

Barbara Borčić

Video Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism

The Context

A long time has passed since video was labelled a new medium. Nevertheless, at least one generation must pass from the invention of a new (reproductive) technology, such as printmaking, photography and film, before it is accepted as a cultural tool and established as a means of artistic expression in its own right. This time lapse is even longer when it comes to interpretation, which should detect media-specific elements and place the new medium in the social and production framework. Video (magnetic tape), like all new image transmitters, preserves certain features possessed by previous technologies (e.g. cinema and photography) at the same time introducing new ones through technological innovation and different (content) encoding capabilities. Video technology changed film in the same way as the latest digital technology is changing video and film today. The term video is used nowadays for almost every moving image, with the sole exception of film.

Video art in Yugoslavia tracked the general ideological and aesthetic characteristics and usages of video technology, although - if we allow a certain generalisation despite the fact that the situation in each of the six constitutive republics of Yugoslavia was far from being the same - there were some specific features which at the same time also differentiated it from the international one. This fact cannot be easily perceived and understood without some basic information about the art and cultural situation in this former state (the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia) which managed to persevere for almost fifty years (1943-1991).

Several structural features defined the post-war political and cultural position of Yugoslavia: the country's size (with approximately 22 million inhabitants and an area of almost 100,000 square miles), its location (between the west and the east, the south and the north; Europe and Asia, Central Europe and the Balkans), as well as the peculiarities of its cultural and political history. The country's political position between the Eastern (Warsaw Pact) and Western Bloc (NATO) generated a unique type of socialist system defined by "self-management" as a point which distinguished it both from communist regimes and democratic societies of liberal capitalism. It was yet

another feature which enabled Yugoslavia to play an important role within global politics, i.e. its founding and decisive role in the Nonalignment movement which presented 'the third option'.

The characteristics of the Yugoslav post-war art and cultural policy can be outlined only roughly for this occasion. Socialist Realism was officially renounced as early as in 1948 (after the split with the Inform-Bureau), losing its power even before it had really begun to function. Already as early as the 1950's there followed a period of the so-called 'freedom of creation' - based on Existentialism and Intimism - allowing artists to express themselves in a modernist language: i.e. Poetical/Magical Realism, Lyric Abstraction, *Informel*, Tachism, Abstract Expressionism etc. Those were also the years when the country was relatively open, i.e. travelling to the West was surprisingly easy and frequent - especially to Italy and Paris - thus resulting in the influence of the School of Paris and later, in the 1970's, of the New York School on Yugoslav artists.

Up to the end of the 1980's the country's art system was quite developed in comparison with other Eastern European countries: there was a considerable number of state and regional museums and galleries, numerous art and

cultural magazines and a huge number of exhibitions and artists, while an art market with an appropriate system of management, sponsorship and private galleries etc., had not yet been established. Artists were neither awarded the title of 'the artist of merit', which was the usual practice in Eastern European countries, nor were they able to participate in keen competition within the 'free' art market as in Western countries. Nevertheless, a free-lance status awarded to active artists by the Ministry of Culture was quite an exceptional attribute which provided Yugoslav artists with social security and a retirement plan.

Yugoslavia was, however, conservative with regard to the progressive and avant-garde movements. In fact, we can describe the history of Yugoslav art as a permanent discontinuous practice, one which has remained on the fringe and was never fully recognised (Impressionism, Constructivism, Conceptual Art, and the subculture and alternative art of the 1980's). The 1970's and 1980's, the years which are of the greatest interest to us here - the former marking the pioneering period of video art, and the latter somehow predicting the end of the Yugoslav cause - were characterized by strong opposition movements on the part of intellectuals as well as artists.

Video, as a reproductive technology which promised the democratisation and internationalisation of the media, played a similar role in the Yugoslav framework as that played by graphic art in the 1950's and 1960's. Thanks to graphic art in the post-war Yugoslav cultural milieu, links with international art and its manifestations were re-established, as well as international exhibitions of graphic art in numerous Yugoslav cities - notably the *International Graphic Biennial in Ljubljana* founded in 1955 - which presented to Yugoslav artists and the general public a series of key authors from around the world, from the Western and the Eastern bloc as well as from China, India and so-called Third World countries, thus contributing to an improved acquaintance with art events and trends in the world and at the same time slowly opening up the possibilities for cooperation and affirmation of Yugoslav artists on the international scene. In the 1960's, within the scope of contemporary visual art, graphic art was of great significance this also being the time when it presented a considerable part of the world graphic production which resulted in the well known Graphic School of Ljubljana.

