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IN THE AFTERSHOCK OF *INSURGENT FLOWS. TRANS*DECOLONIAL AND BLACK MARXIST FUTURES*

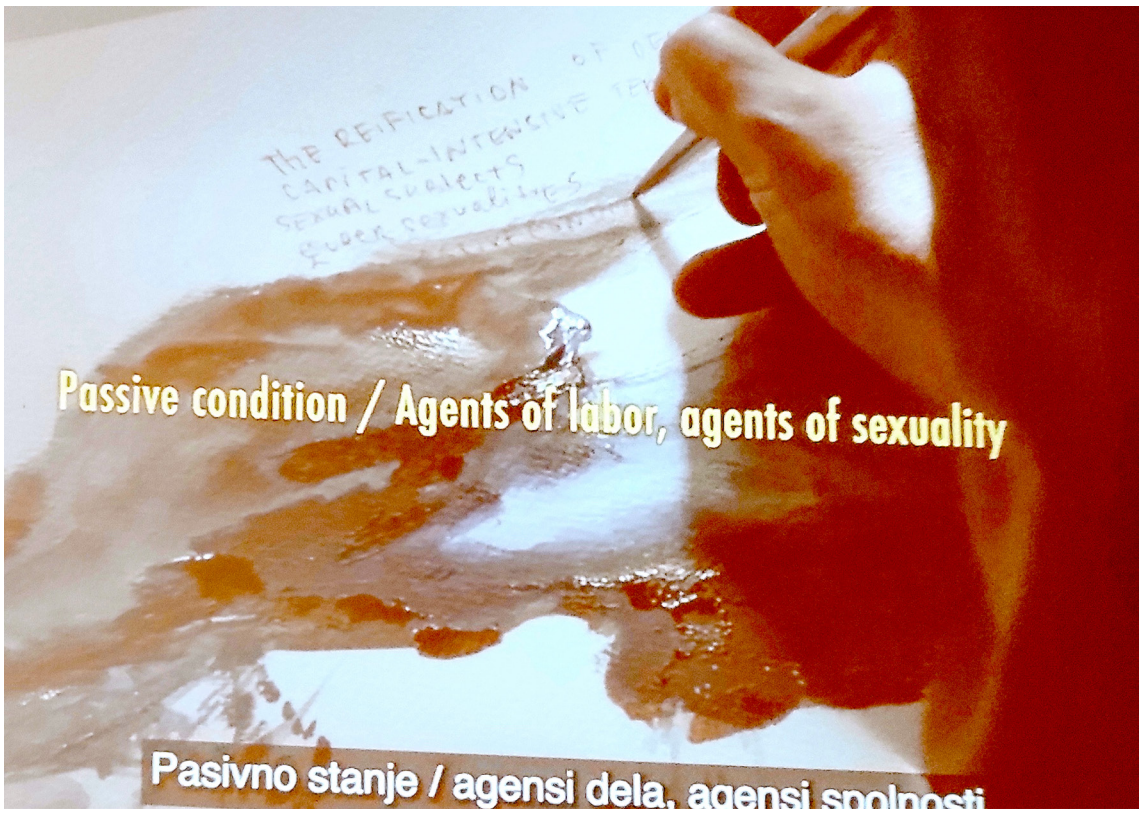
In 2022, Tjaša Kancler and Marina Gržinić started working on a documentary videofilm on the themes of power, extractivism, theory, activism, and digital technology entitled *Insurgent Flows. Trans*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures*. The 90-minute-long videofilm was a central work in the Gdansk exhibition in 2024 co-curated by Łukasz Guzek and Mara Ambrožič Verdeber and conceived and realized as a display by myself and Jovita Pristovšek.

For Insurgent Flows, we intensively explored and engaged Black Marxist, feminist, and trans* thinking. We realized that Black thought, especially Afro-pessimism, brings with it significant political and esthetical shifts. Historically, Marxism has often been marginalized, but its critique of capitalism and the capitalist mode of reproduction - which is closely tied to colonialism and violence in the fundamental relations between capital and labor - remains central. These ideas are not new or recently discovered by us; they have a long and complex history. This analysis forms the basis for much of our work.

The film's structure is based on eight positions that we consider seminal to our topic, and we prepared a detailed list of questions for each position; each interview lasted about an hour. We published them in their entirety in a book in 2023.[1] The interviews were all conducted via Zoom. We re-edited the film, supplementing the thoughts expressed with archive material and images, texts, and reflections. At that point, Jovita Pristovšek was crucial to the editing and subsequent post-production.

The Basics of *Insurgent Flows. Trans*Decolonial and Black Marxist Futures*

Immediately upon its completion in 2023, I labelled the video film *Insurgent Flows* a "*radical documentary complex*" - as a parallel to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's seminal coinage, which speaks of the prison-industrial complex that is at the center of this film.



