Dadaist avant-garde techniques of cut-out, collage, and montage.

»Art video« in Slovenia, meanwhile, was engaged in the reconstruction of suppressed and lost segments of history and creativity in the field of contemporary art, culture, and society. The main features of the period and its video production were, on the one hand, critique, social commitment, and variations on political and social themes, and on the other, experimentation with language, image, and technology. Slovene art critics, film critics, and reporters in general either completely suppressed and ignored such experimental and socially committed art, or attacked it by saying it was lacking in content or form. But what was actually lacking was any real interpretation of these works, for the professional critics were unable to recognize the essential new qualities of the video medium or the forces (in these activist and media-oriented works) that were shaping film history. This lack of understanding on the part of critics continues today; consequently, artists are obliged to become theorists themselves and write about the new expressive possibilities offered by and through video.

In the 1980s, video art experienced a sharp aesthetic and thematic shift on the international scene. If ever since the

seventies video had been primarily a tool for recording, a kind of archival eye or »electronic witness« (often a silent one) that patiently and perfectly documented body-art performances and conceptual happenings, in the eighties it filled the gap between television and experimental film. Another factor that contributed to this shift was its association with MTV's ever-increasing importance in the rock and pop music industry. With its connection to pop and social production, and its influence in these areas, video occupied a buffer zone between film, as the driving force of modernism, and the advent of Web art in the 1990s, as the driving force of postmodernism. The task of the new generation of video artists was to explore ways of producing and articulating through electronic moving images the subject and his or her body, and especially, methods of visualizing the »absent« body, object, or history.

In her essay »Body Politics: Reconstructing Woman Power in the Celebration of Carnival,« Patricia Tamara Alleyne Dettmers described such strategies as »body politics«;⁹ I would go a step further and describe them as developing a politics of subjectivity – inasmuch as they ask the question: »Who (the hell) is the political subject?«¹⁰ Aina Šmid and I were exploring how we could take »Western« models – from the film, music, and visual arts underground of the 1960s and 1970s – and by reconstructing and re-presenting them in the socialist context, radically stage the »collapse« of the institution of One History, One Sexuality, One Politics, and One Art on a wider scale.

Types, Prototypes, and Stereotypes

Let us now examine how fictionalized structures of sexuality and social conflict were used to subvert history and sexuality in socialism and, not least of all, to discover just who this political subject is. With this task in mind, many video artists developed alternatives to the dominant forms of (post-)communist visual

strategies, namely, through various techniques of misrepresentation. As Griselda Pollock observes, the notion of misrepresentation, which comes from feminist film theory and practice, designates a reversal in the process of identification, in that it rarely delivers the anticipated pleasure of being able to identify with a positive narrative or heroic figure.¹¹ Jo Anna Isaak notes that the goal of misrepresentation is to create a »ruin of representation« precisely in the place of that which has been excluded – which could be anything from an object to a historical era.¹² Socialism, for example, denied the very existence of certain historical facts and realities. The process of including such things in the work is about more than simply making something visible, for it inserts the lost or denied object or historical era through a process of misrepresentation. As a result, at the place of the insertion, a ruin of representation is created that now assumes a subversive form of operating in between high culture and popular culture, and in between aesthetics and politics. Several methods can be used for this insertion: appropriation, quotation, rearticulation and rearrangement. What is important is not that these methods capture the lost thing or the lost historical period in some endless (Western, liberal) hysterical search for an object, but rather, that they ambush all binary oppositions, defying them and rearranging them, without, however, constructing some third term, as Derrida might put it.¹³

Aina Šmid and I explored the significance of such methods of appropriation and rearrangement in the video *Cindy Sherman, or, Hysteria Productions Presents a Reconstruction of Photographs by Cindy Sherman*, made in collaboration with Dušan Mandić as part of *Back to the USA*, a much larger exhibition of reconstructions organized in 1984 by the art group Irwin (of which Mandić is a member).¹⁴ In this work, we re-performed Sherman's various female portrayals in front of the video camera. Such an appropriation of Sherman's photographs echoes the Sherman's own use of appropriation in her



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Cindy Sherman, or, Hysteria Productions*
Presents a Reconstruction of Photographs by Cindy Sherman / Cindy
Sherman ali histerija produkcija predstavlja rekonstrukcijo fotografij
Cindy Sherman, video, 1984

photography, where she expertly reproduces a series of female types, prototypes, and stereotypes. Our video, then, operated as a kind of double turn: as reconstructions of reproductions. Images of women, the many faces and identities Sherman had »stolen« or »borrowed« from Hollywood movies and the mass media – from the »empire« of moving images – were now reappropriated in a way that returned them to their »source.« Thus, the video was a double negation of Sherman's already-recycled images: the retrieval of something suppressed. The images returned persistently to the scene of the crime (the Hollywood machine), but as the video beautifully demonstrates, this scene is already displaced and derailed.

In general, what one witnesses in our videos, are acts of appropriation: of documents, photographs, images, faces, and bodies, which are constantly being produced as types, stereotypes, and prototypes. We were not producing new identities, but offering instead something much more radical: *the total loss of identity*. The subject is forced to accept that she is not what she imagined herself to be (or that he is not what he imagined himself to be), but that she (or he) is someone or something else entirely.

Moments of Decision

In 1955, the Czech film director František Čap, who had moved to Slovenia, made the seminal Slovene Partisan film *Moments of Decision* [Trenutki odločitve]. Thirty years later, we reconstructed this film in a video of the same name. What was the significance of this?

Through special video effects, one of the actors (Gržinić) »borrowed« the face of Marija, the main female character from Čap's film. By highlighting a female character who does not play one of the leading heroic roles, the video turns the Partisan drama into a melodramatic love story. In Žižekian terms, I



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Moments of Decision* /
Trenutki odločitve, video, 1985

might define this turn as a specific human dimension of the drive that, in contrast to desire, appears the moment when something that seems marginal (a parallel character and a secondary, non-heroic role) is raised to the level of an autonomous agency.

When, in the video *Moments of Decision*, we see the face of Čap's Marija and we think we have finally arrived at the female human core of the video, we discover we are mistaken, for the main female character in the video is simply a »face,« one that through special video techniques has been encrusted with Čap's film and recomposed through the *coating of the contrasting material* of both the female characters. The film is »kidnapped« by the video. The story from Čap's black-and-white movie is extended in the video; the story is developed and transformed through the doubled performance, the blue-key effects, and the artificially interpolated reminiscences (biographical, historical, political, artistic), as well as through the use of certain iconographic elements. This process of kidnapping can be termed an original »socialist Rashomonic destiny« of feature films (and specifically, those that were put in storage and kept from being viewed by the general population under socialism) – a destiny that was shared even after the fall of the Berlin wall by many other distinctive video works throughout the former Eastern European space. This socialist Rashomonic destiny does mean the simple transcending of particular elements, with the intention of getting to the void of the thing itself (which will then be attainable through metonymy); on the contrary, at the heart of the Rashomonic destiny we remain trapped in the circularity of the story. And, according to Žižek, this is precisely the elementary matrix of the drive, in contrast to desire and its unstoppable yearning. But through this circularity, perhaps, we touch our own humanity.

We altered the ontological nature of the characters' relationships and further reinforced it by changing the genre. If in Čap's film, the story of the battle between the Partisans and

the Slovene Home Guard, the paramilitary force set up by the Nazis, was a kind of socialist western, we turned it into melodrama in the video. At the same time, the methods we used allowed us to create a very precise artistic conceptualization of what can be called the political performative gender, for gender exists in an unending process (including a technological process) of becoming (becoming-other), and through this process it is materialized.

We were very interested in an article about Čap's *Moments of Decision* that appeared at the time in the Slovene film magazine *Ekran*; it noted that the film had not been shown as part of the regular movie schedule, first, because it dealt with Roman Catholicism, and second, because it introduced an aspect of forgiveness in the conflict between the Partisans and the Home Guard. We decided to reconstruct those things in the film that had been censored or suppressed in order for the film to reach the general public at all. In our video, then, alongside the drama of Partisan resistance, we included two additional historical elements that were usually left out of Partisan film narratives. The first was the bourgeois era of the 1920s and 1930s. But our central idea in reconstructing this past was not to express any bitterness or resentment, but rather to conceptualize art, culture, and history in relation to the art and culture of the Third Reich. The Partisan resistance against Nazism should have also interrogated the »cultural superstructure« of the Third Reich, but it failed to do so. In our video, Slovene art from the 1930s (works by Veno Pilon provide the reference¹⁵) is juxtaposed with reproductions of family portraits from the period of the Third Reich. The doubled Marija and her sister (performed by Aina Šmid) are transported into the 1930s, and as they stroll through a »paper« architecture (the setting is made up of reproductions from art-history books), they converse about their childhood, Marija's love for the doctor (the heroic main character of Čap's film), and their family ties. But as a result of these methods, the »lost«



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Moments of Decision* /
Trenutki odločitve, video, 1985

time is not recaptured in some endless hysterical search, but rather the opposite: the video takes direct aim at loss itself.

This pre-war bourgeois era, which had been erased from the historical memory during socialism, is further underscored by a reference to the reality of the 1930s from the Western European context, specifically, with regard to the French colonial past in Southeast Asia. This is the significance of inserting passages from Marguerite Duras's novel *The Lover*. These are, moreover, passages that attack the institution of the mother, which preserves genealogy through psychology. The video thus seeks to present an intentionally sharp critique of such provincial/psychological gestures, inasmuch as its main concern is with social and political change, which possesses a structural character (nationalism–colonialism, capitalism –the division of the world into blocs).

Meanwhile, textual excerpts from Čap's original screenplay (discovered in the Slovene Film Archives) that had never appeared in the final version of the film now became inserts in the video. These excerpts were placed exactly where, according to the screenplay, they were intended to be in the film. This, then, represented a reverbalization of sentences that the final edited version of the Čap film had removed because they emphasized individualism and the sacrifice of one's own life for the communist revolution. Individualism was viewed by Party authorities as a suspicious trait associated with selfish, morally questionable, and ultimately bourgeois reactionary tendencies.

The montage aspect of the video *Moments of Decision* has a double significance. First, it was meant to underscore the ideological aspect of Partisan films: the code that affirms an abstract heroism and so evacuates the human being as an individual. The second layer of significance lay in our efforts to develop a new destiny for film »kidnapped« by video. We wished to draw attention to the inner material aspect of the conditions of production of the film and the video. The development of video as a structural, experimental, and

political strategy inevitably required us to highlight the history of the conditions of our own video as well as the creative conditions that belonged to the film. For this reason we took Čap's film scenario as a historical script for the conditions of filmmaking in Slovenia in the 1950s. In this way, we turned fiction into a document through a maneuver that can be termed the doubling of fiction itself.

In order to construct the historical and political paradigm of *Moments of Decision* in its full materiality, we contacted Berta Meglič, the chief makeup artist for the 1955 film. Although by 1985 she had already retired, she was willing to do the makeup for our video so it matched the look of the film. With Meglič creating the video makeup, the face of the video's Marija came as close as possible to matching the material conditions of the face of Marija in the film. This meeting of film and video in the creation of the makeup (through Berta Meglič's help) might also be viewed as the *tyche* in Lacanian psychoanalysis – the effect of the fateful meeting and coincidence – not for us as the videomakers, but for the film *Moments of Decision* itself. Meglič's expertise can be seen also in the fact that she made the video Marija younger than Čap's Marija from 1955, which allowed the video Marija to »re-play« her hidden or erased past from the 1930s.

The second historical parallel to the film's Partisan wartime drama is the socialist realism of the 1950s, which at the time was the contemporary world of Yugoslav film, art, and culture. In the video we constructed the *mise en scène* by borrowing reproductions of paintings by the Russian artists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid.¹⁶ Komar and Melamid started their collaboration in 1965 and two years later launched the Sots-Art movement, which may be interpreted as a caricature of the Western pop art movement within the particular conditions of Soviet communism. Their ironic socialist realism – Sots-Art as a »parody« of socialist realism (as, for instance, in their painting from 1982–1983, *Double Portrait of the Artists as*

Young Pioneers) – provided just the right *mise en scène* for enacting unspoken dissident positions in the contemporary art of Eastern Europe.

Our video *Moments of Decision* plays an important role within the context of then-current research in art history, politics, and the social, for it cites art-historical parallels with both the time the original film was made (1955) and the time the video was made (1985). The video also represents a kind of critical upheaval, or »critical return,« such as the French theorist Marcelin Pleynet, for example, regretted not seeing in 1970, when a huge retrospective of the works of Piet Mondrian was mounted in Paris nearly a quarter-century after the artist's death.¹⁷ Pleynet's demand for a critical return to Mondrian's work was posed as a type of self-critical self-interrogation with regard to the painter's double historical situation, that is, a return to Mondrian and his work both in the time when he lived and in 1970, the time of the exhibition.¹⁸

Occasionally, instead of using visual-art reproductions, the video creates direct associations with French New Wave cinema; thanks to the blue-key technique, we were able to literally drive through a projection of the original Čap film – in a car represented by nothing more than a plastic steering wheel. As we performed the two characters, we found ourselves in various fictive periods that had been reconstructed and re-enacted (through makeup, props, art reproductions, costumes, etc.), but without parody or sarcasm. Čap's original film continues in the video image through the insertion of live performance and new iconographic elements.

This can be understood in a literal, if inverted way, for the blue-key technology of video makes possible the encrustation, or synthesis, of a second image through digitally created holes in the video frame itself. The *vérité* behind the surface of the image is dependent, metaphorically speaking, on the content of the image that is inserted in the void of the blue hole, and on position of this image with regard to the other, surrounding

images. The structure – the meaning – of the picture is, therefore, created by the content of the encrusted image, in an effect made possible by the video technology, which also establishes the historical, aesthetic, and production conditions of the medium.

Of course, the insertion of film sequences into video announces that the future destiny of film is now changed (remember that this was in 1985, when the digitalization of film had only just begun) when embraced by video, electronic media, new digital technologies, and the Internet. To paraphrase Christine Buci-Glucksmann, video made possible a »situation« in which »eyes can see in the way eyes see.«¹⁹ This describes precisely what happened with the Partisan film *Moments of Decision* in the female embrace of the video *Moments of Decision*. Two different levels are brought together: that which is completely impossible (the constructed/contrived hypothetical history of before and after) and that which is extremely profane (the two main characters talk about love, their relationship with their mother, etc., and not about lofty goals, such as are expressed in Čap's film). One can say (with reference to Alenka Zupančič) that video, unlike film, always finds its fulfillment, just as is true of the copy (but more about this later).²⁰ For Šmid and myself, video is like drive, whereas film is like desire.

In 1985, František Čap's heirs almost took us to court in defense of the original film and, especially, the director's reputation; I suspect they were upset not so much by our rereading of the film as by our use of video, which in those days represented something completely alien to the world of »high art,« especially since we were using video technology as a form of politics. In Slovenia in the 1980s, video art often did little more than play with modernist formal narratives, forms, and colors using the kind of special technical effects that were popping everywhere on the international art scene and that were presented to the untrained eye as some aesthetic innovation.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Moments of Decision* /
Trenutki odločitve, video, 1985

But to read the special effects of video as purely aesthetic reveals a total lack of understanding of the medium.²¹ Such interpretations, however, did fit nicely into that empty formalist modernist continuity of Slovene art, which I mentioned earlier.

What we were doing, on the other hand, was »making strange,« »confiscating,« and »appropriating« the different characters and inserting them into a narrative, so that they were something more than simply an addition to the narrative aspect of the (video) medium; they revealed its innermost logic, the logic of the media-bound contingency (and not the mere arbitrariness) of an age.²² The *Zeitgeist* is not merely a certain spatiotemporal spiritual/mental atmosphere; it is as well the (re)constructed and materialized entity of time and space, which is also made possible by the technological »accident« of video. The result of the processes we used is an image that brings out the possibility of endlessly presenting, inserting, and rearranging material. This point can be illustrated by inverting the central notion in Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* (1958). If the central question of this film is: »Can a dead person, someone from the past, possess a living being?« then in our video *Moments of Decision*, the situation is just the opposite: someone from the present, or maybe even the future (in any case, two marginal female punk video artists) decided to occupy the cinematic socialist past and to conceptualize a new (political) future for it.

What effect do our video works seek to produce? This is the decentralization of the subject to the point where, instead of outside *or* inside, a powerful dynamic relation is created that connects outside *and* inside, dependence *and* independence, art *and* politics, and finally, the existent *and* the nonexistent. To put it another way, a shift is revealed in our videos that might be defined psychoanalytically as the shift from (capitalist, hysterical) desire to (socialist, pathological, suppressive) drive, which in Žižekian terms is the shift from the lost object, era, or body to the *loss* itself as »object.« On the other hand, when

»misrepresentations« shape a fictive career (semantically and semiotically), the medium of video takes account of this way of representing and dissecting history, which allows it to analyze the power of the system, as well as the power of the institutions of art and culture. What is important here is the way video's »liberties« can restore across time something that has been »lost« or put in »cold storage« – whether this is a film (e.g. *When Father Was Away on Business*), a script, a book, or a person.

Let's return now to the video *Moments of Decision*. The original 1955 film, which in the 1970s was deeply suppressed and hidden away in storage, addressed the topic of a possible reconciliation between the Partisans and the Home Guard (a topic that is once again extremely relevant today); this is what made it ideal material for an experimental video. We used the video as a kind of surgical scalpel in relation to the film; we used it to cut deep into the very tissue of the film surface. The film's Marija received her electronic twin, who in the video not only mimicked her cinematic gestures and spoke her lines even before she did, but who also »forced« the film's Marija to say lines that were lacking, or rather had been censored, in the film. These were the lines we had found in the original screenplay. The line about the individual who fights against the system – which echoes the spirit of a true American action movie – had been cut by the censors from the film's final version. At the same time, our almost-obsessive theoretical approach to making a video – reading, making comparisons, making theoretical explications – »defined all our later work in video,« as Aina Šmid wrote in her personal notes about our videomaking: »From this moment on, our videos were created first with the help of the typewriter or the computer, through reading and watching films and other videos, going to exhibitions, or simply reading between the lines of political world news reports.«²³

We took several of the most distinctive sequences from the film *Moments of Decision*: the Home Guardsman being

murdered with a religious object, the conversation about who is »one of us« and who is »the enemy« (Partisans or Home Guard), and a few rare moments that show a possible erotic or at least emotional relationship taking place within the film's whirlwind of war. Čap's film, although a work of fiction, became a document for us, a documentary look at our reality. For this reason, our video supplied the film not only with characters and doubles, but also with a past and a future. We constructed an entire story about how the life of the film's characters before the Second World War; we researched Slovene art from the »bourgeois« past and included paintings by Veno Pilon and others in the melancholic »bourgeois« life of the video's Marija in the 1930s. Through the paintings by Komar and Melamid, on the other hand, we explored the era that would follow the war period shown in the film – namely, socialist realism. Because the film had been made in the 1950s, we also included in its visualization two unspoken but vital international points of reference: Hitchcock and the French New Wave, both of which were contemporaries of the film and of František Čap himself. This 1950s experience we built into the very structure of the video. (In 1986, the year after we made *Moments of Decision*, we dealt with the decade of the 1950s more directly and thoroughly, when we examined its importance in Slovene film, iconography, and history in our short live-action film *At Home*, which was based on the 1950s diaries of the poet and political figure Edvard Kocbek, which had just been published.)

The text of Marguerite Duras's *The Lover*, which we read in 1984 in Italian and Serbo-Croatian (since it had not yet been translated into Slovene), proved an important source for the script and staging. There we found all the expressions and situations – eroticism, death, inner turmoil, hopelessness, and marginality – with which we created our stereotypes, prototypes, and types of characters. The video also made oblique reference to the films *Red Desert* (1964) by

Michelangelo Antonioni and *In a Year of 13 Moons* (1978) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. *Eros* and *thanatos*, political engagement, and aesthetic experimentation were the perfect complement to »the corpses of lost dreams and the bodies of all our lovers,« as Šmid wrote in her notes.

Moments of Decision was made at a time we were wondering about video's relationship to film and television and, more generally, trying to determine the proper role and status of this artistic and technological instrument in Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe. In the 1980s, we were both deeply committed to the rock and punk scene and, in particular, to the whole structure of Ljubljana's alternative movement and its subversive reading of the social, artistic, and political world we were experiencing day after day. It did not take us long to work out an experimental structural approach to working with video, for we were not interested in merely creating a certain pose or doing some cheap sort of social activism; rather, we wanted to explore a medium that possessed several different histories. These histories can be summarized as follows, on the basis of Šmid's notes:²⁴

1. The history of the video medium, which in the developed Western world had already been well formulated in technological, theoretical, and practical terms, and which was already (critically) institutionalized. For us, this was the most important history.

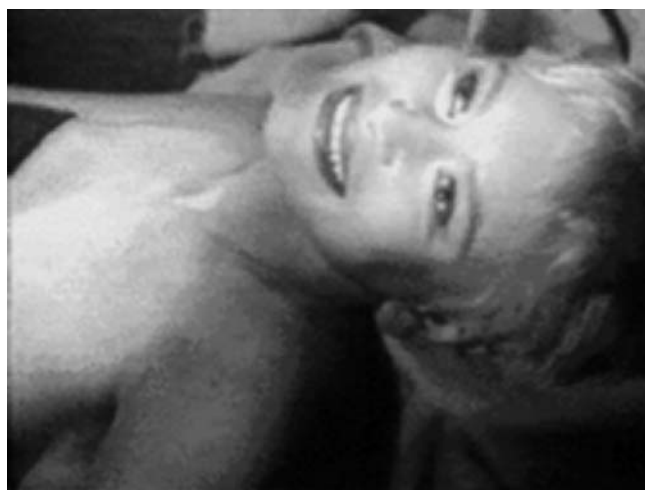
2. Our own personal history as doubly marginalized artists: marginalized first because we were part of Ljubljana's alternative scene, which produced a clear political reading of art and was therefore despised by the socialist authorities and the Communist Party leadership; and second, because we were two individuals without any social status or family pedigree. As a character in our video *Moments of Decision* says: »We were put out on the street, without history or power; we inherited

nothing but our own names and the only worth these had was on the identity cards and passports that were so often inspected at police stations.«

3. The history of the 1980s, a decade that, after the vacuum of the seventies, possessed no appropriate theory and submerged itself in abstract visualization. Of particular importance for our videomaking in the eighties was our artistic collaboration with Dušan Mandič (who was already a member of Irwin and NSK). At the beginning of the decade, moreover, our field of reference developed in tandem with the incipient Ljubljana school of psychoanalysis and, always, with the alternative scene, the world of rock music, the punk and visual-arts scene associated with the Student Cultural and Art Center (ŠKUC) Gallery in Ljubljana, and especially the international film program ŠKUC organized in those years.

The Axis of Life

The first scene in *The Axis of Life*, which we made in 1987, shows a seductive female body that is being cut right above the breasts. Blood suddenly starts spurting from the wound – red, thick, sticky, and »real,« at least to the degree of reality permitted by transforming a static image of blood into a blood-drenched body in front of the camera. The body here has a laughing female face, not contorted in horror but filled with sensual pleasure. In fact, the woman is drenched in pleasure – she lets out rhythmical gasps as the blood spurts from the wound. This »bloody Madonna« alludes both to the pop icon Madonna and to Caravaggio's painting *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598); there is also a reference to Derek Jarman's film *Caravaggio* (1986), as well as to gay culture and the new artistic iconography it was acquiring in the eighties. In *The Axis of Life*, the body is both heroic and stigmatized. In the context



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *The Axis of Life / Os življenja*, video, 1987

of communism, the body occupied several different positions, from the alien body (*corpus alienum*) to the body directly associated with crime (*corpus delicti*). In the video, we see two techniques of media visualization that attempt to involve video with both high culture and mass culture simultaneously. In contrast to the mass-media idea that the body attains its natural wholeness in connection with the new media, the post-socialist visualization of the subject and his or her body in media underscores the artificial, mediated aspect of media's treatment of the body, as well as their treatment of thoughts and feelings. By the same token, the body is at the same time an artifact composed of other artifacts, and not so much of deeper life experience.

This opening sequence is followed by a scene with two talking heads; the heads of the two female performers look like huge mountains or like objects placed in a synthetic reddish desert where in the distance we see the last part of the word *Hollywood*. With reference to Jean Narboni, one might say that »not only are perceptions and emotions discordant, but so too are the faces, which are the real territories.«²⁵ But when we use a face in a video, it does not mean we use it only as a territory to walk through. The face may be doubled (or indeed multiplied however many times we wish, for example, by tripling one of the performers within the same frame), or it may be borrowed.

The main thread of the narrative of *The Axis of Life* concerns two women who remember their »common« husband, a man who was accused of killing them, whereas in fact the two of them have killed him. The dialogue between the women recalls events from the time of the Stalinist purges and the Cold War. There are also references in the video to Edward Ruscha's *Hollywood* (1968) and Gerald Lang's *The Loner* (1969). Subversion is created by a Stalinist text that shifts a reading of Ruscha's work from hyperrealism to socialist realism, giving it the effect of a socialist-realist poster. The video's use of a reproduction of Robert Cottingham's painting *F. W.* (1975) pays

homage to American urban hyperrealism, while the American urban landscape of the 1960s and 1970s is made the setting for a communist hard-boiled detective story.

The Axis of Life remixes socialist-realist and pop-art elements, as well as historical information. Video is lethal to documents, for it points to the power of the »third eye« and readings made from its perspective. For this reason the question, »How do you wring out the body and fill it with acid?« is not rhetorical but strategic. We realize, after all, that oppositional strategies and readings are contingent on how we fill the body and precisely where we insert it in the picture. In Eastern European video, not only are bodies mapped as territories of interest, not only do they represent an intersection of exterior and interior, visibility and invisibility, but they are constantly being reconstructed and recreated by video. We were trying to squeeze monumental effects out of such bodies, to create contemporary relics and sexual fetishes, encrusted and filled with various substances such as oil and blood. Bodies thus prepared condense history and the strategy of suspense, so we can ask: What history do all these faces belong to? And from whom were they stolen?

Citing Žižek, I can say it is never simply about life, but about life that draws on an excess, and about drive that allows us to take pleasure in this excess so we can attach ourselves to this surplus, which appears as a protuberance in the normalizing flatness of life. Drive is not the endless thrust toward the incestuous thing or the braking of the incestuous thing, but rather, it is the brake itself – a brick, or a severed head in formaldehyde placed on the reproduction of a shelf, as in *The Axis of Life*. In video, this brake opens up not only a space, but also the dimension of time. Video and film, then, differ not only in terms of technology, but also in terms of temporality and spatiality. We can say of video that it offers us a certain feeling as it bases itself in time without mediatization. For what catches the eye in ant »hot« TV broadcast is the inner logic of video,



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *The Axis of Life / Os življenja*, video, 1987

what we call being »live.« Although this feeling is false (since many things are pre-recorded and, in any case, everything is transmitted with a certain delay), it is crucial, for it makes us think we are, in a sense, present at the very creation of the TV image. Spatialization, meanwhile, signifies theory's penetration into the picture, as it involves the construction of a parallel space – the space of intersection between our own political position, the history of the medium, the social and political state of affairs, and our desire to rearticulate matters through the combined working of the logic of theory and the concept of practice.

In *The Axis of Life*, we also used inserts from our own black-and-white 16mm film *At Home*, made in 1986. These inserts served to establish a historical connection, since the film dialogues were based on the diaries of Edvard Kocbek, published in the eighties, where Kocbek describes the story of an individual and his role in World War II. In *At Home* we utilized the aesthetics and iconography of the 1950s and socialist realism while at the same time paying homage to Alfred Hitchcock. The film addressed at least three topics: the yearning for »home« while living in a no man's land, the incapability of being truly loved, and the inevitability of death. *At Home* presents an impossible reflection on Hitchcockian suspense. The famous scene in Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) when the two main characters meet is repeated literally in *At Home*. When Melanie Daniels takes a rowboat to Mitch Brenner's house in Bodega Bay, Hitchcock's camera shows us her point of view: it follows her gaze toward the house and thus allows viewers to have their own, personal view of the story and to empathize all the more with the desire, anxiety, and excitement of the film's heroine. By deconstructing these film sequences from *The Birds* and repeating them in *At Home* in a rural socialist setting, we wanted to give the viewer a way to reflect on the drama that had occurred in Slovenia in World War II and its aftermath. The two main characters in *At Home*

(played by Jožef Ropoš and Marina Gržinić) have been traumatized by memories of the conflict between the Partisans and the Home Guard. Only by awakening and re-experiencing the original traumatic encounter, could we situate and elaborate that which had been suppressed and not yet properly historically contextualized in Slovenia. *At Home* re-presents the reality of the Hitchcockian film. The similarity between scenes from Hitchcock films (not only *The Birds*, but also *Frenzy* [1972]) and those in *At Home* provided a means to understand, with the utmost precision, the compulsive tension (in the psychoanalytic sense of »compulsiveness«) of the bodies of the main characters.

In the final scene of *At Home*, the couple's last, hopeless return »home« is presented through the reconstruction of one of Hitchcock's most famous scenes, from *Frenzy*, when the camera moves up and down the staircase in a single continuous shot, thus letting the viewer know that a murder has taken place. We meticulously reconstructed this scene in *At Home*, and then deconstructed it in 1987 in *The Axis of Life*. The final scene in *At Home* imitates Hitchcock's masterful use of camera positioning: in our film, the actors are first shot from above, from the top of a spiral staircase, after which the camera winds down the stairs so as to »end« a moment later in a shot from the side. In this way, viewers experience the gaze of the camera as the third eye, as the film's fictive and, given the theme and setting of *At Home*, also communist (in fact psychotic) intruder in the private life of every citizen: the third eye (of the Party, of the socialist system) that documented and archived everything and everybody.

Some of the sequences in *At Home* we shot on Sveti Urh, a church-topped hill near Ljubljana, where there was a torture camp during World War II in which members of the anti-communist White Guard and the royalist Black Hand (an outlawed death squad) performed bloody acts of extreme brutality on civilians (including many women) who had family

members among the Partisans or who were themselves involved in the Liberation Front (as the Partisan resistance was called). We reused these scenes in *The Axis of Life*, through a computer-simulation editing technique, to show the erasing and rearranging of documentary and photographic historical material in the typical Stalinist manner of »processing« history.

Ultimately, *At Home* both proclaims and denies the story of its title, by showing »home« to be a truly claustrophobic site of trauma.

Taken together, *Moments of Decision*, *At Home*, and *The Axis of Life* form a trilogy that dramatizes three important periods in Slovene (and Eastern European) history and art: in *Moments of Decision*, the socialist countries' pre-World War II bourgeois past and the time of war; in *At Home*, the post-war period of the leaden 1950s along with its antipode, as represented by Hitchcock; and in *The Axis of Life*, the leaden 1970s, as mirrored in American hyperrealism and pop art.

The Excess

»I learned everything by looking. Were it not for these pictures, we too would not exist.« This is how a character in the video *Bare Spring* responds to a friend's question about his rebellious cross-dressing. We made this »road video« in 1987; it is dedicated to the road movies of Wim Wenders. Our video seeks to portray the sensibility and specific nature of the rock-music generation in Slovenia (and Yugoslavia) in the eighties, but it does this not by exploring the psychology of an individual, but rather by recycling stereotypes. For as a medium video confronts us with the appropriation of documents, photographs, images, faces, and bodies, which themselves are products of the continual creation of types, stereotypes, and prototypes. For this reason, in contrast to what is presupposed by the doctrine of realism, there is no psychology in this video

– except when psychology becomes a constituent part of an individual »quotation« or »stereotype.« *Bare Spring* also contains stereotypical, prototypical, and typical images of women from our earlier video *Cindy Sherman, or, Hysteria Productions Presents a Reconstruction of the Photographs of Cindy Sherman*.

The common thread in all of the videos we made from 1982 to 1987 (ending with *Bare Spring*) is the presentation of explicitly self-referential performative strategies. By this I mean the dizzying display of repeated images – photographs, slides, and television and film scenes – where we performed as actors and then immediately used this fictionalization of our own life and history, as well as of the political and social conditions around us, as »raw« documentary material either within the same story or in our next video or film. We wanted to transcend the position of merely being makers of illusions. The appropriation, repetition, and reconstruction of material tied us directly to the whole ideology, theory, and politics of *the copy*.

As the crucial image in our 1987 video *Girl with Orange*, we used a copy of the painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928–1929) by the Belgian surrealist René Magritte (1898–1967); this painting is best-known for its inscription (sometimes also given as its title) »Ceci n'est pas une pipe« – »This is not a pipe.« The meaning of Magritte's painting, in Foucault's interpretation,²⁶ leads us to ask questions about originality, repetition, truth and media simulation. According to Foucault, what is paradoxical in the painting is the didactic function of the text it contains. The text is doubly paradoxical, for it names that which does not need to be named (since the shape of a pipe is very well known and its name is a very ordinary word) and when it does this nevertheless, the »name« is given as what this »is not,« i.e. as a negation. Magritte is making a point about representation, namely, that the image of a thing, even something as familiar as a pipe, has very little to

do with the thing itself. Just as Magritte created bizarre confrontations between familiar objects and events, which he placed in unusual circumstances and thus changed the context of their reading, so too the copy of Magritte's painting in our video produces a new, impossible context, in this instance as part of a love story. Copies of paintings by Kazimir Malevich are also used in the video; here the Malevich copies become, in an authentic setting, profane objects from a different reality, which thus situates them in a new history.

Our method *Girl with Orange* was the opposite of the method we used in *The Axis of Life*. In *Girl with Orange*, the settings are entirely real; the scenes were shot in a deserted castle, in an apartment, on the street, and at a taxidermy store. This was not a space constructed from the imagination and created entirely through technology, as was the case in *The Axis of Life*, where we constructed the »whole environment,« the video's *mise en scène*, was constructed by inserting reproductions from books. In *Girl with Orange*, one sees the real world, the *original* version of the world, unrepeatable in its materiality. Thus, we used an actual *copy* of the Magritte painting – not a reproduction from a book, but a picture that was a copy of the original painting. We filmed in a real castle and our actors performed in a real taxidermy store. The video was also a document of the stratified and divided socialist life in the mid-1980s, and so presented certain »luxury« home gadgets, which were a part of private life – although in some cases they could be found only in the homes of communist party officials. The coffee-maker used in the video, for example, was a sign of social status, though not so rare that you couldn't borrow one from a friend or a friend's neighbors. Friends, husbands, mothers, and even mothers-in-law played an essential role in our works, delivering conscientious performances as actors in our films and videos.

We managed to counterfeit visible reality by transforming it through video technology, with its playful possibilities for

arranging objects and adjusting colors (both vividly real and imaginary), as well as through sound (which can be seen, no less than pictures can be heard). We inserted, doubled, and transformed both actors and objects – there were endless ways to make actors appear and disappear. The video image represents the coexistence of the imaginary, the real, the mythical, and the documentary, which is why it no longer operates as a metaphor that refers to a particular model (the reproduction of a painting), but rather becomes an agent of transformation that deals with two (political) forms and not (merely) two psychological pictures. The decoding that is woven into the fabric of the video work can to a certain degree be conceptualized as a condition of production of our own lives and not only of the video medium per se.

In *Girl with Orange* we also reconstructed a scene from the 1967 film *The Morning* by the Serbian director Puriša Djordjević. This is one of the central films from the Yugoslav »Black Wave« of the sixties, which newly problematized the Yugoslav Partisan movement of World War II. In the video, the scene showing the death of the main female character, Aleksandra (played by Maruša Oblak), is in fact a remake of a scene from Djordjević's film, in which Milena Dravić plays a Partisan who has been tortured by the Germans in prison and betrays her comrades; for this she must pay with her life. To make the farce of her death sentence complete, the killing is staged so that Aleksandra thinks she is being killed by the enemy's bullet (the Partisans dress a German prisoner in his own uniform).

There are at least three essential layers in our videos: the integrity of the individual as expressed in the politics of the body; gender differences; and the division between nature and culture. In addition to these, I should mention also the issue of technology and its influence on gender, culture, and politics. When a video repeats and preserves stereotypes, prototypes, and types, it is reusing and reproducing them in order to successfully reproduce the social and political conditions of a given period.

The video world we created was, then, composed of all possible kinds of stereotypes and copies, which nevertheless still bore the signatures of their authors – copies borrowed from books, history, or film along with their stylistic and semantic codes; stereotypes with which we were intimately acquainted and which were essential for rethinking the conditions of producing or subverting meaning. We owed everything and nothing to these prototypes and types, these templates and originals, for even when the copies were identical to the source, they were (juxta-)posed in a radically different way.

II. Repoliticizing Video and Cyberspace

Electronic and digital encrustation allowed us to forge a new (artistic and historical) destiny in video. In the 1990s, this destiny was shaped by a completely different political and artistic situation – in this period our videos were influenced, or more precisely, dominated, by the Balkan wars. We encrusted documentary footage of the violence with staged fictional material, and thus showed how electronic processes could be used to bring about the political organization of the video image. Through video and the method of appropriation (for instance, by recycling different histories and cultures), it was possible to create empathy in the midst of apathy and a feeling of anguish without ecstasy. The question we faced was: How could we prevent the video conceptualization of the war in the Balkan from succumbing to the emptiness of the global spectacle? Perhaps this could be done by means of representational forms that, on the one hand, spoke about the processes of the loss of freedom, and on the other, illustrated possible conceptual spaces of resistance and opposition to war, massacre, and rape so as to demand immediate political solutions for bringing an end to the atrocities.