The primary source of information and news remained Paris, with the characteristic rudimentarisation of visual

speech into symbolic hieroglyphic signs of different sources and the predominant forms of quiet modernism, particularly those of lyric abstraction and *Informel*. It seems, however, that viewing graphic art through the graphic itself and all its working procedures - the so-called integral graphic art, when the author creatively implements the entire process, from conception to technical performance - was a characteristic which distinguished Yugoslav from West European graphic artists, who in most cases left the technical realization to printers. However, as early as the 1970's saw the attitude toward graphic art change, the objections mainly referring to its formalism and aestheticism, as well as to the unfulfilled promises of the democratisation of art and its accessibility to all. Despite the fact that, for example, graphic exhibitions in Yugoslavia were regularly organized in factories and companies - "in order to bring art to the workers" - even there this art discipline had preserved the bourgeois idealist interpretation of art, on the one hand as a reflection of reality and on the other as a utilizable object with a market value.

The Yugoslav policy of opening up toward other countries in the 1960's, after the aforementioned *International Graphic Art Biennial* exhibition which was

held on a regular basis, also encouraged a series of important international shows in the field of culture, including the *International Biennial of Industrial Design* in Ljubljana, the *Music Biennial*, the *Genre Film Festival* and the *New Tendencies* exhibition in Zagreb, as well as the international film festival *FEST* and the international experimental theatre festival *BITEF* in Belgrade, which was open to various art disciplines and also had a visual arts program.

The idea of international art - which otherwise as a rule overlooks its class character and imperialist tendencies - suddenly, particularly as a result of the revolutionary events of 1968 (the Paris spring of 1968) throughout the United States and Europe, no longer seemed a utopia never to come true. The student unrest, joined by progressive intellectual men and women, also played the key role in Yugoslav circumstances. The revolutionary ideas cultivated during the 1960's and the 1970's in the West, which did not bypass even the Fortress of Art, were also familiar to younger Yugoslav artists. This representation persevered because they were able to identify with conceptual art, current at the time, above all in one main area: that of confronting those conservative institutions of art which maintained the academic hierarchy of artistic

domains and the classical ways of expression and, as a consequence of that, discovering different, more independent channels of personal activity.

Around 1970 in addition to the so-called Centres of Liberty (= culture) and the Youth Cultural Centres, the Student Cultural Centres in the main Yugoslav cities (SKC in Belgrade, SKUC in Zagreb and ŠKUC in Ljubljana) also became the pivots of progressive ideas and transformations of art, while contacts with international events were gradually being established. The exhibitions, also international, which followed, generated intensive socialising and discussion, as well as the emergence of a sociocritical art practice. Through a series of actions and personal statements, the Yugoslav conceptual artists were also confronted with the issues of the position of art in society and the possibilities of acting upon it, significantly contributing to the shift in the understanding of art as a production of objects to the concept of artistic practice as a product of thought and memory.

A significant role was also played by video as a means of expression which placed the process of research and its effect on the public in the foreground. Perceived as a truly democratic medium available to anyone, in the

beginning it also promised completely new artistic paradigms. When in 1977 one issue of the Zagreb photography review *Spot* was entirely dedicated to video, the authors attributed to this "medium of video recording" the exceptional role of generator of structural change in the ways of thinking, forms of behaviour and methods of seeing reality, while video works were seen as a great potential in the scope of social change, especially in the ideological confrontation with the domination of commerce and capital in the domain of artistic practice and promoting social solidarity, a dehierarchisation of values, the creativity of each individual and the overall availability of information and knowledge. Within this framework the review also published the so-called Graz Declaration (*Grazer Deklaration, Pool-Video-Konferenz, Graz 1976*) concerning the relationship between video and politics.

In the context of international space this enterprise was soon critically deemed a failure, because video had also joined the structure of the art system with all the characteristics and consequences which inevitably followed suit. The socializing role of video was supposed to be based on the altered relationship with the public, but one still had to attend the places dedicated to art in order to

see video tapes. The potential danger that video too may fall into elitism turned out to be real; however, the question remains as to whether the cause was primarily the fact that the form of presentation and means of distribution did not manage (or want) to follow the production, or as to whether it was a trap - a danger or a wish - already intrinsic in the video production (art) itself.

The Seventies: the Documentary and Communicational Use of Video

Yugoslav artists encountered their first obstacle at the very beginning, regarding the question of the conditions of production. Video equipment - this widely known technology available to anyone - was simply not at their disposal in those "pioneering times" of the 1970's. It was not in the possession of institutions, galleries or museums like in the West, where thanks to its wide availability, institutions were able to monopolize their position. Nevertheless, surprisingly enough, Yugoslav video production did not lag behind that of Western countries neither chronologically nor in terms of its message. However, the position of video in Yugoslav proportions

remained marginal for a long time, and in terms of the number of tapes produced and their technical excellence it could not be compared with production in the countries of developed capitalism. In order to be able to produce a video, our artists had to find their own ways and be quick and efficient. Only in exceptional cases were they able to borrow equipment from rare companies or agencies. They were able to become acquainted with and use video technology only on rare occasions, which is why in most cases they did not learn how to handle it. They either realized their works during their stays abroad while participating in exhibitions and international spectacles such as the Trigon Exhibition and the International Open Encounter on Video organised by CAYC in Ferrara, Paris and Barcelona or during occasional international encounters in Yugoslavia where the visiting artists or the organizers brought their equipment with them thus giving their Yugoslav colleagues the opportunity to handle their equipment, learn from them and cooperate. Marina Abramović, for instance, realized her first video performance entitled *Freeing the Voice* at the Belgrade April Encounters in 1975 in collaboration with Jack Moore, member of the Paris group Video Heads.