Marina Gržinić, Tjaša Kancler, Jovita Pristovšek, *Insurgent Flows*, 2023. Still from a video.
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I explored the relationship between this documentary complex and the prison system, delving deeper into these themes, which address the concept of necropolitics, as Achille Mbembe has put it.[2] While we often claim to live in an age of biopolitics, we are deep-rooted in necropolitics - a system in which death takes center stage on a large scale. Millions of people are rendered superfluous, their deaths becoming a source of profit that far exceeds the value of their lives. This also applies to cases in which entire states are doomed.

The film incorporates selected documents that form an evolving archive. A large part of our interest is in necropolitics - not simply death, because everyone will die at some point, but how we die. It's not about the inevitability of death, but about its form. There is a profound difference in the way, the mode, and the why of dying. We are deeply interested in this form of death. It is in this context that the concept of *assemblage* comes into play.[3] While there is a lot of talk about collage, theorists like Jasbir Puar have turned to the discussion of assemblages - complex, layered structures - and the idea of radicalizing them. This is related to the idea of making a film that exposes the violence of necrocapitalism. In the work, we make connections to resistance against necropolitical conditions. After all, no one supports necropolitics - no one wants to die or to be controlled by others.

David Marriott summarizes this well when he speaks of the "death that can never die."[4] This sums up the perpetual, relentless violence of

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capitalism that sustains necropolitical systems (or vice versa). This persistence - the refusal to allow the violence to hide - defines much of what we examine.

White supremacy is at the center of this critique. White supremacy, or the regime of whiteness, goes beyond skin color -it is a system of thought, behavior, and life. It manifests as a pervasive and violent structure that excludes others based on a set of differences that are rooted in the violent construction of race, color, our way of life, whiteness as normativity. These 'others' who are only 'different' because of this regime, are forced to come to terms with the toxic demands of this regime.

We incorporated in the video reflections on the state of refugees in Europe, critically examining 'Fortress Europe.' This term reflects Europe as a tightly controlled and highly sophisticated system of violent relations: mass deportations, severe challenges for those outside Europe who are deemed irrelevant, and deep internal disparities. Even within Europe, divisions are maintained or exacerbated based on geopolitical interests.

The Eight Positions Distinguished in the Film

Ruth Wilson Gilmore is the co-founder of numerous grassroots organizations, including the California Prison Moratorium Project, Critical Resistance, and the Central California Environmental Justice Network. Author of the award-winning book *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (UC Press). Gilmore, a specialist in carceral politics, addresses key issues in the U.S.

Basha Changuerra is an anti-racist and Afro-feminist activist. She is one of the promoters of the Afrofeminist social organization AfroFem Koop and a member of CNAACAT (Black, African and Afro-descendant Community of Catalonia). Changuerra, who comes from the Spanish diaspora, is politically active and critically examines the dynamics of power from this perspective.

Bogdan Popa is a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Literature and Cultural Studies, Transylvania University of Brașov. His research focuses on the history of sexuality, gender and affect. Popa, from Romania, explores how capitalism has evolved into a vampiric structure - literally sucking the lifeblood from the so-called 'disposed bodies,' those deemed irrelevant to capitalism, and even from the working class itself, with shameless disregard.

Aigul Hakimova is an activist and community organizer. Hakimova lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and has been involved in numerous self-organized movements in the field of migration and autonomous spaces since 2002. In recent years, she has focused on issues of political organization, resistance, and the commons. Hakimova reflects Belarusian and Russian perspectives from Slovenia, where I come from.

Slovenia is a deeply toxic country in terms of its violent relations with people from other parts of the former Yugoslavia. 'The Erased' (Slovenian: *Izbrisani*) is the term used in the media for people who were left without legal status after the country declared independence in 1991. Following the declaration of independence of Slovenia, some 30,000 people were stripped of their legal status overnight. Their documents were taken away, rendering them illegal. These people were left in a zombie-like state - without money, rights, or recognition.

'The Erased' are mainly people from other former Yugoslav republics who lived in Slovenia. They are mostly of non-Slovenian or mixed ethnic origin and include a significant number of members of the Roma communities. Some of 'the erased' were born in Slovenia but had remained citizens other republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia due to their parents' ex-Yugoslav citizenship and place of birth.

Others had moved to Slovenia from other parts of Yugoslavia before the country's dissolution and remained there after 1991.