War

In the first half of the 1990s, the development of our video art was profoundly connected with the conflicts and wars in the Balkans. This period begins with the video *Bilocation* (1990) and continues with *The Sower* (1991), *Three Sisters* (1992), *Labyrinth* (1993), and *Luna 10* (1994).

The links between the politics of the body, history, and the theory of video are clearly apparent in *Bilocation*. The title itself refers to the notion of the body residing in two different places simultaneously. Indeed, this idea of being in two or more different places at the same time (war, history, revolution) or impossibly uniting two levels of meaning – of history and of the (political) body glimmering in the present, or vice versa – is a perfect description of a process basic to video. Pascal Bonitzer says that video is all about *juxtaposing* pages that seem to have been cropped with little scissors. There is, to be sure, an interpretive battle going on about these »little scissors,« but we're not dealing with manicure scissors (i.e. the idea that Bonitzer's »scissors« produce merely *tactile* effects in video), but with the *tactics* and *politics* of the video medium! The seams created by juxtaposing and cropping video »pages« have to do with something much more than the texture of the video »page.« I would argue that, because the video image (unlike film) has no depth, these electronic video pages are territories impregnated with blood. The video suture – the joining of the edges where two or more video images, or pages, collide – is not merely the intersection of juxtaposed empty scenes; on the contrary, this suture can be the bloodstain of excess. It does not matter whether the cropping has been made with a stylish formal elegance; in other words, the suture is not merely an aesthetic gesture. More importantly, it is (to use Lacan's terminology) a structural stain, a tear, a mistake that not even the best little scissors or most expert hands can repair or sew up smoothly. It is a process that is the very opposite of such efforts



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Bilocation / Bilokacija*, video, 1990

– for it is all about imbalance and dislocation; it is not sublime, but nor is it shit!

In *Bilocation* we used documentary material that Slovene television had filmed during the civil unrest in Kosovo in 1989 (when, as can be seen in the video, the majority Albanian population rose up barehandedly against the Yugoslav People's Army – essentially, the Serbian army – which responded with tanks and tear gas); this we juxtaposed with the fictional world of our synthetic video images. The documentary material (which had not been shown on Slovene television at the time of the crisis) was encrusted with the body of a classical ballerina (Mateja Rebolj) – it was inserted in her eye, her intestines, and other parts of her body. These are pictures on the body of the former Yugoslavia, where our memories become both psychotic and erotic. In *Bilocation*, a body is prepared (embalmed and decorated) for a socialist parade or, perhaps, for a death sentence before the condemned is taken to the scaffold. The atmosphere is one in which every parade seems to culminate not only in the excitement it causes, but also in a body – a body prepared as a sacrifice. When we dressed for parades, we were actually admiring a body that would soon be destroyed by desire. The body in the video, then, re-presents the visual body rituals of East and West. But does this imply a reworking of the body of history? No, for it is more about the simulation of the body's political and emotional coordinates. The body serves to combat amnesia: it shifts time by deepening our understanding of memory and history beyond the medium of video.

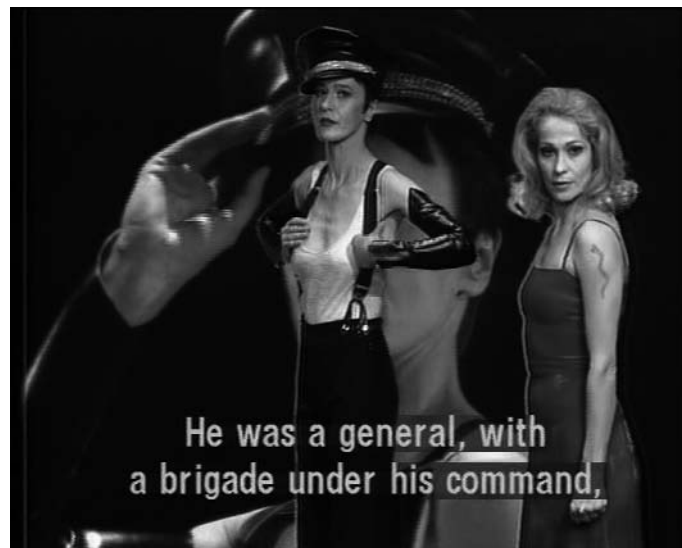
The way the body is presented in *Bilocation* also shows clearly that in video the body is nothing more than video resolution. The real does exist in video, but is different from what occurs in reality. As Alenka Zupančič argues, the difference between reality and the real is of crucial importance, for the real is not something that can be discovered beneath the dazzling reality, but rather, it must be constructed.²⁷



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *The Sower / Sejalec*,
video and video installation, 1991

The story of *The Sower* speaks about the political conditions in Slovene art and culture in 1991. For documentary material we selected video recordings from Slovenia's Ten-Day War, which had taken place in June and July of that year (for the most part these were amateur videos that had been shown on TV Slovenia's news programs).

Three Sisters (1992), which presents an alternative visualization of Chekhov's classic play (written in 1900), refers to an entirely different political and artistic climate. The video may be understood as an attempt to address the collapse of communism, as well as the increase in racism and nationalism, and the new political order imposed by global free-market capitalism. The video touches on such issues as war and its atrocities, the position of women, gender roles, and racism. One of the three sisters, played by the African-Slovene actress Metka Trdin, materializes the black female body that is trapped in exploitation, expropriation, slavery, and overt racism; this body is a powerful signifier for deeply racist politics of Europe's brutal history of colonialism and its present-day neocolonial migration policies. The second sister is the Jewish character from Liliana Cavani's 1974 film *The Night Porter*; she has survived the concentration camp only to be bound to her persecutor, a former guard in the camp. The role, which Charlotte Rampling played in the Cavani film, was meticulously reconstructed by Marinka Štern (wearing the cap, the trousers, and suspenders of a Nazi officer). The replication or »copy« is never sufficient in itself; there is always the question of the political, artistic, and cultural context. Štern turned the aesthetic stylization (the costume) into a form of political dramaturgy. The third sister (played by Olga Kacjan) duplicates Catherine Deneuve's character from Luis Buñuel's *Belle de jour* (1967): a cold, elegant middle-class Frenchwoman who lives the double life of a married woman and a prostitute; as a middle-class wife she is repulsed by sex, while as a prostitute she is ready to fulfill the wildest sexual fantasies of her clients.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Three Sisters / Tri sestre*, video, 1992

In its attempt to unearth the political meaning of the genocide in the Balkans, and in its connection with the Jewish Holocaust of World War II, *Three Sisters* brings out the *unacceptability* of refusing to identify with the conditions of the Balkan war (as the outcome of tribal hostilities and ethnic conflicts). The video questions the capitalist First World and its protection of the dominant subject, who by definition is white, middle class, heterosexual, and capitalist. This construction is undermined by the statements and actions of the contextualized sisters. The black actress Metka Trdin is the only one who can legitimately interrogate AIDS in relation to communism and war. At one point, she replicates the »role« of the white Catholic »sister« (i.e. nun) in the familiar Benetton advertisement (though now her *incarnate* – »flesh and blood« – negative), and as a copy and also, because of her dark undertone, an image of the political unconscious (in another scene she replaces the minute hand on a clock that is about to strike twelve), she bestows kisses on a series of evocative paradigmatic subjectivities with different relations to power (a policeman, a prostitute, etc.). Her final kiss she gives to a stuffed toy: a monkey, the supposed source of AIDS, the new global plague of the 1980s whose origin a witch hunt had located in Africa (which was very convenient, just as in a Hollywood film where you can always find what you need, from guns and rope to cars and cash). Olga Kacjan, meanwhile, »recites« Chekhov's lines as excerpts from Karpo Acimović Godina's 1980 film *The Raft of the Medusa* are projected (Kacjan, in fact, had played one of the lead roles in this film). Both the early-twentieth-century Yugoslav avant-garde – as shown in Godina's cult film – and Yugoslavia itself in the video *Three Sisters* are projects that needed a »raft« as a kind of intermediary. Both sailed across the water straight into the junk room of history.

The final act of resistance in the video is performed by the transvestite body (identical to the body of Cavani's heroine in



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Three Sisters / Tri sestre*, video, 1992

Night Porter) when she states: »I will live.« It is the excess of life as such. Life always finds a way, as one of the characters says in Steven Spielberg's film *Jurassic Park*. The survival instinct does not oppose the explanation of the reproductive instinct of the transvestite (drag) queer conditions of life. Our video methods aim not to create counterfeits, but to develop forms of political and aesthetic resistance, a politics of resistance that is safeguarded and made possible by the specific political subject, which, as Homi K. Bhabha says, emerges at the point of the split.

Through the use of documentary material, notably, television clips from the war in Croatia (for instance, the mass exodus from Vukovar and the attack on Osijek), the video takes us to the very heart of the post-communist reality, which was not merely drenched in »blood and guts« and filled with corpses and monsters; it was also saturated with wild utopian fantasies and visions, as well as a sense of apocalypse coinciding with the Balkan wars. The victory celebration of the Serbian army as they toast the devastation of Vukovar (in documentary clips broadcast by TV Slovenia) is shown as one of the most barbaric articulations of the war in the Balkans. Our revulsion comes not from our experience of the horror of this celebration, but from our knowledge that the people who are celebrating will never be punished, and that because of this fact we have lost our symbolic frame of reality, or more precisely, we have lost »the thing« that sustained this symbolic frame.

All of this leads to a certain radical turn. Jean-Luc Godard, defining French New Wave cinema (which was at its height in the period 1958–1964), said, »It's not blood, it's red.« But what we learned from the body in communism is the very opposite: »It is not red, it is blood«: it is the indivisible post-communist remainder that is not (yet?) re-integratable into the global immaterial and virtual world of new media.

Three Sisters also examines the relationship between Chekhov and Eisenstein (in its reference to his famous silent



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Labyrinth / Labirint*,
video and video performance, 1993

film *The Battleship Potemkin*) and between Chekhov and Brian De Palma (in reference to his film *The Untouchables*).

In *Labyrinth*, artificially produced surrealistic images based on paintings by Magritte, such as *Girl Eating a Bird* (1927) and *The Lovers* (1928), are juxtaposed with documentary clips that present the lives of Bosnian refugees, mostly Muslims, at refugee centers established on the outskirts of Ljubljana during the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina (1992–1995). The video contextualizes what Giorgio Agamben calls the paradigm of the contemporary global city, which is not the *polis* – that is the public square as a space of protest and democracy – but rather, a *concentration camp*, which appears also in numerous contemporary versions: the refugee collection center, halfway houses for aliens, shelters for asylum-seekers, etc.²⁸

The video *Labyrinth* is from the very beginning »speeded up« by using a technology for accelerating video frames. But our goal was not to recreate some Chaplinesque farce or pantomime; quite the opposite: we wished to bring out more starkly the intensity of feeling. We know that bodies in a video cannot be separated from technology, and that our ability to intensify emotion is equivalent to the acceleration of the body through video technology. Clearly, enormous effects can be achieved by technologically inverting the linearity of time. Sometimes this is done by running the videotape »backwards« or »fast-forwarding« it, or by playing it fast or slow, all of which we can do simply by pressing a button on the video recorder, as the best illustration of our feelings and thoughts. Running backwards is not the same as running idle!

The central message of *Labyrinth* is the completely manufactured, artificial temporality of the body. The body at the end of the millennium found itself caught in the confusion of fear, pain, and war – besieged and de-centered. But above all, the body is a fleeting physical–material fact. Its materiality can be taken over by a microprocessor the size of a credit card – at the push of a button we can hook ourselves up to any high-tech



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Labyrinth / Labirint*,
video and video performance, 1993

device we wish. Just like all images used and processed by technology, from photography on, every video is an artificial creation.

Luna 10, which we shot in 1994, represents a rereading, reworking, and recoding of segments from three neo-avant-garde films from the Yugoslav cinema of the seventies and eighties: *Early Works* by Želimir Žilnik (1969), *Red Wheat* by Živojin Pavlović (1970), and *When Father Was Away on Business* by Emir Kusturica (1985). The video explores the role of different media during the Bosnian War, at a time of Internet communication, stories about cyborgs, and global computer networks. If it is true that we are all part of one gigantic hypertext, which is coded by adapted and abridged histories presented also on CD-ROMs and DVDs, then why not show the video image as a hypertext that can reveal hidden points, the nodes of excess in our past and present? In *Luna 10*, we involved not only performers, but also experts in the fields of the Internet and radio communications.²⁹

It is almost painful to see just how much our lives are connected to prosthetic aids – all the technological devices and prostheses that are attached to our eyes, our ears, etc. The influence of technology extends even to how we see and understand things. The world, indeed, has entered our living rooms. One need to think only about the war in Iraq, which every day fills our television screens, yet there is so little we can do to stop it.

Luna 10 opens with the sentence: »Every war has its own medium.« In contrast to the Iraq war, the most accurate information during the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina came from ham radio, not satellite recordings or CNN's cannibalization of every byte of data. Through their radio links amateur radio operators reported the news from Bosnia on all the major television networks – the horrific atrocities, the mass killings, the mass rapes, and the concentration camps. The photographs accompanying these broadcasts were old ones, but the voices of

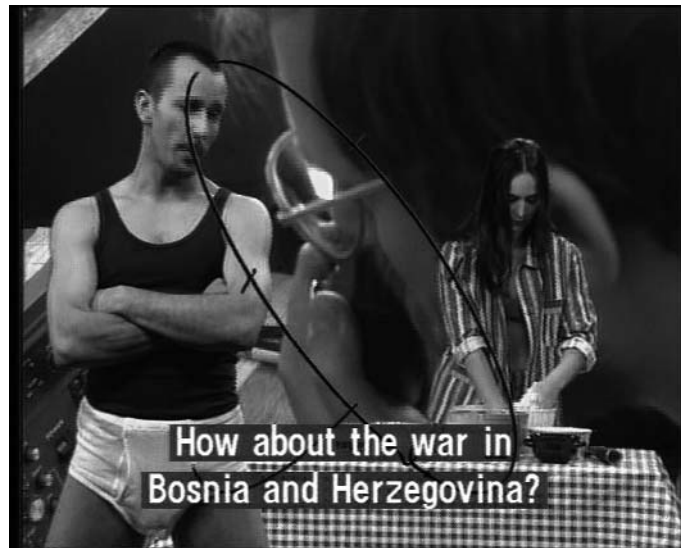
the radio hams delivered the latest information. This example shows us that no technology ever grows old and that even something as simple as radio can provide new meaning in the search for truth, to the extent that we still have access to it. Nothing can be dismissed as insignificant – every institution, every technology, every »crumb« of critical thought can be a productive tool. Everything depends on context and content.

When one of the speakers in *Luna 10* explains »to live« algorithmically, he is not talking about life as such, as something animal and fleshly, but rather the production of life as a »matter« over which we who live have less and less say (while the capitalist state plays an ever greater role in determining how long we can live, or rather, when it will let us die) and the degree to which various codes and programming influence this life.

The fact that we can now, through the moving image and its increasingly accelerated and *terminal* digitalization, inhabit all media, all bodies, all possible spaces and histories, and, seemingly, even exist outside historical time, puts in question certain fundamental arguments relating to art and culture. We are faced with the loss of a historically determined position that records the natural world of the senses. Thanks to new media and technologies, we have acquired the possibility of an entirely *artificial interface*, as Peter Weibel would say.³⁰

Eastern European Monsters and Foreigners

»Anything, anywhere, anybody« – that was the slogan of the 1990s, and it expressed itself in a confusion of bodies, concepts, and strategies; the position of the subject was »out of joint.« *The Butterfly Story I*, which we made in 1994, is a video travelogue composed of pictures, visual associations, and sound effects, which takes us to China, where we »encounter« Mao Zedong's wife, Jiang Qing (as a member of the »Gang of



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Luna 10*, video and video installation, 1994



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Luna 10*, video and video installation, 1994

Four« during the Cultural Revolution), and a famous Chinese dissident from the 1980s, whom we »set in motion« (we discovered him on a piece of film in the TV Slovenia archives as a voiceless »discard«). We wanted to double the liaison, so we visualized Chairman Mao's erotic dreams, thus imagining a love affair with Theda Bara, the movies' first femme fatale. In this video, our dreams of distant lands, of escape from our zero dimension, are realized, again, through an inversion of time and space, and we see the enormous effect made possible by technologically reversing the linearity of time: playing something backwards can sometimes be the best way to portray our feelings and thoughts. Using this method we show that video cannot be separated from contemporary ideology; indeed, through the medium of video, ideology can be utilized, presented, and structured as a conceptual tool.

The second installment of *The Butterfly Story* (a video that is perhaps better known as *A³: Apathy, AIDS, and Antarctica* than as *The Butterfly Story II*) was made in 1995; it deals with notions of fragility, sexuality, monstrosity, and geographical confusion. The main part of the video concerns Elena and Mirjana, the wives of two totalitarian leaders, the former Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević. All such »monsters« are themselves mutations or deformations such as have been depicted in the history of film. By focusing on the portrait of Mirjana Milošević (»The Story of Mirjana M.«), we created a kitschy, melodramatic Balkan tale of power, which features drama, folklore elements, and evil spirits. Emotional apathy is caught up in a dramatic tango, which gradually slows down for the eye of the camera. In this way, *A³* slowly but surely transforms itself from science fiction into a horror film, or more precisely, into a hybrid of both.

What is it, precisely, that shapes the uncertainty and dependence of these film identities so that we see in them the monstrosity of monsters? It has to do with the manner of



The Butterfly Story I / Zgodba o metulju I.,
video and video installation, 1995

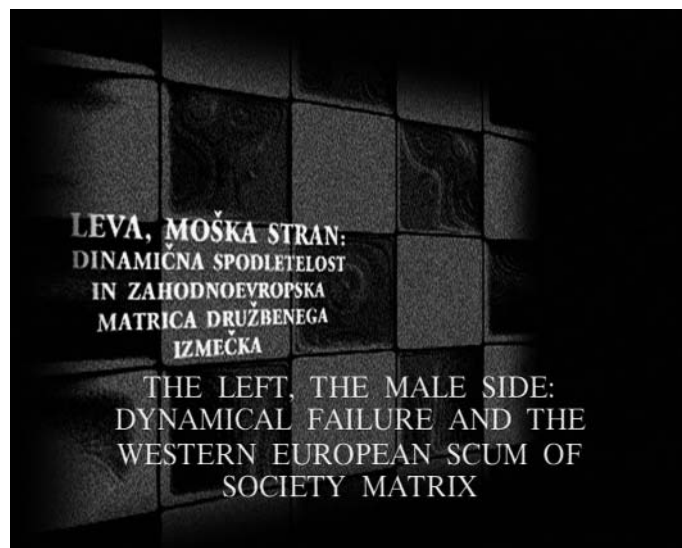
reproduction within film history, and within history itself. Monsters do not appear on the scene primarily because they are following the dictates of nature; rather, their appearance is based on the re-embodiment of dictates from film history and from history in general. For monsters are driven not by survival and reproduction, but by pure drive. They can survive as brands only if we accept their logic of drive and reproduce it. Their monstrosity derives, then, from the way they are reproduced within a given culture as a local model, through a specific chain of anxiety and personal adornment, such as the famous flower in Mirjana Milošević's hair, the pallor of Rosemary's face in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), and so on. The video's unmistakable reference to Roman Polanski's classic horror film is hardly surprising, since the title heroine, played by Mia Farrow, is an emblem of monstrosity who, as a pregnant woman, is (in)capable of her own continued reproduction.

The video *On the Flies of the Marketplace* (1999) examines the sliced and diced European space. It juxtaposes the very different film aesthetics of Ingmar Bergman and Jean-Luc Godard. Eddie Constantine's character in Godard's movie *Alphaville* (1965), a man addicted to alcohol, women, and adventure, is re-enacted in the video. He is placed in a reconstruction of the famous chess scene from Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1956), where Death plays to win. All the elements of this sequence, from the actors' poses to the camera angles, are the same as in Bergman's film, only here the two chess players are »Giulietta Masina« from Federico Fellini's *La Strada* (1954) and the title character from István Szabó's *Mephisto* (1981), who substitutes for Death even as he clears a new way for it through his double personality and ritual symbolism.

A minor role in the video is played by »Mia Farrow« from *Rosemary's Baby* (now a regular in our videos), while the boxer »Jack Dempsey« makes his debut here. American capitalism has always revolved around demons, gangsters, and sports. The



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *The Butterfly Story II: A³ – Apathy, AIDS and Antarctica / Zgodba o metulju II.: A³ – apatija, aids in Antartika*, video and video installation, 1995



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *On the Flies of the Marketplace /*
O muhah s tržnice, video, 1999



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *On the Flies of the Marketplace /*
O muhah s tržnice, video, 1999

pace of the plot in the video increases elliptically, from illusions, schizophrenia, apathy, sexual braking, etc., all the way to the video's bizarre, dark, and silent conclusion. We find ourselves amid the bodies from Costa-Gavras's film *Missing* (1982). The theoretical matrix we develop in *On the Flies of the Marketplace* represents a twisted subverting of the Godard film *Masculin, féminin* (1966). There is, however, a new paradigm in 1999 (the numerical twist, from 66 to 99, is also significant): Eastern Europeans, or »the matrix of the monster,« represents the feminine, while the masculine is represented by Western Europeans, or »the scum of society matrix.« Also involved is a separate fantasy of territorial relations, which are shown as the sexual relations and antagonism between a woman and a man. This, then, is a vision of masculinity and femininity, of gender differentiation as a political *dispositif*. This difference, indeed, reflects the general form of existence in Europe. The form by which hierarchical relations are reproduced from country to country, and way countries are positioned in relation to each other (who is inside the EU and who is outside) – such a sorting of bodies, which enables the free movement of products while forcing a great many people to remain in total immobility (incarcerating them in refugee centers, halfway houses, and transit camps), is a (monstrous) image of the European reproduction model (chauvinistic, racist and deeply fascistic) for protecting neoliberal capitalist democracy. As a consequence of this, to be a woman, and especially to be a black woman or a woman from outside the EU, means to be treated as a voiceless victim without civil rights. It was for this reason that a few years later, in the video *Eastern House* (2003), we turned things upside down.

We can deduce at least three paradigmatic politics of fiction in our video works: political fiction, which characterized our work in the 1980s; territorial fiction, as seen in the videos *Bilocation*, *Three Sisters*, and *Luna 10*; and horror fiction (the vacuum), which was reserved for *On the Flies of the*

Marketplace. The remnants of Eurocentric Western humanism have left humanism behind as they head for a future to be constructed elsewhere.

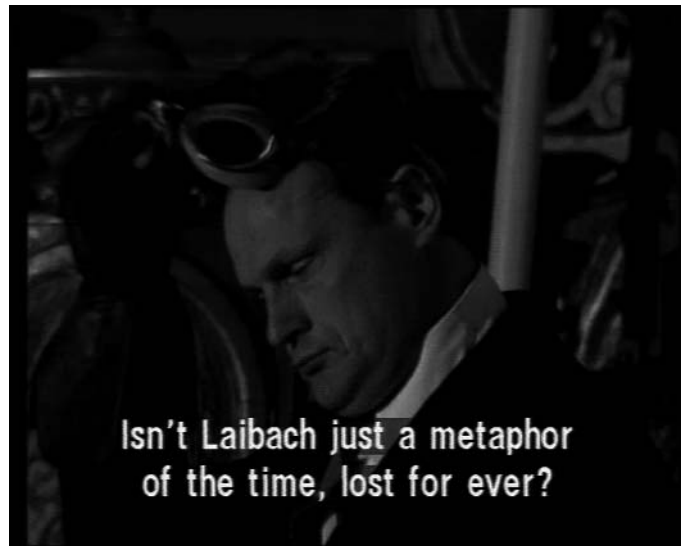
The Retro-Avant-Garde

A second track along which our work ran in the 1990s involved the re-enactment, repetition, reinforced redundancy, and research of the grammar of contemporary art, in particular, by recontextualizing the meaning of the NSK movement and, especially, Irwin, in art, history, and politics.

The Ljubljana-based NSK movement, which linked the music group Laibach, the art group Irwin, and the theater of Kabinet Noordung, was the subject of our 1993 video *Irwin: Transcentral / The Neue Slowenische Kunst State in Time*. The video – which opens with a sequence in which a spinning cross ultimately turns, through an optical illusion, into a swastika – includes statements from all the members of NSK, which thus allowed us to journey into the very structure of the »utopian« NSK State, the »State in Time.« The focus was on the movement's reproductive tendency, its political utopianism, as well as the subordination of the individual's integrity and autonomy to the demands of the NSK ideology.

In *Transcentral*, the theater director Dragan Živadinov, of Kabinet Noordung, describes one of his works, which was conceived as an imaginary trajectory for making plays in the future. In 1993, when Živadinov explained his future theater production, it all sounded like myth, but over time it became a reality:

The premiere will be staged on April 20, 1995, in Ljubljana. Twelve actors, all from Ljubljana, will perform at the premiere. The theme will be William Shakespeare. The next performance will take place in 2005 – that is, ten years later – with the same



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Transcentrala*,
video and video installation, 1993

actors, in the same place and at the same time, with same costumes and set. Everything will be the same, unless someone has died. An actor who has died will be replaced by a symbol. The symbol will be placed on the spot where the actor had performed his role when he was alive. The verbal parts of deceased female actors will be replaced by a melody that lasts the same amount of time. The verbal parts of deceased male actors will be replaced by a rhythm. The living actors will play their parts just as if the deceased actors were present. The next performance will be in 2015. The entire action will be repeated. The fourth performance will be in 2025, and the fifth in 2035. The final performance will be in 2045. By that time all the actors will be dead. I will be alive and the stage will be full of symbols.³¹

We continued our investigation of the importance of NSK and the ideology of the retro-avant-garde in the 1997 video *Post-socialism + The Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin*. The video takes as its basis my philosophical text »Mapping Post-Socialism,« which is explained by the actor Jernej Šugman. The text is a philosophical theoretical treatise on the cultural–artistic and political space in the post-socialist conditions of Yugoslavia and its successor states in the eighties and nineties. One art group and two artists – the Ljubljana-based Irwin group, the artist Mladen Stilinović from Zagreb, and the Belgrade artist known by the artistic pseudonym »the Belgrade Kazimir Malevich« – provide in their art production, and especially through their relationship to socialist and post-socialist ideology, a *sui generis* coding of the former Yugoslav territory. The fruit of this coding process was the retro-avant-garde, an avant-garde artistic and social movement that took place in the 1980s and 1990s not only in Yugoslavia but throughout Eastern Europe as well. The video includes a montage of exclusive historical documentary material (for some of these art projects, VHS video is the only existing



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Post-Socialism + Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin / Postsocializem + retroavantgarda + Irwin*, video, 1997

documentation), as well as commentary by two influential philosophers – Slavoj Žižek from Slovenia and Peter Weibel from Austria – and by the members of Irwin. The acclaimed Slovene actress Milena Zupančič also appears in the video as an iconic avant-garde actress. Just as Olga Kacjan in *Three Sisters* was positioned in relation to her own filmic history, here Zupančič is understood and contextualized as the artistic artifact par excellence. She hardly needs to do any acting; her mere presence is enough to be that surplus from the history of avant-garde and experimental film in Yugoslavia.

The visual dramaturgy of *Post-Socialism + The Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin* is tuned to the character Ali from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1973). In Fassbinder's film, Ali is a Moroccan immigrant in Germany, a prototype for showing German attitudes toward immigrants from Muslim countries.³² Fassbinder masterfully underscores the racial tensions between Germans and the Turks in 1970s Germany through the emotional power of melodrama.

Ali and the retro-avant-garde are both bastards, and both are connected with melodrama, although in very different contexts. Our video Ali (played by Jernej Šugman) is a symbol for a certain way of living that exists through the productive symbiosis of art and culture even as it undermines the actual territory of academic thought. He does not represent only himself, for he is also a stereotype, a prototype, and a type of a certain time. This time, which includes the 1970s, when the world was divided by an »iron curtain,« also saw the beginning of the great story of the catastrophic racial and immigration politics of a United Europe. This story, which began with opposition to and non-acceptance of Turks, eventually grew into a general xenophobia toward Muslims and all Others who have joined, or want to join, or can only dream of joining the great family of Europe. At the same time this period was a time of regression in the counterculture movements, which seemed to stagnate in the seventies, at least until 1976 and the rise of

punk. Our choice of the character Ali for our video also shows our refusal to use film figures for »commercial« enjoyment;³³ we wished to ground the political aspect of the image in the transitoriness of the immigrant's life and thus present also precise meaning of political geography as a whole. In our video Ali is, above all, a figure who emigrates from the socio-political to the artistic context, and thus provokes either pleasure or disgust (or both).

For the first scene in *Post-Socialism + The Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin* we borrowed a sequence from Roman Polanski's film *Chinatown* (1974). Ali begins his monologue about post-socialism while at the same time, through his appearance (his injured nose), he adopts the role of »Jack Nicholson« in *Chinatown*. Ali, the product of the dysfunctional working of society and technology, represents a nightmare for himself, no less than for the story of the retro-avant-garde. Ideology is made manifest in the body, history, art, and culture. The video also shows the *framing* of the site of the retro-avant-garde in relation to technology (through such *framing* we wished to recall the fact that the retro-avant-garde was yet another artificial formation and that it too was dependent on technology); in this way we sought to underscore the conditions of a movement marked by fiction. While it may be true that technology is not destiny, it nevertheless frames the site in which art happens.

When Ali talks on the telephone we hear the voice of Peter Weibel, and his name is also written on the telephone receiver. This comic insert suggests that the frame which sustains the whole video fiction (after all, the text refers to Weibel as one of the first curators to use the term *retro-avant-garde* for the NSK/Irwin movement and thus popularize the concept internationally) is located with the frame as »object,« while the story of the video stays where it is and keeps on going. We could formulate this another way: regardless of the fact that Weibel is known for being hard to reach, he is found right here,



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Post-Socialism + Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin / Postsocializem + retroavantgarda + Irwin*, video, 1997

and what is more, he speaks. Weibel, then, has come back to a place where there should be room for him, for he was the one who gave the retro-avant-garde its name, although the place he has returned to is no longer »his« place.

The video *Moscow Portraits* (1990) reconstructs the life and work of Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935), the great Russian Suprematist painter from the early twentieth century. Next to Piet Mondrian, Malevich was most important pioneer of geometric abstract art. But this story was merely the foundation that allowed us to develop a new video language and aesthetic. *Moscow Portraits* begins with six reproductions of six bizarre portraits, which were made in Moscow in 1989. That year the Belgrade artist who in the first half of the 1980s called himself »the Belgrade Malevich,« and who produced several series of copies of Malevich's Suprematist paintings, posed for anonymous street painters on Moscow's Arbat Street with Malevich's book in his hand. The result was this series of six portraits: *The Belgrade Malevich Reading a Book by Malevich*. At the same time these works represented a unique homage to the first public display, since the 1920s, of Malevich's works in the Soviet Union – an event that took place the year the portraits were made. Reproductions of these portraits became the basis for our intervention in 1990, when we had a residency at the Banff Centre in Canada. In the video, the portraits, which created in a more or less comic-strip style, are altered by means of computer graphics and animation. To this we added performances by an opera singer and a Japanese artist, who together created a new form for the conceptual video language of the 1990s.

In *Moscow Portraits*, a special place is occupied by a historical photograph in which we see artists and others who were involved in the Russian avant-garde. This picture serves as a kind of visual map of the avant-garde: the Japanese performance artist summons each one by name into the present (»Malevich!«), while computer animation marks them on the



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Moscow Portraits*,
video and video installation, 1990

photo. In the middle of the video *Post-Socialism + The Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin*, we had placed the sole remaining photograph from Malevich's *The Last Futurist Exhibition*, an exhibition which took place in 1916–1917 in Petrograd (St. Petersburg); by focusing of this exhibition we looking at the phenomenon of copies as replicants. All three videos – *Moscow Portraits*, *Transcentral*, and *Post-Socialism + The Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin* – provided a particular way of reading the East, which I might interpret as differentiating between the original and the copy. Ultimately, the stereotypes, prototypes, and types in our videos are also copies.

When read through the filter of Marxism–Leninism, the East supposedly presents us with the actualization of Eastern despotism, endlessly overflowing in deprivation and misery, pus and blood, together with myths about some glorious brotherly community and total sexual freedom, which because of »communist« materialism was divested of all ethics, all morality, and was capable of the most heinous sins. When understood solely as a totalitarian project, the far »East« could not be easily aligned with Marxist thinking about the history of the class society; thus it needed a more ambivalent, supplementary idea, such as was provided by Asian despotism and its special methods of production. What we proposed was to connect this phantasmic Asian despotism with the despotism of the copy. This is why copies are at the center of all three of these videos. For the past twenty years, copying has been an important strategic tool in the former Yugoslavia, and it spread as well to the rest of what we once called Eastern Europe. While the use of copies also became an established art practice in the capitalist First World in the 1980s, it had a different meaning; there it was mainly a style.

At first glance, the copy appears to be something populist and profane, even dilettantish – a process suitable for vulgar egalitarianism: anyone can make a copy. From another perspective, however, the copy expresses the desacralization of



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Moscow Portraits*,
video and video installation, 1990

the original, and so is in fact an act of barbarism against the original, and not a sign of egalitarianism. On the one hand, the East equals anarchy, a place where anyone can mate with anyone else, but on the other hand, it is despotism, the barbarian act of desacralization of the original. This latter notion lies at the core of the *retro-principle* of the NSK movement and forms its deepest logic.

By discussing the despotism of the copy, I am proposing an extremely radical position: I am not arguing for the right to make copies, but for the opposite: the rights that are inherent to the copy itself, the rights that belong to the copy and allow us to speak of the tyranny and despotism of the copy. It is essential to recognize the radical nature of the copy's presence in the field of contemporary art.

The copy does not represent liberation from the tyranny of civilization and its laws, regressions, and norms; on the contrary, it is even more tyrannical than civilization. No equation is possible between the copy and the original. The original is posited as the paradigm of artistic value, as the most complete form of merchandise in capitalism. It is a form of civilizational norm and possesses vital meaning for the art market and the institution of art. In relation to the original, the copy can be seen as a form of evil, a brutal form that offers unlimited and immediate pleasure. The original accommodates itself to the law, while the copy stands outside the law and is, moreover, kitsch. The copy introduces the order of nonsense.

The copy constitutes a law that reaches beyond the good and the sublime. Between the copy and the original there is no well-meaning intention for exchange or reciprocity, such as normally applies to the connecting of different social groups. The relationship between the original and the copy, which is the Other, is always asymmetrical: this is a relationship of domination and submission. The copy represents the gratification of ahistorical history, and it controls the situation: through its position as evil, it aids the development of the



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Moscow Portraits*,
video and video installation, 1990

amodernity of history, as Bruno Latour puts it.³⁴ It possesses an excess of knowledge, which can be summarized as: »The copy possesses the idea of the original and the original's own conception.« The copy enjoys and represents its power and creativity. It says: »I am having fun!« – which cannot be true of the original, for it does not present the understanding, and the acknowledging, of this pleasure.

The original is the victim of illusions, norms, conventions, and artifacts. The copy is connected with the law of amodernity and discontinuity, whereas the original is »moral« and does not possess knowledge of the source of the law to which it is subject. The law is entirely arbitrary, but the original submits to it blindly, and at many levels; that is to say, it submits to a number of laws: of the marketplace, of fashion, of history, and so on. As a result, the copy opens ethical, political, and pedagogical questions that transcend the relationship between the master (the law) and the victim (the original). The original suffers, for even before it becomes the victim of the copy, it has already been the victim of norms, the laws of various markets, exhibitions, and genealogy. But does the original truly suffer? It does, indeed. But this does not mean it knows that it suffers, for it is not even aware of its own ignorance. And this is what the copy exploits as it produces its excess of pleasure.

What sort of social arrangement, then, disseminates the copy and its pleasure, or at least does everything it can to make sure these flourish? What social system is best able to create a fertile ground for the despotism of the copy?

Political despotism, it turns out, is not the best choice for the despotism of the copy, for it produces relationships that are parasitic and, above all, apolitical. In the former despotic times of socialism, the usefulness of the copy was only partly established. State socialism did, it is true, suppress originals: we did not have the opportunity to see the original works by Magritte, Picasso, Matisse, etc. We used a *copy* of a Magritte painting in the video *Girl with Orange* (1987), and *copies* of

works by Duchamp, Picasso, Matisse, and Malevich in *Post-Socialism + The Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin*. Under despotism, equality sprang from, among other things, the total ban on the original; we could study history, and watch it, only through reproductions. The Brechtian alienation effect was only half-effective thanks to this general suppression of the original. Moreover, the high modernism of socialism was itself a counterfeit. The power of the copy was only partial because state socialism provided no antipode; the copy was presented in the psychotic space of mere egalitarian ignorance. The height of this ignorance was the price everyone had to pay by being part of this state egalitarian socialism.

The despotism of the copy, therefore, requires democracy, for the power and authority of the master in democracy is not conceived in egalitarian reciprocity, but as unequal exchange, compensation, and repayment. Enslavement to the law is enslavement to freedom, and in such circumstances we see that the law which places the copy on a pedestal in fact enslaves us, but under the guise of equality. The asymmetry of democracy means that the individual is never the author of the law but always subject to it. The statement I made in the eighties, that the original is the universalized copy, receives its full validity in democracy.