Video shows, where the latest works by international and local artists could be seen, were relatively frequent

in Yugoslavia from the beginning of the 1970's onwards, usually organised by the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Arts and the Belgrade Student Cultural Centre (SKC) and quite frequent in collaboration with the Ursula Krinzinger's Gallery in Innsbruck, the Cavalino Gallery from Venice, the Art/Tape 22 Studio from Florence and the cousins Ingrid and Žika Dacić from Tübingen. From 1972 there were regular April encounters of expanded media in the gallery of the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, and after 1974 there were also video encounters in the Croatian towns of Zagreb, Motovun and Brdo. The April encounters in the 1970's were undoubtedly the most significant international shows of contemporary artistic practice in Yugoslavia, with participants such as Joseph Beuys. An important aspect of those encounters was that the foreign artists participated personally, some of them appearing quite often, including personalities such as Luciano Giaccari, Ulrike Rosenbach, Luigi Ontani, Katharina Sieverding and the group Video Heads.

The aforementioned manifestations encouraged interest in video and at the same time determined distribution since outside them the broadcasting of video tapes was practically impossible. Similarly to other conceptualist practices, particularly performances and actions, video

remained a more or less exclusive medium, linked to the gallery context and thus limited to a narrow circle of artists and followers, also determined by time. Goran Trbuljak, a Croatian artist who was one of the rare Yugoslav artists to research the technological possibilities and limits of video as a medium, pictorially described this paradoxical situation and utopian desire for change, according to his own experience:

At the several exhibitions/festivals of video tapes held so far it has become obvious that those manifestations are hardly attended by anyone else but those who appear on the screen. Such a scene always reminds one in a way of a person standing in front of a mirror, looking at their own reflection... When an artist thus communicates with himself, it rarely interests the other. However, if anyone who has not worked with video before were given the possibility to handle it, they would soon realize that they are caught in the charms of one of the most seductive media. Perhaps its democratic ability to arouse creativity in people will lead to a time in the future when everyone will be equipped with video technology - a time of art without artists, when everyone will be doing art.¹

The potential of video as a technology and as a communication apparatus was thus recognized and its socializing role defined. The fate of these utopian desires in our country like those elsewhere, of course, was not in the hands of the producers - the artists - but in the domain of ideological and economic demands and interests. Although the artist's socializing tendency could nicely match the proclamation of "art for everyone" made by the Yugoslav socialist authorities, video artists also remained in the isolation of a kind of a ghetto from which they were unable to have a wider impact on society. In any event, it was the fate of conceptualist art in general. Video was related to such practices - locally termed "new art practice" - quite directly. Accepted as a new technological attraction and a technical aid, video made the broadening of the field of vision and experience possible. From the very beginning, however, a distinction was established between the specific video expression and the video as a means of documenting ephemeral events. Regardless of whether it concerned the documentary, communicational or experimental application of the video technology, early video works were based on actions and performances which emphasized the relationship between the artist and society.

Video authors also came from the context of visual art, less often from the domain of cinema or other fields. For some of them, learning to use video technology was of decisive significance for their later work, but for many of them it was only a transitory experience, one which was soon to be forgotten. In most cases, video, as a new reproductive technology abolishing the aura of the original and producing a matrix which can freely be copied and distributed, did not interest them; video technology was not used to its full potential, its language and its communicational effects were not studied. Video was mainly used as an auxiliary means of recording and presenting the artist's performances or as a technical tool related to the artistic message within the context of other media, i.e. as a conceptual continuation for the formulation and transmission of social and political statements.

The action happened only in front of the video camera and not live in front of an audience, and even if video made it possible for the audience to follow a live performance happening in a physically detached space, such as in *Rhythm 4* by Marina Abramović (1974), video was accepted only as another means of expression in all its immediacy. The early performances of this Belgrade artist, who later worked alongside the German activist artist Ulay

in the period between 1976 and 1988, were marked by a considerable amount of self-aggression, i.e. self-destructiveness, at the risk of causing the sensations of discomfort and resistance among the audience. In *Rhythm 4* - a performance where the artist was interested in how her body would react to a great air pressure produced in a narrow empty space by huge fans - video also carried out the function of a screen which made the acceptance of the indirect action, despite its simultaneity, somewhat less painful.