A juxtaposition of the thoughts of Aigul Hakimova and **Piro Rexhepi** shows how much the politics in the radical documentary complex of *Insurgent Flows* is an aesthetics of collapse. It is not a confrontation, but a dialectical relationship between thesis and antithesis. Hakimova calls for the right to statehood or freedom of movement. Rexhepi shows that in this respect, Kosovo also plays a decisive role in the new Europe, Fortress Europe, which plans to expand its borders. Kosovo was an important chapter in the history of the former Yugoslavia, especially given the immense violence perpetrated by Serbia against Kosovo and the genocide in Srebrenica. Kosovo was once a symbol of hope. However, the current situation is worrying: today Kosovo has become an outpost of Denmark, which outsources refugees and criminals there. Kosovo, in turn, is dependent on financial support from Denmark in order to survive. We see similar parallels in the relationship between Italy and Albania. These dynamics reveal the broader questions about Europe's role and responsibility.

Danijela Almesberger co-ordinator at the Lesbian Organization Rijeka - LORI. LORI was founded on 19 October 2000. The goal of the organization is informing the public and raising awareness to support the acceptance of LGBTIQ+ persons, to eradicate prejudices and homo/bi/transphobia, and to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as well as to achieve true equality before the law. Almesberger is a pivotal figure within the LGBT community in Croatia - a region, along with Serbia, marked by extreme toxicity, both toward one another and toward LGBT individuals. In Serbia, for example, the Pride parade has been a site of violent confrontations, with participants risking their lives.

Nat Raha is a poet, and queer/trans* activist-scholar, based in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her research addresses sexuality and gender, critical theory and Marxism, and contemporary poetry and poetics through creative and critical methods. She is a postdoctoral researcher on the *Life Support: Forms of Care in Art and Activism* project at the University of St Andrews. In 2018, she completed her PhD thesis "Queer Capital: Marxism in queer theory and post-1950 poetics" at the University of Sussex. Nat Raha highlights that a "gendered, racialised division of labour within white, patriarchal capitalist society reproduces the feminized and racialised character of this work across the supposed 'divide' of the Global North and Global South, where women and feminized workers from the Global South (that is, workers of colour) are often responsible for the social reproduction of bodies in or from the Global North. Such work has also highlighted that waged reproductive labour makes up a significant portion of GDP in Western economies."[5]

Her current research also focuses on radical transfeminism, race in UK poetry and poetics, and queer and trans print cultures. She is the author of three collections and numerous pamphlets of poetry – her third book, *Of Sirens, Body & Faultlines*, was published by Boiler House Press in November 2018. Some of these themes are represented in the film.

Finally, **Ramón Grosfoguel** is a full Professor of Chicano/Latino Studies in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkley. He is internationally recognized for his work on the decolonization of knowledge and power as well as for his work in international migration and the political economy of the world system. Grosfoguel is the author of numerous articles and books, among others, *Colonial Subjects. Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (University of California Press), *Unsettling Postcoloniality: Coloniality, Transmodernity and Border Thinking* (Duke University Press), and co-editor of the journal *Tabula Rasa*.

Grosfoguel is one of the most renowned decolonial theorists. His work connects Black thought with decolonial perspectives, which originated from Latin American intellectuals and

activists in the U.S. These perspectives critically revisit how capitalism operates, exposing the 'colonial matrix of power.' This matrix reveals coloniality not as a historical relic but as a recurring and evolving structure embedded in modern systems of power.

This is Europe

Navigating through, along, and being subjected to capitalism requires an understanding of a few conceptual links. Colonialism serves as a prime example: you take everything for centuries, build the foundation of capitalism, and then wonder why the people you exploited come to you. Extractivism seems to know no shame. Extractivism is also the act of extracting knowledge. Under the white regime, this means appropriating everything - archives, materials and resources - and then constantly reinventing oneself by appropriating from those racialized as the 'others.' This is not just true in the East or the West but also in the global system, where today's capitalism is all about extraction.

Ruth Wilson-Williams often talks about this new form of capitalism, racial capitalism. Her ideas are closely linked to the work of Cedric Robinson.His monumental book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) has produced much of the vocabulary we use to think about emancipation today. No other work has contributed so much in this regard. Cedric Robinson's concept of racial capitalism describes a system that is unfolding before our eyes today. Linked to this is the urgent task of dismantling the prison industrial complex that continues to expand around the world.

Racialization - a persistent mechanism where race is instrumentalized. It's more than just racism; it's a continuous cycle of violence, subtle yet pervasive. The forms of this violence evolve, so much so that people can believe they are anti-racist, yet when they speak, their words reveal the opposite.

Marginalization is another key aspect, particularly pronounced in the former Eastern European countries. It targets not only LGBT communities but also class-based groups, with Roma people often viewed as the 'zero factor' in this equation. Then there's the selection of bodies: every country identifies a specific enemy, positioning them as the primary 'other.'