The despotism of the copy acquires new elements in the so-called space of transition from post-socialism to capitalism. This is the constellation of the non-egalitarian system that lies at the foundation of a system in which the original and the copy coexist in a in a savage »marriage,« with the copy as parasite sucking on the original, for it exploits its position in the social and political arrangement. The copy performs differentiation. It is negation at the point of the breakdown of social stability. Because the copy knows no limit, we can make more than a hundred copies from a single original. The copy illustrates the phantasm that everyone has the right to own the artwork; indeed, it is the universalization of this phantasm. Social

connection, on the contrary, is based on limitation.

But at the same time, it is not true that by banishing the copy we open a path to pleasure, for civilization itself has already robbed the body of original pleasure. The law of civilization mediates originals as signifiers, for an original is, precisely, the body without pleasure; it is subject to all the forms of law. Signifiers kill the body of the original, but here there is a paradox: without signifiers we would not even have the body. What copies desire is simply a metaphor of emptiness, the trace left behind by the signifier. If we were to cut through the civilizational norms, we would not get a body that experiences pleasure, and moreover, we would also lose the original. Because of such a position, it is possible in fact to assert that the original is divided and able to produce that excess of pleasure which is the copy.

Copying and repeating something is sometimes a very good method for understanding it.

This also explains why we have never produced originals in our works (so to speak), but only copies, stereotypes, prototypes, and types. The copy is a metaphor of what civilization has done to the Institution of Art, the body, and pleasure. This is also what allows us to describe the copy as excess pleasure.

Time to Die!

In 1996, we created the website *The Axis of Life* in order to contextualize the »fast-food« users of the Web community. On the *Axis of Life* menu, one finds the following choices: Birth, Body, Love, Art, Media, History, Geography, Community, and Death.

The website represented an attempt at a critical, almost political and diacritical, reintegration of the content of artistic material distributed across the World Wide Web. If the Web already creates a community that forms a network of millions



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Post-Socialism + Retro-Avant-Garde +*
Irwin / Postsocializem + retroavantgarda + Irwin, video, 1997

of people seeking new content or the fulfillment of their desires, or trying to discover possible intermediary worlds, new directions and paths, then the questions we asked as artists, social activists, and cyborg political entities were the following: How can we define the basic elements of this state of interconnectedness? How is it possible to create a new kind of individual responsibility without any shallow, superficial moralizing or pathos? These questions constituted the basic concept of our Web artwork *The Axis of Life*. Through this project we also challenged the notion of the Internet as a limitless world. Finally, we put our website together using specific images that relate to the »Eastern« post-socialist context – to the history, art, media, and life of Eastern Europe.

In the website we raise questions about a possible conception of Internet art. *The Axis of Life* takes surfers to two key boundaries: »Virtual Bread« and »Antarctica.« »Virtual Bread« (»bread« that exists solely as a digital image or text) is a sign that essentially defines an anti-community and is the opposite of the superabundance of techno-escapes, whereas »Antarctica« is a community without the image or topos of a geographical setting. We in fact constructed a virtual space that could be settled by the imagination of individuals cut off from the intimate world of their own past. With the help of this virtual environment we stimulate the description of cleared space between the life of the home and its turbulent history.

In Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982), Nietzsche's inversion of Descartes's »I think, therefore I am« into »I am, therefore I think,«³⁵ is invoked as a philosophical introduction to what must happen in the next act of the film – the killing of Tyrell, the creator of the four replicants. The »blade runner« Deckard must track down and destroy the four replicants (Leon, Pris, Roy, and Zhora) who have hijacked a spaceship and come back to earth to find their manufacturer, Tyrell. They are tracking him through Sebastian, who works for him. And it is in Sebastian's apartment that Pris quotes Descartes's dictum »I

think, therefore I am,« to which Roy responds, »Very good, Pris – now show him why.«³⁶ By killing their creator, which signifies the removal of God (»God is dead!« is yet another interesting and widely abused quotation from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*), the replicants are possibly seeking to assume full responsibility for their lives, which have been programmed with the utmost precision: they know not only the date of their birth, but also the date of their death.

This game between possibility or contingency, on the one hand, and actuality or random coincidence, on the other, lies at the heart of *Blade Runner*; we used a similar game also in our interactive project *Troubles with Sex, Theory, and History* (1997).³⁷ Like any good interactive game, *Troubles with Sex* begins with mere chance or contingency. The user/player must choose between the numbers 1 and 2 in order to enter the game. All images, sentences, and situations are organized into four levels of value: *minus-minus* (– –), *minus-plus* (– +), *plus-minus* (+ –), and *plus-plus* (+ +). The images and interactions express function and redundancy on the one hand, and on the other, meaning, nonsense, fate, and emptiness. It is impossible to travel through these four structures without altering them in accordance with one's own particular history, private world, prejudices, and stereotypes. The narrative flow is realized through persistent negativity: users must choose the thing they dislike or disagree with (»Pick the one you don't like!«) – that which is read as an excess that cannot be easily inscribed in an economy of plus and minus.

In contrast to the structure of nearly every other interactive game, once the user has chosen between 1 and 2, the user can no longer change the course of events by jumping backward or forward, but must continue on in the same direction to the end, or must end the game (as Leon says, »It's time to die!«).

Users who are prepared to take the gamble and play the interactive game *Troubles with Sex, Theory, and History*, will find themselves facing the basic concept of David Fincher's film

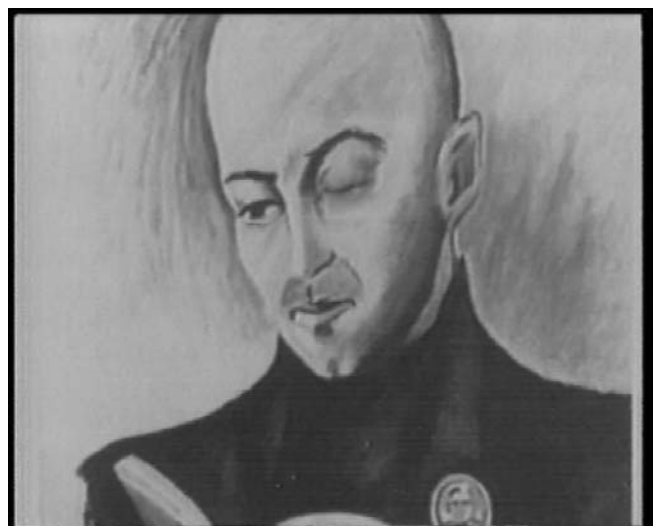
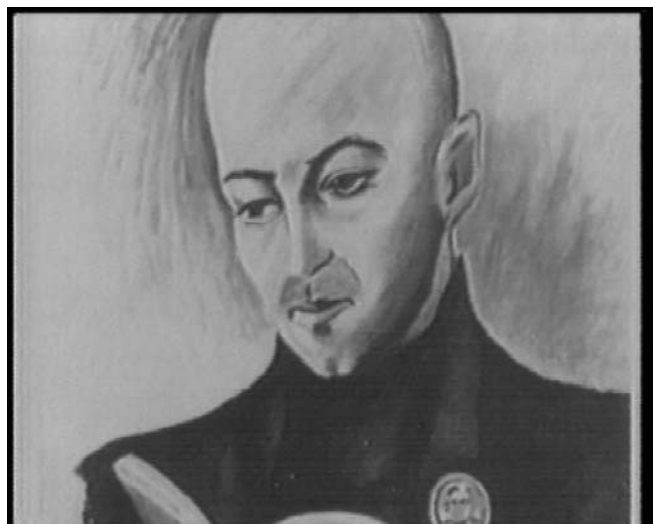
Seven (1995). In this film, the police detective Somerset, who is just about to retire, and the serial killer »John Doe,« who kills his victims by applying the seven deadly sins, are both connoisseurs of the same global capitalist culture: they read the same books and use the same sources. The key is to be able to understand and reuse these »sources« when something thought of as trivial might turn out to be important or, conversely, when things turn into politically and socially acceptable or criminal monsters.³⁸

»Take a chance! 1 or 2?« relies on a »brute chance« that will soon be shaped by meaning. Meaning in *Troubles with Sex, Theory, and History* is programmed outside any binary code (*minus-nil* or *plus-full* are disturbing value strings) as an interface in which users demonstrate their ability to respond to a number of uncomfortable questions about history, sexuality, and theory. Depending on the user's response to the question posed, *Troubles with Sex, Theory, and History* develops as an interface between at least two force fields, between a form of content that is pure contingency and a random form of expression. This is a way to translate a basic order of taste, knowledge, obsessions, and political views into a personal order that is itself already global, for it has been sucked up, (de)generated, and spat out by the capitalist machine and is ready for sale at a multimedia store near you.

In *Troubles with Sex, Theory, and History*, the reference to the early films of Dušan Makavejev is of key importance, for we made a study of the power relations and hierarchy of characters in his films and then applied these relations of hierarchy to other characters.

Political Intervention into Theory

The works we create represent, among other things, a narrative about the position of theory and identity; it is extremely important not to overlook our own complicity in



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Moscow Portraits*,
video and video installation, 1990



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Eastern House / Vzhodna hiša*, video, 2003

structures of exclusion and inclusion, which are constitutive to what can be considered the theory or technology of writing and the politics of videomaking. This was the approach we developed in, for instance, the video *Eastern House* (2003).

In this work we offer a rereading of certain key scenes from cinematic history: Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blowup* (U.K., 1966), Eric Rohmer's *My Night at Maud's* (France, 1969), Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry* (USA, 1971), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (USA, 1979), and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Alien: Resurrection* (USA, 1997). Sequences from these movies, which are known all over the world and can be found in any standard history of film, are reconstructed in the video, but with certain statements and ideas – missing in the original but indicating the political and social consequences of the work – being placed in the mouths of the characters. After all, when these films were made, certain political positions were left out, as were also certain spheres of life and the mutual conditions between the capitalist system and its politics, its exploitation and enslavement of others. In the video, we placed the selected excerpts in the context of persistent patterns of transposition and transformation; Coppola's film, for example, is reconstructed and placed in a post-socialist bathroom, right where the *Apocalypse* finds its 1990s sequel, in the Balkans.

Eastern House also rearticulates the body art and conceptual happenings that were performed in the Eastern European context. The video is a kind of revolutionary homage to Neša Paripović and the happenings and actions he carried out in the 1970s in Belgrade. Along with artists like Marina Abramović, Paripović was one of the crucial figures from the first generation of body artists in the former Yugoslavia. For this reason, our homage was not a »mere« reiteration, but instead replayed various kinds of transposition and transformation. In 1971, the »fascistic« message of *Dirty Harry* about the power of the individual in capitalist society sounded like this: »You've got to ask yourself a question: Do I feel lucky? Well, do ya,

punk?« In 2001, the »Other,« that is to say, all the powerless people who had been getting in Harry's way on his road to happiness, finally answered, »No!« And what is more, they »helped« Harry blow himself to pieces.

The text of *Eastern House* represents a political intervention into the field of theory; it treats the question of global capitalism and the radical position of technology in cyberspace, with reference to the cyberfeminist approach and viewpoint. From this perspective, sexuality and compassion are evidently polluted in cyberspace by ethical and political questions, through cloning and radical politics. In this regard, the relation between the East and West of Europe appears not only as the relationship between individuals and difference in their private lives; such positioning also brings to the surface the much deeper inequality and disproportionality between the paradigms, which thoroughly and on multiple levels shape attitudes toward history, philosophy, social gender, and politics. Capitalism interprets individuals as consumers, as desiring subjects, and spurs them to new and ever more perverse desires, even manipulating them so they have desire, and although the desire to have desire and not find satisfaction is, as it were, the final stage of this process, we still do not achieve drive. Drive appears in capitalism on a more systemic level; it is that which moves the whole capitalist machine, an impersonal force that compels us to get involved in an endless circular movement of widespread self-reproduction. Endlessly consumed and expropriated, these are the elements of capital's drive.

The question of humanity is decisive, and it can best be expressed by answering the question we posed in *Eastern House*: »Who are the mothers of the monsters?« That which is supposedly understood as human derives not from natural categories that might be ascribed, on the one hand, to all biological people, and, on the other, to all digitally created monsters. Rather, the categories are assessed with regard to cultural, social, and political operations, as well as context and



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Eastern House / Vzhodna hiša*, video, 2003



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Eastern House / Vzhodna hiša*, video, 2003

marking. As Slavoj Žižek points out, scenes of trauma that never actually happened and were not even the fruit of deliberate thought play an even more crucial role in cyberspace, for they show clearly that the real is an entirely virtual entity that possesses no positive ontological stability.³⁹ But here we still remain on but one level.

Consider the bombastic movie series *Alien*, in which Ripley, the commanding officer, expends a great deal of effort trying to rid herself of the alien being. In the fourth installment, *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), the monstrous creature recognizes Ripley as its biological mother, which is possible only in this installment, where Ripley, unlike the earlier movies, is a cloned and therefore artificially impregnated human entity, not a real human woman. This same biological mother must destroy the alien by totally dematerializing it in outer space. Nevertheless, the alien's gesture of love, though ghastly, is also extraordinarily romantic and compassionate. We can agree with Stahl Stenslie that a phantasmic emotional relationship in some hi-tech world between two monsters (or cloned cyborgs), or between a human and a monster, can say more about social attitudes, interpersonal relationships, and the politics of love than any sexual relationship, limitation of power, or control between people, regardless of sexual orientation or preferences in the real world. Although Ripley was created through cloning, she was still much too human, and therefore much too ideologically burdened, to fit neatly into a sci-fi story.

In the motion picture industry, and in the ideology that supports it, we still encounter the problem that, when it comes to alien creatures, the only permitted and possible relationship is between a quasi-human and a slime thing. An emotional sexual relationship between a human being and something that strives to the position of a human being is forbidden territory. This was true even in *Blade Runner*, the first film that dealt with cybercloning; the relationship between the blade runner and the character Rachael has a soft gentle feeling because they

are both replicants; it would be different if a man were mating with a cloned female entity. This is why Rachael and the blade runner work as the perfect realization of the phantasmic romantic couple (they are both *almost* identical to a human being).

The logic of the sexual–emotional relationship, then, is as follows: in the capitalist industry of the motion pictures, a sexual relationship involving an exchange of emotion between a slimy micro-modeled substance and a human being – something that has never yet been fully digested – always takes place at a strategic distance. This removal I call *safe distance*, and its purpose is to preserve the hygienic boundary between us and the formless Other, in keeping with the ideology that we are able to create all other living entities (this »we« refers to the capitalist production machine, which does this best), but we ourselves (or rather, the capitalist production machine) will not have sexual relations with them or feelings for them. But do we not find such a »safe distance« in real life too? Is there not some similarity between this relationship and the attitudes of the allegedly »socially aware« middle class of the First World toward the so-called Third World, or even toward the Second World, which presumably lies in the heart of Europe and is known as Eastern Europe? Can we not recognize such a relationship in the activities of UNICEF and similar humanitarian organizations, when people – the rich, sufficiently middle and excessively rich upper classes – send in a dollar a month for an African child so he won't die of starvation. But nobody asks whether these children are able to do something more than not die of starvation, whether, in fact, they are able to live!

In all these cases we are dealing with external emotion, which we can see in the letters that, on the one side, overflow with these distant caregivers' love and, on the other, with expressions of gratitude from African children. But such relationships are entirely abstract; they require no physical contact and thus preclude any chance of catching some

infectious disease that might be transmitted by such contact. A similar position is expressed by the alien in *Alien: Resurrection* in its yearning for love and tenderness. Everyone keeps a safe distance. And this is precisely what tells us who the mothers of the monsters might be, what the real children might look like, and what the borders are of our sexually paternalistic and maternalistic lust.

A subtle analysis of contemporary worlds in fact reveals that culture no longer opposes to nature; rather, it must fight against new barbarians of profit, neocapitalistic xenophobia, etc. Today we face the extremely powerful censorship of capitalism's so-called free communication. The same is true in the world of cyberspace: it opens the imagination, but at the same time presents us with certain radical processes of total censorship, such can be found in the real world. Cyberspace was conceived on a basis of total freedom and mutual communication, but it soon turned into a vehicle for economic interests and censorship. The Internet, which was once characterized by an ideology of pure unlimited communication, is now radically shaped by such questions as: Who can agree on the sort of information, images, etc. that can be freely distributed on the World Wide Web?

The Performative Politics of Nodes

There are at least four themes, or concerns, that are more or less constants in our videos, films, and media works: *survival* (»I will live,« from the video *Three Sisters*, 1993); *the politics of positioning* (»Instead of being treated like a feminist, I will treat the Eastern European space like a woman,« from the video *Eastern House*, 2003); *working strategies* (»We use only the same strategies as our enemy,« from the video *The Axis of Life*, 1986); and *gender difference* (»You don't interest me at all,« from the video *Luna 10*, 1994).

Our 2005 video, *Tester*, speaks about current processes of work, capital, and resistance. We shot it as part of a collaborative project involving five artists, from Berlin, Vienna, Johannesburg, Lima, and Ljubljana, and the group Rodriguez org. from the Basque Country. We were all renamed »nodes« in an artificially created network in order to discuss such topics as space, the architecture of power and life (including food), and problems with the contemporary institutions of art and global capital. Each of us operated as a node in the project. A node represents a particular member of a particular community that serves as a link with the other nodes. This kind of vocabulary is associated with the notion of wireless connectivity in a community. Each of the nodes in this project was like an old computer that enables the other nodes to be only sporadically connected. As Susana Noguero points out, communication frequencies (hubs) exist at the microwave level, 2.4 GHz, which avoids any legal problems and so makes it possible to test free-access devices.⁴⁰

The video spotlights performative politics; it is a fictional story that opens up new strategies in contemporary documentary videomaking. At the beginning of the video we see a desk, microphones, and a blackboard – everything that will form the setting for the future narratives. In other words, when we look at the entirety of the video locations, it is clear that the video's logic is not documentary comprehensiveness and the presentation of the multicultural diversity of global capitalism, but the very opposite: it seeks to emphasize the disgustingly bureaucratic aspect of these shots of difference, which are meant to be happily archived, as well as our insignificance as nodes in comparison with the cosmic world: we are nothing but the product of a photographic record, of archiving and processing. For most of us, the monitor cable and microphone hook-up are our umbilical cord. In the middle segment of the video, therefore, we are confronted by a »queer« action with muted sound, which underscores an inversion in the state of normal node activity.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Tester*, video, 2005

What we see is a picture of »queer« origin as an automatic function of technology – a function, that is, that derives not so much from an activism of presented heterogeneity as from the fictionalization of technology.

The text in the video is a political debate between the nodes, which concerns money, possibilities in the conditions of production, and whether or not the project participants will get paid. This direct speculation on the conditions of production brings together the economics of videomaking, the economics of our participation in the video, and the aesthetics of the image. Thanks to its use of parody and caricature, which is based on the nodes' need for money and food, and the question of language usage,⁴¹ *Tester* may be also understood as being profoundly at variance with the rest of our works.

This dissonance contributes to the abandonment of that sense of kinship which is usually at work when treating topics of this nature.

A State of Exception

The video *HI-RES* (2006) reworks a contemporary dance performance (also called *HI-RES*) by Maja Delak and Mala Kline, which premiered in 2004 in Ljubljana, focusing on two questions in particular.⁴² The first comes from the thesis Deleuze developed in connection with Spinoza: »Nobody knows what the body is capable of.«⁴³ The second is the question Deleuze asks in his book *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983): »Is contemporary dance able to represent the body?« In dance, the body is a locus, a point of compression; at the same time, however, it is clear that the presence of the body on the stage is in itself not enough to allow us to give the body the status of a concept. Video *HI-RES* alludes to the history of dance and the processes that have throughout its history normalized and disciplined the body; at the same time, we



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *HI-RES*, video, 2006

witness the singularity of the dancing body, its uniqueness and the strength that radiates through the performance of creative choreographic figures.

One figure in the video is particularly memorable – it is a hybrid between the Egyptian Sphinx and a street beggar. This figure then is seen in relationship to a box, which I will call »Pandora's box.« In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman on earth. Zeus ordered Hephaestus, the god of artisans, to create her, and he did so by fashioning her from water and earth. The gods then presented Pandora with numerous gifts: Aphrodite gave her beauty; Apollo, musical talent; Hermes, the power of persuasion; and so on. Hence, her name Pandora: »all-gifted.« Pandora was also given a box, which she was told she must not open under any circumstances. But her natural curiosity got the better of her, and all forms of evil escaped from the box and spread to every corner of the world. Pandora immediately tried to shut the box, but nearly everything had already managed to escape, except for the one thing that remained at the bottom of the box – hope.

In the video *HI-RES*, the box speaks about private property as the engine of contemporary capitalist society. In order for the capitalist machine to work, it must always possess new products and new expressions of creativity, since the logic of capitalism lives through the ceaseless production of excess value for goods, including artistic goods. A key feature of contemporary neoliberal global-capitalist and transitional societies is the importance of ownership relations; exhibitions and art projects, as well as public spaces and public goods (e.g. intellectual property), are owned by concrete owners who possess both economic and symbolic power (powerful curators, powerful art institutions, multinationals, etc.). As Donna Haraway argues, we know precisely who the players are in every field, the ones who can speak for everybody and everything. Only a few are called, while everyone else is cut out of the (his)story of video.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *HI-RES*, video, 2006

Boredom and Captivation

HI-RES develops to great effect two conditions of functioning and thinking in neoliberal global capitalism today: *boredom* and *captivation*. To elucidate this boredom and captivation, I would like to refer to Heidegger and Agamben. According to Heidegger, there are two structural moments that determine the essence of boredom: being held in limbo and being left empty – these two temporal conditions are both present in the dramaturgy of the temporality of the video as well. The second moment – being left empty – is at the same time the sign of an all-encompassing boredom. Agamben stresses this point in his reworking of Heidegger's ideas.⁴⁴

My question is: Who has time to be bored?

Agamben also raises a number of questions ranging from the difference between nature and history to the process of humanization conducted by the anthropological capitalist neoliberal machine, which is based on the Western traditions of metaphysics and science. *HI-RES* examines the constant processes of humanizing and civilizing that are imposed on everyone outside the capitalist First World. In Delak and Kline's performance, the entire history of contemporary dance is presented, developed, and conceptualized as performative, as a process of artificially reconstructing the history of contemporary dance. This history is entirely artificial, though presents itself as natural. Actors, dancers, and choreographers who come from worlds not directly connected with the capitalist First World are evacuated (and not only in international contemporary dance, but also in the domestic Slovene context). For this reason, the video *HI-RES* represents the state of exception in contemporary dance and is, at the same time, an attempt to perform the state of exception – as the paradigmatic logic of the functioning of neoliberal global contemporary capitalist societies – in video.

The Decoloniality of Knowledge and How to Re/present Conflict

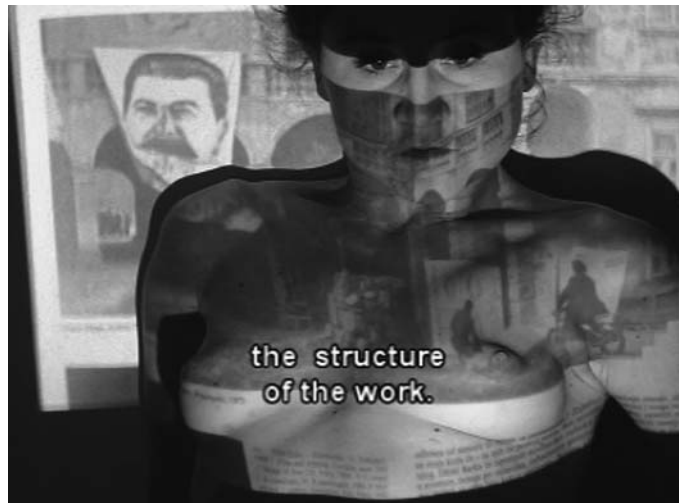
The video *Obsession* (2008) demands an emancipatory politics through the possibility of a production of knowledge that opposes capitalism's old, persistently hidden history of colonialism and its new forms of neocolonization. In a word, the video demands decolonization, in particular, the decolonization of the medium of contemporary video. Contemporary video is trapped in an obscene amnesia about all practices, theories and politics produced in the medium outside the capitalist First World. The video is based on the work of the theoreticians Walter Mignolo, an Argentinean based in the USA; Šefik Tatlić, who lives in Sarajevo; and Ana Vujanović, who lives in Belgrade; as well as the French philosopher Alain Badiou's critique of the rising anti-Semitism in Europe today and the possibility of thinking about the signifier »Jew« for a new politics of Europe. The video constructs its own new conceptual genealogy as it reflects on a different experimental history. This has become necessary today because of changes in video digital production and critical art-historical vocabularies. One of the questions the video raises is: How do we document the poverty of the video medium in relation to the condition of its production today? What does it mean to perform class struggle, the social antagonism that cuts through video and connects the medium to the wider social and political stance of contemporary capitalism?

The text in *Obsession* is a »ready-made« that functions as a disjunctive platform for practicing historical, theoretical, and political readings. The text proposes the critical interpellation of the viewer through the practice of performative reading; it offers the possibility of an analysis of pertinent theoretical positions. Performative readings of theory that use theory as a script to be performed in front of the camera as a love poem, an intersubjective dialogue, or simply a monologue for the camera,

in an everyday setting, stand in opposition to the role of global scenarios as the narrative in standard feature film production. In such scenarios, what we get is the eternalizing of the present and a rethinking of subjectivity in the name of global planning. In the video, by contrast, theory is used as an alternative vehicle of subjectivation, and it makes it possible to conceive video as an intervention or civic action. The text becomes the condition that stands against the deceptive modern separation of the economical, the cultural, the social, and the political. Through the text as a ready-made, therefore, it is possible to connect political macro-economic actors and singular individuals; the theoretical script in question is thus situated in the interstices of relations of alternative knowledge and actions constituting the public sphere.

Also important is the fact that most of the spoken theory in the video comes from the wider political theoretical context. This is not simply contemporary art being spoken in front of the camera. What is significant in this regard is not that we want through video to turn politics into a domain of video art, but just the opposite: we want to use the medium of video to analyze the conceptual foundation of contemporary politics and its processes of governmentality. Today's neoliberal politics seeks to foster a pastoral discretion, i.e. an unwillingness to speak publicly about social contradictions, and to do this it uses a complex of economic, legislative, judicial, and discursive practices – the procedures of governmentality – to stifle all debate and normalize every situation of power, appropriation, and enslavement. Video can be used as a site to denaturalize this normality by generating and problematizing the context of its own reception. The different perspective we propose and are trying to develop derives from our perception of politics today: as a terrain that escapes or bypasses conflict. As Agamben has pointed out, this particular aspect is becoming more and more evident in the way neoliberal capitalist democracy is managed.

The crisis of representation in contemporary art (and not only in video) is connected, therefore, with the extent to which



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Obsession / Obsedenost*, video, 2008

we are able to relocate the conflict, the social contradiction, back in the work. Precisely because the politics of representation is still such an open question, we must ask: How can we make video art an explicitly political practice? In what way can this be done? Our answer is to search for ways to re/present conflict in the work of art, conflict that points to processes of social contradiction, racial injustice, and capital expropriation. This means reorganizing the format of the video frame so it can be opened up to intervention, and reappropriating the language of this intervention by linking it directly to art and culture as once again possible pertinent practices. But to do this, the medium and the knowledge it contains must be extended beyond the confines of Europe; our task, then, must be to examine Western democracy's relation to imperialism and colonialism. What needs to be put into the video work is not a process of decolonization but what Walter Dignolo calls *decoloniality*.⁴⁵ The work we do is not just about the opposition between Western democracy and totalitarian dictatorship but, even more essentially, about the relation between Western democracy and imperialism/colonialism.

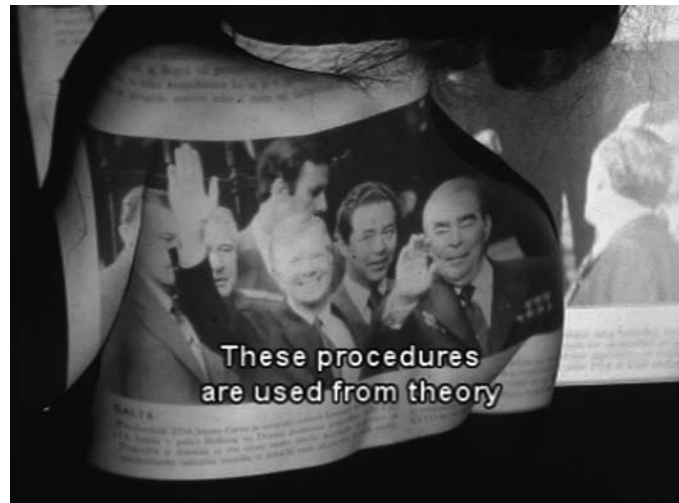
To demand this kind of political act, we must first understand gender and technology through the prism of the logic of *coloniality*; only then can we propose a process of decoloniality, or delinking, as Madina Tlostanova and Walter Dignolo call it.⁴⁶ Coloniality (which is not the same as colonialism) is the hidden logic that makes possible imperial transformations and colonial management in the name of progress, civilization, development, and democracy. This process of coloniality is grounded in the Western rhetoric of modernization and salvation, through which global capitalism attempts to reorganize »human« relations and transform subjectivities around the globe. No revolutionary movement is possible without revolutionary theory, for it is necessary to understand social and political practices from a theoretical perspective in order to intervene in them. The idea, then, is to



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Obsession / Obsedenost*, video, 2008

translate social conflicts as refracted in the political field into a specific and irreducible form of video.

As Sarah Kember has noted, two important strategies are implied in the logic of coloniality: the first is based on the phantasm that the new media technology is out of control, while the second is based on technology fetishism.⁴⁷ In an apocalyptic scenario, technology gets out of control; it seeks only progress and development, and in this progress the only scientists, or artists, or activists, who can be involved are those from the First World. Look at any serious conference on science and technology, and you will be hard pressed to find any trace of a position that originates anywhere outside of Western neoliberal capitalism. What computer technology and virtual reality put forward is, for the most part, an »anti-politics,« as Kember calls it. Such technologies are seen as a »consensual hallucination,« the new »final frontier,« an out-of-control realm in which only »post-humans« can live. But what are real humans doing in the meantime – those who sometimes are not even considered fully human? They are looking for discarded food in the immense garbage dumps on the outskirts of the big cities of Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Even in Slovenia, ten percent of the population depends on aid from humanitarian organizations such as Caritas. Sarah Franklin describes today's technology and science as a platform that, in its desire for dominion, lacks the foundational authority of a different knowledge. Science no longer has any limits on its progress; it has entered a new phase of illegitimacy that is based on the elimination of boundaries.⁴⁸ To put an end to this situation we must adopt another knowledge, a knowledge that is limited and situated, which today is found on the other side of the colonial divide.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Obsession / Obsedenost*, video, 2008

The Conditions of Production

Without question, a key part of this retroactive reconstruction of our video history must be the genealogy of the chances we were given to make our videos. Television Slovenia (or Television Ljubljana, as it was called in the 1980s) was the producer of the majority of our videos – a fact that should not be interpreted as some altruistic gesture on the part of the national television, for it was a »fortunate coincidence« for everyone. Especially in the eighties, if you were interested in serious video production you had no choice but to work with the national television. This was not because they had any special love for video, but rather because the collaboration worked to the benefit of both sides. The national television was always obliged to show a certain percentage of original cultural and artistic production in its annual reports, and video artists provided a cheap way to satisfy this requirement and show support for local culture. There were other advantages, too, for both the TV company and the artists; the needs of these experimental artists put pressure on the national television to make full use of technologies nobody else had the time or interest to try out, given the run-of-the-mill nature of most of their programming. The fact that television under socialism was state-run and noncommercial, and that it had its own mandated artistic production, is something almost incomprehensible in the capitalist world.

We also collaborated with certain visionary private producers, such as Kregar Video Productions, a company that showed incredible openness to and interest in art video. These possibilities for production also exerted an essential influence on the aesthetic concept. It was necessary to coordinate the conditions of production with the aesthetics of the work. Our system of working could not be one of timeless artistic creation; instead, it was a time-constrained process that required conceptually well-developed scripts and storyboards.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Obsession / Obsedenost*, video, 2008

The supposed democratic aspect of ever more affordable new technology is not the product of capitalist egalitarianism, but stems instead from the capitalist system's need for increased earnings and profit. The mass production of technology also means its ceaseless and ever greater capitalization. The technology and conditions of video production have changed. If video art was once an exclusive practice because of its technology, and its technological visual effects were understood as the medium's aesthetic dimension, then today in the capitalist First World video technology is available to almost everyone. This explains why video artworks have today been canonized as exclusive high-art objects. The medium's former technological exclusivity has been replaced by the boutique offerings of galleries. Technology is more than a tool; it is a social relationship, an institution of power and a lever in the constitution of thought. Technology is never innocent; even less so are its aesthetic and social cadres.

Notes

- 1 Slavoj Žižek, »... ce seul objet dont le néant s'honore,« *Filozofski vestnik* (Ljubljana) 26, no. 2 (2005).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 7, tr. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 71.
- 4 In the 1980s, Slovenia witnessed a video renaissance in connection with the emergence of the »alternative scene« in Ljubljana. This phenomenon was centered in two student cultural organizations: the Student Cultural and Art Center (generally known by its Slovene acronym ŠKUC) and the Student Cultural Association Forum (the ŠKD Forum). In 1982, both organizations jointly established a section devoted to video, which became the basis for independent ŠKUC–Forum productions.
- 5 Called *Meje kontrole št. 4* in Slovene; the other two members of the

group were Barbara Borčič and Dušan Mandič.

- 6 The video uses the following lines from the Kraftwerk song: »For every camera, she gives the best she can, / I even saw her on the cover of a magazine. / Now she's a big success, I want to see her again.«
- 7 The history of the group Borders of Control No. 4 and the band Raid at the Mercator Clinic begins in 1979, when Dušan Mandič and I, along with the Ljubljana group FV 112/15, founded Theater Performance (*Gledališče performans*), which performed twice at the ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana. In 1980, Mandič, Šmid, and I performed as a group called Lenin's Dreams of Coconuts (*Lenjinove sanje o kokosih*) – a direct allusion to the work *Portrait of V. I. Lenin in July 1917 Disguised by a Wig and Working Man's Clothes in the Style of Jackson Pollock II* (1980) by the conceptual art group Art & Language, which in the eighties was focused on deconstructing various painting styles. Also in 1980, Šmid and I founded Raid at the Mercator Clinic (*Racija v kliniki Mercator*) – »Mercator« is the name of the largest chain of grocery stores and department stores in Slovenia. In 1982, Barbara Borčič, Šmid, and I exhibited a series of punk-inspired staged photographs at the ŠKUC Gallery. That same year, the three of us, together with Mandič, established the group Borders of Control No. 4.
- 8 Here is part of the dialogue from *The Threat of the Future*: »Then you get total paranoia. Somebody telephones you and you get the feeling, like an *idée fixe*, that someone else is always listening in. Because it's not entirely clear to you that they know everything, from the different round tables and generally anything you have ever said – verbatim quotes; it's all been recorded. Plus, the guy is always telling you that he isn't talking to you officially, he's just personally interested. As if I went there to have a chat. In reality, you get a summons, and then you know for sure that he's with the police. Shit.« Another excerpt from *The Threat of the Future* goes as follows: »— Did they ask you anything about the fanzine? — Yeah, they did. But not directly. I said I was finished with it now, that I was looking for a job. And then he asks me, how did I think I would ever get a job? And I asked, why, what's the problem? And he says, 'Yeah, well, because of what

- you've been doing.' And I say, what does he mean by that – the punk stuff or what? And he says, 'You know very well what's been going on with the fanzine.' « For a comprehensive survey and analysis of the punk movement in Slovenia, see the essay collection *Punk pod Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Republiška konferenca ZSMS – Univerzitetna konferenca ZSMS, 1985); and Peter Lovšin, Peter Mlakar, and Igor Vidmar, eds., *Punk je bil prej: 25 let punka pod Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2003).
- 9 Patricia Tamara Alleyne Dettmers, »Body Politics: Reconstructing Woman Power in the Celebration of Carnival,« *Shedhalle Newspaper* (Zurich), no. 2 (2005), 7–10.
 - 10 My question, »Who (the hell) is the political subject?« alludes, among other things, to a performance and musical lecture by Jamika Ajalon at Cornerhouse in Manchester, England, in July 2004, in which the audience was asked: »Who the hell are you?«
 - 11 Griselda Pollock, »Feminist Film Practice and Pleasure – A Discussion with Deedee Glass, Judith Williamson and Laura Mulvey,« in Tony Bennet and Victor Burgin, eds., *Formations of Pleasure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 157.
 - 12 See Jo Anna Isaak, »Woman: The Ruin of Representation,« *Afterimage* 12, no. 9 (April 1985), 6.
 - 13 Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 43.
 - 14 This exhibition of reconstructions was presented at the ŠKUC Gallery in 1984 as a response to the exhibition *Back to the USA*, through which the United States art establishment made its entry into the Western European space in 1983–1984. The show was presented in all major Western European art centers but never reached Eastern Europe (although thanks to our being next door to Austria, it almost reached Slovenia). The Irwin group, applying their characteristic »retro-principle,« simply repainted and reconstructed nearly all the works in the show and then presented these reconstructions at the ŠKUC Gallery in an exhibition that bore the identical title, *Back to the USA*. The show presented what was then the new generation of American artists, who soon became some of the most important names in art

- (and most lucrative names on the art market): Cindy Sherman, Jonathan Borofsky, etc..
- 15 Veno Pilon (1896–1970) was one of Slovenia's most important artists and made a significant contribution to European expressionism and the New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) movement. He spent most of his life in Paris. He was a painter and a printmaker, but in the early 1930s, devoted most of his energy to photography, especially portraits. In the video, our reference to Pilon relates to his life in Paris (with reference to the passages from Duras) and with his involvement with art styles the Nazis labeled »degenerate« (*entartete Kunst*). We use a reproduction of a Pilon painting that depicts a historic church in the village of Log, which, as Tanja Velagić has observed in her analysis of *Moments of Decision*, stands on the site of a crucial battle in Roman times, in other words, a place of »decisive moments.«
 - 16 Vitaly Komar (born 1943) in Alexander Melamid (born 1945), both originally from Moscow, became United States citizens in 1978.
 - 17 Marcelin Pleynet, *L'insegnamento della pittura* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1974), 120–130; originally published in French as *L'Enseignement de la peinture: Les problèmes de l'avant-garde* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971).
 - 18 Ibid., 120.
 - 19 Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *La Folie du voir: de l'esthétique baroque* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986).
 - 20 See Alenka Zupančič, »Reversal of Nothing: the Case of the Sneezing Corpse,« *Filozofski vestnik* 26, no. 2 (2005).
 - 21 In those years the only people in Slovenia who had access to the new video technologies were the children of VIPs in the Communist Party, politics, and business, so the establishment of such a genealogy was something self-evident and naturalized in the Slovene milieu.
 - 22 In a different way, too, the story of our involvement with lawyers and law courts has formed a constant parallel of sorts to the history of our video production. We turned to a lawyer when we were told to turn over our entire video history so it could be included in the book *Videodokument*, which was being published by the Soros Center for Contemporary Art – Ljubljana. Anyone who wishes may interpret our

work, but anything more than that has to be paid for, especially when it comes to private organizations that want to show our work or have it made available to them for free, when they themselves are »rolling« in money – money they use to build their own history rather than to invest in or contribute to the production of video art. With regard to this same book project, we also forbid the editors from publishing our pictures or any materials relating to the early videos *Icons of Glamour*, *Echoes of Death* and *The Threat of the Future*. In the 1990s, when *Videodokument* was published, this would have simply been a meaningless parading of our work, since our input as performers was crucial in these two videos. The present book provides by far the best possible context for any interpretive efforts.