In any event, the pioneering usage of video at the time was characterized by a static camera which recorded the event in real time, while the subject and the object was the artist him or herself - only exceptionally from different angles or focusing on fragments of his or her body. The documentary record contained the temporal and spatial unity, while the length of the video tape corresponded to the real time of the action, since the shots were not edited or transformed in any other way. A representative of such 'reduced' usage of video was Raša Todosijević who explained his dealings with video as follows:

I have made my video works without any special interest in the technical side of this medium, in the process of production or those spectacular possibilities of manipulation of electronic technology. I was interested in video more as a transmitter of psychological and mental activities in which any technical exhibitionism is fundamentally extraneous. My video works should be regarded as realizations closely related to all that I did in my performances. Such behaviour and usage of video tape has been termed video performance.²

This Belgrade artist, who sharply analysed the issue of the artist's position in a cultural and social context - e.g. in the video *Who profits from art and who makes honest money* - accepted video only as one of the numerous means of expression, without the illusion that the technique itself contributed to the democratisation of the arts. In a series of performances entitled *Was ist Kunst* for example, he obsessively repeated this same question, directly examining what is and what could be art, while the video, by focusing on the artist addressing the audience in a narrowed frame, emphasized the almost unbearable aggressiveness of the act.

Fascination with video technology and the understanding of video surface as a latent erogenous image inspired Nuša

and Srečo Dragan from Ljubljana to remain involved in video for years - from 1988 until today. They were active in a movement which united various artistic practices of creating art as an idea which developed around the Slovenian conceptualist group OHO. In 1969 they made *Belo mleko belih prsi* ("The white milk of white breasts"), which is considered to be the first video in the former Yugoslavia: a static black and white recording with mobile graphic signs/captions and statements made by the participants in the action who discussed video art in different languages. Action was seen as the target of their activity, as they understood video in actions (the analysis of observation and the mechanisms of illusion) and attempted to use it as a medium of immediate and interactive communication with the public. Since they could interfere in the course of the action - they were in an active relationship with the camera and the monitor - moreover, they were expected to do so, the participants in these actions were supposed to feel included in the video experience and establish an active mental relationship with what they saw. Video was at the same time a realization and a regular notation of the process model of communication, the visualization of ideas or - as they classified it themselves - an imprint of the creative consciousness. The

image was on the monitor immediately, without a time gap, thus emphasizing the unity of time, place and action. In the action *Video painting*, for instance, performed by its authors at the international manifestation Trigon in Graz in 1979, they demonstrated the ephemeral procedure steps of painting by mixing various pigments in real time and at the same time prolonging this process by video camera and freezing it on the monitor.

We could similarly classify the video work *Rhythm* by Neša Paripović (1981) in which the artist applies paint onto a white sheet of paper by rhythmical beats of his fingers, until eventual saturation. This record of creating both a painting and a sound finally demystified the modernist process of the creation of a painting, at the same time introducing the omni-dimensionality of video which includes the subject, sound, object, movement and colour etc.

Conceptualism, as a movement started by a resistance against industrial society and consumer mentality, seeks meaning in the confrontation of the field of art with social and political contexts. Despite its undisputed critical attitude toward society, in hindsight it can often be recognized as a specific kind of escape from reality and withdrawal into a hermetic world of self-reference, the

acceptance of oriental philosophy and a turn towards rituals and meditation.

Resistance against the established system of art was almost without exception condemned to marginalisation or resulted in its general acceptance and agreement with its mechanisms, including **musealization**. Here we should raise the issue of the video document and its usage: how can something performed live in front of an audience in real time, involving a special relationship between the artist and the audience and the real duration - in other words, performance art, as one of the most radical art practices - be presented with the available documentation, photography and video? What does it lose and what can it gain? The question concerning the nucleus of (conceptualist) practice of this kind - the dematerialization of an art object with a potential market value - and the performer's resistance toward **historicization**, sometimes even before recording the documentation and especially before viewing it, will be left aside here due to the time distance. This is also due to the fact that the artists' utopian effort to avoid the functioning of the system of art and market mechanisms is as a rule condemned to failure and in retrospect appears only as a short term naive belief. This should not mean, however, that such a standpoint is not a significant base

for a certain value and reflection. Nonetheless, it appears that it was video - next to less attractive static photographs - which made the modification of what had passed possible. The fact that the conceptualists themselves, along with many other rising artists, profited from this short period when attempts were made to deprive society of material works of art, seems from this perspective quite just. Finally, it was they who brought about the increased demand and higher prices in the market due to the rarification of art works.