In the former Eastern Europe territory and generally in capitalism and even more in necrocapitalism, there is always a need to define an 'other.' In this case, the enemy became the working class, which was openly despised. The working class in Slovenia largely consisted of people from poor Bosnian regions and areas like Kosovo. This dynamic worked as a form of cleansing, reinforcing the idea of the nation as 'pure' while portraying everyone else as a problem. The genocide in Srebrenica, and even Rwanda - each of these represents other manifestations of necropolitics.

LGBT communities, especially trans individuals, hold a unique position within this discourse. The question arises: *Who is the other?* No one is born as the other; it's a constructed identity, shaped through the racialization and perpetuation of otherness. This process is part of the vocabulary we seek to address, particularly in Slovenia, where Southerners are treated as the other, and deemed less valuable. The working class also faced significant marginalization during Slovenia's formation as a nation-state.

Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid

Some questions of aesthetics, politics, and technology are drawn from videos that were not part of the exhibition, works as *Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death* (1982), *Bilocation* (1990), and *Three Sisters* (1992). They serve as historical artifacts, reflecting our exploration of Europe as a spectral entity - a concept that lacks a foundation.

Aina Šmid and I have been working with video as an experimental political fictional and documentary form since 1982, and we celebrated our 40th anniversary of collaboration in 2022. We have collaborated on more than 40 video art projects, made a 16mm short film, and created numerous video and media installations; we have independently directed several video documentaries and television productions.

Historically, we began with socialism and its intersections with global movements. This perspective, of course, spans the last 40 years of our work. The Erased People in Slovenia in 1992, the genocide in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, the turbo-fascist post-socialist processes in Serbia (which never ended), and the poisonous hyper-nationalism in Croatia (much alive and strong) are all reflected in our video works. These events occurred in a broader context of escalating hostility towards LGBTQI+ people, alongside a resurgence of hatred against Roma, Muslims, and other racialized communities.

The Waves of Restless Violence have Their Roots in Ethnic Nationalism and Post-socialist Decay

The empty rhetoric of we from the former Eastern Europe being 'colonized,' often invoked in nationalist discourse in the region, stands in stark contrast to the realities of our complicity in imperial ambitions and racist escalation against those produced as the Other. This rhetoric often draws on narratives from the Second World War and portrays Eastern Europe as a victim of external colonization, while conveniently erasing our proper history of oppression, including the pervasive violence against Roma people, and refugees, and the antisemitism that has been shaped for centuries. This selective memory-invoking victimhood while obscuring guilt - has allowed harmful ideologies to persist.

It perpetuates the cycle of discrimination and denies the ongoing struggles of marginalized communities, both historically and in contemporary society. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to dismantling the legacies of oppression that continue to divide and damage societies in the post-Yugoslav space.

Sex and Rock 'n' Roll

There is a long story of the 40 years of collaboration between Aina Šmid and I which began in 1982. This story would require a patient documentary timeline, which is in a way a fiction. After all, how can you summarize 40 years of work?

I am focusing on creating a short, rough contextualization of these years that situates the most recent work, *Insurgent Flows*.

The revival of video art in the 1980s in Slovenia - its second, political birth - did not take place outside the ideological, political, and aesthetic framework of socialism. Instead, video artists like myself adopted this framework as the basic parameters within which we produced and reflected on video and contemporary art in innovative ways. In the 'leaden period' of the late 1970s, Slovenian film production was too sluggish to engage with or represent the major aesthetic and political issues of the time. As a result, video art took on this critical role.

If the political dimension in Slovenian film had faded in the 1970s, it was revived in the 1980s by the new political video art. The first work shaped by the conceptual horizons of the 1980s - steeped in underground ideology and politics - was *Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death*, a video created by Šmid and I in 1982 while working as part of the group Borders of Control No. 4 in Ljubljana, Slovenia, in the former-Yugoslavia.

In this video, the phantasmic world of a woman, a fashion model (played by Marina Gržinić), is contrasted with her friend (played by Aina Šmid), whose (double) sex is fully revealed at the end when a phallus becomes visible between

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her legs. Throughout the video, the model appears at least as a transvestite, seamlessly changing gender through speech. However, this transformation is accompanied by a neurotic tic: She repeatedly raises her hand in front of her face. This archetypal gesture, which is both comic and tragic, creates a distance between the body and the speech act and emphasizes our dual nature - the difference between what we are and what we say. This neurotic tic also leads to additional distortions in the video's setting - a private apartment - and reflects the deep disorientation in the main character's life. The tic interrupts the narrative flow, which is already characterized by painful memories, as both characters talk about their childhood, their school days, and their early masturbation experiences.

The visual narrative shows the fashion model confronting her own photographs and slides. She re-enacts the poses and situations depicted in these images 'live' for the audience in front of the video camera, creating a voyeuristic dynamic akin to a peep show. As she performs her poses, the soundtrack plays *The Model*, written by Kraftwerk and performed by Snakefinger. Through this repetition and posturing for the camera, the video deliberately references the aesthetics of the German and American avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the works of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Rosa von Praunheim, and Andy Warhol.