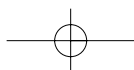
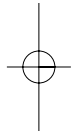
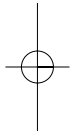
- 23 This comes from Aina Šmid's notes, which so far comprise hundred pages and are part of our private archive.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 See Pascal Bonitzer, *Le Champ Aveugle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).
- 26 See Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1983).
- 27 See Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan* (London: Verso, 2000).
- 28 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 29 As is stated in *Luna 10*, in 1994, when the video was made, the Internet was used by two million users worldwide. In 2008, statistics show that more than one billion people use the Internet. This has had dramatic consequences for the social sphere and for information per se.
- 30 See Peter Weibel, »Ways of Contextualisation,« in Ine Gevers, ed., *Place, Position, Presentation, Public* (Maastricht: Jan van Eyck Akademie, 1992).
- 31 The 2005 performance did indeed take place as planned. We are looking forward to the next performance, in 2015.
- 32 In fact, Fassbinder's working title for the film was *Alle Türken heißen Ali* (*All Turks Are Named Ali*).
- 33 Fassbinder opens the film with the line: »Das Glück ist nicht immer

- lustig.« (»Luck isn't always fun.«).
- 34 See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, tr. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- 35 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, tr. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).
- 36 See Stephen Mulhall, *On Film* (London: Routledge, 2002), 41.
- 37 The interactive game *Troubles with Sex, Theory, and History* was made in collaboration with Steffen Ruyt Cramer; the CD-ROM is part of the series *Artintact*, produced by the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe. In 2002, the CD-ROM was reissued as an interactive DVD.
- 38 Mulhall, *On Film*, 114 and 131.
- 39 See Slavoj Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).
- 40 See Susana Noguero, »Aire Incondicional,« in *Zehar* (Donostia-San Sebastián, Spain), no. 50 (2003), 10–19.
- 41 Here is an excerpt from the text of the video: »We are talking about margins within margins, and not only about geographical margins, but also ideological ones. How can I put it? Do you understand what I'm saying? It's about the ideological context within the local, that is, the geographical context.«
- 42 The two Deleuze references are taken from Christel Stalpaert, »Deleuze's Aesthetics of Intensities and the Possibility of Queer Post-Representations,« in Katrin Deufert, Jeroen Peeters, and Thomas Plischke, eds., *B-Book: A Project by Frankfurter Küche and Vooruit after B-Visible* (Ghent: Vooruit, 2004).
- 43 Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza – philosophie pratique* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1981).
- 44 See Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, tr. Kevin Attell (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 70.
- 45 See Walter Mignolo, »Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality,« *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007), no. 2, 449–514.

- 46 See Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, »The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality,« in John Hawley and Revathi Krishnaswamy, eds., *The Postcolonial and the Global* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
- 47 See Sarah Kember, »Feminist Figuration and the Question of Origin,« in George Robertson et al., eds., *Futurenatural: Nature, Science, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996), 256–269.
- 48 See Sarah Franklin, *Dolly Mixtures: The Remaking of Genealogy* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Obsession / Obsedenost*, video, 2008



ANA VUJANOVIĆ AND MARINA GRŽINIĆ

»It's Not Red, It's Blood!«

ANA VUJANOVIĆ: Both the general public and *TkH* readers know Marina Gržinić as one of the leading contemporary theorists in the fields of art, the media, philosophy, and cultural studies in the former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe.¹ Along with this, she is herself an artist, as well as the curator and organizer of numerous exhibitions in the international art world. Although I, too, value Gržinić primarily as the originator of sharp, uncompromising, and often searing materialist and psychoanalytic theoretical theses about art made during the post-socialist transition and in post-socialist Europe, I hope now to engage her in a quite different conversation about her work. Well, perhaps not so very different.

What I mean is a conversation about her artistic activity in film and video, which is almost unknown here; this is work she has been doing for more than twenty years (since 1982) in collaboration with Aina Šmid, and it includes approximately thirty videos, films, and multimedia video installations, which have been shown around the world and won numerous awards. When I looked at some of these works recently, I realized that if we wish to create an Eastern European post-socialist discourse about art – by which I mean, here, a discourse about film – we might well begin by talking about the videos of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid.

That's all I'll say to start with. So, Marina, I would like to ask you to introduce yourself to the readers of *TkH* however you wish.

MARINA GRŽINIĆ: The truth is that Aina and I were developing, in these electronic forms – which are radically

different from film – something that was actually a *dispositif* for film. This was never simply an experimental-film structure, such as might easily be expected from an art perspective when one develops this sort of short video structure. We were developing film as a revolutionary *dispositif* – a kind of film that would include a project for a possible different society, a different politics of affectivity and effectivity, a different perception of society and art.

Regarding our videofilms, one needs to talk about frames, and not simply about shooting scenes. This is why our videos are so condensed, almost viscid and heavy, since each frame in the video relates to the production of life and to politics, and only then to art! What we are primarily researching, and seeking (new) ways to express, is biopolitics, that hybrid of the biological and the political, that power which organizes not only bodies in contemporary societies but also, to an extreme degree, the conditions of life and politics. We started dealing with this issue very early in our work, way back in the 1980s, before these procedures were called biopolitics. In fact, we have always been making politics, not art. We strive for revolution through contamination. Our intention is not some nice experimental gesture of an art that seeks autonomy for itself. In our work, everything is contaminated; every picture is embedded with the space outside and every outside that exists in so-called society and politics is attacked by that inside, which is art. Well, to return to the question of biopolitics, this is not only about the way bodies – including »the body« of art and history – relate to procedures of power, but also about the fact that such »bodies« – of art and of history – find themselves outside the »law« that regulates the institutions of both art and history; these »corpuses« are subjected to sanctions and thus become disenfranchised. This means, if I may use Agamben's terminology, that what interests us is the »state of exception,« not only in society, but also in art.

There is yet another crucial aspect, as well, to »the creation of a politics of video and film,« namely, the need to think in

terms of a different economics, which means constantly questioning various kinds of ownership, for instance, the ownership of history.

Ana, you began our conversation by saying some wonderful things about my almost-feverish creative work and activities, which might give your readers the impression that Marina is some sort of old-style revolutionary Bolshevik entity who works and works and constantly produces many different kinds of things. But this isn't true. There is no difference between my writing, my videos, my lectures at the art academy in Vienna, etc. – the same thing applies to all of them: they are all part of the same painstaking, almost bureaucratic work of insisting on constant differentiation and contamination. Everything I do is a patiently constructed genealogy of power and dirty relations, the bloody situations of art and politics. Or as another Marina recently stated, our preoccupation in the medium is all about the question: What can still make poverty and slavery disturbingly visible when theory has become just another empty industry?² There will never be an end to art because too much money is invested in contemporary art productions and also because art today has signed a clear and visibly normalized contract with capital.

AV: When I was listing your various activities, I was thinking primarily about the different institutional *dispositifs* in which you work. Film and theoretical writings originate in very different institutions, which also means that their material natures are quite different – not only in the phenomenological sense of how a given medium manifests itself, but in the actual sense of the materiality of the *dispositif*. In other words, it is impossible to reduce the revolutionary *dispositif* of a given theoretical text or academic lecture and the revolutionary *dispositif* a given film to a single, generally valid »revolutionary *dispositif*.« For this reason, I believe, a difference *does exist*. And this difference is crucial in

approaching any and every individual practice. What is your view on this?

MG: I was talking about the point of departure, that is, the point from which I am speaking. By entering different institutions and working in the framework of different cultural practices, we use and refer to different histories and *forms* of activity. We operate in a framework of specific models and aesthetic practices, but what is important in the »heterogeneity« of what we term interventions, is always a precise point of departure, what French theory calls *pris de position* – the taking of a position. For me this means – primarily and ultimately – intervening, in a form of a political act, in art and theory. I agree that it is also important to take account of the politics of the form, which is the particular intervention in writing, filmmaking, or curatorship. This act establishes the basis for the genealogy of a given production; it disrupts the abstract struggle for old form and confronts it with another, new form, which rearticulates the history of productions that have hitherto been entirely excluded from History. This is an act of political rearticulation *par excellence*, and a rearticulation of the space of different institutions. But what interests me most is whether such political rearticulation creates a new content that could be expressed as a new form.

AV: Thank you for explaining this. Your point of departure is quite clear now. But I would like to take it further, and I'll also invite you, so we stand together on the site of the very materiality of the institution of production, which we enter from this point of departure and in which this point of departure is »practiced.« In this light, I would ask a short and simple question, which, perhaps, will leave enough room in its cracks for you to give a multilayered answer: namely, what can you achieve with film that you can't achieve with theory?

MG: I can, in essence, reformulate the question and ask: What cannot be done in both practices? What cannot be said or reflected in both practices? My answer is, »Nothing!« For in both practices we can do or express absolutely everything. Although there still is a small problem: every practice has its own unique language and its own unique history, experience, and conditions of production, which need to be mastered and expressed in these procedures – just as we (Aina and I) do over and over again in our work.

Both practices involve a process of interpretation. Interpretation of what? In my case, or rather in our case, that which has been left out, pushed to the very edge of society, or almost systemically neglected. In saying this, I am also thinking of the twenty-five-year history of our video and film production! In Slovenia there has not been a single analysis written about our work, except for those I have written myself or with Aina.³ This is also a history, or rather, for me this is precisely what you call the »materiality of the institution of production.«

Every history is a struggle. I am continually asking about the inner logic of the video medium, about its specific technological structure and its relation to other technologies, about the political place of video history in relation to other histories of art and histories in general, and our lives and works in this history. We (Aina and I) ask continually ourselves if we have a »document« we can show and through which we can point to the material elements of a resistance that shapes a given practice and that enables us to transcend mere psychological narrative. There is, in fact, inscribed in the video medium itself the possibility of the document's immediate presentation (video from its infancy has been based on a short circuit of immediacy, between recording and projecting), as well as the possibility of inserting in a single video image other images, which come from another source (the well-known blue key effect). Through this process of *keying*, which is not only a process of filling but

also of emptying the image, the political aspect of the medium is also inscribed. These technological elements in the transformation allow us to (video) switch the initial point of view. This means producing a radical difference.

What happened in the eighties in Slovenia, when we started to make videofilms, was the birth of political art – not only in terms of content but even more in terms of the emergence of the political subject in the sphere of contemporary art – within Ljubljana's underground scene, which we were deeply involved with. The underground provided a subversive, countercultural visibility to the domains of both sexuality and history precisely in their connectedness to politics. This is why I always say that rock, punk, the Ljubljana gay movement, and anarchist politics were our home, our mother, our aesthetic language, and a spiritual shelter.

AV: I would like to problematize – or rather I'd like us to problematize together – what you said at the beginning of your answer. If your answer to the question, »What cannot be achieved in both these practices (theory and film)?« is, »Nothing,« then my answer is, on the contrary, »Revolution.« That is to say, you cannot carry out revolution. That's my thinking. Given what you have said – your explanation of this »nothing« and your description of the phenomenon of the new political subject in the Slovene art scene of the 1980s – I expect you won't agree with me. But nevertheless, if you believe that you can do this, that you can carry out revolution, with both your films and your theory, or that »it isn't red, it's blood« in your films, then you really are operating like »some old-style revolutionary Bolshevik.« Or maybe it's not blood after all, but »only« red?

MG: In my earlier answer, which perhaps wasn't clear (although I think it was), I responded to the question, »What is it possible to do in one medium that cannot be done in the

other?« by saying, »Nothing!« – in the sense that everything is possible, in both these media. So my answer is »nothing,« in the sense of »everything.« *Everything* is equally possible in either of these media.

I want to say, Ana, that the issue is whether you are interested in the work or in language games. Because my first answer is the most unexpected – and this is revolution. This means that the inversion I proposed in my theoretical writing in the 1990s – the inversion of Godard's »it's not red, but blood« – is important because it shows that the work of art is always structural in nature, and not psychological, although art most often bills itself as a psychological narrative. Video is about possible revolutions and changes inside the medium, and this is also how we should understand the jumps inside the remarkable history of experimental and New Wave film. »It's not red, it's blood« is not a slogan, but rather a paradigm that can also be defined as that traumatic »thing« that arises from the work and, in a new way, expresses and considers the political territory of the former Yugoslavia.

AV: I understood your earlier answer perfectly, Marina – that you can do everything in both media. But I don't agree, or rather, at least I don't want to agree now, and that's because I would like to introduce an important problem into this answer. That is, it's my assertion that it is impossible to make revolution. That in film, revolution is not blood; it is »only« red. This is not a language game – it directly addresses your work; it gets to the heart of it.

Let me give you yet another reason for my disagreement. Your theoretical writings, just like my own, as well as your films, are produced and used in institutions of high art and science: at the academy of sciences, in scholarly journals, at symposia, at art festivals, at the academy in Vienna, and so on. All these institutions are subsidized by the state; their protocols are supported by the established institutions; they are intended

to serve cultural policies and are very elitist. As a result, they are, in a way, a certain luxury, a permitted use of time, money, human ability and talent, a labor force, and means of production. Thus in a way they carry out a reproductive role on behalf of state systems – even when they involve revolutionary ideas. But revolution, on the contrary, is not red, it is blood, for it is the space of discontinuity, of breaks and ruptures – of something that separates itself from the system and thus becomes an actual threat to this system, the only thing that can destroy it. (Here I am also thinking about the difference between the Bolsheviks and the Russian avant-gardists in their respective understandings of revolution.) The social system is horrified by this, for in revolution it becomes clear that the system cannot hold on to its imaginary »totality of totality.« But does not art – as well as theory, each in its own way – »serve« also to preserve this imaginary totality of the social totality? What I have to ask myself, then, is this: How does one now bring blood into film, or into theory, so that the two media remain film and theory and do not become street fighting, barricades, and terrorism?

MG: All right, let's look at the issue on a different level. First, it is not true that our video works are used on the levels you name. If they were being used on such levels and were included in the ways you indicate, and if they had received subsidies, that would be a different story. Second, I will respond to you by reworking a couple of theses I developed at a round table organized by *Maska*, a performing-arts journal in Ljubljana, for the London-based journal *Performance Research*, on the unbearable lightness of creativity and the political subject.

There can never be too much politicization, and the fear of it is, for the most part, false. I agree with those theorists from Latin America, who are today gaining recognition, when they state that the main problem, essentially, is that art and culture

are not political enough. The conversation you and I are having, for example, is precisely what I would define as a process of political conceptualization, and not merely a simple process of hybridization. That is, this conversation produces a kind of politics of space by ascertaining the limits to aesthetics, interpretation, and politics, and this for me is essential. I am against the idea of always »overlapping« things and superimposing one production on another, followed by a bit of modernization. It is not enough to put things side by side, to place them within a certain, say, creative context; what we need to do is draw lines of demarcation in relation to contemporary art production and its interpretation, and in relation to state institutions and the government.

On another level, however, readers can interpret the whole thing as if »anything goes« in art (in the sense of creative freedom), but this idea is extremely mistaken! There are projects and stances that are excluded! Everything looks possible, but actually, not everything is possible. There is a definite limit when it comes to freedom in art. When we cross this limit, when things become truly contaminated, everything gets very complicated. If a certain project, video, film, or book functions as a real traumatic point, which fundamentally shakes the art field as such, and not only its relationships with other fields, then difficulties cannot be avoided.

Another key aspect here is economic, that is to say, the art market, which today, more than ever before, influences what is given visibility and what is included in other interpretations. Certain projects examine art as an institution and seek answers to such questions as how this institution is codified, how it is perceived, how it is structured, and who holds sway over it.

A third key aspect I'd like to stress is ownership relations, since exhibitions and projects belong to someone and have specific owners, both economic and symbolic. There are fathers – and I am not speaking only about patriarchy, but also about what has been called the institution of masculinity – various

individuals and groups who present themselves as the owners of a given terminology, which then becomes further reinforced. When projects appear that question ownership relations and the institution of masculinity, they are immediately excluded. Then we witness the exclusion of people and projects, which are evacuated and relocated to very obscure political and culturological interpretations. Key here are those projects that tackle such issues without proclaiming the end of art. This is simply about a moment when historically grounded intervention is needed in order to show that art and culture have never been simply a matter of freedom, but have always been a matter of ownership relations, a matter of the institutions of power that operate both inside and outside art and articulate it. So I will say this: It is indeed about blood and not about the red, or, to put it a different way, it is about what kind of red makes the blood visible!

AV: Yes, I agree with your thesis about the exclusion of certain practices and projects, despite the declarative neoliberal slogan, »Anything goes.« I am thinking here in the context of your film and video work, which, as you yourself say, has not had a single serious text written about it in Slovenia. That's why I'm interested to know if you find this conversation in any way disturbing. Does it help to assimilate your and Aina's work into the system of culture and art? Does such an introduction of your work remove the traumatic charge from it, rather than letting it stay on the margins of society in this traumatizing region?

What I am really trying to do with my questions is to enable a conceptualization of your work that is as thorough as possible in order to bring it, through *TkH*, into the local context as a specific, critical, and important filmic discourse of post-socialism. In so doing, of course, I want to intervene in the Institution and its History, which excludes this discourse. But *TkH*, despite being a socially critical and outspoken journal fighting for survival, is all but an academic journal itself: it's

edited by PhDs; it gets financial support from the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Belgrade; it's distributed by a powerful publishing/bookstore system; it plays a role in the development of, mainly, younger artists and writers, and so on. I am not exaggerating if I say that after this conversation and the retrospective of your films and few other actions, »everyone who's anyone« in the local art scene will know about your work, and many will accept it, without any serious doubts, as an important contemporary practice precisely because it was introduced to them through the filter of *TkH*. Will this, then, mean a »return to the established order« for your work? Are we possibly on the entirely wrong road?

MG: No, we are entirely on the right road, or as Suely Rolnik says: »To simply remain in the ghetto of 'art' as the separate sphere to which the power of creation was confined in the earlier regime is to run the risk of keeping it dissociated from the power of resistance, and limiting it to being a source of value, off which its pimp, capital, can make an easy living.« As I stressed at the beginning of our conversation, what interests us in our work is the opposite of this, namely, the process of contamination. This means to place ourselves, as Rolnik says, »in an area where politics and art are intertwined, where the resistant force of politics and the creative forces of art mutually affect each other, blurring the frontiers between them.« We see our work as being situated in an area of activity that is totally contaminated – »first on the side of politics contaminated by its proximity to art, then on the side of art contaminated by its proximity to politics.«⁴ This is also a reason for the lack of interpretation of our art in Slovenia, though it is also true that ours is not the only work that has been subjected to such abstraction and evacuation. Look at what has happened with all the work produced in the eighties, late seventies, and nineties – do any interpretations of it exist? A book about the punk movement in Slovenia was published on the occasion of the

movement's twenty-fifth anniversary – and note that punk appeared in Slovenia at the same time it did in Great Britain! And although this book raised some interesting questions about politics, interpretation, economics, the environment, and language, and presented a precise rearticulation of the given space, it did not elicit a single response in the media; not a line was written about it in any of Slovenia's daily newspapers. For me, this is an example of evacuation, of the complete abstraction of the punk movement from the Slovene space. Was anything written about the journal *Maska*? Three issues had appeared by the end of 2004, but did they get any sort of critical response? I think we have to fight for the genealogy of a proper space instead of complaining about there currently being, let's call them, »pathetic souls« in positions of power, although it is clear that they reached these positions partly by means of the processes of the systemic evacuation of pertinent but straightforwardly marginalized artistic, cultural, and social productions.

AV: In light of what you have just said, how do you then formulate, take up, and introduce the notion of *queerness* in your films? My feeling is that this notion can help us to more thoroughly concretize – and thus also conceptualize – many of your film methods. You yourself present it as an important element of your work. I'm curious about how you transfer this notion of queerness from its original context, the gay and lesbian theories of the seventies and eighties, to the domains that are important for your films: post-socialist Eastern Europe, the political subject, the female subject, the institution of art, theory, the distribution of power in art, history, the genealogy of economic and symbolic ownership relations, and so on.

MG: First of all, *queer* means something that goes beyond just sexual and gender differences; it refers to a transgendered situation that can be applied to the political as well. Queerness

is an attempt to reinscribe the meaning of the political as »a situation of permanent instability,« which is wedged right in the middle of what Homi K. Bhabha calls »not quite/not right.« Queerness is about confusing boundaries, and today more than ever, such confusion requires *responsibility*, especially when it involves the use of such reproductive technologies as video, digital film, and computer technology. Inside this *queer* politics, which is a part of our work, certain »monstrosities« are yet to be reversed and re-filmed. The idea is to create not-quite/not-right spaces, where the human body – intersexual or female – meets the exterior space. This is not about the elucidation of the sexual body, the shaping and remodeling that might be carried out on it, but rather about the *performing* of such a body – with all the political consequences this involves – before our very eyes. This is why I can present a very clear *queer* repoliticization of my own position. To position myself means to assume a *clear* stance about one's own condition of working, living, and acting. This approach to taking a stance can be seen, for instance, in the video *Eastern House* (2003), which gave a new reading of several key names and scenes from film history: Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blowup* (U.K., 1966), Eric Rohmer's *My Night at Maud's* (France, 1969), Don Siegel's *Dirty Harry* (USA, 1971), Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (USA, 1979), and *Alien: Resurrection* (USA, 1997). In addition, *Eastern House* rearticulates the body art and conceptual »happenings« that took place in the Eastern European context. It is a sort of twisted homage to Neša Paripović's »happenings« and body actions in Belgrade in the 1970s. The text in *Eastern House* is a political intervention into theory regarding the issues of global capitalism and the radical position of technology in cyberspace; the text also makes reference to cyberfeminist positions and points of view. In this regard, sex and empathy in the cyberworld are clearly contaminated by »cloning« and radical politics. In 1971, the »fascistic« message of *Dirty Harry*, about the power of the

individual in the capitalist world, sounded like this: »You've got to ask yourself a question: Do I feel lucky? Well, do ya, punk?« In 2001, the »Other,« the one without power who is probably obstructing Harry's road to happiness, finally replies, »No!« and »helps« Harry blow himself to pieces – one need only remember September 11!

The queer repoliticization of my own position is connected with Aina's and my background and the particular history of our artistic development. The context of our formation as intellectuals and activists was the intense and powerful punk and rock-music movement of the 1980s in Ljubljana, which had an explicit influence on our thinking and work. This was also an essential factor in the formation of the Ljubljana underground and alternative scene at the beginning of the eighties, which we were both part of. Ljubljana's underground/ alternative movement not only redefined rock and punk resistance in the visual area, it also displayed sexuality and history in a new way. It brought a subversive and countercultural visibility to both the sexual and historical domains in that it connected them with politics. Thus it gave new expression to suppressed sexuality (the gay and lesbian movement) and critically assessed (today we can say, undermined) the prestige of the totalized unitary history of Socialism.

Since 1982, we have staged quite a few transgendered and lesbian roles in our videos, openly in front of the camera, and thus underscored the awareness that non-heterosexual positioning is an overtly subversive political stance. We constructed and exhibited our lives and public personas as openly *queer*: they were displayed through restaged and re-performed sequences from films by Rosa von Praunheim, Bridge Markland, and others.

AV: I would like you to expound on something you mentioned in your last answer, but not only in relation to the concept of queerness. To expound, that is, on the process of performing. I

think it is important to make a shift in the understanding of film – from it being about making a finished product, which can therefore easily become an unproblematic commodity in the mass-culture market, to it being about dealing with the processes of performing.

Here I am not thinking only of the work processes that lead to the film (the research, experimentation, technical procedures and the like), but primarily the process of implementation within the film itself, the implementation of concepts, methods of visualizing them, their representation – or also their avoidance – that is, ways of underscoring presence. It seems to me that your films set a precedent for dealing with such procedures. A precedent in that – in contrast to films as consumer commodities with boilerplate scripts, imbecilic stories, dramatic conflicts or turns, stiff characters, etc. – your films feel as if they were a training ground for displaying performing procedures in which the various elements (from theory and current social events to the female subject and the biopolitical body) are being performed live, on the screen. This is why I find them exciting: they demand my careful attention and concentration if I am to follow this process of battling with the medium. I think this is what can rescue film from drowning in the consumerist net, which is so unbearably intractable: to introduce, to perform, and actually to show on the screen itself the material scene of performing the film!

MG: I am delighted with what you are developing in this interview, which is, as you yourself have suggested, more of a conversation, an elucidation of viewpoints, than merely an interview. In this conversation there's not a single superficial question, but each one is for me an assertion that tries to mark out a road toward positioning ourselves more precisely. That's why I'm excited by all these new comments and observations of yours.

The procedure of performing is essential in our work. This means the continual and time-consuming performing of every

layer of the (video) scene: from the costumes and makeup, the set, the text, the music, all the way to the sound effects, etc; I should say all of these things are created artificially, as well as the post-production phase. In other words, all of our works are entirely artificial creations. In the post-production process, further implementation takes place: we correlate and redesign things twice. First, there is nothing natural in what happens in front of the camera, and second, this (un)naturalness is doubled in the process of editing. Nevertheless, the result is never simply a technological effect, although it is, so to speak, always there and video and digital effects are of crucial importance, even if they are not immediately visible. In our work, the main thing is not, if I may put it this way, the psychology in the structure of the work, but rather, the obsessive recycling, reconstruction, and process of quotation, which is implicit – from theory to practice, from movements to tears. After all, who better to speak about the affects and the politics of history if not replicants?

In the video *Three Sisters* (1992), for instance, the ultimate disobedience of the stereotypical transvestite body (which is a precise reconstruction of the heroine in Liliana Cavani's film *The Night Porter*) is represented by the video's last sentence: »I will live.« Our strategy is not to make fakes, but to develop tactics of resistance about a particular kind of subject that, as Homi K. Bhabha would say, is constructed at the point of splitting. Godard said, »It's not blood; it's red,« but what we learn from the body in communism is, »It's not red; it is blood!« – it is a traumatic real that comes through the surface of the video picture in (post-)socialism. Or to take another example, in the early 1980s when we started making videos (our first collaborative video project was made in 1982), this process was done by externalizing sexuality as perceived, learned and adopted from the underground film tradition of Fassbinder, Rosa von Praunheim, Warhol, etc. Their films were shown in Ljubljana's underground venues in the eighties. The

externalization of sexuality took the form of overtly staged pornography and the gender confusion (gender-bending) of gay, lesbian, and transvestite sexual attitudes. It was a process that can be simply explained: sexual stereotypes and civil-rights prototypes were not only consumed in, and by, the underground, but were also immediately performed and staged in private rooms and bedrooms in front a VHS camera. In these works the masquerade of reappropriation ensured not only the simple question of the formation of identity of the artists or of the underground community, but also the process of negotiation with multiple realities in the direction of producing continually ambiguous and unbalanced political situations and questionable identities. From the early 1980s to the present, the outcome has been the appropriation in our video works of documents, photographs, images, faces, and bodies, which are constantly reproduced as types, prototypes, and stereotypes, in a kind of double negation of identity and the body.

I can state that what happens in our videos is the performing of contingency, which is literally being transformed into an occurrence that, in each and every video frame, paradoxically results in a deadly coincidence of all the levels I have mentioned. This coincidence is the absolute contingency of the art video space intertwining with the politics of history (and historical time). This coincidence is what I call the new logic of performativity.

AV: To conclude, I would like to ask you more about the relationship between theory and the medium of film or video. How does this relationship manifest itself in your and Aina's work? For it seems clear that the usual order of things – one makes a work of art, which is then interpreted with the help of theory – is inverted in your work. Is theory your starting point, the basis for the problematics you deal with in the film? Or do you build theory into the filmic material during the process of making the film? I suppose you develop both aspects

simultaneously. I found it interesting to watch how the actors in *Eastern House* speak your condensed, heavy, and »unmelodic« theoretical text as if they were speaking lines in a play. Because this was always being done in the name of »resistance,« it created a genuine »dramatic atmosphere,« a feeling of anxiety. In *Tester*, theory is itself the main theme, while it seems that in *Labyrinth* and *Bilocation* it is present as the conceptual, thematic frame of the work. How, then, does theory affect the very viscosity of these films, and what sort of procedures do you use to introduce it? I am interested in how you look at this relationship, at its possibilities and limitations, at your own intention and the expectations of the viewers. I would also be happy if could explain how you and Aina collaborate in the making of an individual work.

MG: Thanks for the nice prompt. Thinking about theory is very important, and not only as the context, but also as the content, the material; it's on the same level as brushing hair, for example, or cutting a line along the vein in the wrist with a razor. We need a working framework of theory if we don't want to perform »facts« and repeat factual and conceptual errors. The modus operandi in our videos, which is to create a short circuit between a theoretical position and a politics of aesthetics, is in itself a political issue, or rather, it is the act of politicizing our work. To put it another way: everything I have mentioned speaks to the fact that there is no meta-language, that is to say, a place outside or beyond the work and its visual texture, from which the directors or authors »safely and innocently« create the work. The use of theory is, precisely, the condition of possibility on the basis of which we work in the field of video or art. Theory, then, is not an aberration, but the only arena that makes it possible for us to develop and intervene in the work aesthetically and politically and, through the video work, to intervene in the theory itself. Such videos and artworks are important, too, because of the way they situate theory in history.

It is equally necessary to understand the question of theory as the political unconscious (in Jameson's sense) that is then situated in the artwork. This means, moreover, that theory is important for us also from the perspective of rethinking the organization of desire, of our personal desire, as well as the relationship between desire and other manifestations of various visual, historical, and aesthetic drives. As you mentioned, in *Eastern House*, theory reached too far; pleasure turns into pain and shows an excessively driven theoretical background: first we have the feeling that it is about relations of sexual nature, then you see it is about the excessive pleasure of theory and a demand for an (emancipative) politics. It is also possible to understand the spoken theory as an act of total externalization that is at the same time a specific way of organizing the power and politics of the medium.

AV: Marina, I want to thank you for this conversation, for coming here »to put yourself on display,« as well as for your patience in providing such precise explanations for all these finer points connected with your and Aina's film and video work. Of course, there are still many questions raised by your work that we haven't talked about. So let this conversation be the beginning of a basic conceptualization that has for too long been lacking.

Notes

- 1 »It's not red, it's blood!« is the way Marina Gržinić summarized her reading of art video in the former Yugoslavia, in particular, the videos she made with Aina Šmid. In her analysis, she suggested that we might more precisely understand the conceptual and political dimension of their videos if we turn around Godard's thesis about French New Wave Cinema, »It's not blood, it's red,« and say instead: »It's not red, it's blood!« This conversation between Marina Gržinić

- and Ana Vujanović was originally published in Serbian in the Belgrade journal for performing arts theory, *TkH*, no. 9 (2005):46–55.
- 2 Marina Vishmidt, »What Is a Political Artist?« in Marina Gržinić and Walter Seidl, eds., *Double Check: Re-framing Space in Photography: The Other Space, Parallel Histories* (Celje: Galerija sodobne umetnosti, 2005).
 - 3 This was the state of things in 2005, when this conversation took place. The following year, however, a comprehensive monograph on Gržinić and Šmid's video art was published in Slovenia as *Trenutki Odločitve: Performativno, politično in tehnološko: Umetniški video, filmska in interaktivna večmedijska dela Marine Gržinić in Aine Šmid 1982–2005* [Moments of decision: The performative, the political, and the technological: The art video, film and interactive multimedia works of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid 1982–2005], eds., Marina Gržinić and Tanja Velagić (Ljubljana: ZAK, 2006). This book included analyses of Gržinić and Šmid's body of work not only Marina Gržinić, but also by Giorgio Bertellini, Nataša Govedić, Kerstin Kellermann, Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki, Birgit Langenberger, Saša Šavel, Miško Šuvaković, Yvonne Volkart, and Ana Vujanović; many of these essays also appear in the present book.
 - 4 Suely Rolnik, »The Twilight of the Victim: Creation Quits Its Pimp, to Rejoin Resistance,« *Zehar*, no. 51 (fall 2003).

MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ

The Retro-Garde, Techno-Aesthetics, and Open
Questions Regarding the Political Apparatus:
Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid

The artistic efforts of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid belong to the unstable, shifting period in which media works sought to index and map the changeable, open relationships in the postmodern and post-socialist art, culture, and society of the 1980s and 1990s.¹ The specific processes in the evolution of postmodernism and post-socialism may be seen as an unfinished, *shifting map* of ways of representing both encouraged and unencouraged possibilities, procedures, and effects of the media/political display of the process of fragmentation of particular social macro- and micro-*games*, such as *late socialism, post-socialism, late capitalism, the Third World, post-colonial cultures, the former Yugoslavia, Slovene national culture, Slovene alternative culture, Slovene high art, the technology wars, civil wars, nationalism, national hegemony, internationalism, the transnational, the worlds of biopolitics, the politics of the body, the unstable relations between sex and gender as media representations, feminism, the transition, the differences between sexuality and eroticism*, and so on.²

Such domains, which are part of certain political/media *games*, reveal an important aspect of Gržinić and Šmid's video works, namely, *the shift from art to culture* and the shift from *the aesthetics of artistic figures to a politics of the body in the representation of existence*.³ We find that the historical period of the 1980s and 1990s encouraged the posing of pragmatic media questions, and their corresponding theoretical pro-

positions, concerning the »borders« and »margins« of art as a »mirror« and/or »simulacrum« of macro- and micro-politics. »Territories« of representation and forms of expression are treated in relation to contemporary culture and its production power, as well as in relation to the functions of representing the symbolic and imaginary arrangements (of screens and barriers, foreclosures of the gaze) connected with the Lacanian Real – that which is indeed impossible and traumatic.

Certain videos by Gržinić and Šmid index and map power and the distribution and dominance of *evil* in the *game* of power and dominance.⁴ Where does it come from, this *evil*, which the video artists explore, detect, present, and explain, using both symbolic and imaginary effects? Can knowledge not save the world from *evil*? Here we must convert the answer into a Sollersian, or Žižekian, question: *Who needs to be saved, Kant or de Sade?*⁵ That is to say, every knowledge is imperfect, establishing itself in the chiasmus (dilemma, void, paradox, slip, shift, or doubling) of the functions and effects of power and dominance. Power and dominance are like deception, illusion, and distortion in *the kingdom of negativity*.