The Seventies: the Analytical and Experimental Use of Video

Along with photography, video played a decisive role in the introduction of reproductive technologies into the world of art and thus partially altered the method of production, distribution and acceptance of the work of art. At the same time, the most common usage which served to determine video's direction towards the arts - the world of galleries and museums wishing to appropriate it - caused its involvement in the world of the arts. The prediction that video would become the means of social and political struggle, the most democratic form of transmitting information and exchanging messages, did not materialize

and thus video lost a great deal of its social potential and political acerbity. As a creative means, in most cases due to the length of the tape, the intimacy of artistic statements and the fact that it was performed only in galleries, it remained hermetical, misunderstood and unpopular among the wider public. It was only rare amateurs and connoisseurs who found it interesting. It was similar to the announcement that video should encourage a different mode of socialization and arouse creativity in people, because the use of video equipment was in most cases limited to filming and viewing family events or recorded films.

Television, which could have changed those relations by expanding the channels of distribution, was a rather strong mass medium in Yugoslavia during the 1970's. It existed only as state television, based in the capitals of the six republics, but due to the limited broadcasting time it was not widespread and popular enough and it was not at all commercial. Therefore the claim that video, based on the same technology as television, appeared as its antithesis in the sense of non-commerciality in the Yugoslav circumstances is not sustainable. In certain aspects the video of that time was subversive in relation to the social system and explicit in its artistic (political) statements;

however, our artists did not see it as a medium of communication and in dealing with the new technology they were not aware of the possibility of confronting and subverting state television. The social use of video which could have constituted a socially engaged program as a counterbalance to official reporting was not at all common. Although in literature one can find the initiative for establishing a "communal video station", addressed to the Zagreb municipality in 1974, this and similar initiatives, then as well as later - e.g. concerning the proposal to set up the first alternative television in Ljubljana in 1987 - did not find a positive echo in the Yugoslav political and media domain.

As we have already seen, video creation in Yugoslavia was above all related to the visual arts practice and artists who dealt with the technical, structural and linguistic characteristics of the new medium were rare. In most cases those were the authors who had made experimental films before, such as Zoran Popović and Goran Trbuljak. Short Super 8 and 16mm experimental (avant-garde) films produced within the framework of film clubs and student cultural centres which in terms of their number exceeded all expectations had a far reaching impact on some video artists. The aforementioned films from the 1960's and

1970's radically called into question the dominant film patterns and aesthetics by researching the possibilities of the film tape, and some of them already dealt with television as a medium or object. They often juxtaposed the grainy tape, characterized by mechanical and chemical damage, with the screen television image with its characteristic noise and flickering monitor. Bojan Jovanović, for instance, also used TV sets as elements in his events and in the spirit of the radical critique of the television medium which produces consumer needs, subsequently destroyed them. Another approach to television as an institution can be seen in Mladen Stilinović's project *Cenzurišem se* ("I am censoring myself") already performed in video technology. He manifestly pointed out the issue of state censorship and self-censorship: first he recorded a text that would by no means be broadcast by any official television channel, and then he erased all the potentially problematic parts and broadcast this (self)censored version, erasing the original tape.

Despite technological differences, film procedures and strategies somehow poured over into experimental video which soon, due to simpler handling and faster and cheaper production almost abolished short films and took their place of potential critical stand and resourcefulness.

The first example of a critical confrontation of video with official television was a twenty minute black-and-white video *TV-Timer* (1973) produced by the Zagreb artists Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis, who at the same time dealt with television graphics and visual design at Zagreb television. It was a series of author interventions in the regular TV programme by other media (the telephone, the clock) and their own appearance on the screen, thus establishing a link between reality and media reality. By analysing the ideological and aesthetic structure of the television programme and the effects of that mass medium on individuals, they showed that they were not only interested in video as a means of individual expression, but also as a critical analysis and reflection on television: "Public television is an institutionalised form of television programming which introduces subjective aspects of communication into objective ones: one person or one group acts as an information selector, attempting to introduce itself (or the information) as a TV channel (information channel). TV video is a possible means of objective presentation of contents from the viewpoint of one person (the subject)."³ Each of the authors continued the study of communication and representation codes in the mass media and their impact on the everyday life and behaviour of the

individual, where in the shaping of identity the public image meets the world of privacy (e.g. Sanja Iveković in the videos *Make Up-Make Down* and *Instructions*, and Dalibor Martinis in *Image is Virus*).

If we attempt to briefly analyse their later video works, it can be said that Sanja Iveković's work is characterized by its performative dimension, autobiographic referentiality, structural complexity and feminist acerbity, when in her treatment of identity she introduced the female character into the political sphere. Dalibor Martinis particularly built upon analytical and conceptual approaches, as well as the technological, formal and semantic characteristics of video. He presented the relationships between reality and illusion through means of irony, absurdity, mystery and humour, even self-aggression. Their work undoubtedly places them among the most interesting and most significant video artists both in local and international contexts.