The reenactments are enhanced by the interplay of light from the slide projector, artificial lighting, and close-ups of faces, transforming the video into a conscious exploration of the politics of fe/male desire.

Back then in Socialism, we studied Fassbinder and Rosa von Praunheim, and then we asked ourselves: What can we do from the perspective of socialism?

We were always told that socialism was a bad copy of the West, so we said: If we are a bad copy, then we should embrace the idea of being copies. After all, we couldn't be the original, but we soon realized that the original is a very limiting concept. If you are the original, you have to constantly maintain that originality. But if you are a copy, you can free yourself from these constraints. You are not limited to maintaining the original. You can be rough, insurgent, and disruptive - exactly what a 'copy' allows. This perspective explains why we have never created 'originals' in our work, but have instead focused on the production of copies, stereotypes, prototypes and archetypes. The copy serves as a metaphor for what civilization has done to the institution of art, the body and pleasure. Through this lens, we can understand the copy as an expression of excessive pleasure.

The April Meetings (festival of expanded media; later Video Meetings) were founded in 1972 on the occasion of April 4, Students' Day, in Belgrade and on the day of the opening of the Student Cultural Center. Characteristic of the April Meetings, which took place between 1972 and 1977, was an interdisciplinary artistic program that was conceived in the spirit of the time and aimed to overcome the boundaries between art forms (video, performance, photography). In the 1980s we traveled to Belgrade and presented our first VHS video artwork *Icons of Glamour, Echoes of Death*. The reaction was overwhelming -we got a lot of attention. The idea of using VHS, normally associated with home entertainment, for artistic video was seen as provocative and repulsive at once. This publicity had a domino effect and influenced the opportunities we were given. We were also attacked that this was not video art, but pornography. The traditions that came from the academies of fine arts in former Yugoslavia were all connected to research and adjustments of color, long exposure, and a simulation of the aesthetics of the visual arts genre in video. Our work was a bastard threshold, punk, mass-media orientated, political, and non-binary.

Technology plays a crucial role in the videos we create because it reflects the history of technological development. Łukasz Guzek has highlighted this brilliantly in many of his summaries of our work. We started with VHS

tapes, which were originally used in the West for home pornography. We repurposed this medium for art. We didn't have computers back then, so we worked with what was available to us. We photographed images, made slides, and used slide projectors for our first media installations. I remember working with Aina Šmid in 1982, when we used a slide projector for an installation in which the images ran continuously - long before PowerPoint or similar tools existed.

Technology Plays a Crucial Role

Slovenia provided an interesting context at the time. Under socialism, every television station was obliged to produce original cultural content. This opened up opportunities as experimental traditions found their way into state institutions. A visionary figure in Slovenian television who represented this tradition approached us and asked: Could you make a video for us?

Technology has played a crucial role, not only in the way we work but also in reshaping the relationships between practices, including scientific disciplines, which have taken on completely new dimensions. This change has given rise to the concept of the 'radical image' As I have argued in many writings, not every image is inherently political, but its potential for political meaning lies in its radicality.[6]

We could access technology even though it was not widely available. The equipment was there, but no one was using it. They approached us with an offer: Maybe you could make a video for us. We can lend you a camera and a cameraman - maybe for a day, for eight hours. That was the usual working day for TV people, and the same applied to editing: You'll have about five hours for editing - they said - including a break.

From there, we developed a new methodology with Aina Šmid that focused on how we could maximize production within the confines of five to eight hours. We had none of the technology in hand, no money, no practice, just film theory, the knowledge of avant-garde film productions, hours and hours of watching all kinds of films, and our punk and subculture contexts. It was fascinating to see how technology pushed us to be innovative. We developed different approaches to meet the constraints we faced before the arrival of computers, which revolutionized everything. Suddenly the process became easier, although the financial challenges remained - no one wanted to fund artistic experimental video.

Paul Virilio[7] foresaw that all technological advances, including video, television, radio, and computers ultimately have military origins. Even tools such as the photographic camera or Polaroids have their roots in military development. This connection became clear when reading Achille Mbembe,[8] the act of recalibrating - whether with a sniper rifle or within a technological framework - reflects this military ancestry.

Art, including abstract art, must deal with the social and political - it is the contour that shapes the work. Today, abstract images are often seen as serene and peaceful. People claim that they are tired of politics and do not want to see it reflected in art. Yet abstract images are a response to the abstraction that comes with the financialization of capitalism. Just as capitalism functions through abstraction, these images reflect, reproduce, and repeat its mechanisms - precisely and systematically.