And what is it that Gržinić and Šmid do? They become, in a sense, *workers in culture* or *activists in culture*, who produce unexpected, *de-centered* images within the critical dialectics of the »uncontrolled« quantity of negativity itself (the signifying quantity of evil), which manages the relationships of dominance and power vis-à-vis the human body, desire, and pleasure, as well as suffering, weakness, and horror. Their theory of the video medium is defined by an understanding of video as a means of juxtaposing not only viewpoints but also bodies: »eyes can see how eyes see« in the constructed field of perception within a context of social »struggle.«⁶

From another angle, the video image is the »trace« of history: »Video is also the eye of history.«⁷ In this regard, there exist images of (historical) places that cause our own memories to become psychotic and erotic.⁸ All these signs point to the

fact that the video presentation operates along various registers: corporeal, societal, and psychotic. These registers are dramatically juxtaposed realms that define the subject, or rather, the process of the viewing subject's (self-)identification with the viewed subject. Thus, Gržinić and Šmid approach the video image like terrorists. Their approach is terroristic because through the electronic image on the screen, which comes from the very world that surrounds »us« and makes us the way we are, it reveals the overdetermined strategy of the approach itself, its tactics of constructing and executing the guise of reality. It is the artists' *homelessness* (*Aufenthaltlosigkeit*) that is shown. *This* is a glorification of homelessness in the arbitrariness of the world (nature, society, the electronic image). A possibility emerges of revealing the *conspiracy* (or *the mad Law*) of authority and power, not only over the individuals who live under real socialism or liberal capitalism, but also over the very »reality« of this homelessness, a reality it shares with the Other and lives in its mortality, mundanity, and sexuality. For this reason the visual attack (in Gržinić and Šmid's videos) must be centered on images of the *identification* (the visualized symbols of identity) of political existence in society and then, as well, on the erotic representation of impossible objects of desire (object *a*). It turns out that existence – and equally, desire – are in fact the blurred trace of decay, the trace of the entropy of affirmative reality, with which the institutionalized order controls the symbolic projection of acceptable reality. The double, or triple, game between the representation, that is the *blurred trace*, everyday reality, and the inaccessible Real, unveils the drama of human *existence* within the framework of hypothetical or real/realized »conspiracies.« The unveiling occurs on a site of divergence, on the electronic site of the video screen, which is real in the way our everyday world is real but which does not try to convince us of its reality; on the contrary, it shows us the power of its own *deception*.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Labyrinth / Labirint*,
video and video performance, 1993

Marina Gržinić's theoretical and artistic activities originate in the area of producing de-centered possible worlds of philosophy and aesthetics after modernism, namely in that part of her work which focuses on the inter pictorial and intertextual realm between the theory of society (cultural studies and the *theory of ideology*), the theory of technology (the postmodernist theory of technology, simulationism, the theory of media or screen presentation, biopolitics), and the theory of art (the theory of media and the *virtual worlds* of media).

To understand the full extent of Gržinić's theoretical achievement, it is important to remember also the following: her theoretical approach can be designated as *performative*, or to put it another way, we can describe and explain her theoretical work as *theory in action*. This means her starting point is not some *disinterested* area of interpretation; she begins not from a point of aesthetic or artistic contemplation or the institutional autonomy of philosophical theorizing about art, culture, and society, but rather from a point of *concrete artistic praxis* and *the cultures connected with it*, in other words, from the practice of the video artist as an active and current critic who observes what is happening in contemporary art and is an intellectual/activist who advocates very clear political views. Her fields of interest and her personal ideology derive not only from certain epistemological expectations (from *knowing about the knowledge* of philosophy, the theoretical study of art and society), but also from the pragmatic reasons behind actual artistic and existential responses and expectations (from the power of expression, presentation, and production) in the open, artificial, changeable, obscene, ecstatic, arbitrary, and *lethal* world of art in the 1990s. For Gržinić, theory is a provocative virtualized and dynamic discursive figure that multiplies and transforms its epistemological shapes in *bodies* of art (media productions of reality in the realm of imaginary and symbolic representation), and then epistemologically

encodes the effects of the body's phenomenality in the ideological horizon of contemporariness. Her approach to art and culture is defined by the ways she deals with the positions, roles and effects of juxtaposing the human and the artificial *body*.⁹ She anticipates and develops a *new approach to affect*. As a result, aesthetics is transformed from a discourse about a given specialized, humanized, and cultivated sense for receiving (the eye and the ear) – as was the case in modernist tradition – into aesthetic theory as a multi-registered discourse about *interactive systems*: human, technological, and social.

The primary concerns of Gržinić's theoretical writings are the activities of the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) movement, to which she has devoted numerous essays and studies; the theory of visual media; and the topic of culture (high, mass, or alternative) and ideology (the *necessity* of ideology after *the death of ideology* as the great exalted *fiction*¹⁰) in postmodernism. Her stance toward the theory of postmodernism is an exclusive one, which means that she did not follow the usual path of other artists and critics of her generation, which went from the soft, eclectic postmodernism of the late 1970s and early 1980s to *techno-aesthetics* as a dramatic union of high and mass culture. On the contrary, her path starts out in the context of the extreme and excessive *retro-garde* postmodernism of Slovene alternative culture in the 1980s;¹¹ she continues by interrogating and interpreting the *rigid* ecstatic discourses and forms of operating, not only in aesthetic or political terms, but also in terms of media. Such work foregrounds the ways in which *ideology*, in its epochal transformations (from real socialism through post-socialism as the dominant moderate postmodern culture), is mirrored in the social fabric (texture) and shows itself by emphasizing and presenting particular symptoms.

Gržinić's methodology of writing is rooted in the intertextual relationship between:

1. Lacanian theoretical psychoanalysis (with a special interest in Žižek's philosophy);
2. The theory of postmodernism, in particular, those segments that relate to critical social and ideological processes (late capitalism, post-socialism, alternative cultures);
3. Feminist theory (of particular importance is the work of Donna J. Haraway¹²); and
4. Media theory (and more broadly, techno-aesthetics and the *sociology* of simulationism).

Gržinić's rhetorical digital discourse is a discourse about postmodern culture; it is a voice of incisive sharpness that, when offered to choose between *obscene courtship* or *penetrating critique*, chooses critical and subversive resistance. She shows how a critical stance can survive the »soft« postmodern period and, in doing so, achieve greater rhetorical strength. Criticism is no longer the epochal radiance of revolution (a tool in the global project of transforming the world); rather, it is confrontation with the empty signifying game of *truth* in the dilemma between *the first and second performative conditions of existence*.

What Gržinić has brought to theoretical discourse is the possibility of an expanded and rhetorically anaesthetized *negative dialectics*. Here Adorno's negative dialectics still appears as an intellectual humanistic effort to recognize and understand the crisis of modernity. In Adorno, negative dialectics is always related to transgression or the abandonment of the paradigmatic model of enlightenment. As Slavoj Žižek has shown, a negative dialectics, if it is at all possible, is the outcome of the trap set by signifiers in relation to the unconscious, which exists in parallel to the conscious »I« but stands outside its influence.¹³ Gržinić, by pointing to the *non-all (pas tout)* compatibility between Žižek and Haraway,¹⁴ has defined *the multiple possibilities of the negative digital*



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Post-Socialism + Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin / Postsocializem + retroavantgarda + Irwin*, video, 1997

dialectics as that paradoxical, shifting, and multiplying split between the subject, its body, and technologically (media-) reproduced or created images vis-à-vis the concept of reality.

For her, the work of art is a symptom (e.g. Irwin's fictive *NSK State*, the *anonymous subject*, the Malevich from Belgrade, Mladen Stilinović's use of dead signs, etc.¹⁵); it is a symptom and not an *innocent symbol* or an expression of the relationship between the artist, the world, and society, but rather a process of creating an *obvious falseness*, a seemingness in which the system of art, culture, and politics expresses itself as something missed, as an error, as a suspension in the normality and naturalness of self-understanding, as a crisis in the agreements, norms, and values of historical society. *The retro-avant-garde* is a term that refers to artistic practices that are *similar* to the avant-garde (recalling the rhetoric and iconography of avant-garde effects) but are not the predecessors of the actual culture that at a certain moment will assume power; rather, these are practices that take a *psychoanalytical* look back – into the concealed past of a trauma, a hidden law, into the discourse of the master, the utilitarian symbols of political power, and totalitarian systems of domination. The retro-avant-garde is a post-socialist art that, like a cynical archeology of knowledge, points to the mortal and entropic nature of the *political being* of art and culture. For this reason, the positions Gržinić adopts are post-political ones. She is a post-political theorist, in that she presents her theory of art (aesthetics, philosophy, and cultural studies) as a discursively *timed* retro-avant-garde (bomb) and, through this, as a search for the material traces, their coming into play, of a theory in the frameworks of *potential ideologies*.

Notes

- 1 The present text is based on a chapter from Miško Šuvaković's book *Konceptualna umetnost* [Conceptual art] (Novi Sad: Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, 2007).
- 2 On the theory of media in the techno-culture, see Marina Gržinić, *V vrsti za virtualni kruh: čas, prostor, subjekt in novi mediji v letu 2000* [Standing in line for virtual bread: Time, space, the subject, and new media in the year 2000] (Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1996). For Gržinić's approach to post-socialist society, see the chapter »Telo v komunizmu« [The body in communism] in her *Rekonstruirana fikcija: novi mediji, (video) umetnost, postsocializem in retroavangarda – teorija, politika, estetika 1997–1985* [Reconstructed fiction: New media, (video) art, post-socialism, and the retro-avant-garde – theory, politics, aesthetics, 1997–1985] (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 1997), 89–108.
- 3 Kathy Rae Huffman, »The Reversible Logic of History and Media: Sex, History, (Sub-)Culture: A Re-Consideration,« in Center for Art and Media (ZKM), ed., *Artintact 4* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1997), 53–69.
- 4 Examples are the videos *Moments of Decision* (1985), *The Axis of Life* (1987), *Three Sisters* (1992), and *Luna 10* (1994). Evil is an important theme in contemporary culture and art, as can be seen, for instance, in the films of David Lynch and Wim Wenders. This represents a new phenomenology of evil, one based on the post-semiotic theory of the gaze. See Jean Baudrillard's *The Transparency of Evil* (London: Verso, 1993), as well as his *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
- 5 See Philippe Sollers, »Sade dans le texte,« *Logiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), and Slavoj Žižek, »Kant s Sadom,« in Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo* (Ljubljana: Univerzum, 1984), 83–99; a later version of Žižek's essay, in English, may be found in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), as »Kant with (or against) Sade.«
- 6 A concept developed by Christine Buci-Glucksmann, as summarized

by Marina Gržinić in »Troubles with Sex, Theory of Video Processes of Re-appropriation – Recycling Different Bodies, Histories and Cultures Through Video Medium,« in *Artifact 4*, 61.

7 Ibid., 65.

8 Ibid., 63.

9 See Marina Gržinić, ed., »Biotechnology, Philosophy and Sex,« a themed issue of the Ljubljana-based journal *Maska*, nos. 76–77 (2002), 4–69.

10 In her understanding and treatment of the concept of the *ideology* of art and culture, Gržinić makes particular reference to the writings of Slavoj Žižek, especially to the volume of essays he edited under the title *Mapping Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1994). It is important, she argues, that we do not interpret »postmodernity« as a post-ideological condition. On the contrary, the »end« of the great ideological narratives of modernity (liberalism: technological progress and individualism; communism: the classless society and collectivism; Nazism: national unity and mythological reasoning) does not also mean the end of ideologies, for »postmodernity« is a period in which ideologies can be detected in various registers of our existence (everyday life, entertainment, culture, art, economics, the biopolitics of the body, etc.).

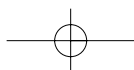
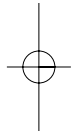
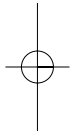
11 See the chapter »Retro-Avant-Garde, or Mapping Post-Socialism,« in Marina Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-Socialism and the Retro-Avant-Garde* (Vienna: Selene, 2000), 37–49.

12 Notably, Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) and *Modest Witness@Second Millennium. FemaleMan© Meets OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).

13 Slavoj Žižek, »Adorno in označevalec« [Adorno and the signifier], in *Problemi* (Ljubljana) 15, nos. 173–175 (1977), 13–20.

14 See the chapter »Harawayova–Žižek« in Gržinić, *V vrsti za virtualni kruh*, 161–163.

15 See the respective chapters on the Zagreb artist Mladen Stilinović, the artist generally known as Kazimir Malevich of Belgrade, and the Slovene art group Irwin's *NSK State* project in Gržinić, *Fiction Reconstructed*, 51–138.



GIORGIO BERTELLINI

Making Spaces: At War
(Notes on Video-Art and Space in Marina Gržinić
& Aina Šmid's *Luna 10* and *Bilocation*)

Metaphorizing the transformations of discourse in a vocabulary of time necessarily leads to the utilization of the model of individual consciousness with its intrinsic temporality. Endeavouring on the other hand to decipher discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power.

– Michel Foucault, »Questions on Geography.«¹

On October 3, 1964, Martin Heidegger gave a brief talk entitled »Raum, Mensch und Sprache« (»Space, Humanity, and Discourse«) at the Galerie im Erker in St. Gallen, Switzerland, thirty miles outside Zurich, on the occasion of an exhibition of sculptures by the German artist Bernard Heiliger.² Five years later, a twelve-page written transcript of that talk, now retitled »Die Kunst und der Raum« (»Art and Space«), was included in a small, limited-edition volume published by Erker Verlag in St. Gallen. I would like to begin my discussion of the spatial signification in two video artworks by considering Heidegger thought as expressed in those precious few pages.³

Contrary to his characteristic philosophical conceptualizations about *Dasein* (Being), the human being, and temporality – as found in his seminal text *Being and Time* (1927) and in his writings over the next forty years – in »Art and Space« Heidegger took a very

different position toward art and art-making.⁴ In his usual view, the search for Being is formulated not as its speculative presentification – that is, as its becoming present, »at hand,« in this world together with concrete beings – but through the notion of its openness, that is, through its constant being-present, as the condition of the visibility of other objects, like an unfocused yet necessary background rather than a distinct, visible object.⁵ For Heidegger, the perennial openness-exposure of Being is not only what makes the different mundane beings present, but also what allows Being to play out its own existential projectuality. How, then, can Being be encountered? According to Heidegger's established view, the role of art functions as the setting and coming-to-pass of the truth of Being in the work.⁶ Thus, art is what allows a revelatory opening of Being, which is always open but not always manifested. Being, in fact, is Truth which – as Heidegger emphasizes in his analysis of the etymology the Greek word for »truth,« *aletheia* – signifies »unconcealedness, uncovering.«

Early in his writings, Heidegger had stressed the fact that the work of art is not the setting of truth as a »fixing,« but as the site where Being comes to pass, bringing forth its own unconcealedness.⁷ »Setting« and »coming-to-pass« appeared as contradictory concepts: one emphasizes the spatial unfolding of the event of Being, the other its dynamics. Concerned about these terms' co-presence, Heidegger resolved the apparent contradiction between the locality, or concreteness, of the artwork and its capacity to signify an openness by means of the specific modality of the event of Being: namely, a projection.⁸ Art projects the light of Being onto the artwork through a manifestation that is never reducible to a fixed presence but is always performed in movement.⁹ Art is thus a (flickering) temporal aperture, a performance of Gestalt projection: the totality of Being is partially and provisionally »screened« toward the single being of the artwork.

Within Heidegger's philosophical project of destroying/restructuring the Western metaphysical utterance, which for

him had produced the speculative oblivion of Being since Plato, the language of *Dasein*, and in particular, the artistic language of poetry (Hölderlin), allows a privileged path to Being. Because language opens horizons of signification and contexts of encounter with beings, poetry becomes the privileged artistic performance and the model of other artistic endeavors. »All art [...] is essentially poetry,« where »poetry« is not only the specific »art of poetry,« but also that in which all forms of art find their essence.¹⁰

Quite a different view, however, is offered in »Art and Space,« which rather extraordinarily – and without any notable sequel – challenges the solidity of Heideggerian thought. First of all, Heidegger does not talk about language as the privileged form of art. Instead, sculpture becomes the art form *par excellence*. Sculpture is the art of bodies, and a sculptured body embodies space. Space is what sculptures, and modern figurative art in general, strive to conquer; that is to say, space is the object over which art performs its constant dispute. But what is space? Space is a primary ontological concept, not reducible to other dimensions. There is no other reality behind space: beyond its borders there is still only space. But what, then, defined space *as* space, apart from its technical and physical measurements? In the face of the necessary resilience of this question and its equally inescapable answer, Heidegger replies phenomenologically. When we experience a sculptural work, we experience the space occupied by the figure, the space of the volumes of that figure, and the empty space that persists among that figure's volumes. As a result, space is what art may disclose; art is, in fact, the process and the work of *making space*, which is space both being freed and becoming inhabited.¹¹

What exactly does this »making space« mean? Fundamentally, the making-space of sculpture signifies the possibility for things and bodies to be gathered and maintained in their own spatiality. This is an important point. Heidegger is

not saying that making space is like filling a void; on the contrary, things already possess their own spatiality, but making space allows them to disclose their own space in a site, a locality, a place. Thus making space means to open up a horizon, to create a territory where former spaces become »bodies in perspective.«¹² As a result, a sculptural work is art because it opens the spatiality of a body into a spatial event (which reveals other spatialities and other bodies within one or multiple fields) and, moreover, discloses in perspective (here again, the Gestalt) the permanent spatial openness of the fundamental background, the unfocused Being.

In this sense, the emptiness is not what previously occupied the space of a body, but what remains between one body and another. A body, in fact, does not occupy nothingness, but space. Heidegger is even more audacious on this point: »We must learn to admit that things themselves are sites, and not simply that they belong to a site.«¹³ I read this important admission as comprehending that space holds a dense discursive significance, and therefore that, because it is always someone's or something's, space exhibits itself as a site always already gathering identities.

Heidegger's »Art and Space« is important, I would argue, because it shows the germ of spatiality at the heart of one of the densest modern philosophical systems, a system that is otherwise devoted almost exclusively to exploring human metaphysics in temporal terms. If it is true that, from this point on, Heidegger does not change his approach to his speculative inquiries, this short, almost incidental, essay illuminates a discourse on space that I would like to superimpose on the critical registers of video-art's own discourse.

If we ask, what, in the criticism of contemporary video-art, is the significant relevance of the issues of space and geography, as well as the issues of void, vacuum, and openness, we find that the issues of spatiality have been marginalized in favor of almost pleonastic inquiries about the (post)modernist reworking of time

and its appearances. In particular, given the polemical technopoetic contiguity between experimental video and broadcast television, Raymond Williams's commonly adopted definition of the latter as »total flow« has ended up influencing the critical configuration of video-art. Temporality, in its disjunctive and to-be-appropriated unfoldings, has become criticism's most prominent »key word« for the medium. Consider, for instance, Rosalind Krauss's »Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,« one of the most influential essays in recent debates. Krauss opens her essay with a spatial question: »But what does it mean to point to the center of a TV screen?« But then, after discussing Vito Acconci's gesture of pointing to himself in *Centers* (1971), she quickly theorizes the psychological model of the video-tautology in temporal terms: »Unlike the other visual arts, video is capable of recording and transmitting at the same time – producing instant feedback.«¹⁴ Krauss observes that, when the projection and reception of an image occurs simultaneously, the main object of representation can be only a personal identity constructed through the rolling surfaces of temporal auto-reflections and recurring selfdoms epitomized in a »collapsed present.«¹⁵ But there is still much that could be said, I believe, about a number of video artworks through a more focused investigation of their poetic use of space, distance, and superimposition. Such attempts would further enhance the fertile critical notion of performance without limiting it to bare or creative paraphrases of Fredric Jameson's »reel/real« formula.¹⁶

A group of texts that, to my reading, dwell deeply on the notion of space and its regimes was presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York as part of the museum's weekly Video Viewpoints Program in November 1994. Titled »Post-Socialist Readings in Eastern Europe,« the presentation consisted of five video works by the Ljubljana-based artists Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, who have been making video-art and documentary works since the early 1980s. The MoMA program included five works: *Luna 10* (1994), *Red Shoes* (1994), *Three Sisters* (1992),

Labyrinth (1993), and *Bilocation* (1990). Here I will limit my discussion to *Luna 10* and *Bilocation*.¹⁷

Luna 10 is an eleven-minute color video produced by Television Slovenia in 1994.¹⁸ The name of the video is borrowed from an unmanned Soviet spacecraft that was sent into orbit in 1966. Such events filled the popular imagination with futuristic promises of scientific progress and human advancement. The video shows the dramatic contrast between the expansion of electronic (postmodern) media (along with the euphoria associated with them) and the (modern) outbreak of war on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, i.e. a »real« tragedy. Gržinić and Šmid's visual strategy attempts, quite successfully in my opinion, to stage the clashing and blurring of various images and contexts (TV news footage, film excerpts, animation), through what I shall explain as a palimpsest of visual emergences.

Luna 10 opens with a rather asymmetrical split-screen effect that juxtaposes two images. In the foreground, a woman peers upward through an old-fashioned telescope; an insert in the background, meanwhile, shows an excerpt from the Sarajevo-born Emir Kusturica's well-known 1985 film *When Father Was Away on Business*¹⁹ that presents us with images of a cheerful social gathering. This initial split screen is then complicated by its renderings: images are compressed into geometric shapes (rectangles and squares) of various sizes while abstract mathematical figures (snow-like graphics, arcane harmonic symbols, and two orbit-like ellipses, evidently alluding to the space exploration implied by the video's title) are slowly drawn against the black background. Suddenly a domestic scene appears: a woman is preparing some food on a kitchen table while a man, dressed only in underpants, talks to the camera. The woman remains silent. We will see this kitchen-like situation again and again in the video, as well as a slightly different, less intimate scene in which the same woman, dressed as a postal worker, stamps letters as the man continues his



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Luna 10*, video and video installation, 1994

monologue.²⁰ The man speaks about the collapse of representation in contemporary Yugoslavia in the critical jargon of Western postmodern ontology. The imposing »old-fashioned« reality of the war compels the presence and the return of a past (Wellesian) medium of communication:

Every war has its own medium. Some wars took place before TV became part of our life. Other wars, however, were going on by television, which has become our roommate. The Korean and Vietnam wars. [The voice of a ham radio operator is heard, speaking in English: »I-Z-T-O-K is my name . . .«] . . . which has become our roommate. The Korean and Vietnam wars. How about the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina? It is a radio war.²¹

Television itself becomes a more faithful illustration of the war situation when it turns into radio by broadcasting the fuzzy dispatches of amateur radio operators.²² Interference seems to be the key word: the layering of different sources of meaning exemplifies the objective confusion of Yugoslav political and cultural realities, but it also shows people's shared feelings of alarm, disorientation, and disorder. At the same time, the war itself is somehow placed amid the technological and economic transformations of political reality that progress and profit-making have brought about. Such mutations do not happen through the instantaneous erasure of contexts, histories, and textualities, but through the problematic and disorienting co-presence of electronic ontologies with opaque materialities. In *Luna 10*, the near-naked man, displaying both his physicality and his proud decision to put up a losing resistance, repeats:

At the end of the millennium the body has found itself in the chaos of fear, pain, and wars, being attacked and de-centered. Above all it is a fleeting physical-material fact. A credit-card-sized processor has taken our body materiality. . . . A credit-card-sized processor has taken our body materiality. By a single



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Luna 10*, video and video installation, 1994

key we can plug into any high-tech appliance. »We are idiots and we'll die,« said Zhora in *Blade Runner*. Idiots are those who defend beauty and freedom till death. We are idiots.

Yet the man's dystopian art-theoretical declarations and the enthusiastic comments of Slovene radio hams and bulletin board system (BBS) operators about radio and Internet communications constitute only part of the video's construction of meaning.²³ Indeed, the visual register of the video is much richer and more ambitious than the man's speech. The silent woman beside him is the same figure who at the beginning of the video was holding the telescope: she appears to serve as a vehicle for the visual articulation of what we see and hear.

In fact, the images that are spliced in, either as the background of the »central« scene (domestic or public) or in the rectangular windows that crowd the screen, present portrayals of women's suffering: an image from a TV news report shows a mother shouting, »They slaughtered my children!«; a film sequence reveals a woman who is first threatened with being gang-raped and then brutally murdered; while another film sequence shows a naked woman embracing a clothed man who rejects her affection. My reading is that the video's multilayered images attempt to reproduce the hallucinating cultural impact of a war that »should not occur in a fully electronic age« (as Baudrillard provocatively suggested in a series of articles in the newspaper *Libération*)²⁴ but that instead, by inciting insane violence, especially toward women, puts in question the past of a country that, to paraphrase the title of a famous Soviet film, »cannot believe its tears.«

At a specific moment in the former Yugoslavia, then, whole populations found themselves without a safe and meaningful location. This sense of disarray and chaos is rendered visually through what I call a palimpsest of visual emergences.²⁵ Gržinić and Šmid, in fact, use the screen as a pictorial palimpsest on which they reinscribe, or make space for, fresh visual con-texts

that emerge over imperfectly erased images, which are, literally, marginalized or dislocated. The blank (or black) spaces that remain between the geometric shapes are the void and the loss that the artists, as modern scribes, construct and fill with their current cultural urgencies. In a state where official documentaries were often used to deform reality, the most objective video rendering of reality requires a visual strategy that attempts to literally reproduce the visual disturbances of the present-day cultural disorder by questioning the historical genealogy of the tragedy of the war. Interestingly, the visionary historian Michel Foucault was also well-acquainted with the palimpsest; at the beginning of his essay »Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,« he described genealogy in palimpsestic terms:

Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.²⁶

In a later scene in the video, the man, wearing a metal headpiece connoting insanity, copies nonsensical strings of digits on a blackboard from a list held by the woman. The result is almost declamatory. He occupies the central part of the screen; other images are added behind and around him, with the video camera tracking back and forth. We see, and then only hear the voice of, a geekish computer programmer, who explains, »LIVE is a very simple program; there is a special algorithm . . .« and then goes on to make similarly enthusiastic comments about Internet communications, while we are shown, in the background, film clips of a woman being attacked by three men and then murdered, walking soldiers, a military parade, and a burning village. Meanwhile, the man in the headpiece has started crossing out and erasing his own formulas and adding new signs and words over the partially erased numbers. Gržinić and Šmid's visual strategy is thus

redoubled: to show is to make room for new images, but it is never possible to erase them entirely from the screen/parchment, or from memory. Loss, blank space, and remnants are part of the hallucinatory textuality of the present.

The visual tactics used in the 1990 video *Bilocation* are somewhat different. Occasioned by television news reports about the unrest in Kosovo at the time, *Bilocation* represents an inscribing of these images of conflict, and their digital treatment, on the body of a soldier, who is played by a woman.

The video opens with the woman-soldier, in a red dress, marching in a peaceful rural setting (her image is electronically multiplied two to five times). A male voice-over comments on the profound significance of the socialist parade, thus setting the conceptual context of the video: the relationship between the individual and the state in times of conflict:

»A socialist parade is not only a solemn performance; it is also a preparation involving the man condemned to death before he is taken to the scaffold. As if the final culmination of every parade were not the excitement it arouses, but might just as well be a body embalmed, glazed and made-up as a victim. When dressing up for the parade, I am actually adorning my body, which is soon to be destroyed by lust.«

The woman's ritualistic movements include a high-step march, the seemingly hieratic embracing of a cross-like object, which she rhythmically raises and lowers, and the carrying and opening of a suitcase in an optically reconstructed setting that includes other images of her marching. Again this most urgent interrogation of the inter-ethnic violence appears somehow as a quest for historical evidence: how can we see and recognize the past traumas that led to these violent conflicts? An uneasy answer is recorded on the body:



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Bilocation / Bilokacija*, video, 1990

»The past can only be transmitted in the form of ruins, monuments, bric-a-brac in retro. The stroke of lightening is like hypnosis. I am spellbound by the scene. First I am shocked, thrilled, rotated. Then caught in a trap, flattened, bilocated.«

As these words are spoken, we see, from the inside, the roof of a gigantic observatory begin to open and sunlight come in. As with the hand-held telescope in *Luna 10*, Gržinić and Šmid again make expressive use of an optical apparatus to embody and accentuate a gazing interrogation. At this point, the video visually develops the historical question of »evidence« – or, to play with words, e(video)sense – by projecting television footage of the events in Kosovo onto the body of the woman, who continues to perform agitated choreographic movements.

The specific strategy used here is the chroma key technique, which is, in a way, the electronic equivalent of cinematic superimposition. The chroma key technique enables the opening of a locus of representation – a making-space, one might argue – on top of another space, which is usually part of an entire figure. In *Bilocation*, this tactic is applied either on the whole body of the woman or on a part of it, for instance (with clear symbolism), onto an area surrounding her left eye. The conflict, visualized in burning villages, marching soldiers, and diplomatic visits, with all its absurdity and violence, is attached to her body in a kind of contamination: her affective life is profoundly influenced by the conflict, for, as the following quotation from the voice-over suggests, she shares its destiny:

»But we may ask ourselves, is it not cynical to compare a lover's suffering to that of the deported men at Dachau? Can the worst atrocities in our history be compared to the almost infantile and gloomy states in which a lover finds himself? And yet, the two states have something in common. They are both panicky, with no way back and no future.«

In a scene in which the woman appears to be making love with a soldier, her movements and gestures are also affected by the violence: the lovemaking is passionless, overtly mechanical, and without any tenderness whatsoever.

At the end of the video, a red star settles like a hovering logo on the woman's forehead, marking her thoughts and dreams (she is sleeping). The state, after educating its citizens with red books about nationhood (a strong theme during Tito's rule), still occupies people's minds and bodies wherever they are, for conflict in any part of Yugoslavia affects everyone. In 1990, when the video was made, the power of the state and ideas about Yugoslav nationhood, though they were crumbling, had not yet been jettisoned. The video displays a perverse bridging of tragedies: between public spheres, political geographies, and diplomatic failures, on the one hand, and the never entirely private sphere of one's own interior life, on the other. It does this by literally mutating people's bodies into screens of conflict, filling the space of their body with projections of violence. According to their notes about the video, Gržinić and Šmid write that *bilocation* »means the residence of the body and soul in two different places at the same time – simultaneously. It is the perfect term for delineating the process of the video medium.«

Let's go back now to Heidegger's »Art and Space.« Delivered on the occasion of a sculpture exhibition in 1964, the talk provided a foundation for speculating around two basic notions:²⁷ first, that art is a work and gesture performed over space; and second, that this gesture is acted out not as a means for filling voids, but as making space to space. To make space means, fundamentally, to open up an already-present, yet too-vague spatiality into a discursive spatiality, defined with references to other sites, horizons, and perspectives. In this sense, the artistic gesture of making space is an epiphanic endeavor: it discloses the necessary Gestalt of any body in space by showing this body as a place, that is, as a body *in* a site



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Bilocation / Bilokacija*, video, 1990

and *as* a site. Foucault's comment on the discursive loadings of space and power, which I quoted as the epigraph to this essay, might well continue the argument from here. A sculptural body, or an electronically constructed body, has an identity, or a potential for identity, with regard to its position, that is, to its spatial occupancy within wider fields of visual signification.

Going against the grain of current discussions on the language and forms of video-art, *Luna 10* and *Bilocation*, while deeply rooted in historical questionings about Yugoslavia's political and human catastrophe, performed electronic reworkings of the spatial dimension.

Luna 10 sought to be a truthful visual rendering of an emotional and cultural state of disarray. In this way, the screen became the horizon on which the artists could spatialize, that is, discursivize, different entities and images. Interestingly, the action of making space, obtained by a dynamic juxtaposition of background and foreground, never results in a successful deleting procedure: the viscosities of former images cannot be easily suppressed. The notion of the palimpsest, embodied in the video by the presence of a blackboard, seemed to provide an appropriate metaphor for an artistic endeavor that »makes space« in densely populated settings. Using a different technique, the video *Bilocation* sought, instead, to be a truthful visual rendering of an emotional and cultural state of contamination. The artists screen nightmare images onto a human figure through a localized projection: the unrest in Kosovo is re-inscribed, literally chroma-keyed, onto the human body, and vice versa. The effect is similar to a Gestalt exercise: once one has seen different visual configurations (and dislocations), one's perception of distinct and autonomous identities is effectively challenged.

Gržinić and Šmid have, as a result, quite successfully shown the necessity, in times of conflict, of keeping the analytical potential of their critical (video-)gaze intact. Embodied in each video by different-sized optical devices (the hand-held

telescope and the observatory), their glance over the recent history of the former Yugoslavia takes the form of the repeated dismemberment and propulsion of spaces. Their visual mapping of catastrophe has not left any body safe; no trace of narcissism is to be found here, for the only mirrors are broken ones.

Notes

- 1 Michel Foucault, »Questions on Geography,« *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 69–70; Foucault's essay was originally published French in 1976.
- 2 This essay on Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid's videos *Luna 10* and *Bilocation* was written in late 1994. I would like to thank Rawley Grau, the English-language editor and translator of the present book, for his many editorial suggestions and comments and his help with the English translation of the Slovene texts.
- 3 »Die Kunst und der Raum« appears in Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, v. 13 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), 203–210. An English translation by Charles H. Seifert was published as »Art and Space« in the journal *Man and World* 6 (1973), 3–8. My familiarity with the text stems from a bilingual Italian–German edition: Martin Heidegger, *L'arte e lo spazio*, tr. C. Angelino (Genoa: Il melangolo, 1979), which includes an introduction by the philosopher Gianni Vattimo.
- 4 An important discussion of Heidegger's theory of art may be found in Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), especially pp. 186–208. Surprisingly, this otherwise valuable source, which attempts to summarize and discuss every essay Heidegger wrote about art and artworks, ignores the essay »Art and Space.«
- 5 It may be significant that in 1921, a few years before Heidegger published *Being and Time*, the psychologists Max Wertheimer, Kurt

Koffka, and Wolfgang Kohler founded *Psychologische Forschung*, the official publication of the European Gestalt movement. This journal was dedicated to presenting research, mainly by psychologists, based on the idea that the life of the psyche, and in particular, perceptual activity, is made up of dynamic processes organized by a number of structural principles. The main structural principle was that of the *Gestalt* («shape» or «figure»), a perceptual configuration whereby the function of the parts is determined by the organization of the whole. In 1938, after frequent conflicts with the Nazi regime in Germany, Wertheimer, Koffka, and Kohler emigrated to the United States. Gestalt theory soon became highly influential in behavioral and cognitive psychology, as well as in physics and phenomenology.

- 6 See Martin Heidegger, »The Origin of the Work of Art,« *Poetry, Language, Thought*, tr. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 17–87. This essay, drafted in the late 1930s but first published in Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, v. 5: *Holzwege (1936–1946)* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1953), 1–68, represents one of Heidegger's most direct treatments of the nature of art.
- 7 Heidegger, »The Origin of the Work of Art,« 58–59.
- 8 »*Art then is the becoming and happening of truth.* . . . Truth is never gathered from objects that are present and ordinary. Rather, the opening up of the Open, and the clearing of what is, happens only as the openness is projected, sketched out, that makes its advent thrownness.« Heidegger, »The Origin of the Work of Art,« 71 (italics in the original).
- 9 »What poetry, as illuminating projection, unfolds of unconcealedness and projects ahead into the design of the figure, is the Open which poetry lets happen, and indeed in such a way that only now, in the midst of beings, the Open brings beings to shine and ring out. . . . Projecting is the release of a throw by which unconcealedness submits and infuses itself into what is as such.« – Ibid., 72–73.
- 10 Ibid., 72 (italics in the original). For this point, I am indebted to Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Heidegger on Art and Art Works*, 187.
- 11 Heidegger, »The Origin of the Work of Art,« 61–64.

- 12 »Createdness of the work means: truth's being fixed in place in the figure. . . . What is here called figure, *Gestalt*, is always to be thought in terms of the particular placing (*Stellen*) and framing or framework (*Ge-stell*) as which the work occurs when it sets itself up and sets itself forth.« – Heidegger, »The Origin of the Work of Art,« 64.
- 13 Heidegger, *L'arte e lo spazio*, 29. I am translating from Angelino's translation.
- 14 Rosalind Krauss, »Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,« in John G. Hanhardt, ed., *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation* (New York: Visual Studies Workshop, 1986), 179, 181. Krauss's essay was originally published in Gregory Battcock, ed., *New Artists' Video* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1978).
- 15 Nevertheless, more than a decade later, even such a detached neophyte in experimental video as Fredric Jameson could state resolutely: »Yet since video is a temporal art, the most paradoxical effects of this technological appropriation of subjectivity are observable in the experience of time itself.« – »Surrealism Without the Unconscious,« *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 74.
- 16 Jameson develops this interesting, but limiting, conception of video-art in »Surrealism Without the Unconscious« (see especially pp. 74–77).
- 17 I will examine them in the order I first experienced them, though it should be noted that *Bilocation* was made a few years before *Luna 10*.
- 18 It is important (and perhaps surprising) to realize that Television Slovenia is credited as producer not because it funded Gržinić and Šmid's video, but because it provided them with its standard video-making facilities and aired the completed work on selected evenings in prime time.
- 19 Winner of the Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festival in 1985 and nominated for an Oscar for the Best Foreign Film, Kusturica's film was appreciated in Yugoslavia also because it brought international critical attention to the domestic cinema. *When Father Was Away on Business* examines the events of the late 1940s when Marshal Tito's

Yugoslavia broke away from the Soviet sphere of influence and started to develop its own brand of communism. These events are shown from the perspective of a little boy, Malik, and his family. As a result of the country's macropolitical shift, Malik's father is sent to a labor camp for political prisoners, though his mother tells the children that he is »away on business.« When the family is reunited at the end of the film, a traditional village festival is held. Images of this festival (the social gathering we see in the opening of *Luna 10*) are combined in Kusturica's film with images from the television broadcast of the legendary soccer game in which Yugoslavia defeated the Soviet Union.