Although not openly presenting itself as a repressive ideological state apparatus, television in Yugoslavia in the 1970's remained totally uninterested in any kind of change and was therefore an institution beyond the artists' reach. Thus it came as a great surprise when TV Ljubljana broadcast Miha Vipotnik's artistic video entitled *Videogram*

4 during a late night programme (part of its experimental programming) in 1979, announcing it as a "very rare television event or even a new experience" and warning the viewers that "any interference or unusual features in the image or tone are part of the program, so do not try to adjust the image on your TV sets." The electronic image was indeed incredibly stratified, even amazingly transformed and edited for that time (double exposition, solarisation, recast, feedback, synthetic colour changes and generating moving shapes), and the sound was syncopated, alternately soft and screeching. He described the process in this video project as follows:

On the music score for synthesizer and script for their activities, the performers completely filled the twenty-eight-minute recording period with their movements, unarticulated expression, mimic and body speech in the electronically created field of the video screen. In two years, I repeated the shootings three times, each time using the materials from previous shootings. Under the influence of them, the performers reintegrated themselves into the events, changing their behaviour in each subsequent shooting, thus presenting

a concept of social situations created by the TV information environment.⁴

Miha Vipotnik was thus the first video artist who succeeded in transmitting professional video technology from institutional television into individual usage. The video equipment used by Yugoslav artists was still at the initial rudimentary stage and the possibilities of processing and editing were still very limited. Although the latest television equipment was reserved only for news programs and for regular TV production, while even television professionals were not completely familiar with its technological possibilities, Vipotnik managed to work with it thanks to his enthusiasm and persuasiveness: he researched the characteristics and potentials of video technology, the structure and the aesthetic effect of the electronic image, and he came up with a more formalist and experimental kind of video. As an external collaborator in television he then began to introduce the elements of his experimentation into television programs, particularly musical ones, and he made the first video clip in Yugoslavia, for the Slovenian punk band "Pankrti". At the same time he obtained a graduate degree in Video Art and

became a professional video artist, remaining dedicated to this medium to this day.

The project *Videogram 4* had another important dimension: it introduced the inter-media practice onto the Yugoslav scene. The process of intensive work with a group of collaborating performers in the television studio, based on which the video was created, was also presented as multi vision, combining experiences of different media (performance art, video, cinema, photography and music). Made in a gallery space through mirrors and prisms turning simultaneously, four video tapes were screened and four films and slides made, all accompanied by original music. The emphasis on the time component and the working process, as well as the innovative use of the camera and editing in the construction of personal stories and the superimposition of images, inscriptions and discourse is intertwined in the video creation of this artist, who began studying film direction in Los Angeles in the mid-1980's.

The Eighties: the institutionalisation of video and its introduction into television houses

At the turn of the decade the 'poor, reductionist video' lost its significance and attraction, video technology

developed further and the time of more complex video works arrived, implying, among other things, professional video equipment and increased financial means. The dilemma between marginalisation or joining the system - the gallery or television network - due to the still scarcely available equipment and the resulting lack of technical knowledge on the one hand and a reorientation of interests on the other, often resulted in a declining interest in the video. Thus Yugoslav artists at the turn of the 1980's all stopped dealing with the video with the exception of a few persistent ones, in particular Dalibor Martinis, Sanja Iveković, Srečo and Nuša Dragan and Miha Vipotnik, who recognized in the video their essential means of expression and who remain active video artists today.

Together with a group of curators, critics and organizers of art events (such as Dunja Blažević, Biljana Tomić and Ješa Denegri) they fought for the affirmation of the video and made efforts to secure its rightful status of an independent means of expression. The video slowly gained its place in the education system as a studio subject and later a department, first in 1979, at the initiative of the artist and professor Bogdanka Poznanović within the framework of the Visual Studio at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. The studio included the realization of author

videos, video installations and documentary videos related to research, performance art, ambiences, installations and multimedia projects.

Working in close cooperation, artists, curators and organisers of art events in old and new art centres throughout Yugoslavia (in addition to those already mentioned there was also the Centre for Multimedia Research of the Student Centre in Zagreb, the Academy Film Centre of the Youth Centre "Studentski grad" in Belgrade and the ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana etc.) screened video productions and at least partially succeeded in broadening the circle to include the gallery public and in placing the Yugoslav video on the international scene. Video works by Yugoslav authors still aroused attention at international festivals and there were (international) shows, gatherings and workshops in the 1980's in Yugoslav centres from Ljubljana to Belgrade, Sarajevo, Skopje and Zagreb. At the same time national television houses took part in these manifestations for the first time, opening the doors of their (well equipped by that time) studios to artists.

The first international video biennial was organized in Ljubljana in 1983 by Miha Vipotnik under the name *VIDEO CD*, which institutionalised the video in our milieu and aroused wider interest in it. As the director of three consecutive

biennials, Vipotnik brought video art into our country, facilitating the establishment of contacts with visiting artists and curators and the increasingly noticeable participation of the Yugoslav video in international circles. In those years the biennial represented international video art and television production, while 22 local and international video works were produced in its video workshop situated in a temporary video studio. This was a significant dimension of that biennial, one which distinguished it from other international video shows. It attracted artists from around the world, because even in other countries there were not many centres where they were able to realize video works. The growing interest in the Ljubljana Biennial eventually placed it among the three most important video festivals in the world. Introductory articles in the catalogue accompanying the first biennial were written by artists such as Pierre Restany, Woody Vasulka, Dalibor Martinis, Čedomir Vasić, Dunja Blažević and Biljana Tomić to name but a few, while the articles written by Wulf Herzogenrath and René Berger have been reprinted.