I have stated in the past that not every image is political, but they can become political to the extent that they are radical. This radicality is always shaped by the social and political context because every aesthetic practice has to respond to these forces. You could say: Yeah, yeah, I'm just making art. But the truth is that art has to maintain a relationship with the social and the political. These dynamics form the contours that shape artistic expression, even in 'pure' abstraction.

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The 1990s

In the early 1990s, the development of our video art was closely interwoven with the conflicts and wars in the Balkans. This period was elaborated with the videos *Bilocation* (1990), *The Sower* (1991), *Three Sisters* (1992), *Labyrinth* (1993), and *Luna 10* (1994).

The video medium was significant in the 1990s because Slovenian films at that time showed little interest in dealing with the war and its consequences. Experimental cinema was almost non-existent, so video played a decisive role. After the wars in the 1990s, we dealt intensively with topics such as the genocide in Srebrenica.

The links between technology, the politics of the body, history, and video theory are particularly clear in *Bilocation (1990)*. The title itself refers to the concept of a body that exists simultaneously in two different places. This idea of being in two or more places at the same time - be it war, history, or revolution - or of merging two seemingly disparate levels of meaning, such as history and the (political) body in the present, perfectly encapsulates a fundamental process in video art.

In *Bilocation*, we used documentary material filmed by Slovenian television during the unrest in Kosovo in 1989. By chance, one of our friends who worked for TV Slovenia (then Television Ljubljana) was sent to Kosovo. He shared the footage he had recorded with us, enabling us to create the work. However, this piece was never shown in Slovenia. It was simply not possible; there was no platform or context in which it could be shown. The footage showed the Albanian majority population rising with their bare hands against the Yugoslav People's Army - essentially the Serbian army - who fought back with tanks and tear gas. This documentary material, which had not been broadcast on Slovenian television during the crisis, was juxtaposed with the fictional world of our synthetic video images. In Slovenia, even Radio Student, an independent radio station, took an interest and traveled to Kosovo to document the events.

In the 1990s, we produced videos for Slovenian television, which changed its name after Slovenia declared its independence and left the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (in June 25, 1991). In a referendum on December 23, 1990, 88.2% of Slovenian voters voted for independence. TV Slovenia allowed us to use blue-key technology, which was groundbreaking at the time because previously video film had consisted of putting one image next to another, but with blue-key technology - a hallmark of video - we were able to create entire narratives in a single frame. The documentary footage was metaphorically 'encrusted' onto the body of a classical ballerina, Mateja Rebolj. The images were inserted into her eye, intestines, and other parts of her body, transforming her into a vessel bearing the visual traces of the former Yugoslavia. These are images etched into a collective body in which memories intertwine the psychotic and the erotic.

In *Bilocation*, the ballerina's body was prepared - embalmed and adorned - for a socialist parade or perhaps for execution before being led to the scaffold. The atmosphere suggests that each parade not only generates excitement but also culminates in the destruction of a body - a body prepared as a sacrificial offering. Dressing for parades in this context becomes an act of admiration for a body destined to be consumed by desire.

This video presentation sheds light on visual body rituals in East and West. However, it does not attempt to rework the body of history but rather simulates the political and emotional coordinates of the body. The gendered body fights amnesia and shifts time by deepening our understanding of memory and history beyond the boundaries of the video medium.

The way the body is presented in *Bilocation* underscores a fundamental aspect of video art: the body becomes nothing other than video resolution. The real is not something that is hidden beneath the shimmering surface of reality, but something that must be actively constructed.

Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Bilocation*, 1990. Still from a video. Copyright Gržinić, Šmid

Bilocation was also a concept related to what was highlighted in the 1990s by Sandra Lischi.[9] She writes, "The electronic image allows for and facilitates the expansion of cinema towards a new way of portraying and narrating: its natural habitat is metamorphosis; its actor is the image itself in continual transformation and proliferation; *its mise-en-scène* is *mise-en-page*, wrote Pascal Bonitzer in 1982."[10]

This reference to Bonitzer emerged early on in our research into the distinction between film and electronic images. Bonitzer described video as the juxtaposition of 'pages' that seem to be cut with a small pair of scissors. There was an ongoing debate about the meaning of these 'scissors,' because in our view they should not only be interpreted as tools for creating tactile effects in video, but we argued for the tactics and politics of the medium of video. The seams created by juxtaposing and cutting video 'pages' mean much more than just the surface structure of these electronic images: The video seam, the suture - the point of contact where two or more images or 'pages' intersect - is not a neutral overlap of empty scenes. On the contrary, this seam is often a place of excess, metaphorically marked as a bloodstain. Whether the cut-out is executed with stylistic elegance is irrelevant. The seam is not just an aesthetic device but, in Lacanian terms, a structural stain - a break or flaw that no amount of precise 'scissors' can repair or completely smooth out.