- 20 While such a gendered division of roles may seem significantly patriarchal, and therefore questionable, and although Gržinić and Šmid have a declared interest in issues of gender and sexual representation, it seems to me that this particular video touches on these topics without making a clear and definite point about them. Other discursive targets appear to be at stake here. The idea of the kitchen, moreover, is not apparently loaded with themes of sexual representation, although it is articulated through them. Instead, the kitchen here is portrayed through a discourse of political spheres, of private and public. Also, the kitchen represents a sort of visual topos for the private sphere, as Gržinić suggests in the essay, »Transcendental of Exorcism,« about the Slovene art group Irwin, a part of the Neue Slowenische Kunst collective, whose paintings and sculptures were exhibited in Moscow in 1992 as the »NSK Embassy.« The essay was published in *Irwin* (Ljubljana, 1994), a booklet that accompanied an exhibition by the group. (Sally Berger, at MoMA, was kind enough to recommend this booklet to me.)
- 21 The man goes on to say: »Have you queued up for the virtual bread? As is the case with technological revolutions in the West, you will get only breadcrumbs. Better than nothing. It works as a magnet on the verbal level. Can you argue with someone who bombs you with cyber-punk, who keeps using words like 'virtual'? Can artificial worlds be generated on a computer screen? It is a bloody real world of economy and politics, scientific progress strategies, experimental

- labs worth billions, thousands of inventors called hackers, computer freaks, more mildly called yuppies, programmers, researchers.«
- 22 As the man comments: »Television reports on the war, but we listen to it as radio. The reports of radio amateurs on the TV news can barely be made out because of interference. But that is when the television voice becomes the most effective picture.«
- 23 For example, a BBS operator says: »When one appears on the BBS for the first time, one has a chance to realize all one's possibilities, ideas, and phantasms. There are no limits. There is a difference between seeing someone face to face and seeing only a computer screen. It's a different level of communication.«
- 24 Jean Baudrillard collected three of his interventions on the topic of war in the book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995); these essays first appeared in the Paris newspaper *Libération* between January and March 1991.
- 25 Etymologically, the word *palimpsest* comes from the Greek *palimpsestos*, which means »scraped again,« that is, it refers to a parchment where the original writing has been scraped off – erased or wiped out. The earlier text, called in Latin *scriptio anterior*, is often still visible on the margins or between the lines of the more recent writing, since the new writing was usually done between the lines of the erased writing. Because they were expensive commodities, parchment and paper were often reused, with important documents being written over lesser, erased documents.
- 26 Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992; 1977), 139.
- 27 As I mentioned at the beginning, I am not claiming here to exhaust any further reflections on art that deals mainly with temporality and its discourses. I simply wish to develop a limited discussion on the issue of space, which seems – especially in video criticism – to be too often overlooked. The Foucault quotation that heads my essay should make this point clear.

YVONNE VOLKART

Technologies of Identity

Within communities of political activists and socially committed art producers, the utopian hope that new media technologies can be put to alternative ends has always been of crucial importance.¹ In the early 1970s, the use of video was deeply connected with this »utopian moment.« It is no accident, for example, that the rise of the second wave of feminism, at the start of that decade, corresponded in historical terms with the appearance of the camcorder. The widespread use of the Internet in the early 1990s was to a large degree triggered by a similar conviction. Like many of the feminist art practices of the 1970s (though unlike them, largely in opposition to hard-line feminist theory), cyberfeminism can be seen as the offspring of this utopian moment, as well as the product of a link between art, technology, and female identity politics.² This is not to say, however, that technologies and media fully shape our bodies in a techno-determinist sense. Rather, it shows the extent to which technologies are culturally and ideologically coded. Technologies are never neutral, for they are always constructed within specific contexts and with respect to specific aims – it is a mistake to believe their content depends only on their »proper« use. At the same time, they are the offspring, and target, of culturally and socially coded fantasies. These fantasies also shape and construct our bodies and identities.

This is why the metaphorical use of the term »technology,« as developed in the writings of Michel Foucault and Teresa de Lauretis, has always been central to my research. Beyond any techno-determinism, Foucault and de Lauretis show that the construction of bodies and gender has always been techno-

logical.³ I would argue that politically engaged aesthetic strategies must go beyond socially and visually coded and controlled public and private fantasies; they must open up other phantasmic zones to create spaces of identity. In my view, identity politics is still crucial, for it addresses and »produces« multiply coded, hybridized and differential political subjects and agents.

In this essay, I will discuss three different cyber/feminist aesthetic strategies that use video to negotiate questions of technology and gender, even as they map identity models for an existence in the posthuman space of our time.⁴ One will notice that my argument employs the terms »woman« and »female subject,« among others, and that the concept of »female identities« is key for me. Although I would prefer to speak of »agents« instead of »subjects,« in the plural instead of the singular, and also to take as my starting point the notion that gender is a set of variable and not indeterminate rules – in other words, that »gender is a boundary concept«⁵ – I nevertheless consider the terms »woman« and »female« to be useful insofar as they always refer, again and again, to the embodied experiences and life conditions of specific agents and entities called, and calling themselves, »woman.« As a woman myself, I too represent a situated female perspective, albeit a temporary and shifting one.

As a female, cyberfeminist theorist, one of my aims is to render these different female, or rather feminist, points of view transparent and productive. My interest, therefore, is to analyze the different ways artists form specific aesthetic strategies that embody these issues. I also hope to cross the various borders that define and often separate, among other things, the issues of art, new technologies, new media, and gender.

Wounds and Machines

In her video *Performing the Border* (1999), the Zurich-based artist Ursula Biemann takes the Mexican border town Ciudad Juárez as her example as she investigates the kinds of bodies, identities, and genders the global high-tech industry produces at its »low end.« She uses the semi-documentary medium of video in a polyvocal, visually heterogeneous manner. The work weaves together Biemann's own video and film research from 1988 to 1998, interviews with local women's organizations, TV clips of the situation at the border, data about such transnational corporations as Philips Electronics (among others), and police films and documents about serial killings in the area. But the video goes beyond mere reportage: on the one hand, it performs the idea of borders on a structural, aesthetic level, while on the other, it is grounded in theory, as represented by the Mexican border activist Berta Jottar and the social theorist Mark Seltzer.

The aesthetics of Biemann's video-essay suggests that the border city of Juárez, beyond its significance as a place of exploitation in the context of the new international division of labor and the use of advanced technology, is also a metaphor for the performativity of bodies, genders, identities, nations, and capital. This metaphorical function is produced primarily by images of constant motion, interrupted at times by shots of seated women who are either being interviewed by Biemann or waiting together in bars or on the street for clients. In between are other shots showing movement: masses of women streaming into spotlessly clean *maquiladoras*;⁶ women taking the bus to work in the morning; cars and people on horses in the desert; flickering images on television; digital images of detonations in the minefields on the U.S. side of the border; and images from driving along the five thousand miles of border fence. There are also the movements of a floating rubber dinghy, of white-dressed women working in pure-white rooms, of a woman washing laundry by hand, of a girl walking down

the street («She is still a little girl. Can she find a way to steer herself through these cultural ruptures?» asks the voice-over). The constant motion of the camera, of the montage, and of the people can be interpreted as an aesthetic performance of the »flow discourse« that connects all these different streams in a shared mobility: the rhythms of the assembly line, the flow of financial capital from the North, of migrants from the South, of female desire articulated in the love songs heard on morning bus rides, and finally, of the production of female bodies. But *Performing the Border* is more than a visual criticism of pan-capitalism; it is also an attempt to show, or rather to ascertain, the possibilities that exist for individual female lives in this cyborg world of labor.

More than twenty years ago, the first U.S. high-tech corporations set up shop in this border region. On the screen we see the words: »The maquiladora is a laboratory of deregulation,« as the voice-over comments: »Within a short time, a new technological culture of repetition, registration, and control was introduced into the desert city.« Control is an important issue in the video in terms of the regulation and use of female bodies in the production process, in the sex industry, and as the victims of murder. Biemann does not show the actual technologies of repression, nor does she try to create a sense of »authenticity« by presenting these women's private lives; instead, she lets the women talk about their worries about their means of existence, and in this way establishes a certain distance that leaves room for reflection. The productive force of control is expressed by describing the way the rhythms of these women's labor and leisure are regulated, and through the parallels Biemann shows between their lives and the increasing militarization and mediatization that constantly redraw and reinforce the geographical border. This equation is set in place from the very beginning of the video. As we hear the voice of activist Berta Jottar speaking about the materialization and naturalization of current U.S. border politics, we see an infrared

image of the border and a man on guard duty, who is monitoring the border through his binoculars. »In a way the border is always represented as this wound that has to be healed, that has to be closed, that has to be protected from contamination and from disease,« Jottar says. ». . . It's like a surgical place.« Her remarks about geographical landmarks recall discourses about the body: notions of the body as a battlefield, of open and closed bodies, and of the female body, which is traditionally represented as a wound.

A running text in the video states: »Gender Matters to Capital.« Biemann reveals life on the border as a set of total sexualizations. Here, women are permanently reinstalled as mute objects for working and for sex, although with at least two striking shifts in the traditional patriarchal patterns: women are now consumers targeted by the local entertainment industry, and they are the principal earners in their families. Nevertheless, the beauty competitions organized by the maquiladoras, as well as international corporations that explicitly seek pretty young girls for their advertising campaigns, reinforce the patriarchal structures under the sign of global capitalism. Significantly, none of the many younger women shown in the video is willing to talk about her situation; it is only older women, journalists, members of women's organizations, activists, the mothers of girls who have gone missing, and a fired trade unionist who have the courage to speak openly for the camera. Another text in the video informs us: »The maquiladora is a strategic point in the national economy of the Mexican state.« Nothing is natural in Juárez; everything is dictated by the needs of the pan-capitalistic machine; as Jottar states at the beginning of the video: »So you need the crossing of bodies to produce the discursive space of the nation state and also to produce a type of real place as a border.« And this place is always represented as a place of danger, which may even lead to death if one is unable to adapt to its prohibitions.

In fact, more than a hundred and forty women have been killed and buried in the desert since 1994. Many girls are still missing, and many of the victims remain unidentified. Sometimes only pieces of clothing are found; sometimes clothing has been switched between the corpses. The pattern of the murders is always the same: the women are raped, strangled, and stabbed. We learn that the nameless murdered women are catalogued by the kind of wounds that led to their deaths; we also learn that local corporations refuse to be identified as their employers. Thus, the dead woman from the South becomes the metaphor of this wound, which is always represented as a consequence of living in a war zone. But Biemann goes a step further and argues that this way of female death is caused by the rhythm of the machines; in a voice-over she says: »The compulsive, repetitive violence of serial killing does not exist without an extreme entanglement between eroticized violence and mass technologies of registration, identification, reduplication and simulation. . . . Serial killing is a form of public violence proper to a machine culture.« The economic war that dominates this region is waged over the bodies of poor women from the South, which means it can be endlessly naturalized and renewed. The new international division of labor is structured as a »technology of gender« (de Lauretis's term) and exists to ensure the permanent reconstruction of gender difference, the consolidation of power, subjectivity, and identity in a frightened world of cyborgs. As Biemann points out, the only fundamental line of difference recognized between the perpetrators and the victims of the serial killings is that of gender. *Performing the Border* refers to the opening and closing of bodies in the endless cycle of today's high-tech control methodologies that consume, produce and fix these bodies as female. As the journalist Isabel Velazquez says in the video, »We believe technology is good when it's shared for the benefit of all.«

Becoming a Techno-»Wound«

As I said at the beginning, it is important to address and produce the subject as something hybrid and paradoxical. The video and Web-based artwork *I Am Milica Tomić*, by the Belgrade artist Milica Tomić, offers a good example of this.⁷ Tomić's use of digital technology allows her to trigger strange and alienated sensations, so we perceive her project as something completely artificial and constructed.

In the work, Tomić stands before us in a white slip; she is radiantly beautiful with a kind of heavenly glow about her. Then she starts to speak, in German: »I am Milica Tomić. I am a German.« She introduces herself this way sixty-five times, although each time she speaks in a different language and identifies herself as a different nationality: I am an Austrian, I am an American, and so on. With each statement, a new wound appears on her body, so that by the time she finishes she is completely covered in bleeding gashes. After all sixty-five statements, the wounds close up, her body is once more intact, and the whole thing starts up again. The wounds appear spontaneously, and we instantly realize that it is only digital technology that brings them to life. Here technology is flesh and blood, and flesh and blood are technology. Nothing is natural, neither the body, nor the gashes, nor the different languages. There is only this abstract situation, this mechanical, monotone repetition of virtual, i.e., metaphorical inscriptions.

Nationality and native language are important factors in the formation of identity, and in our age of (not yet obsolete) nation states, they help define our sense of home and being-in-the-world. The yearning for such identities is all but inscribed in the body; it determines the potential of desire expressed in the unmarred body. The reality, however, is that fantasies of nationhood mutilate bodies, that the subject articulates itself as a contingent, vulnerable, and wounded body, regardless of whether or not one's »own« nation is particularly bloodthirsty.

The subject, as a splinter of such a fantasy, has always been caught in the paradox of being both body and symbol. Tomić's wounds, the direct result of her words, reveal that each of these performative acts, in which she is obliged to state her identity, is an act of misunderstanding. Nevertheless, through her hysterical mimesis of the yearning for national identity, including the simultaneous deconstruction of this yearning in her gaping wounds, she does not dismiss her desire for (national) identity a priori. On the contrary, she takes it seriously, with respect to both its power to both constitute subjectivity and cause fatal trauma, and then extends it, so to speak, in a ritual act of reiterating the understood misunderstanding to the point of absurdity. In her hysterical identification with the Oedipal condition (she is both blinded and castrated), it becomes manifest that she is reduced to being nothing but a woman with a name and the subject of a national-state entity. In this way, her performance of a symptomatic becoming-a-wound has the effect that we too, as viewers, are called to take part in this mimetic process and to identify with her role of complete vulnerability – and to transform it into something powerful.

War Zones

To conclude, I will now turn to the video *Luna 10: The Butterfly Effect of Geography* (1994), by Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, a work that treats the desire for expansion, the conquest of the world, and the question of survival, all from a female Eastern European point of view. As Gržinić has explained, the video's title refers to the Soviet interplanetary unmanned spacecraft that entered the moon's orbit on April 3, 1966, becoming the first artificial satellite of the moon in the history of the effort to conquer the moon; the subtitle refers to the dream of acquiring new territories as the result of the end of the Cold War.

At the beginning of the video, we see a woman looking through a hand-held telescope – in other words, a »repetition« of the female viewer's own situation as observer. In a kind of frame, this woman and a man guide us through the video's various window-like (or as Gržinić describes them, »hypertext-like«) image sequences. In the »hypertext« sequences, we see clips from films by neo-avant-garde Yugoslav directors such as Emir Kusturica and Želimir Žilnik, as well as documentary material, including interviews with amateur radio operators. The beautiful woman remains silent while the man who is with her talks about such technological »revolutions« as the Internet, the role of the media during war, and the perspective from the East of Europe. Although he plays the role of a pontificating male authority figure, he is dressed in nothing but his underpants and at one point turns into a kind of technological instrument, writing numbers on a blackboard that are dictated to him by the woman. In this way, his underpants-clad body occupies a female subordinate position. The woman wears several different outfits, sometimes only a slip, at other times, a military uniform. The gender-specific and social matrices of both figures are temporary and contradictory, complex and diffuse.

Luna 10 may be interpreted as a critical argument for appropriating new (wartime) technologies and media and reassigning them to women and other subaltern groups. The woman from the East has taken control of the old-fashioned telescope (an anachronistic technological »prosthesis« and phallic substitute). She too wants to go to the moon, and she too will pass on only the images she sees. Her searching eye and the greenish tinge of the images suggest an analogy to military infrared surveillance footage. But the screen images we are offered are replete with contrasts. At the beginning, for example, the woman appears before us with her hands covered in dough, indicating a poor rural setting. As the man recites Western technological fantasies of transgression, we see images

of private domesticity, rustic simplicity, weddings, communist parades, and three soldiers executing a woman in a field. The greenish tinge also emphasizes the archival nature of the footage. Spaces, bodies, identities, and technologies are represented as historical, media-produced, ideological constructs. Everything becomes reciprocally involved with everything else, but there are very real spaces and bodies in which we experience such everyday emotions as desire, fear, sadness, and joy. Media constructs of places and bodies do not preclude intense experience.

To make art in the age of posthumanism means to place the specific positionality of one's own perspective in the foreground through the active pursuit of deconstructive practices (with a focus on the »constructive« part) without, however, forgetting the negative and paradoxical nature of the current conditions. We should be skeptical of simple identity models and bliss-promising attempts at reconstruction. But we must also be wary of overworking territorialized zones. We need to pursue strategies of infiltration, invasion and, »despite everything,« attitudes of survival – strategies of simulation and construction that, from the start, destroy every form of naturalization.

»Have you queued up for virtual bread?« the man asks in *Luna 10*, adding, »As is the case with technological revolutions in the West, you will get only breadcrumbs! Better than nothing!«

Notes

- 1 A version of this essay was published in the book *The Body Caught in the Intestines of the Computer and Beyond: Women's Strategies and/or Strategies by Women in Media, Art and Theory*, ed. Marina Gržinić and Adele Eisenstein (Maribor: MKC and Ljubljana: Maska, 2000).

- 2 See Martha Rosler, »Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment,« *Block* (London), no. 11 (1985–1986).
- 3 See especially Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, v. 1: *The Will to Knowledge* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998; originally published in French in 1976) and Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1987).
- 4 The term »posthuman,« though it was not then new, became an important term for many theorists following the exhibition *Post Human*, curated by Jeffrey Deitch, in 1992 at the FAE Musée d'Art Contemporain in Lausanne, Switzerland; the term stands more or less for the notion of a performative, non-natural hybrid body. See Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, eds. *Posthuman Bodies* (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1995) and N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 5 Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 9.
- 6 The Spanish word *maquiladora* (»golden assembly plant«) commonly refers to the U.S.-owned factories in Mexico along the border, to which parts are shipped for assembly and which then ship the finished products back to the United States. Wages are extremely low in the maquiladoras, and the working conditions are very poor.
- 7 The work is available on the Web at <http://www.shiseido.co.jp/cygnat/>.



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Obsession / Obsedenost*, video, 2008

DIANE AMIEL

Theory, De-documenting and Fiction

The following study does not purport to describe the video works of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid. While this analysis does examine part of their production, it primarily addresses the link between video and history, and thus also the relations between these Slovene artists and power. Created over the period that witnessed the collapse of Titoism and its totalitarian system, the establishment of capitalism, and the development of globalization, Gržinić and Šmid's numerous videographic works call for, and merit, close scrutiny and thorough analysis. The spread of this form of electronic expression has been met in Europe, and particularly in France, by insufficient critical discourse and feeble analytical methods. Indeed, if Gržinić and Šmid have seen the progressive integration of their artistic production into art history since the expansion of the European Union, it is still the case that most French critics and theorists remain silent or seem temporarily incapable of analyzing their works. While the art currently being produced is locked in a global discourse that tries to eradicate the differences and specificities of identity, such critics still see Gržinić and Šmid's videos as a terrain of resistance, a field to be explored. Employing traditional analytical grids, they lose their bearings in the face of these works, which demand that they replace their »universal« artistic and theoretical references with new ones. As a result, there have so far been in France but few articles, and no books, devoted to the art produced by Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid.¹

If the present situation may be partly explained by France's political history, and especially the period of the Cold War, this

is only to be regretted. Most of the players in the current art scene in France, having been marked by the ideological struggle that for decades opposed East to West and still finding it hard to accept the new realities (i.e. the end of the ideological antagonism between the two former blocs), pay scant attention even today to the art produced in the eastern part of Europe. Consequently, even if we see, in recent years, a Balkan artistic presence in group shows (the white cube begins to shatter) and certain Paris galleries (Yvon Lambert, Michel Rein, Chantal Crousel), Gržinić and Šmid's videos – the artistic potential and unique aesthetic logic of which have yet to be fully grasped – continue to stir little interest.

Still, one might easily be surprised at such attitudes on the part of the French art world. For these video works, in fact, occupy a privileged place in international art production: they play an active role in the evolution of the relationship between history writing and the image, namely, in the possibility of writing history through video. These works, by presenting themselves as a true discourse (after decades of opposition by historical scholarship, which had long rejected the video document as untrustworthy), contribute like any document (and this is something genuinely new) to the writing of history, and more specifically, to the writing of Balkan history.

Images, then, no longer lie. Through their works, Gržinić and Šmid propose a political and historical counter-analysis² of a region whose historical writing was falsified over the course of many years (and still remains so), in certain periods in particular. During the communist era, the decline of Titoism, and the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, official and mass-media versions of events, whether in written or visual form, suffered from »selective memory«³ – and still suffer today from »distorted representation« – and have never provided a true and accurate version of social and political events or historical periods. If once they were subject to governmental authority, today they are most often filled with a reactionary ideological

nostalgia or falsified by most of the representations and interpretations in the mass media.

Gržinić and Šmid, therefore, fearing that memory – the matrix of history – might be only partially transcribed, or used for ideological manipulation, saw in video the possibility of unveiling the silent majority. As the material mark of that which once took place but is no longer, video makes it possible, through the record it creates, to represent and preserve experiences, situations, events, and feelings that social and political analyses in Slovenia and other Balkan countries have so far forgotten. Gržinić and Šmid, then, provide through their work a new and complementary social and political analysis of their society.

The works produced in this medium, however, demand another way of thinking history, that amorphous entity. Aware of the control exerted by governments and the media on history and its writing, Gržinić and Šmid decided to deliberately reject the analytical and interpretational tools that had until then been used by historians subject to the political and ideological authorities and by journalists. Instead, to provide a new and complementary social and political analysis, they sought to create a new relationship between the past and reality.

In the light of the struggle to which Gržinić and Šmid have committed themselves, the following analysis now situates itself in a desire to reflect on the gaze the artists have cast on history by means of their camera, and on the new interpretation of history they propose. How do their works approach political and social representation? Does such representation differentiate itself from the written forms that historical discourse sometimes adopts: general history, memoir-history, problem-history? What effect do they have on the life of society? Do they assume the role of privileged information? What strategies do Gržinić and Šmid employ so that their impact is not instrumentalized by politics and the media? Can the aesthetic evolution of their video production be seen as an

artistic and personal expression of the deep political and social upheavals the Balkans have experienced for more than a decade?

In effect, the videos of Gržinić and Šmid, which are, above all, direct and immediate accounts of a certain social and political reality, are not mere imitations or replications of reality. While using technology to transcribe life and its unfolding, these videos relate back to a reality whose image – although constructed on foundations that are part of reality and inserted in the world – is a new proposition. They have, as it were, integrated and reappropriated the social and political reality by means of the tools that belong to them, in other words, modes of appearance, technological methods, and ways of seeing, all mutually dependent and organized around the eye and the varied aesthetic choices made by the two artists. As a result, Slovene society and its socio-political context, as represented through their work, are never presented or projected as such on the screen but only in the aspect required by the time's forms of expression and the choices Gržinić and Šmid make.

Thus their videos confess more than simply the state of affairs or the visible aspect of a society. By capturing and staging people – sometimes through choreography – in phantasmic and critical situations, they reflect that which is hidden, which is unspoken, in a society. By scrutinizing the inner life of a community and, in their formal treatment, causing the unseen and the unseeable to surface, they reveal the society's psychological biases, the deep-lying strata of the collective mentality that lie within its unconscious, as well as its most secret elements and subtlest tensions. These works suggest, then, throughout the situations they treat, what a society thinks about itself, its past, its »others« and its relationship with the world. In this way, by acting on the social reality, their works become more than a simple mirror. Their ability to reinforce or destroy widespread convictions, arouse

repressed aspirations, bring together people of similar views, and so on, transform these works, through their potential for intervening in social processes, into a social force, a genuine weapon of protest.

For this text, however, I have chosen to analyze Gržinić and Šmid's video production during the time of civil war in the former Yugoslavia. These works, the first of which appeared not long after the collapse of Titoism, reflect the identity crisis »of the 'East,' a region devastated by brutal dislocation and seeking new ways to define itself.«⁴ Realized between 1984 and 1993, the works I have selected provide, in effect, an opportunity to analyze the specific reasons – historical and technological, no less than aesthetic and philosophical – that led Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid to choose video for their medium of expression, as well as an opportunity to try to understand, through the proposed representations, the different perceptions these artists, connected as they are to a specific cultural group, have of the social reality during this time of great political and ideological upheaval. Mobilized and infusing their work with an acute political awareness, Gržinić and Šmid become active, if unassuming, witnesses of these political events.⁵

The War in the Former Yugoslavia

In the early 1990s, Europe, and in particular, Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, underwent profound political and historic change. This was the result of the fall of political systems that had been in place since the World War II: the ideology of communism, with its logic of global and strategic control, completely collapsed, thus making way for modernization, democratization, and a pluralistic separation of powers.

These transformations, however, gave rise to a serious moral, ideological, and political crisis throughout the region.

The new leaders, often intellectuals »guided by romantic, nostalgic and naïve notions,«⁶ opted for radical orientations in their quest for a new identity. They allowed themselves to be influenced by various opposing values that largely differed in their perceptions – globalization, international liberalism, pragmatic modernization, and so on – but were all in keeping with the principles of the market economy and the analytic rationalism of the Enlightenment. Frustrated during the communist era by the inability to express the distinctive features of their nations, these new leaders attempted, as part of this process of ideological and political redefinition, to give form also to national identity, which soon became their principal preoccupation to the detriment of their countries' modernization and political transformation.

This explicit interest in national identity was justified on an ethnic basis and was considered from an ahistorical point of view. Numerous celebrities and intellectuals effectively legitimized this approach by turning to a nationalist ideology, with collectivistic and post-communist accents, and by employing a political language that was hostile to neighboring nations and to the minorities in their own nations. Given the new context, such a strategy could have no economic justification and so created an anachronistic political atmosphere in which the different populations, who now began to live in a world of illusion, were totally cut off from international political questions.

The Federation of Yugoslavia in the 1980s, after Tito's death,⁷ became the first country to display a restless alliance between the ahistorical nationalist extremism that was the product of nineteenth-century political ideologies and the rigid communist centralism that rejected any type of social reform or modernization of production standards. In a country composed of six republics and two autonomous provinces, however, these nationalist claims assumed a different character with each population. The government in Serbia, with the support and



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *The Butterfly Story I /*
Zgodba o metulju I., video and video installation, 1995

assistance of the Serbian Orthodox Church, founded its policies on what was to them an incontestable principle, namely, the right to security of the Serbian minorities who lived outside their own republic though still within Yugoslavia. In this way, the policy of reconquest and homogenization conducted by Slobodan Milošević, then president of the Socialist Party of Serbia (the former Serbian Communist Party), unleashed civil war.

Faced with the rise of nationalist movements and war, the response of artists was no less diverse. Depending on the political and historical context, and the personality of the individual artist, this response varied from republic to republic and province to province. If artists in Kosovo and Bosnia–Herzegovina, subject to oppression and injustice, took part in the nonviolent and underground resistance established by their societies even as they maintained their artistic production and activities, Croatian and Serbian artists remained silent, with only a few exceptions.⁸ It was difficult for these artists to involve themselves or their art in a direct relationship to the political. Meanwhile, the art scene in Slovenia, in which Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid were already active participants, assumed the important role of witness.⁹ Soon isolated from the conflict, it was the only art community, in the part of the Balkans outside the war zone, to have the courage to criticize what was happening and take a political and moral stance.

We can, however, say that the war made Slovene artists more sensitive to shared concerns and topics.¹⁰ In their works, they often dealt with such issues as memory and the attitude of the media in these conflicts. The history that was being written and presented in books and, especially, in televised reportage, did not record the truth – their role was, to say the least, ambiguous.¹¹ These artists considered it important, on the one hand, to preserve through their artwork traces of this history so it would not be lost to oblivion and, on the other, to propose an approach that was unlike that of the mass media. They

presented their testimony, then, by creating works that were devoid of shocking imagery – to ensure that these events would be remembered as accurately and as fully as possible – and that addressed the question of memory and its representation.¹² Wishing to present a different version of this history, they proposed a new relationship to reality, seeking, in other words, to penetrate the psychological shifts and the social and political landscape that surrounded them, and in this way, to capture and transcribe »the evolution of possible or actual fields of consciousness, the transformation of sensibility and of the perception of things, the psychology and history of the individual.«¹³ Their works, then, captured, as accurately as possible, immediate experience and personal attitudes, subjective and controversial readings of the war, the pain and suffering caused by the conflict.

Gržinić and Šmid, who throughout their creative work helped to bring this testimony into existence, chose nevertheless not to treat the war in its totality. They limited themselves only to certain aspects of it: in particular, the Bosnian refugee camps in Slovenia and the media coverage of the war. Their videos, then, which tackle such specific themes, should be read as chapters, as segments of this history.

Gržinić and Šmid – who are themselves the products of the art scene that took shape at the beginning of the eighties, i.e. at the birth of the avant-garde protest movements that developed after Tito's death and before the fall of the Berlin Wall – have created a number of works of a markedly political nature with distinctive aesthetic characteristics that are still too little studied in France. By eschewing the »narrative« or demonstrative logic of militant art, and by taking their inspiration from a vast cultural reservoir largely unknown to the »Western« viewer, Gržinić and Šmid have, in fact, invented strange fictions. Constructed from numerous stylistic effects and references of every sort (literary and cinematic), drawn from the social and political reality of »post-socialism« and mixed »with a

surprising disnarrative detachment and semantic multiplicity,«¹⁴ these videos become disorienting fragmentary fictions, phantasmic situations, and critiques woven around the political state of affairs.

One might note, too, that in the works discussed below, the artists have completely abandoned the use of dialogue. By obliterating speech, they have left room for the body, which as »a topos and a tropos, a figure, construct, artifact, movement, displacement,«¹⁵ becomes the surface or material that best expresses the violence of the era.

Traumatized Human Bodies

In the video *Labyrinth* (1993), Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid artificially construct surrealist images based on the art of Magritte. The result is a work that expresses the liberalization and renewal of the status of video. For artists and intellectuals, who had previously been excluded from their history and writing, the act of reappropriation signified the chance to finally regain possession of the construction of their country's civic discourse. Hidden, neutralized, masked, and even renamed, they had, in effect, found it impossible, during the communist years, to interpret this discourse or produce criticism of it. But during this period of war, if history's position had been strengthened in the cultural and artistic domains, the communist past was now partly excluded from artistic concerns: »During the 'post-war period' in Slovenia, history was beginning to play an important role . . . while attempting to reject the vengeance, nationalism, and racism that could rise up from 'the ruins of war.' «¹⁶

It is, then, through the body – or a body whose status has been modified – that Gržinić and Šmid propose a new interpretation of certain episodes of the war. Freed from its old obligations and liberated from ideological representation, the

body is now able to express itself and freely reveal its direct link to reality, even as it criticizes the communist and/or nationalist consciousness.¹⁷ Thus, in the video, the body »goes wild.« It dances, it shakes, it convulses. It dares to express a situation that bewilders and shocks it: the war, which in Slovenia is materialized through the presence of the refugee camps. Although created at the height of the Bosnian conflict, this video does not represent the traumatic event directly; rather, it represents the difficulty of accepting this breakdown and the psychological repercussions it engenders in individuals. Bodies encounter each other and seek to discover themselves again in their deepest intimacy, although they are unable to set aside their psychological condition or the violence buried within their very existence.

One should, as well, take note of the way the video recycles different stories and cultures: images of the camps are combined with scenes of a striptease being performed before an audience; this kind of recycling places the work »outside time.« By evoking what Gržinić calls an »interior multiculturalism« with international resonances,¹⁸ which alludes to a potential time situated between certainty and potentiality, *Labyrinth* thus situates itself in a space where present and past exist simultaneously, where different notions of time are condensed. In this way, the history constructed by the video is – to pursue our critical analysis – an alternative history that reassembles the names and the forgotten or hidden aspects of cultures.

The Media during the War: A Theoretical Approach

As I have suggested, the media – the written press and the electronic media – played a decisive role during the war: they encouraged the outbreak of hostilities, and then, during the course of the conflict, constructed and maintained an atmosphere of racial hatred. According to British journalist and

writer Mark Thompson, who was interviewed on the Serbian radio station B92¹⁹ in 1995, the media's role can be explained in several ways. From 1991 on, war was waged between peoples who had lived together more or less peacefully for decades. The different populations, therefore, needed a propaganda campaign to mobilize them. In addition, none of the warring parties in the former Yugoslavia were strong enough to achieve a quick victory. The media's representation of the war, therefore, was always focused on maintaining patriotic support for the war cause: »The systematic occupation and destruction of the transmitters show, moreover, just how much the warring factions were attached to the electronic media.«²⁰

Television, too, which had undergone a purge by the new governments, was the most controlled, and most utilized, medium during the war. Employed as a propaganda tool, it became a vital link in the relations between the state and the society and was able to influence, with some facility, populations who were seeking the truth. By producing documentary films²¹ and news reports with biased and violent content, which were watched by a large segment of the population,²² television indoctrinated minds while carrying out a policy of disinformation. TV thus became a »warmonger,« and was a central factor in inflaming irreconcilable hatred and fear toward enemies only recently discovered: »If you spoke to the different populations, people on both sides were absolutely convinced that the other side intended to kill them.«²³

Despite this indoctrination, a small segment of the population remained clear-headed. In the opening scenes of the 1995 documentary *Truth under Siege*, people interviewed on the streets of Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo say unanimously that the war was started by the media and that, more specifically, the roots of the conflict can be found in television. They are, however, hard pressed to explain why. So instead, they try to describe the feelings and intuitions they felt while watching the

documentaries broadcast by their respective national television stations. They do not conceal their dread of feeling disoriented and insecure when confronted by the media. They are aware that it will be difficult for them to break free of the absolute control exerted by their governments, and that they will not learn the truth until the lies of the media have been eradicated.

In her essay »The Media and the War,« Marina Gržinić provides a theoretical basis for this phenomenon, that is to say, television's inability to treat reality, to produce accurate information free of political bias. In a way that was quite rare in the Balkans during this period, she writes about her own experience in precise terms, as a witness, describing her own strange and troubling relationship with television.²⁴

She says, in effect, that during the Balkan conflict, television became detached from and, ultimately, contradicted its own inherent logic, which is the logic of realism, the logic of information. By broadcasting information around the clock and erasing, through technology, all notions of distance, television altered both its relationship with the viewer and, equally, the nature of its production and its broadcast. For now the viewer – transformed, as René Berger describes him, into a »squatter« of satellite and cable television, and able to receive in the privacy of his home the events of the war, without any physical effort and almost without delay – becomes totally immersed in a universe of fiction. He becomes one with the television, unable to detach himself physically or mentally from the information presented to him on the screen, from the distorted and incomplete news reports that with each passing day become more horrible and more sensational. »The television viewer experiences the event as if it were taking place in the 'here and now,'« Gržinić writes. ». . . Here, then, we are witnesses to the paradox of the television aesthetic. The aesthetic that provides us with access to the coordinates of time and space by presenting them as a never-ending electronic scan; that offers us the world by means of simultaneous recording and trans-

mission; this aesthetic has caused us to lose the habit of establishing and protecting in our memory a balance between the past and the future, on the one hand, and the nearly obsessive present of the television medium, on the other.«²⁵

But the war reveals another process as well, Gržinić says. Basing her reflections on Arthur Kroker and David Cook's very precise rereading of Baudrillard,²⁶ she argues that the war changed the perception of the relationship between television and society. With the breakdown of the positive cycle of the social, which tends toward normalization and expansion, the media were responsible, especially during this time of war, for accelerating the breakdown of genuine forms of social solidarity. By participating in the triumph of the culture of signs, and in the elaboration of a system of implosive and structural signs, the media had, in effect, reinforced an exteriorization in which »the strategies of normalization are replaced by the simulation of the masses, where the hyperreality of the culture is indicative of an enormous dissolution of the space of the social.«²⁷ In this new world where the social no longer exists, television, then, with its unreal existence as a system of image-signs, is not merely a technology, but neither is it a social instrument. No longer does it reflect society like a mirror: henceforth, it is society that mirrors television. Television offers a form of social cohesion that works essentially, according to Baudrillard, through »these pseudo-solidarities generated by electronic television images, for which the public is the dark and silent mass of viewers.«²⁸

In *Luna 10*, the video she made with Aina Šmid in 1993, Gržinić resumes her critique of television. Using all the technical and visual tools of the video medium and employing a strategy of recuperation, she stages her reflections in a very precise, detailed scenario: »At times, Gržinić and Šmid's videos assume an explicitly video-essay style and thus invent a unique formula for filmed theory. Pushing a Godardian attitude further, the artists stage characters who recite excerpts from Gržinić's theoretical

writings in the form of declaimed or acted-out dialogue, performed in discordant settings.«²⁹ The work is constructed of excerpts from certain neo-avant-garde films made in the 1970s and 1980s by Emir Kusturica, Živojin Pavlović, and Želimir Žilnik – in other words, made during the existence of Yugoslavia – and from news reporting on the war. Re-read, reworked, and recoded, these excerpts become a complex, multilayered, and dislocated visual sequence to which a man and a woman are then grafted and/or juxtaposed. The man and woman, who form a sexual couple and develop in scenes made up of various mundane and political elements, are given the task of explaining the role of the media and the new technologies during the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina, at a time when communications were already dominated by the Internet, computers, and cyberspace. Whereas the man, sitting in a chair, expounds on the theory in serious if improbable tones in the manner of a soliloquy, the woman completes the explanation by abandoning speech altogether. While the propositions set forth by the man are at times interrupted by reporters who discuss various media, from radio broadcasting to the Internet, the woman expresses herself with the aid of singing, gestures, and the clothes she wears on her body. This video, in which Gržinić and Šmid manage to bring together theory, documentary reports, and the fictional, creates a paradoxical situation and a feeling of incomprehension. Faced with this confrontation and brought into this time–space continuum, viewers are obliged, then, not only to reflect on the functioning of the media, but also to question their own position.