At the same time, the relationship with television during the 1980's slowly changed in the video's favour, although it was still widely held that author video

belonged to independent production and that in terms of its technical and aesthetic features it was incompatible with television. Possibilities opened up in the scope of educational and cultural programs which were given special attention by all the television centres in the former republic capitals. The video language and the messages of artistic statements became acceptable to state television, thanks especially to certain individuals who made endeavours to find a place for video within the regular programming, whether by translating video works or by thematic programs which presented and analysed various aspects of video creation in the scope of current processes in art or (surprisingly) problematised the relationship between video and television. The first one to do so was TV Belgrade: in 1981 and 1982 Nebojša Đukelić dedicated a special program to the video within the cycle *Moving Pictures*. The program dealt with the role and function of video and the author's deconstruction of the television image. The guests in the studio expressed their opposing views; Ješa Denegri considered video art from an art history perspective as just another means of expression in visual arts, while Nenad Puhovski, from the aspect of technological-television, saw the possibilities for video in the scope of individual (micro)television. In the same

television centre Dunja Blažević included video art (comprising contemporary production) in her series of programs entitled Other Art. In 1984 she introduced the first authentic television program on visual arts entitled TV Gallery, and by 1990 she had produced sixty particularly significant programs, dedicated to the latest processes in art, their recognition and analysis. The conception of the program was based on close cooperation with artists and critics from all over Yugoslavia and several author videos were produced within its framework, including the "Russian Artistic Experiment" by Boris Miljković and Branimir Dimitrijević and the anonymous project "Modern Art Experiments". The artists had the television studio equipment at their disposal for the realization of their works, and then the created video work would be broadcast as part of the program.

More direct and constant contacts between television professionals and video artists were genuinely set up only with the international video biennials in Ljubljana. During the first Biennial (1983) TV Ljubljana broadcast live events and excerpts from video works, and there were also contributions (TV chronicles) from the artists themselves - participants in the festival and various television crews. This late night program could be watched by viewers of all

the Yugoslav TV channels based in the capitals of the federal republics.

The authors who dealt with video had a twofold attitude toward television, depending on whether they rejected the influence of television patterns and programs and wished to act autonomously or, conversely, tried to change its rigid forms of production and program making. The former strategy led them toward marginalisation, while the latter led toward consumer usage. In any case, this clearly demonstrated the contradiction between the democratic conception and the elitist practice of production and distribution of video. By that time television was able to broaden those limits, although the classification of video in the world of television still depended on the convictions of the editorial board and management. In any event, until the mid-1980's the majority of video works were realized within the framework of television centres while national television houses acted as producers or co-producers, making such a symbiosis between video and television specific of the Yugoslav milieu for a long time to come, which in turn secured the institutional production conditions for video art in the future. Toni Tršar, who as editor of TV Ljubljana should be given the most credit for the introduction of video into television, recognized the

role of television at the time as follows: "Through video art the opportunity suddenly arose to cultivate authorship within the electronic image form, a certain type of author-centred television and at the same time research into the medium"⁵. He was quick to recognize that video art had a stimulating influence on abandoning the model of television as a picture radio and the current TV production. Of course, the issue raised here is as to whether aesthetic practice, being potentially transformative, can change the dominant - television - usage of technology. In other words, whether an individualized usage of video technology (artistic video) changes the television usage or endangers its ideological foundations. And, on the other hand, whether video has succeeded in developing a specific language distinguished from television standards.

The frequent cooperation between artists and television experts inevitably led to a certain degree of mutual influence: the artists became dependent on professional equipment and television crews; their experimental work on television brought their products closer to the television language. Television cinematographers, sound engineers and editors transmitted their experience with the artistic usage of video technology into the regular television programming. On national televisions at that time one could

see several works whose form and messages were socially and politically critical, e.g. the first author program concerning author video entitled *Autovizija* realized in 1986 for TV Ljubljana by Miha Vipotnik and Marjan Osole-Max, inviting video artists to participate with one minute works on a topic of their choice.

Miha Vipotnik attempted for years to set up a permanent international centre for video based on the Western model, one which would at the same time be a polygon for new technology research, encouraging large companies to use it free of charge. His attempts failed however, since there was neither enough understanding nor enough money for this kind of incentive. Such a public production studio was never established in Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, during the mid-1980's several private and partly commercially oriented video studios appeared. Particularly prominent among them, as producers of author, non-commercial, independent videos, were *Studio Brut* and *Video produkcija Kregar* in Ljubljana. A specific Yugoslav feature at this time were non-profit centres which made independent video production possible, among them the Academy Film Centre in Belgrade and the ŠKUC-Forum in Ljubljana. In order to be able to reach a fuller understanding of video in the 1980's it is essential to consider the so-called ŠKUC-Forum video in more detail.