Unlike film, video lacks depth. Nevertheless, its 'pages' can be imbued with meaning,

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Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Three Sisters*, 1992. Still from a video. Copyright Gržinić, Šmid

even blood. In this respect, our video work Three Sisters in the 1990s was particularly significant. *Three Sisters* (1992), a reinterpretation of Chekhov's classic play (written in 1900), reflects a completely different political and artistic climate. In response, we have engaged in reconstruction, often referring to significant figures and movements of the avant-garde. The Russian avant-garde, for example, especially Lyubov Popova and her colleagues, was an important inspiration. *Three Sisters* also explores the overlaps between Chekhov and Eisenstein, particularly through references to *Battleship Potemkin*, and between Chekhov and Brian De Palma, particularly in relation to *The Untouchables*.

In its effort to expose the political significance of the Balkan genocide (that we anticipated in 1993, and was executed in Srebrenica in 1995), and its connection to the Jewish Holocaust of World War II, *Three Sisters* questions the refusal to address the conditions of the Balkan war, which are often dismissed as the result of tribal feuds and ethnic conflict. The video critiques the capitalist First World and its construction of a dominant subject - white, bourgeois, heterosexual and capitalist - while systematically destabilizing this construction through the statements and actions of the contextualized sisters.

At that time, we began to see racism coming to the surface in a supposedly socialist country. Slovenia had cultivated close relations with African nations as part of the Non-Aligned Movement. Many second and third-generation families from these regions had settled in

Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Three Sisters*, 1992. Still from a video. Copyright Gržinić, Šmid

Slovenia, completed their studies, and made a life for themselves. Nevertheless, racism persisted. The video can be seen as an exploration of the collapse of communism, the rise of racism and nationalism, and the new political order characterized by global free market capitalism. It deals with issues such as war and its atrocities, the role of women, gender dynamics, and racism.

Metka Trdin, the first sister, the Black actress, addresses the intersections of AIDS, communism, and war in a unique manner. At one point, she takes on the role of the white Catholic 'sister' (a nun) depicted in a well-known Benetton advertisement that is now reawakened as its flesh-and-blood 'negative' with an intense political undertone. As an image of the political unconscious of turbo-postsocialist reality, it embodies a subversive critique. In one scene, she replaces the minute hand of a clock about to strike twelve to symbolize the urgency of change and kisses a series of vivid archetypes embodying various relationships to power - a policeman, a prostitute and others. She gives her final kiss to a stuffed monkey, referencing the origins of AIDS, the global epidemic of the 1980s that was conveniently associated with Africa in a witch hunt. This context shaped much of the discourse and visual culture of the time, where racial stereotypes were reinforced through media and social narratives.

Olga Kacjan, the second sister, parallels the character of Catherine Deneuve in Luis Buñuel's

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Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Three Sisters*, 1992. Still from a video. Copyright Gržinić, Šmid

Belle de Jour (1967): a cool, elegant middle-class Frenchwoman who leads a double life as a married woman and prostitute. As a middle-class wife, she is repulsed by sex, but as a prostitute she willingly fulfills her clients' wildest fantasies. Kacjan, the second sister, 'recites' lines from Chekhov's play while excerpts from Karpo Aćimović Godina's 1980 film *The Raft of the Medusa* are projected. Kacjan, who already played the lead role in Godina's cult film *The Raft of the Medusa*, draws a parallel between the Yugoslav avant-garde of the early 20th century - depicted in Godina's film - and Yugoslavia of the 1990s (a space of murdering, cleansing, violence). I refer to the painting *The Raft of the Medusa* (from 1819) by the French Romantic artist Théodore Géricault, which shows the survivors of a shipwreck at sea. Géricault's painting depicts a moment after the sinking of the French frigate Méduse, which ran aground on July 2, 1816 off the coast of what is now Mauritania.

In 1992, 12 years after the myth of socialist brotherhood had melted away, this indeed called for a new representation of *The Raft of the Medusa*.

Marinka Štern, the third sister, replays the concentration camp survivor that restores her sadomasochistic relationship with an ex-SS officer working as a night porter at a Vienna hotel, a character from the 1974 film *The Night Porter* by Liliana Cavani. Having survived a concentration camp, she remains psychologically bound to

Marina Gržinić, Aina Šmid, *Three Sisters*, 1992. Still from a video. Copyright Gržinić, Šmid

her persecutor, a former camp guard. This role, originally played by Charlotte Rampling, is carefully reconstructed by Marinka Štern through her performance and scenic props, the cap, pants, and suspenders of a Nazi officer. Here, the act of reenactment raises questions about the political, artistic and cultural context. Štern transforms the aesthetic stylization of the costume into a form of political dramaturgy.