Notes

- 1 We should, however, note the recent publication of Gržinić's *Fictions Reconstructed* in French translation: *Une Fiction reconstruite: Europe de l'Est, post-socialisme et rétro-avant-garde* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005).

- 2 A term used by Marc Ferro in *Cinéma et Histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).
- 3 See the article by the research group Mémoire Grise, »La mémoire historique non institutionnelle dans les sociétés du monde soviétique, de l'Europe Centrale et Orientale,« in *Mémoire en Bataille: Histoire et mémoire en URSS et en Europe de l'Est* (Nanterre: Bibliothèque du Documentation Internationale Contemporaine and the Institut du monde soviétique et de l'Europe Centrale et Orientale, 1989), 32.
- 4 Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki, »The Reconstructed Fictions of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid.« This essay, originally published as »Les Fictions reconstruites de Marina Grzinic et Aina Smid,« *Bref: Le magazine de court métrage*, no. 59 (2003–2004), appears in the present book.
- 5 As Camus states in his *Notebooks*: »Vinaver. The writer is ultimately responsible for what he does toward society. But he must accept the fact that he does not know his responsibility in advance, that he remains ignorant, *for as long as he writes*, of the conditions of his involvement – that he is taking a risk.«
- 6 Lóránd Hegyi, »Sarajevo – The Challenge of a Site: To Overcome the Discrepancy Between Centers and Peripheries,« in *Sarajevo 2000: Schenkungen von Künstlern für ein neues Museum in Sarajevo* (Vienna: Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 1998), 12.
- 7 After the death of Tito in 1980, it was not clear how the system he had put in place would be able to last. Who would have the charisma and emblematic personality Tito had to hold together a country that was suffering under a system »worthy of the heroes of antiquity or demigods, and not simple citizens«? The death of Tito, the hero of the post-war generation and the irreplaceable president of the federal state, meant something much more than the end of a political regime. The embodiment of Marxist ideology and the social conscience, Tito had become for his country its only guarantor of survival, its only assurance that the social cohesion of Yugoslavia could be maintained.
- 8 The exceptions were the Croatian video artists Sanja Iveković, Dalibor Martinis, and Ivan Faktor. As for Serbian artists, they in effect did not respond to the intense surge in nationalist movements.

Relinquishing their role as a force of protest, they themselves contributed to this ideological reorientation and even supported the new nationalism and its racist ideology. It was not until the second half of the nineties, with the emergence of a new generation, that the situation could begin to change. It was this younger generation of artists who finally had the courage to get involved, criticize their government, and incorporate political and social reflection into their works.

- 9 There are, no doubt, many reasons for this quick and energetic response. I will, however, name only three: First, the war lasted only ten days on Slovene territory, thus leaving these artists with the necessary freedom and requisite physical security to express their thoughts about the conflicts. Second, like many Yugoslavs, numerous artists were of mixed heritage and so could not remain indifferent to what was happening. And finally, as Yugoslavs, these artists had the necessary facility and the social and historical knowledge to deal with such a complex and delicate subject.
- 10 Here I am thinking of the video artists Marko A. Kovačič, Neven Korda, and Zemira Alajbegović.
- 11 During the war, the historians, no less than the mass media, played ambiguous roles. Faced with the inter-ethnic divisions, Yugoslav historians adopted attitudes that reflected the political passions, while the media, through their partial handling of information, distorted the war in a way that can only be considered science fiction and lies.
- 12 In this world of speed, manipulation, propaganda, and lies, the question of memory arises. Produced by the mind, memory has always required support to be preserved and technique to be exercised. During this time of war, in which images, televised news reports and independent reports, and their sources were constantly varying and multiplying, artists, too, raised questions about memory and its representation: How would the history of these conflicts be constructed from the flood of images and information? Should one write this history from the images on television and so make them part of the archive of our contemporary society? Can these images have the value of a document? Can one not write history from other

images, from different testimonies? In what way, then, can artists propose a different interpretation of reality? Can they create a different point of view through the elaboration of a new aesthetic? Can such a work also have the value of a document? Can artists criticize the official version of history? How will they correct the media's falsifications? In this time of media manipulation, could the testimony of artists possibly suggest a more accurate version of events? Should violent images be used? What would they bring to such testimony?

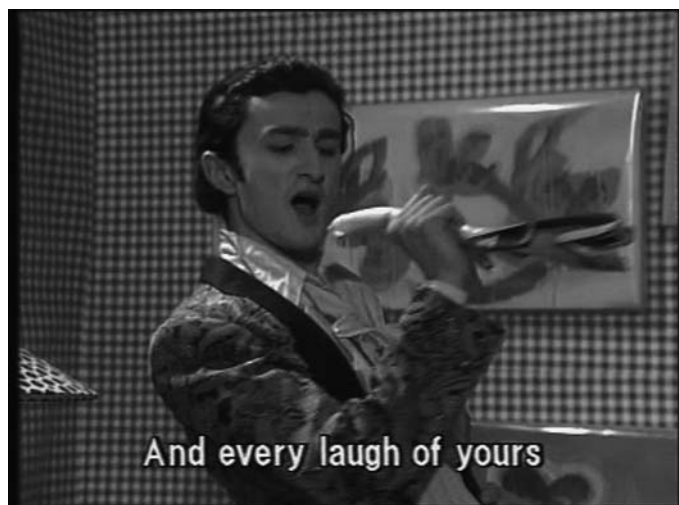
- 13 Anne-Marie Duguet, *Vidéo, la mémoire au poing* (Paris: Hachette, 1981), 48.
- 14 Klonaris and Thomadaki, »The Reconstructed Fictions of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid.«
- 15 Marina Gržinić, »It Is Not Red, It Is Blood, or, The Body under Communism,« in Christine Rigler, ed., *Das Jugoslawische Labyrinth: Symposion im »Forum Stadtpark« 1988, 1995, 1999* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2001), 275.
- 16 Marina Gržinić, »Video as Civic Discourse in Slovenia and the Former Yugoslavia: Strategies of Visualization and the Aesthetics of Video in the New Europe,« in Laura Lengel, ed., *Culture and Technology in the New Europe: Civic Discourse in Transformation in Post-Communist Nations* (Stamford, Conn.: Ablex Publishing, 2000), 212.
- 17 While the body had a different status in Yugoslavia than in other Balkan countries – Tito had, in effect, authorized a greater freedom for artists, in performances, etc. – it was nevertheless subject to certain representative rules. One finds in cities monuments that represent the heroes of the revolution, and those who sacrificed their lives for it, in which their bodies have been realized in accordance with the aesthetic canons of communism; statues of Tito, the creator of Yugoslavia, were present in public spaces throughout the country; while parades were organized in which bodies were made to represent the communist ideology in their clothes and choreography. Unofficial and dissident artistic movements, as way of criticizing these practices, used the body as the basis for their work and reflection.

- 18 Gržinić, »Video as Civic Discourse in Slovenia and the Former Yugoslavia,« 212.
- 19 During the war, Radio B92, a former student radio station, was the main rival to the official Radio Belgrade. But because it transmitted solely to its immediate vicinity inside the Yugoslav capital, its broadcasting range never went past ten percent of the area of the city of Belgrade. This station originated a number of different actions, including helping army deserters, recording the Belgrade peace anthem, and collecting food supplies for Bosnia.
- 20 Mark Thompson, discussing the manufacturing of the war and the media in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia–Herzegovina, in his interview on Radio B92 in 1995.
- 21 See Dina Iordanova's description of the documentaries and films that were made with the goal of indoctrinating the public, in her book *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: BFI, 2001), 166–167.
- 22 In Serbia in 1990, two and a half million viewers watched the news every night on Serbian Television's Channel One, which equates to fifty percent of the population putting their faith in television.
- 23 Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, 168.
- 24 Marina Gržinić, »The Media and the War,« in Nicola Hodges, ed., *New Art from Eastern Europe: Identity and Conflict* (London: Academy Editions, 1994), 19–25.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 See Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 172–173.
- 27 Gržinić, »The Media and the War,« 21. Compare Baudrillard's comment on the hyperreality of the situation for the Bosnians: »It is hell, but a hell of a somewhat hyperreal kind, made even more hyperreal by the harassment of the media and the humanitarian agencies, for this makes the whole attitude of the world even more incomprehensible. The Bosnians live, then, in a sort of spectral aspect of the war – which, by the way, is fortunate, because otherwise they could never endure it. I am not the one who says this; they say it.«

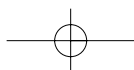
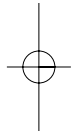
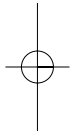
(»Pas de pitié pour Sarajevo,« *Libération* [Paris], January 7, 1993; later published in English as »No Pity for Sarajevo,« in Thomas Cushman and Stjepan Meštrović, *This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia* [New York: New York University Press, 1996], 80–84.)

28 Gržinić, »The Media and the War,« 22.

29 Klonaris and Thomadaki, »The Reconstructed Fictions of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid.«



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *The Butterfly Story II: A³ – Apathy, AIDS
and Antarctica A3 / Zgodba o metulju II.: A³ – apatija, aids
in Antartika*, video and video installation, 1995



BIRGIT LANGENBERGER AND MARINA GRŽINIĆ

»All That Really Counts Is the Political Concept!«

The Slovene philosopher Marina Gržinić, who last year was appointed professor of conceptual art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, comes from the underground scene of Ljubljana. This background and her »linking of theory and activist practice« form an important distinction between Gržinić and her countryman and colleague Slavoj Žižek. She spoke with Birgit Langenberger about her book *Fiction Reconstructed*, in which she takes as her starting point the contrast between Eastern and Western Europe in order to define a new symbolic culture space. The term »post-socialism« is here contrasted with the term »East,« which tends to exclude the political, social, and cultural contexts.

BIRGIT LANGENBERGER: In *Fiction Reconstructed* you emphasize that Western and Eastern observers tend to date the collapse of communism differently. The West generally equates it with the fall of the Berlin Wall, whereas you emphasize that, from the perspective of the former Yugoslavia, the new order actually began with the death of Tito in 1980, that is, almost ten years earlier. What does it change if one shifts the date this way?

MARINA GRŽINIĆ: The view taken of the former totalitarian countries of the East is itself often totalitarian in that it subsumes clear differences into a single difference. This cannot be left unchallenged. The question is how history is reconstructed. My thesis is that in the former Yugoslavia a significant change began already in the 1970s and 1980s – well

before the fall of the Berlin Wall – with the formation of an underground scene, the struggle for civil society, the struggle for improvement in the position of gays and lesbians, and the ecology and peace movements. The real issue is the mental gap between the Balkans and the countries that were under Soviet influence. Cultural backgrounds in Eastern Europe differ greatly from country to country. The alleged cultural underdevelopment never actually existed. This world cannot be understood in blocs, neither then nor now. Thus the construction of history always appears as something artificial.

BL: Has this view changed with the EU membership of many Eastern European countries, or is there continuity?

MG: Since the construction of the new Europe, a phenomenon has emerged that tends to erase the memory of former Eastern Europe. Whereas previously it was said that there can never be enough Europe and that the fall of the Berlin Wall had finally brought back this lost part of Europe and made it part of the European family again, today things are the other way around and this loss is no longer reflected upon; we are merely »integrated.« In this respect, the East is always out of joint.

BL: Can this be understood as a double erasure, i.e. not only the erasure of the memory of the socialist past but also the current erasure of the differences between the individual Eastern European countries?

MG: Quite definitely, and therefore one can say there is a nonexistent Second World between the First and Third Worlds. Through a process of »McDonaldization,« through an excessively rapid integration and historicization, a number of things are being erased simultaneously – supposedly to produce an allegedly pure European unity!

BL: You talk about »a« Yugoslavia. But wasn't Yugoslavia very heterogeneous – also in the cultural sense?

MG: I am not nostalgic, nor do I long in some romantic way for the unity of Yugoslavia. Yet the differences were not, in my opinion, really cultural in nature. The destruction of Yugoslavia was carried out by various political lobbies and elites – in addition to the economic imbalance that prevailed throughout the country. Nevertheless, there was an active cultural exchange between Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Sarajevo, and Skopje, and even a common mental space in the areas of art and culture – far more than we dare imagine. For this reason, I see the special avant-garde movement that came from the East as the »retro-avant-garde.« In this schema, Belgrade, Ljubljana, and Sarajevo were connected with the scenes in St. Petersburg and Moscow in a single conceptual movement. Through contemporary productions and radical thinking, powerful, important connections between these centers still exist today – what links them is the reflection on post-socialism.

BL: The art institutions lack financing. Does this also split the culture scene?

MG: Yes, but also because the entire idea of culture has been turned upside down. Art and culture play an important role in the West, but the question is how one thinks and acts on the cultural level. It is also true of the former Yugoslavia that it is not possible to think radically and theoretically from just a national perspective, as this always reflects the perspectives of the state and the elite. The postconceptual underground productions in contemporary art are certainly connected with each other, but not so much in terms of national unity – which is always the product of traditional culture – but more in relation to the question of how a different form of culture can be constructed.

BL: What function did postmodern ironic art fulfill in Eastern Europe? And if this was only negative, what might a positive concept for the idea of political emancipation look like?

MG: The conceptual movement in Russia, as well as the Apt-Art movement in private apartments, used irony and parody. Certain artists in the former Yugoslavia, however, were attempting something different, for example, Laibach, Irwin, and Mladen Stilinović, among others. They took the ideology of socialist self-management – which was a kind of third way, a bloc-free movement – quite literally. Their attempt to operate within this extremely ideological ethical socialist rhetoric ultimately turned out to be far more destructive for socialism and the state. They took things precisely as written and stated. The result of this approach was absolutely positive, but also absolutely horrifying, because it was understood without parody, and when juxtaposed with the absolutely different reality of society, it turned everything upside down. To ask how history can be written differently and what kind of art will be included in history and what kind won't be, is to ask about the political level of art. For example, in designing an »Eastern European art map,« what was important was not parody, but rather to go back fifty years into history to reconstruct radical, non-Western positions. When combined in a single map, these positions were intended to provide others with a way of approaching this history.¹

BL: What contribution does the art market make to the rewriting of the history of art and culture?

MG: Here again, the reference is to the difference between East and West, i.e. to a political moment. What is interesting about the underground artists of the 1980s is that they emphasize the structural aspect. It is not enough to interpret the way the art

business functions and how it changes using a psychological model. The issue is not only the sale of artworks but also the positioning of artistic production in society. For example, Documenta 10 focused on the theme »private apartments.« The aim was to investigate whether art is only for institutions or whether there are other spaces outside the traditional art institutions for which the production of art is a substantial issue. And what happened? Only a few committed artists from the former Eastern Europe were involved. This was paradoxical because practically the entire Sots-Art movement, as well as the Apt-Art and underground movements, had developed in all the Eastern European countries in private apartments.

BL: Is this how the »Balkan« brand is sold?

MG: Something similar happened at Documenta 11 and at the Manifesta exhibitions: most of the invited artists came from Western Europe; there were a few from the Ukraine and none from the Balkans. This is like a kind of punishment for the three Balkan exhibitions last year that were held in Austria and Germany. We have had enough of the Balkans. And when we think about Balkan art, we remember only the three curator father-figures: Harald Szeemann, Peter Weibel, and René Block. These names cling to the Balkans.

BL: For you, then, these are not accidental but structurally necessary phenomena?

MG: Precisely, because the issue here is the already-existing matrix of the »capitalist First World« that dominates the art world. This is most important, for it deals with the writing of books, criticism, curating, and so on. And everyone involved plays into this system. Although the importance of its role is often concealed, it functions as a »trendsetter,« deciding what is in and what is out. In fact, it is a censoring machine with

cannibalistic traits. A machine that is constantly setting boundaries. Crossing a number of these boundaries is not permitted – not because there is something obscene on the other side of them but because there is some critical content involved here that questions the machine's *modus operandi*. Naturally, the artists who are part of this one big family must follow the rules in the art they make. But I also believe that wiser people can be found among the critics in Eastern Europe. Why? Because this Eastern European world was produced by ideology and politics. The view from the outside is often much clearer than the one from the inside.

BL: Is this the difference between you and your Slovene colleague Slavoj Žižek, whom you often quote in your books?

MG: Our positions are indeed very different. Žižek is a genius – like Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Rosa Luxemburg. However, I find it impossible to understand why these writings are written if, ultimately, they don't strive to be anything more than a Hollywood product, if they don't aim at social and political change. This is where our different backgrounds come into play. The underground is a »mother« for me, and my »father« is the rock 'n' roll and punk movement in Ljubljana. I grew up in the Ljubljana gay and lesbian scene and so was closely tied into the theoretical power of the underground movement. Although I have a doctorate in philosophy, what guides me is the linking of theory and activist practice. Without the practical moment of involvement in a concrete situation and the attempt to change institutions and artistic and cultural practices, theory doesn't make much sense to me. I am an avid defender of linking theory, politics, and art. This is the only position a person can adopt in a world of inequality.

BL: From the critical viewpoint of the underground, where does the difference between East and West actually lie?

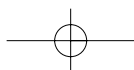
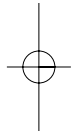
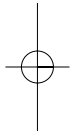
MG: The East is a body that functions poorly; the West represents the perfect body. But the advantage of the poorly functioning body – the body that is not fashionably and magnificently developed – is that it is in a position to understand the perfect body. Our (poorly functioning) body is a far more progressive machine because we can integrate both positions in our consciousness, which makes us far more flexible than the body that has everything.

BL: Does the same apply to art and artists?

MG: Such an assertion would be an inadmissible generalization; this is something that very much depends on the particular context. All that really counts is the concept; that is, the concept must always be incorporated. We must attempt to think emancipation in order to create a different and better world that shows more solidarity with those outside the capitalist First World. The issue is the implausible world that doesn't yet exist but that could be created in the future. It is precisely this impossibility that can be exercised by the practice of art.

Notes

- 1 This project was carried out by the Slovene art group Irwin in the first half of the 2000s. See Irwin, eds., *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006).



GULSEN BAL

Mapping the Shifting Borders: Beyond »Point Zero«

In her essay »Synthesis: Retro-Avant-Garde, or, Mapping Post-Socialism in Ex-Yugoslavia,« Marina Gržinić proposes the notion of *post-socialism* as a way to approach the deconstruction of »the modern myth of a global world, a world without cultural, social or political specificity, a world without centres and peripheries« through an analysis of the »new« Europe, coded as »East reading East.«¹ She addresses a number of current issues while questioning the role of post-socialism in an enlarged European Union and the realignment of a new Europe. She focuses in particular on new-media art and the aesthetic makeup of a culturally specific condition and its political and philosophical implications. Thus she seeks to establish a mechanism for creating a synthesis between the specific cultural conditions in Eastern Europe and emergent Western theoretical debates.

But how can post-socialism in the former Eastern Bloc, in the culturally specific conditions that form its basis, be read in the visibility or invisibility of the multiple psychological and social loci of these conditions? A possible method for understanding the new situation, and the paradigms of specific spaces, is to map where the effects of difference, or *otherness*, are represented in the transition from *ideology-in-itself* to *ideology-for-itself*, relative to the subjective position tacitly conceded by ideology's own articulated process.² This makes it possible to step away from ideology in its otherness, or externalization, so as to develop new media strategies that problematize representation and self-representation.

To facilitate a clearer tactical/strategic position in artistic practice with regard to the specific conditions of post-socialism, Gržinić introduces the notion of an aesthetic based on cognitive mapping as a way to identify situational representation. This is problematic, however, because it lacks the constituent element of the *unrepresentable*.

As Fredric Jameson suggests, the *unrepresentable* is an integral part of *cognitive mapping*,³ which is understood as a theoretical stance that reaffirms the analysis of representation. The problem arises, by contrast, in its immediate effect on the political praxis within the realm of the representation of the subject's imaginary relationship to his or her real conditions of existence, as Althusser describes ideology.⁴

Cognitive mapping, then, needs to be supplemented by correlating the empirical position of the subject with abstract conceptions of the geographic totality. What is more, if such correlation does not identify the point at which differences manifest themselves, then how is cognitive mapping characterized in its relationship to a new cultural landscape?⁵

Nevertheless, the concept of space presented in Gržinić's essay offers a political-cultural model that is suitable for addressing spatial issues and accommodating still-unrevealed organic structures so as to provide the necessary criteria and principles for analysis and evaluation. What kind of mechanisms can be applied, then, to the transcoding of the notion of post-socialism within the context of a *virtual/generative* matrix that regulates the relationship between the *visible* and the *invisible*, between the *representable* and the *unrepresentable*? Gržinić describes the cultural logic of global capitalism as an abstract collaboration within the equally abstract positioning of East and West. The process of mirroring involves questioning whether this cultural logic can be subverted in order to create a new locus that would allow for a new critical approach to art and political activism. Given such a situation, what kinds of change can be highlighted in the

practices and processes of today's art and culture, as multiple and inconsistent as they are, along both the Eastern and Western axes?

It might be best, then, to explore ways of theorizing practice in relation to the binary opposition between *the self* (or *identity*) and *the other*. But is this paradigm, in fact, still relevant, or if it is not, then how can one understand the politics of the other, and who, today, is »the other«? To deal with the new processes presented by specific spaces, creative practices, and art production in Eastern Europe, Gržinić borrows the concept of the »inappropriate/d Other« from Trinh T. Minh-ha, who has proposed a model for rethinking Asian space and the so-called Third World as a new way of theorizing the problematics of identity.⁶

Gržinić takes the notion of difference as her point of departure in her examination of the opposition *self–other*. She attempts to conceptualize the necessary philosophical constraints by insisting on the articulation of critical difference through the notion of the »inappropriate/d Other« in an effort to develop a specific concept for reading the former Eastern European territory. As a result of the ontological fixed foundations of the visibility and invisibility of multiple loci, a new conjunction occurs in the transition, which arises from the potential ubiquity of otherness throughout the multiple systems in which it is a nomadic presence. This is a conjunction of events from the virtual to the actual, which points to a shift in the paradigm of the virtual/generative process toward the abstract multiplication identified in virtual worlds.

In, for example, *The Axis of Life*, the website Gržinić created in 1996 with her longtime collaborator Aina Šmid,⁷ she and Šmid are concerned with developing a tactical/strategic position with regard to certain culturally specific conditions in the form of a virtually generated community. Could this be described as *the divergence of actualization* that leads to a *tactical becoming*?

The same concept of »otherness« assumes the role of a new currency. . . . Otherness reaches an abstract value and a virtual dimension. Otherness is transformed into a »geographic expansion« where different visions are converging and moving. Otherness itself becomes a nomadic entity, a floating raft where contemporary culture survives the self-defeating idea of globalisation.⁸

But what issues are at stake in this territory, which might be characterized as a »Balkanization« of a simulated Balkan reality? The analogy is processual and concerns intensities rather than the properties of formed things – comparable to degrees of *detrterritorialization* relative to a certain transformative intensity or potential. Deterritorialization is what marks the interval that characterizes the transformation of the possible into the real, a *rhizomic* marking that forces the creation of a structure that leads to the destruction of the grid of representation. The first processual step in »becoming« is to become tangible, which has a precedent in its exercise of »becoming other.« Becoming-other generates »our concrete being-in-the-world, or . . . a conceptual determination, that of being a subject.«⁹ The Deleuzian subject, in the process of becoming-other, undergoes »political creations and social becomings: this openness is precisely the 'producibility' of being.«¹⁰

The rhizomic function of this deterritorializing (sub-)version is to offer a multiplicity that defies the totalizing of monolithic and/or homogenized orders. This is a »becoming« in the density of intensities and multiplicity, a singularization of the relationship between the »virtual« and the »actual,« and never the possible. When added to Gržinić's analysis, the theory of the rhizomic function of deterritorialization, as I have described it, provides the missing principles that allow for an evaluation of the post-socialist condition of Eastern Europe. Deleuze applies further significant lines of argument that reinforce the

proposition that the shift in paradigm that influences social change is brought about by dematerialization. One of these arguments concerns his theory of individuation, or »the processes of becoming,« which involve various spontaneous spatiotemporal dynamics in a »divergence of actualization.«¹¹ This raises the vital question of how new visual and media strategies can be developed that problematize representation and self-representation and allow for the formation of new forms of articulation that facilitate reflection on post-socialism and the Eastern European condition.

Gržinić notes that, in the conditions of Eastern Europe, the aim of the new generation of artists has been to investigate the means by which a subject and the body are produced and articulated in electronic moving images. Especially, to investigate the ways of visualization of the »so-called« absent body, object or history . . . on the grounds of what has been excluded, of the non-represented object.¹²

The production of objects, then, gives way to »a growing multitude of image-objects«¹³ whose immediate reality is their symbolic function as image. Baudrillard observes that »duplication suffices to render both [the real and the copy] artificial,«¹⁴ and in an augmented real (in an idealized simulation) »images no longer refer to a real that would be (in principle) prior to and independent of them; they penetrate, volatilize, and thereby (re)constitute that real.«¹⁵ What remains of the virtual/generative matrix is this dichotomy, this confrontation with the other in the self or of the self, which blurs any sense of self-presence, even after the return to the »subject,« and so reflects the blurring of boundaries at the edges of the emergence of a double transformation.

The threshold that has so far confined Gržinić's discourse may yet be crossed in the creation of the »other,« of autonomy in difference, with the »self« becoming reclusive through its inability to deal with the mediated real, in which everything

becomes more real than real. The phenomenon of the simulacrum is based on the virtual–material dualism within the simulacrum, which by simulating absence proves the real. The concept »autonomy in difference« is itself already politicized through the simulation of its antithesis, but it takes this politicization even further, leading to a tautology of nothingness through the reinforcement of definitions in which nothing is the »same,« allowing its productive force to constantly actualize itself within the shifting complexity by questioning where »mirrors make the real false.«¹⁶ All this concludes, however, in an odyssey that oscillates between a multiplicity of physical and social locations and multiple belongings. The process remains in convergence whenever and wherever it becomes elusive: whether identifying the »inappropriate/d Other,« suggesting a symbiotic relationship to address the complex issues of the inappropriate/d Other, or analyzing the new Europe coded in the East reading East. It is here that a certain paradox needs to be confronted inasmuch as »we live in a cultural moment dominated by de-differentiation and at the same time in a political moment whose vital sign is difference.«¹⁷

Problems concerning differences would then be resolved by referring to limits and oppositions. The resulting disjunctions and contradictions are, therefore, central to explicating the politics and practices of difference. Not only a cultural practice, but also a critique needs to emerge from the production of the subject if the specific matrix of situational representation is to be analyzed and elaborated.

Notes

- 1 The essay is available on the Web at <http://www.ljudmila.org/nettime/zkp4/53.htm>. A shorter version was also published in the catalogue for an exhibition of the same name that was held at the

- Visconti Fine Art Gallery in Ljubljana (1994).
- 2 See Slavoj Žižek, *Mapping Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), 8. My use of the term *ideology* here follows Hegel's understanding of ideology as a complex of ideas along three axes: ideology in its externality, or materiality; ideology in the apparatuses of the state; and finally, ideology at the center of the social reality itself. This succession corresponds to the Hegelian triad: ideology-in-itself, ideology-for-itself, and ideology-in-and-for-itself.
 - 3 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 56.
 - 4 »Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.« – Louis Althusser, »Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation),« *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 162.
 - 5 See Slavoj Žižek, »The Cyberspace Real,« available at <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/zizek/zizek-the-cyberspace-real.html>.
 - 6 See Trinh T. Minh-ha, ed., »She, the Inappropriate/d Other,« a special issue of *Discourse* 8 (fall–winter 1986–1987), as well as her *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1989).
 - 7 Available at <http://www.ljudmila.org/quantum.east>.
 - 8 Francesco Bonami, abstract for the paper »Kula of Contemporary Visions: Rituals of Exchange in a Ring of Cultures,« presented at the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale (1997); available at <http://camwood.org/abstracts.htm>.
 - 9 Ute Guzzoni, »Do We Still Want to Be Subjects?« in Simon Critchley and Peter Dews, eds., *Deconstructive Subjectivities* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1996), 208.
 - 10 Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 120.
 - 11 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 336.
 - 12 Marina Gržinić, »The Representation of the Body Under

- 'Communism,'« *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 4 (1998), 27–30.
- 13 The phrase comes from Guy Debord's Thesis 15 in his *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1977; originally published in French in 1967).
- 14 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, tr. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 9.
- 15 Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 138.
- 16 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 49.
- 17 Peter Beilharz, »Back to Postmodernity,« *Thesis 11: Critical Theory and Historical Sociology* 29 (1991), 114.

WALTER SEIDL

Video as a Matrix of Mental Consciousness: The Works of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid

The videos of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid epitomize a way of working in a medium that allows us to transcend the boundaries of objective reality as a fictional construct that can be approached only through a discursive matrix of cultural, social, and political practices. Since the early 1980s, Gržinić and Šmid have used the video medium as an interface between the perceptiveness of motion pictures and the onslaught of television, music video, and news reporting, which challenge art's ability to intervene in and utilize these media without succumbing inevitably to the production of mere surfaces. For Gržinić and Šmid, the notion of »the cut« has become vitally important, not only as a technical device, but even more as a mental and political reality that creates a rupture in our view of the changes that take place in society and history.

Originating in an Eastern European context, the videos of Gržinić and Šmid constitute an extensive oeuvre – a body of work that has become a crucial artistic reference point for analyzing the (post-)socialist situation in Europe as well as the influence of global power systems on the transformation of Western life. References to (film) history, philosophy, cyberculture, the Internet, and the discourse of gender form the central themes of these works, compelling both physical and imaginary bodies to explore »the Other« within themselves in order to come to terms with one's identity vis-à-vis externally defined powers. The beginnings of Gržinić and Šmid's collaboration are rooted in the subversive underground movements of punk rock and the gay scene of Ljubljana in the

1980s. At the time, Yugoslavia occupied a unique position as a country pursuing a »third way« between the doctrinal forces of communism and efforts to supplant these forces with an inclination for Western ideologies. To distance themselves from mainstream Western videomaking and its dominant formats, Gržinić and Šmid have always used Slovene as the main language of their videos.

The New Wave and punk movements of the 1980s provided an ideal counterforce to both the dominant ideology of the West and the regime of socialist Yugoslavia. In the video *The Axis of Life* (1987), a peroxide-blond Gržinić portrays a creature who is a cross between a vampire, a cyborg, and a conspirator in a terror plot that could have been taken directly from a Hitchcock movie. The opening scene shows a woman lying on bed sheets, as blood suddenly gushes from her neck. The clear shift in the image, in which the head is removed and inserted onto another image, is an example of the layering technique called encrustation – excising and replacing parts of the main image source – which has become a hallmark of Gržinić and Šmid’s video methodology. In this regard, their videos are in line with trends in contemporary filmmaking, notably, the works of Peter Greenaway, who also used encrustation to express postmodern identity in his films of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The opening scene of *The Axis of Life* recalls, as well, Cindy Sherman’s *Untitled Film Stills*, although it goes a step further in questioning the reality of the image through the artificiality of the body parts and the apparent death of the female vampire. The image of the female vampire reiterates a feminist motif that was prevalent among intellectuals at the time. The same year Gržinić and Šmid’s video was released, Elfriede Jelinek’s play *Illness, or, Modern Women* premiered in Bonn. The play deals with a bored housewife and mother, Carmilla, who is seduced by Emily, a lesbian vampire, and becomes a vampire herself in order to evade the forces of male dominance. In the context of feminism, vampirism can be seen as a metaphor for female

revenge against male hierarchies, in which women participate while being at the same time excluded, just as vampires are dead beings who nevertheless participate in life. Like the intertextual references in Jelinek's play, the encrustation technique in Gržinić and Šmid's video allows for the construction of realities that go beyond the coherent tracing of particular identity formations. In *The Axis of Life*, we see two dead women/vampires, who recall events of crime, murder, and war that bear witness to life without ever mentioning specific details.

A more thorough construction of bodies and their histories can be seen in the video *Bilocation*, from 1990, which reflects the ways in which bodies exist as physical as well as mental entities. Fictively constructed and duplicated bodies as video images are contrasted with images from the conflict in Kosovo in the 1980s. Albanians and Serbs oppose each other in the same geographical territory, where the mental construction of difference also calls for the differentiation of bodies. Like soldiers in uniform, a woman dancer in a red dress is doubled and tripled by means of image manipulation as she performs a rhythmic ballet in the style of Japanese Noh theater, at times with the support of a male dancer in a black costume. Textual fragments borrowed from Roland Barthes's *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse* contrast the final state of a love relationship with the »final solution« of the Nazi regime. The atrocities of the conflict in Kosovo, seen in images that were recorded (but never broadcasted) by Television Slovenia, are scrutinized through the telescope of an observatory as well as in the eyes and hands of the dancing woman. Here, the technique of encrustation is used to create a precise reading of what is veiled and unveiled in the mass media, and especially on television.

In 1997, Gržinić and Šmid created for Television Slovenia a seminal video work dealing with the recent art of the former Yugoslavia. In *Post-Socialism + The Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin*, they established a thematic matrix that links the works

of the Zagreb-based artist Mladen Stilinović, »Kazimir Malevich« from Belgrade, and the Irwin art collective from Ljubljana. In a witty scenario we see a man and a woman who try to trace these artists via computer and telephone in a philosophical hunt interrupted by commentary from the philosopher Slavoj Žižek and the art theorist Peter Weibel. The narrator of the video (the man) uses the notion »ideology-in-itself« as the thesis in a Hegelian dialectic to describe the works of Mladen Stilinović, who in various installations has dealt with such issues as money in the Yugoslav context and the international status of artists. Stilinović's statement, »An artist who cannot speak English is no artist,« is a key slogan that has been repeated throughout the Eastern European context; Gržinić herself used it recently as an ideological statement, with a slight modification: »An artist who cannot speak English well is no artist.«¹ Stilinović's paradigmatic statement suggests that art spreads solely within a small elite segment of society, which, although globalized, is still restricted to a very homogeneous group. Modernism, similarly, was a movement restricted to a small elite; thus, the so-called Belgrade Malevich provides the anti-thesis in his attempt to present modernist values to a broader audience. By precisely reproducing the »original« Kazimir Malevich's *Last Futurist Exhibition* of 1915 and presenting it in Belgrade (in 1985) and Ljubljana (in 1986), the Belgrade Malevich sought to raise awareness about the modernist project and its repercussions in art and society; for this same reason, he presented the *International Exhibition of Modern Art* at the ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana in 1986. In 1992, the art group Irwin went to Moscow to set up the »embassy« of the *NSK State in Time* in a private apartment. In this way, they provided the synthesis, as well as a synopsis of the state of art in the former socialist Eastern Europe, and especially the Apt-Art movement, in which art was exhibited primarily in private apartments due to a lack of sites for public (re-)presentation. This phenomenon can be seen in the way Stilinović exhibited



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *HI-RES*, video, 2006

his works in his Zagreb apartment, and the Belgrade Malevich, in his Belgrade apartment, and Irwin's traveling to Moscow, where the Apt-Art movement started.

To summarize what had been happening in Yugoslavia, an outsider's perspective was necessary; only thus can one look at »the Other« within one's self and understand one's identity, in the Lacanian sense, from the other side of the mirror. It was the Austrian Peter Weibel who coined the term *retro-avant-garde* for an exhibition in the 1992 Steirischer Herbst (Styrian Autumn) Arts Festival in Graz; he used this term to describe what had been going on in the art scene in Yugoslavia, bringing together ideology-in-itself and ideology-for-itself. In Gržinić and Šmid's video, Weibel is presented, in a telephone conversation, as one of the leading lights of art theory, while Slavoj Žižek performs the role of philosophical entertainer throughout. Thus the educational aims of modernist thinking are made explicit, while being compressed into a television-compatible format, to create one of the prime documents that reflect on the development of Eastern European art and, in particular, the works of Irwin.

The interconnectedness between art and cultural practice in globalization is further elaborated in the video *HI-RES* (2006). Based on the dance performance *HI-RES* by Maja Delak and Mala Kline, the video continues Gržinić and Šmid's tradition of commentary, in which actors and voice-over narration reflect on the action with reference to relevant topics in philosophical thought. The color red again becomes a dominant marker not only in the costumes of the female dancers but also in the clothing of the musicians Stefan Geissler and Jakob Ortis, who near the end of the video perform French cover versions of anarchistic songs by the Sex Pistols. The central question that evolves within the action is the link between art and life: this is seen at the beginning of the video in the way the body of life and the life of the dancing body are at times intertwined, at times separated. Similarly, questions arise about art and politics

and how they affect each other. Can art contaminate politics, and can politics contaminate art? These questions are later answered by one of the musicians, who says, in German, that what we need is not the ghettoization of art, but rather, the mutual contamination of art and politics. The central problem that emerges from this constellation is, then, the existence of the art market, an inescapable phenomenon. Here Gržinić and Šmid elaborate Mladen Stilinović's concept, claiming that an artist has to speak English well in order to become a player in the global art system and not be excluded from the capitalist First World. This dependence is highlighted in the dance performance when one of the two female dancers drags along the other woman, who is cowering behind her, by putting a finger in her mouth. As for the issue of the ownership of art exhibitions and art institutions, capitalism ultimately operates as a matrix of cannibalism that devours everything and leaves no room for resistance. But this again leads to the privileging of the elite few and creates an emptiness they enjoy even in their state of boredom and arrogance.

In the end, the videos of Gržinić and Šmid always present a thorough critique of the cultural, social, and economic models of life. Their art questions the status of dominant ideologies, as well as the eclectic mix of postmodern and post-socialist thinking, to show that the way out of the dilemma of historical preconceptions can be found only by using the materials at hand, in a process that demands the balancing of philosophical inquiries and visual fragments. Just as the Irwin group formulated their *East Art Map*,² so too Gržinić and Šmid have created their own maps of cognitive reasoning, stemming from a dialectic matrix of visual and mental consciousness, which the artists creatively intertwine so as to achieve results that are textually and aesthetically challenging.

Notes

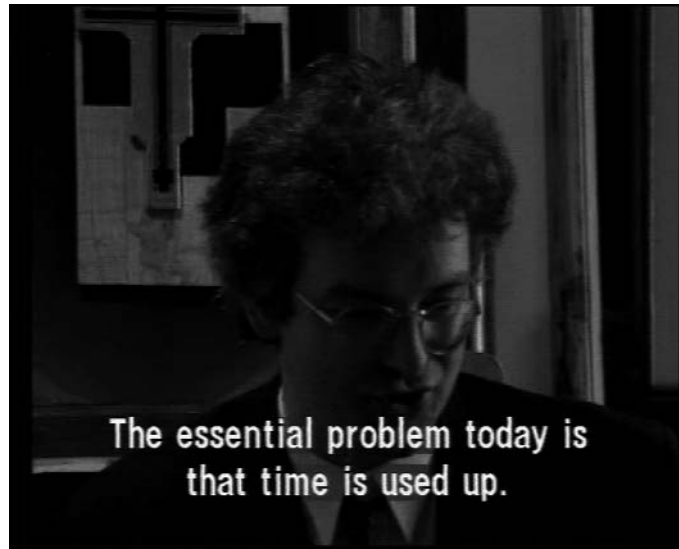
- 1 In the video *HI-RES* by Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid (Ljubljana, 2006).
- 2 A survey of visual art in Eastern Europe since World War II: Irwin, eds., *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006).

FEDERICA TIMETO

An Elsewhere within Here

In the introduction to his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha affirms that we can still use the prefix *post-*, provided we get rid of any idea of consequentiality or antithesis with regard to what supposedly precedes or is opposed to the matter at hand. In fact, he believes that the appeal to a *beyond*, which the use of *post-* suggests, makes sense when it is used to transform the present through a movement of inversion and revision, which expands this same present by making it *ex-centric*. The post-socialist subjects around which the theoretical and artistic work of Marina Gržinić revolves inhabit precisely this kind of beyond, a beyond that establishes an interstitial, differential relation with its spatial and temporal Others, rather than an oppositional or classically dialectical one.

This is what emerges, for instance, from her analysis of the post-socialist Eastern European condition, which she chooses to interpret *as* and *through* a cyberfeminist paradigm.¹ As we are told in the video *Eastern House*, a work that was realized by Gržinić and Aina Šmid in 2003 and that can reasonably be considered a sort of manifesto of Gržinić's thought, if we describe the artist solely as a cyberfeminist from Eastern Europe, the three terms of our description (i.e. feminism, cyberspace, and the geopolitical space) remain both unquestioned and unrelated, as if they were givens, and we also fail to articulate the artist's position. Quite the opposite, in fact: if we assume that »Eastern Europe can be seen as the female side in the process of sexual difference,« then we ground ourselves »in the real of cyberworld,« which allows us to escape any essential definition not only about the spaces of



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Transcentrala*,
video and video installation, 1993

the real and the virtual, but also about femininity and feminism.²

To understand what this means and how it is possible, we need to see, first of all, how these three elements are approached and reconceived in Gržinić's theory. Then we need to understand how they can be recombined so as to articulate a condition that situates a *beyond*. Finally, we have to understand how this *beyond* is worked out in terms of negotiation, rather than negation. In this context, the appeal to a *beyond*, as the postcolonial theorist Bhabha suggests, serves to transform the present through a movement of inversion and revision that expands this same present by making it *ex-centric*.

What are the prevailing ideas about Eastern Europe today? In the political as well as in the institutional, academic, and artistic fields, Eastern Europe, and therefore the Balkans, are very often constructed and perceived as a monolithic entity endowed with a set of homogeneous attributes. At the same time, however, the homogenization of Eastern Europe hides a process of fragmentation brought about by commercial, political and philanthropic approaches, with the consequence that the pre-existing civic discourses of Eastern Europe are rendered as increasingly fragile.³ Maja Ćirić, for example, when discussing the curatorial politics of three exhibitions about the Balkans that took place in the early 2000s, notes that many of the selected artists tend to play with the stereotype of the Balkan artist (a market construction in itself) in order to be integrated into the Western European art system, albeit as the exotic Other. The Balkan region, Ćirić notes, is considered to be an incomplete, obscure Other, even if it is part of Europe in every respect, and ends up representing what she calls »an externalization from within.«⁴

According to Gržinić, after the political events of 1989, Eastern Europe was lost to the West a second time, just as it was on the point of being rediscovered. Treated as a whole – a whole in which something was nonetheless lacking, i.e.

freedom and development – the region appeared as a relic, a remnant, a mute and immobile territory in search of proper articulation. As opposed to the neocapitalist, globalized and technologically evolved Western world, it was positioned on the side of »therapy,« as a passive victim to be rescued and integrated, as if it suffered from a defect that might eventually be healed.⁵ But this image was itself a normative construction that worked as a formalized frame, and as such was often appropriated from within, thereby producing a chain of truth-effects inside which post-socialist subjectivities were thought to find the instruments they needed to read and write their new social reality.⁶ A set of temporal and spatial oppositions have flourished around the idea of change and transition: as Susanne Brandtstädter writes, »‘Postsocialist countries’ have come to appear as ‘spaces of transition’ in so far as they are constituted under a new ‘regime of representation’ that locates them both in distinction to the ‘West,’ and temporally and spatially being related to it as a new ‘future’ and ‘centre.’«⁷

A regime of representation is precisely where identities are constructed and managed, and where languages of sameness and otherness, of interiority and exteriority are developed.⁸ Why, then, does Gržinić believe that Eastern Europe was lost again after the fall of the Berlin Wall? Because its »rediscovery« was a construction rather than a disclosure, the construction of a relative alterity, which was needed for the West to be able to cope with a structural, rather than accidental, lack of totality, namely, the *real* coming back in the form of *trauma*. Considered as a concept and not simply as a geographical extension, Eastern Europe, which Gržinić calls »the Matrix of Monsters« to distinguish it from the Western European »Scum of Society Matrix,« is not symmetrical to the concept of Western Europe, because it cannot be made to occupy a complementary position and, therefore, cannot be refounded as a whole; rather, the concept of Eastern Europe is similar to what Derrida would call a *specter*, and Lacan, a *not-all*.⁹

As Pheng Cheah suggests in his discussion of the ideology of the nation through the Derridean concept of *hauntology*, spectralization sets aside the ontologocentric perspective about the nation, opting for a process of a radical alter-ing and opening up of Being, which appears as never fully in itself.¹⁰ The disavowed real returning as a specter impossible to symbolize allows us to escape the ontological binarism of reality vs. illusion, as well as that of identity vs. alterity. Actually, the specter is what haunts the present as a radical but immanent difference, as that which cannot be made fully visible but is always already inscribed within.

Following Žižek's reading of the Oedipus myth via Lacan's notion of »surplus enjoyment,« Gržinić compares Eastern Europe to Oedipus: Oedipus is *plus d'homme* since, once he has fulfilled his destiny, he finds himself in the condition of a no-man and a surplus man at the same time. He has reached a sort of zero point of subjectivity, thus embodying a structural monstrosity that is impossible to refound or integrate, like the monstrosity of the cyborg who speaks from her inappropriate (residual and excremental) location. Similarly, as Gržinić says, Eastern Europe can be thought of as »*plus d'Europe orientale*«: »a surplus of Europe (as it was before the fall of the Berlin Wall: too little, or not enough, European) and no Europe.«¹¹

The new Europe, however, seems to disregard its internal surplus and goes on acting in accord with a perverse inclusive welfare capitalist-with-a-socialist-face type of social totalization, as Gržinić describes it, drawing on Henry Krips's analysis.¹² The psychoanalytic object that corresponds to the perverse type of social totalization is *the lack in the Other*. If the hysterical type of social totalization, to give just one more example, completely excludes the enemy by neutralizing his or her power, the perverse type plays at including the excluded, while at the same time maintaining its status as excluded, often provoking in the excluded a sort of fragile *mise en scène* of his or her same alterity, in order to please the Other. For example,

the European Union's policies concerning the treatment of illegal immigrants are, in this sense, perverse.¹³

The metaphysical cannibalism practiced by the Modern European Subject has always devoured the Other in its various forms: as the ethnic and racial other, as woman, or as nature. Gržinić, however, affirms that it is time to shift from the logic of the One to the logic of the Two, since counting in the logic of the One will never lead us to the Other as the Second, but only as another One.¹⁴ The Other is in the process of becoming, whereas the One simply is. That is why, for example, the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti claims that a different consideration of Europe as post-Europe could arise from the difference of the post-woman woman as becoming subject.¹⁵ It is, then, worth taking a closer look at this idea of the post-woman woman as theorized by certain contemporary feminist thinkers.

According to Braidotti, feminism traverses three (coexistent) levels of alterity, or (sexual) difference: the first is that of a difference conceived *in relation to men*, a difference that is intended, alternately, *both as lack and as excess, not yet represented or entirely unrepresentable*. The second level of alterity is where feminism, having acknowledged a radical asymmetry between men and women, looks at differences *among women*: this is the level where power relations, commonalities, and differences among women are discussed and questioned and the representation of Woman is criticized from a situated perspective. The third and final level corresponds to a post-psychoanalytic dimension, where a disjuncture between identity and conscience reveals the imaginary relation each woman establishes with her history, genealogy, and materiality: here, difference is found *inside* each woman, as the hiatus where a woman sees herself as always already *other to herself*.¹⁶

Similar to Braidotti's scheme is the distinction Teresa de Lauretis makes between three axes of difference: the negated

woman, that is, woman as object and representation; the split woman, traversed by the many interrelated differences of sex, class, race, age, and so on; and the *eccentric* woman.¹⁷ If de Lauretis agrees that to be a feminist one must be able to give an account of one's own positionality, she nonetheless believes that a situated perspective also requires a movement of disidentification and displacement that leaves behind the ideology of the Same implied in every inclusive perspective, be it that of the territory, the house, or even of feminism itself.¹⁸ The eccentric subject passes through multiple borders of exclusion and inclusion, like Bhabha's hybrid postcolonial subject, who practices negotiations and re-signifies contradictions without needing to negate them.¹⁹ It is important to note that Gržinić has frequently invoked a cultural practice intended as negotiation as a method for working from *within* a certain situation – in communist as well as post-socialist Eastern Europe – to articulate a series of alternative significations. Actually, *negotiation* is, precisely, a form of intervention that operates within a given structure, not by dismantling it completely, but by making constant readjustments.

The post-woman woman and the eccentric subject have much in common with a figuration that originates with the postcolonial feminist theorist and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha and that Gržinić often uses in her texts. Trinh (whom Gržinić has interviewed²⁰) coined the term *the inappropriate/d Other* to deal with the issue of identity and difference in relation to postcolonial women. Here, the notion of difference moves from a »pattern of sameness« to »an inconsequential process of otherness.«²¹ Intended in this way, difference therefore undermines the clear line traced to separate you and me, him and her, here and there. According to the logic of the same, Trinh writes:

the further one moves from the core the less likely one is thought to be capable of fulfilling one's role as the real self, the

real Black, Indian or Asian, the real woman. The search for an identity is, therefore, usually a search for that lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated within a process of elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake, corrupted, or Westernized.²²

On the contrary, the inappropriate/d Other, who is both inappropriate and inappropriable, both beyond and alongside, looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider.²³

The inappropriate/d Other moves the axes of difference from the between to within, creating what Trinh calls an »elsewhere within here.«²⁴

What we experience when we enter virtual reality and cyberspace is also very similar to an *elsewhere within here*. The common notion that we transcend our real limits (physical, sexual, geographical, social, etc.) and enter an entirely different dimension whenever we experience virtual reality, is in fact based on the illusion that it is possible to overcome the medium's mediation in order to reach the (presumed) reality beyond it. This illusion has been extensively discussed, for example, by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin.²⁵ As Bolter and Grusin note, the illusion that cyberspace is a space that transcends real limits and is ultimately without limits rests in turn on the idea of the transparency of space – the attributes of which comprehend immediacy and connectivity – a notion Henry Lefebvre has discussed in his seminal study, *The Production of Space*.²⁶ With regard to space, the concepts of transparency and opacity both derive from the same illusion (even if they pertain to two opposing perspectives), namely, the illusion of

the substantiality and naturalness of space, which says that space is a given, self-evident, and fully decipherable object, rather than a social production. In this kind of illusory space, knowledge, information and communication all coincide. This description fits perfectly most accounts of cyberspace, but it also empties virtual reality of complexity by drawing sharp distinctions between inside and outside, as well as between what is real and what is virtual.

In her interview with Gržinić, Trinh T. Minh-ha observes that nowadays technology is too often used to access a reality without mediation in order to pursue an aesthetics of objectivity. When this occurs, reality becomes that which is immediately visible, while the tools that are used to access it simply disappear. But the removal of boundaries, whether by rendering them invisible or blurring them, is in the end illusory, even in cyberspace. Rather, Trinh says, »it is a question of shifting [the boundaries] as soon as they tend to become ending lines.«²⁷ Here again, the issue of the inappropriate/d Other comes into play. But let us step back for a moment.

Slavoj Žižek, though he approaches the issue from a different angle, also criticizes claims for the transparency and total accessibility of cyberspace and warns us about the false antithesis of total openness/total closure that are attributed alternately to both virtual reality and reality.²⁸ He notes that informatization appears to threaten three essential boundaries: between real life and simulated life; between objective reality and our perception of it; and between our identity and our self-perception. The full accessibility of cyberspace, however, with its excessive plenitude that denies closure, far from offering infinite choices, translates into total closure insofar as it does away with the very idea of limits. Žižek goes on to say that both distance and immersion depend on a marked border, without which we would experience the psychotic dimension. In other words, cyberspace in its dominant form is not spectral enough precisely in that it disregards the thing that is purely virtual

about spectrality, namely, the non-actual effectivity that will never be *as such* and that will always escape dialectical mediation.²⁹ According to Žižek's psychoanalytic approach, then, it would be better to conceive cyberspace as the radicalization of an already built-in division of the symbolic order (speaking in Lacanian terms). Žižek finally suggests that maybe if we recognize that in cyberspace we experience the displacement of subjectivity as something internal to subjectivity itself, and not simply as a detachment from the multiplicity of possible alternative selves, we can learn to externalize, to »act out,« this void at the core of the Same at the moment we encounter the so-called Other Scene. Here, we can touch the traumatic Real in all its spectrality, traversing it without identifying with it (in this sense, the spectral means precisely the possibility of moving between fantasies). The traversing of the fantasy (*la traverse du fantasme*, in Lacan's terms) is what enables us to plunge into our fantasies while at the same time keeping a necessary (and playful) distance.

Quoting Žižek explicitly, Marina Gržinić goes further: she believes that a radical step *beyond*, into the space of the virtual or, which is the same thing, into the real of cyberspace, can help us adopt not only a *different* but also a *differential* perspective, and not only in the space of post-socialist Eastern Europe and with regard to post-socialist subjects, but also in the space of women as cyborg subjectivities. Since these »conceptual matrices« are themselves contested fields, which nonetheless try to maintain clear borders, we must adopt a situated perspective if we are to interpret and criticize them.³⁰ Here, »situated« does not necessarily mean situated geographically or locally, but rather, we might say, it means »inappropriately« *grounded* – constantly, and paradoxically, positioned *within* displacement³¹ – situated, in other words, in a space that opens up precisely at the moment when the subject is »out of joint« and space seems forever lost, at least as a direct and natural experience.

Therefore, in order to properly articulate the space of the post-socialist subject for both political and artistic purposes, we must first problematize the paradigm that sustains its construction. Gržinić firmly believes that talking about space in geometrical or even geopolitical terms no longer suffices, at least not in a context where information and communication technologies deeply influence our perception of spatial and temporal coordinates. What kind of space, then, is this »Other Space« Gržinić talks about? More to the point, how does it work? Surely, it should not be confused with the space of the Other as the reified container of substantial differences. For as we have seen, this Other Space is a space that exceeds the idea of territory, although it can sometimes appear in mappable spaces and also include geopolitical entities.³² This does not, however, make it a non-space, insofar as the Other Space »expose[s] or turn[s] to [its] advantage the fissures, gaps and lapses of the system,«³³ whereas non-spaces, like the World Wide Web in its hegemonic form, sometimes conceal the constant dynamic of reterritorialization that hides behind the appearance of an absolute deterritorialization. Nor should this Other Space be characterized as utopian (as informational space often pretends to be), for it does not establish »a relation of inverted or direct analogy with the real space of Society«³⁴ but rather substitutes a dialectical relation with a negotiable one.

Applying Scott Bukatman's notion of terminal identity, Gržinić defines the Other Space as a space in terminal condition: that is, a totally decentralized space where the binary opposition »reality/illusion« is overcome in favor of their articulation.³⁵ In the »inside-out glove situation« of zero gravity, »everything I positively am, every enunciated content I can point at and say that's me, is not I,« says Gržinić, drawing on Žižek's position.³⁶ Moreover, this is not because I am a pure negativity, but because what I am not is already (in) me. The Other Space already contemplates its constitutive inappropriateness in that it puts together field and counterfield



Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *On the Flies of the Marketplace /*
O muhah s tržnice, video, 1999

as real and virtual, sameness and otherness, original and copy, positivity and negativity. As we have seen, it also operates by a spectral logic, since it alludes to space while making the illusion of space evident.³⁷

Consequently, according to the Other logic of virtual space, a political articulation of the Otherness of women and Eastern Europe becomes possible *from within* a technological discourse. These subjectivities are located, like those of cyborgs, »in the belly of the monster,« to use Donna Haraway's expression.³⁸ They occupy a space that requires a completely different sort of geometry, one that avoids integration and recognizes that the non-unitary condition of both women and Eastern Europe is neither a deficiency nor pure negativity, but a consequence of their inappropriateness, which causes a failure in the system of the One. Actually, the inappropriate/d Other cannot fit into the taxonomy of Identity and Difference; rather, she tries to escape the strategies the One uses to subsume difference, namely, »the hierarchical domination, incorporation of parts into wholes, paternalistic and colonialist protection, antagonistic opposition, or instrumental production from resource.«³⁹

Because the *elsewhere* has always been within *here*, and not outside it as opposite to it, an alternative account of the here – *from here* – is possible, an account that gives voice to what has been evacuated and eradicated from hegemonic narratives. For Gržinić, this re-conceptualization must happen today through technology, for only through the artificiality of technological mediation can we avoid the risk of longing for lost presences and concentrate instead on how presence is constructed. Thanks to technology, and in particular, video technology, a »new economy of seeing«⁴⁰ develops, one that is based on what can be rendered visible beyond what we already see.

Notes

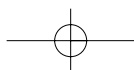
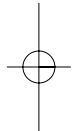
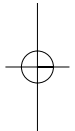
- 1 Marina Gržinić, *Spectralization of History, Spectralization of the Image, Spectralization of Europe*, Quaderns portàtils 1 (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2001), 12; online at http://www.macba.es/uploads/20060531/QP_01_Grzinic.pdf. For an elucidation of the relationship between video and theater, see Hans-Thies Lehmann's discussion of the theatrical use of media in *Postdramatic Theater*, tr. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 167–173.
- 2 Gržinić, *Spectralization of History*, 12.
- 3 See John Horvath, »Alone in the Crowd: The Politics of Cybernetic Isolation,« in Laura Lengel, ed., *Culture and Technology in the New Europe: Civic Discourse in Transformation in Post-Communist Nations* (Stamford, Conn.: Ablex Publishing Corp., 2000), 77–104.
- 4 Maja Ćirić, »Constructions of the Balkans as the Other in Contemporary Art Practices,« a paper delivered at the 8th Annual Kokkalis Program Graduate Student Workshop, Harvard University, February 2–3, 2006; online at http://www.hks.harvard.edu/kokkalis/GSW8/Ciric_paper.pdf.
- 5 Marina Gržinić, »Spectralization of Europe,« in Marina Gržinić and Adele Eisenstein, eds., *The Spectralization of Technology: From Elsewhere to Cyberfeminism and Back: Institutional Modes of the Cyberworld* (Maribor: MKC, 1999), 18.
- 6 See Susanne Brandtstädter, »Transitional Spaces: Postsocialism as a Cultural Process: Introduction,« *Critique of Anthropology* 27, no. 2 (2007), 131–145.
- 7 Ibid., 132.
- 8 Ibid., 143. As Brandtstädter points out, this notion of a »regime of representation« comes from Arturo Escobar.
- 9 Gržinić, »Spectralization of Europe,« 30–31.
- 10 »By *ontopology* we mean an axiomatics linking indissociably the ontological value of present-being [on] to its *situation*, to the stable and presentable determination of a locality, the *topos* of territory, native soil, city, body in general.« Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*:

The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International, tr. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), quoted in Pheng Cheah, »Spectral Nationality: The Living On [sur-vie] of the Postcolonial Nation in Neocolonial Globalization,« *Boundary 2*, v. 26, no. 3 (1999): 249; available online at: <http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/boundary/v026/26.3cheah.html>.

- 11 Gržinić, »Spectralization of Europe,« 21.
- 12 See Marina Gržinić, »From Transitional Postsocialist Spaces to Neoliberal Global Capitalism,« *Third Text* (London) 21, no. 5 (2007), 563–575.
- 13 »The welfare pervert wants only that the integrated subjects complete the social and civilisational demands of the Other. The subject who seeks to be integrated repeats, in a ritualised set of almost sadomasochistic relations, what the Other wants to hear. Unsurprisingly, the perversely instrumentalised subject explodes! This is described in welfare states as a betrayal of the established relationship – seen as a model of perfection – forgetting that in a perverse inclusive welfare state the will of the subject is the will of the Other.« *Ibid.*, 573.
- 14 Gržinić, »Spectralization of History,« 15.
- 15 See Rosi Braidotti, »Genere, identità e multiculturalismo in Europa,« in *Nuovi Soggetti Nomadi* (Roma: Luca Sossella, 2002), 165–201.
- 16 Rosi Braidotti, »La differenza che abbiamo attraversato,« in *Nuovi Soggetti Nomadi*, 91–127. Braidotti, by the way, is a Deleuzian materialist feminist whose thought is in some ways very distant from Gržinić's Lacanian–Žižekian approach. See Braidotti's critique of the spectral economy of subjectivity in her *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2002).
- 17 Teresa de Lauretis, *Soggetti eccentrici* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999), 115. For de Lauretis, a woman is simultaneously a psychic, corporeal, and social subjectivity.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 48.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 20 See Trinh T. Minh-ha and Marina Gržinić, »Inappropriate/d

- Artificiality« 1998, online at <http://arch.ced.berkeley.edu/people/faculty/bourdier/trinh/TTMHInterviews002.htm>.
- 21 Trinh T. Minh-ha, »Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference.« *Inscriptions*, no. 3–4 (1988), online at http://humwww.ucsc.edu/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_3-4/minh-ha.html.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Trinh and Gržinić, »Inappropriate/d Artificiality.«
- 25 See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).
- 26 See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1991).
- 27 Trinh and Gržinić, »Inappropriate/d Artificiality.«
- 28 Slavoj Žižek, »Cyberspace, or, The Unbearable Closure of Being,« in *The Plague of Fantasies* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 127–170.
- 29 Slavoj Žižek, »The Cyberspace Real« (1998), online at <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/zizek/zizek-the-cyberspace-real.html>.
- 30 See Gržinić, »Spectralization of Europe.«
- 31 See Trinh and Gržinić, »Inappropriate/d Artificiality.«
- 32 As with certain art projects that deal with topicality – see, for instance, the works of the Ljubljana-based art group Irwin, whose projects Gržinić has extensively discussed in her theoretical writings and also presented in several of the videos she made with Aina Šmid.
- 33 Trinh and Gržinić, »Inappropriate/d Artificiality.«
- 34 Michel Foucault, »Of Other Spaces,« *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986), 24.
- 35 Marina Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices: Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe* (Ljubljana: ZRC; Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2004).
- 36 Marina Gržinić, »What Space?,« paper presented at the symposium Media and Ethics of the Contemporary Critique, Helsinki, September 12–14, 1996; available online at <http://neoscenes.net/archive/me/texts/grzinic.html>.
- 37 Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices*, 17.

- 38 Donna Haraway, »The Actors are Cyborg, Nature is Coyote, and the Geography is Elsewhere: Postscript to 'Cyborgs at Large,'« in Constance Penley and Andrew Ross, eds., *Technoculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 25.
- 39 Ibid., 24.
- 40 Marina Gržinić, »Video as Civic Discourse in the Former Yugoslavia: Strategies of Visualization and the Aesthetics of Video in the New Europe,« in Lengel, ed., *Culture and Technology in the New Europe*, 208.



GRŽINIĆ AND ŠMID:

List of Works and Awards

Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death / *Ikone glamourja, odmevi smrti*, video, 1982.

The Threat of the Future / *Grožnja prihodnosti*, video, 1983.

Cindy Sherman, or, Hysteria Productions Presents a Reconstruction of Photographs by Cindy Sherman / *Cindy Sherman ali histerija produkcija predstavlja rekonstrukcijo fotografij Cindy Sherman*, video, 1984.

Moments of Decision / *Trenutki odločitve*, video, 1985.

The Axis of Life / *Os življenja*, video, 1987. Honors: recognition, Video Susreti biennial (Sarajevo); First Prize, 3rd International Video Biennial, Cankarjev Dom (Ljubljana).

At Home / *Doma*, 16-millimeter film, 1987. Honors: selected as one of the year's ten most important Yugoslav film or video productions by the Alternative Video Festival (Belgrade).

Bare Spring / *Gola pomlad*, video, 1987.

Girl with Orange / *Deklica z oranžo*, video, 1987.

Thirst / *Žed*, video, 1989.

Bilocation / *Bilokacija*, video, 1990. Honors: First Prize, Video Susreti biennial (Sarajevo).

Moscow Portraits, video and video installation, 1990.

The Sower / *Sejalec*, video and video installation, 1991.

Three Sisters / *Tri sestre*, video, 1992. Honors: First Prize, Videonale 5 (Bonn). Honors: Special Jury Award, 37th San Francisco International Film Festival (1994).

The Woman Who Constantly Talks / *Ženska, ki nenehno govori*, video, 1993. Honors: special prize for an experimental work, Balaton Television Festival (Keszthely, Hungary).

Labyrinth / *Labirint*, video and video performance, 1993. Honors: German Video Art Prize, Center for Media and Culture (Karlsruhe) and SWF (Baden-Baden); nominated for Video Dance Creation

- Award, Vidéo Danse festival (Paris); First Prize for original music composition, Il Coreografo Elettronico (Naples, 1994).
- Transcentrala**, video and video installation, 1993.
- Red Shoes / Rdeči čevljički**, video, 1994. Honors: Blue Sun award, 10th Riccione TTVV Festival (Riccione, Italy, 1995).
- Luna 10** (*The Butterfly Effect of Geography*), video and video installation, 1994. Honors: video award, 38th San Francisco International Film Festival (1995); First Prize and Best Female Artists, 1st Buenos Aires International Video Festival (1995).
- The Butterfly Story I / Zgodba o metulju I.** (*The Butterfly Effect of Geography*), video and video installation, 1995. Honors: Silver Spire Award, 39th San Francisco International Film Festival (1996).
- The Butterfly Story II: A³ – Apathy, AIDS and Antarctica / Zgodba o metulju II.: A³ – apatija, aids in Antartika** (*The Butterfly Effect of Geography*), video and video installation, 1995.
- Irwin CD-ROM, Model 2000**, computer graphic/animation, 1995.
- The Axis of Life / Os življenja**, website (<http://www.ljudmila.org/quantum.east/>), 1996.
- Post-Socialism + Retro-Avant-Garde + Irwin / Postsocializem + retroavantgarda + Irwin**, video, 1997.
- Troubles with Sex, Theory and History**, interactive CD-ROM for *Artintact 4*, produced by the Center for Art and Media (ZKM), Karlsruhe, Germany, 1997.
- D-Day / Dan D**, video, 1997.
- Stargazer / Zvezdogled**, video, 1997.
- Luna Park**, interactive video installation, produced by the ICC Biennial, Tokyo, 1997.
- On the Flies of the Marketplace / O muhah s tržnice**, video, 1999. Honors: First Prize (video), 2nd InterFilm Festival (Nuremberg, 2000).
- net.art.archive**, website (<http://www.zrc-sazu.si/net.art.archive/>) and multimedia interactive installation, 1999.
- SILENCE SILENCE SILENCE**, video, 2001.
- Eastern House / Vzhodna hiša**, video, 2003.
- Tester**, video, 2005.
- HI-RES**, video, 2006.
- Obsession / Obsedenost**, video, 2008.

Biographies

MARINA GRŽINIĆ AND AINA ŠMID

Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid started making video art together in 1982, in the midst of Ljubljana's vibrant alternative punk scene (before they collaborated on videos, they had a punk band). Since then they have made more than forty video art projects, as well as a short 16-millimeter film, an interactive CD-ROM, and numerous video and media installations. They have also directed documentaries and productions for television. Their videos and video installations have been shown at more than one hundred video and film festivals around the world, winning major awards in Sarajevo (1991), Bonn (1992), San Francisco (1994, 1995, and 1996), Buenos Aires (1995), and Nuremberg (2000), among others. In 2003, a retrospective of their work was presented at the International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen, Germany, and in 2005, a selection of their videos was released on DVD by the Austrian new-media art publisher Index (www.index-dvd.at). In 2006, a monograph on Gržinić and Šmid's video art appeared in Slovene: *Trenutki odločitve: Performativno, politično in tehnološko: Umetniški video, filmska in interaktivna večmedijska dela Marine Gržinić in Aine Šmid* [Moments of decision: The performative, political, and technological: The art video, film and interactive multimedia works of Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid], edited by Marina Gržinić and Tanja Velagić (Ljubljana: Društvo ZAK, 2006). The artists also have a website: <http://www.grzinic-smid.si/>.

MARINA GRŽINIĆ, born in Rijeka, Croatia, in 1958, holds a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Ljubljana. She is a professor of post-conceptual art practices at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, as well as a research fellow at the Institute of Philosophy of the Scientific Research Center of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts in Ljubljana. She is a well-known media theorist and art critic. Her most recent book is *Re-Politicizing Art, Theory, Representation and New Media Technology* (Vienna: Schöbebrügge Editor, 2008). Also a curator, she organized ten special programs for the 2000 International Short Film Festival in

Oberhausen, under the title »Short Video Films from Eastern Europe, 1950–2000: Sex, Rock 'n' Roll, and History.« She lives in Ljubljana.

AINA ŠMID, born in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 1957, is a professor of art history, as well as a contributing editor at an interior design magazine in Ljubljana.

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

DIANE AMIEL received her doctoral degree from the University of Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne with a dissertation on the aesthetics of video art in the Balkans from 1985 to the present. She lives and works in Paris and is active as a writer and curator.

GULSEN BAL is a visual artist and theoretician. Her work focuses on the differential structures in representational boundaries, in particular translocal and transnational border phenomena in cultural geography. She is the director and the head of development for projects and programs at Open Space – Zentrum für Kunst Projekte in Vienna. She has exhibited her work, curated shows, published articles, and given talks in Turkey, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere in Europe.

GIORGIO BERTELLINI is an assistant professor in the film and visual studies program and in the department of Romance languages and literatures at the University of Michigan. He is the author of the book *Emir Kusturica* (Milan: Il Castoro, 1996), and edited a special issue on early Italian cinema for the journal *Film History* (2000), soon to be published as a book of essays, as well as the book *The Cinema of Italy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004). He has also published articles on race and film spectatorship in urban America, international silent film, and Italian cinema.

RAWLEY GRAU is a translator and English-language editor. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland, he has been living in Ljubljana since 2001. His recent translations from Slovene include *The Hidden Handshake: National*

Identity and Europe in the Post-Communist World by Aleš Debeljak (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield, 2004), the novel *The Succubus* by Vlado Žabot (Ljubljana: Slovene Writers' Association, 2007), and the short-fiction collection *Family Parables* by Boris Pintar (forthcoming). He was also a language editor for the books *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, edited by Irwin (London: Afterall, 2006), and *Mind the Map!: History Is Not Given*, edited by Marina Gržinić, Günther Heeg, and Veronika Darian (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006).

MARIA KLONARIS and **KATERINA THOMADAKI** are media artists, filmmakers, and theorists. Originally from Greece, they have been based in Paris since 1975. Leading figures in French experimental film since the late seventies, they introduced the notion »cinema of the body« (*cinéma corporel*), and in line with this idea create subversive works on the body, female and androgynous identity, sexuality, and the unconscious. They work not only in film and video, but also in multimedia installation, performance, photography, and sound art. They have written numerous texts, and their work has been showcased internationally in museums, galleries, film festivals and art cinemas. A book about their films was recently published in France: *Klonaris/Thomadaki: Le cinéma corporel*, edited by Cécile Chich (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006). Katerina Thomadaki is also an associate professor in the visual arts department at the University of Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne.

BIRGIT LANGENBERGER, Ph.D., is a Vienna-based philosopher, cultural and political theorist, and translator. Her work focuses on the interface between the philosophy of law and public culture and art.

MARTA POPIVODA is a video artist and the program coordinator of TkH (Walking Theory), a theoretical-artistic platform in Belgrade; she is also one of the editors of the *TkH* journal and the website www.tkh-generator.net. She has taken part in several exhibitions of photography, installations, and video works, and makes videos for the theater and the opera. She has also published a number of theoretical texts and reviews. She is currently studying film and television directing at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts at the University of the Arts in Belgrade.

MOJCA PUNCER holds a doctoral degree in philosophy. She is a research assistant in aesthetics and the philosophy of art and culture at the University of Maribor in Slovenia, and a member of the Slovene Society of Aesthetics and the International Association for Aesthetics. She is also a member of the Publishing Society ZAK and is on the editorial board of the performing arts journal *Maska*. She works as a freelance cultural educator, art critic, and curator.

WALTER SEIDL is a curator, art critic, and artist based in Vienna. He writes for a number of international art magazines, such as *Camera Austria*, *contemporary*, *springerin*, and *Život umjetnosti*. He has curated projects in Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hong Kong, and the United States. Since 2004, he has been the curator for the art collection of the Erste Bank Group.

MIŠKO ŠUVAKOVIĆ was one of the co-founders of Group 143, a conceptual art group that operated from 1975 to 1980. He also co-founded the informal theoretical and artistic institute Community for Space Investigation (1982–1989). He is a member of the theoretical platform TkH (Walking Theory). He is a professor of aesthetics and art theory at the Faculty of Music at the University of the Arts in Belgrade, and also teaches the theory of art and culture in the university's interdisciplinary studies program. He has published extensively, including, more recently, *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, edited with Dubravka Djurić (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti* [A glossary of contemporary art] (Zagreb: Horetzky, 2005), and *Konceptualna umetnost* [Conceptual art] (Novi Sad: MSUV, 2007).

FEDERICA TIMETO is a postgraduate doctoral student in the computing, communications, and electronics program of the Planetary Collegium at the University of Plymouth (Milan Node). She lives in Palermo, Italy, where she is a lecturer in the phenomenology of contemporary art. She has written extensively on feminist aesthetics, feminist art, and visual and cultural studies, and her essays have appeared in such magazines as

Cyberzone, *Duellanti*, and the online magazine *Technèdonne*. She is the author of »L'arte al femminile: Percorsi e strategie del femminismo nelle arti visive,« published in *Studi Culturali* 2 (2005).

TANJA VELAGIĆ is a philosopher and the editor of the Ljubljana-based journal *Borec* (founded in 1948) as well as the book series of the Publishing Society ZAK (www.drustvo-zak.si). She is also a translator in the humanities, the social sciences, and contemporary art. Among her most recent translations are, from German into Slovene, *We Survived and We Remember: Slovene Internees in the Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp* by Silvija Kavčič (Ljubljana: Društvo ZAK, 2008), and, from English, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Ljubljana: Emanat, 2007) and the essay collection *Conceptual Artists and the Power of their Art Works for the Present*, edited by Marina Gržinić and Alenka Domjan (Celje: Zavod Celeia – Center sodobnih umetnosti, 2007).

YVONNE VOLKART is a freelance writer and curator. She teaches art theory at the Academy of Art and Design of the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland. In 2006 her book on media art, *Fluide Subjekte: Anpassung und Widerspenstigkeit in der Medienkunst* [Fluid subjects: Accommodation and recalcitrance in media art] was published by Transcript. In 2007 and 2008, she co-curated, with Sabine Himmelsbach and Karin Ohlenschläger, the exhibition *Ecomedia: Ecological Strategies in Today's Art* at the Edith Russ Site for Media Art (Oldenburg, Germany) and [plug.in] (Basel).

ANA VUJANOVIĆ is a freelance theoretician, lecturer, organizer, writer, and dramaturge in the fields of contemporary performing arts and contemporary culture. She holds a doctoral degree in theater studies from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts at the University of the Arts in Belgrade. She is a regular contributor to the TkH (Walking Theory) platform for theory and practice in the performing arts (www.tkh-generator.net), and is very involved with the independent art and performance scenes in Belgrade, the region, and Europe. She is a lecturer at the University of the Arts in Belgrade.