The final act of resistance in the video is performed by the body of a transvestite who mirrors the body of Cavani's heroine in *The Night Porter*. She says: "I shall live!" The methods used in *Three Sisters* aims to develop forms of political and aesthetic resistance. This politics of resistance is made possible by the emergence of a specific political subject that, as Homi K. Bhabha argues, emerges at a point of the 'liminal' negotiation of cultural identity across differences of race, class, and gender.

Homi K. Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*: "How are subjects formed 'in-between,' or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?"[11]

Bhabha's model of liminality is productive as it offers an opportunity to rethink "the

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realm of the beyond"[12] and connecting it with postfeminisms and postcolonialisms.

Through the use of documentary material, especially television footage from the war in Croatia - such as the mass exodus from Vukovar and the attack on Osijek - the video delves into the heart of post-communist reality. This reality was not only saturated with 'blood and guts,' corpses and monsters, but also teemed with wild utopian fantasies, apocalyptic visions and the chaos of the Balkan wars. A particularly terrifying moment is the Serbian army's victory celebration toasting the devastation of Vukovar, shown in a documentary broadcast by Slovenian television. This scene is considered one of the most barbaric depictions of the Balkan wars. The disgust it arouses stems not only from the horror of the celebration itself, but from the awareness that those celebrating will never face justice.

This culminates in a radical change of perception. Jean-Luc Godard said of French New Wave cinema during its heyday from 1958 to 1964: "It's not blood, it's red." However, the lessons learned from the body under communism suggest the opposite: "It's not red, it's blood." This epitomizes the indivisible post-communist residue - a raw remnant that cannot (yet?) be incorporated into the global, immaterial and virtual world of new media.

In *Labyrinth* (1993), surrealist images inspired by Magritte's paintings such as *Girl Eating a Bird* (1927) and *The Lovers* (1928) are juxtaposed with documentary films showing the lives of Bosnian refugees, mostly Muslims, in refugee centers near Ljubljana during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1995). The video locates these scenes within what Giorgio Agamben calls the paradigm of the contemporary global city.

This paradigm is no longer the polis - the public square that symbolizes protest and democracy - but the concentration camp, which today manifests itself in numerous contemporary forms: refugee collection centers, migrant transit homes, shelters for asylum seekers and similar spaces.

Time to Die!

Europe has always been an idea, one that requires constant reinterpretation and visualization. Ultimately, this reconstructive practice aimed to provoke critical engagement with images - whether as reconstructions, prototypes, or stereotypes - and to invite reflection on their historical and cultural implications.

In our work, historical moments parallel each other, highlighting recurring patterns of displacement and violence. The logic governing sexual and emotional relationships in capitalist motion picture industries is as follows: any emotional or sexual relationship involving a human and a formless, alien entity - represented as a slimy, micro-modeled substance - is always mediated by a strategic *distance*. This 'safe distance' maintains the hygienic boundary between humans and the formless *Other*, upholding the ideology that humanity (or more precisely, the capitalist production machine) may create such entities but will not engage emotionally or sexually with them.

But do we not witness this same *safe distance* in real life? Does this dynamic not mirror the attitudes of the ostensibly 'socially aware' middle class of the First World toward the so-called Third World - or even the Second World, epitomized by Eastern Europe? Consider the practices of UNICEF and similar humanitarian organizations. Wealthy middle and upper classes may donate a dollar a month to keep an African child from starving. Yet, no one asks whether these children can do more than merely *not starve*. Can they actually *live*?

Notes

[1] The interviews were fully published in *Political Choreographies, Decolonial Theories, Trans Bodies*, eds. Marina Gržinić and Jovita Pristovšek (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023).

[2] See Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

[3] See Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[4] David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 231.

[5] Natalia Raha, "Queer Capital: Marxism in Queer Theory and Post-1950 Poetics" (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2019), 112.

[6] See Marina Gržinić, "Video kratki stik v 21. stoletju: turboekstraktivizem in nekrokapitalistična abstrakcija. Intervju z Marino Gržinić" [Video Short-Circuiting in the 21st Century: Turboextractivism and Necrocapitalist Abstraction. Interview with Marina Gržinić]. Interview by Nina Cvar. *KINO!,* no. 49–50 (2023): 60–76

[7] See Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, trans. Julie Rose (London: Verso, 2008). Originally published as *La vitesse de liberation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1995).

[8] See Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

[9] Sandra Lischi, "In Search of Expanded Cinema," accessed July 5, 2025, file:///C:/Users/margrz/Downloads/7-1.pdf.

[10] Pascal Bonitzer, *Le Champ aveugle. Essais sur le cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma/Gallimard, 1982).

[11] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 9.

[12] Ibidem.

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