In discussing significant changes in form and content of video as a medium, it is also worthwhile taking a look at the Slovenian alternative scene (or, more precisely, that of Ljubljana) since video was its important constitutive part. From then on we can no longer speak about video art, but rather video practice and production, intense happenings and what was materially created and what has remained.

The Eighties: the Social and Media Use of Video

Although the division into decades could be misleading because, as a rule, boundaries and crossings are placed where there are none, in the Yugoslav milieu it seems appropriate if one considers that the decades in question coincide with certain social changes. The seventies were still a remnant of a social-political system which exerted intensive control at all levels, while the eighties were marked by the rise of new social movements as a critical reaction to the socialist system. This was particularly true of the westernmost Yugoslav republic of Slovenia.

In Slovenia the eighties were marked by a slow but important process of liberalization at several levels - political, ideological and cultural. The alternative scene

was a conglomerate of artistic and cultural protagonists and new social and theoretical movements (New Left, Post-Structuralism and Lacanism) which eventually constituted a civil society. Although the aim of the civil society was to embrace the whole Slovenian population, in reality it was formed from marginal groups, subcultures and other alternative movements such as the peace, ecologist, feminist, gay and lesbian, alternative art and culture and theory movements, which proposed that a 'parallel society' be organised on the fringes of the dominant, socialist one. These were actually the propelling forces behind the deep social transformation during the eighties which eventually led to the fall of the one-party rule and to the introduction of the pluralist parliamentary democracy.

So far we have spoken about video art which was created, accepted and interpreted in the context of (visual) arts where both the authors and their video works were analysed by art critique. In contrast to this, the mass video production and practices of the 1980's could no longer be easily placed within the context of art, since they occurred outside the institutional frameworks and belonged to the context of alternative (rock, punk) culture and new social movements. Young university educated artists at the time also overwhelmingly saw themselves as part of

the alternative scene and acted within it, rather than as part of (postmodernist) art. The only valid reference until then - video art - was no longer adequate and it did not hold up. The field of video usage became wider and social usage emerged in place of the purely artistic phenomena. In other words, the widespread mass creative usage of video technology in Yugoslavia was developed only in marginal milieus, in the domain of subculture whose protagonists wanted to draw attention to their activity, to document it and present it abroad, although perhaps to a specific public. Documentation helped consolidate the scene, the scene recognized itself in it, and instead of artistic video the term used was "author video" (*vidéo d'auteur*), distinguishing this production from artism and denoting a specific author's approach in considering the topics directly related to this scene.

In brief, video practice and production made up a considerable part of the club and multimedia practice of this so-called "Ljubljana subcultural alternative scene" and there were two student cultural organizations set up under the name ŠKUC-Forum: the Students Cultural Association Forum and the Students Cultural Art Centre from Ljubljana. Membership of these two organizations, like in other Yugoslav centres, was not limited only to students.

Progressive younger creative individuals and groups were particularly active there, showing resistance and disobedience, finding new means of cultural action and presentation which would reach a wider public and exert a (cultural, even political) impact on society as a whole. In socialist Yugoslavia political activity was impossible, albeit illegal outside communist parties or Socialist Leagues of the Working People and the Socialist Youth League. From the 1970's on, however, these organizations were increasingly joined by individuals who wanted to change the system from within and influence the development of the socialist state by liberalizing its system and functioning.

The main centres of subcultural and civil social events, production and presentation, linked to mass culture as well as constructive theoretical and critical practice, were the student media *Radio Študent* and the magazines *Mladina* and *Tribuna*; here we could also mention the theory periodical *Problemi* and the film magazine *Ekran*. As regards multimedia and video practice, there was the club *Disko FV* (led by the members of the FV group, in particular Zemira Alajbegović, Aldo Ivančić, Neven Korda, Dario Sereval and others) and the ŠKUC Gallery (led by Dušan Mandić, Marina Gržinić and Barbara Borčić) in Ljubljana.

Video equipment became more accessible to a greater number of people thanks to the FV group, which started a multimedia program of the alternative club *Disko FV*. They filmed various events on scrap computer tapes with used video equipment which had to be borrowed for each occasion: thematic music nights, film and video projections, concerts, photography exhibitions, graffiti and (Xerox) posters and multimedia projects which took place in the club, which due to frequent (forced) changes of location all became a symbol of the alternative scene's struggle for space. The Yugoslav socialist regime at that time no longer functioned through strict supervision and ideological censorship, but rather regulated events and production by granting or denying funds and premises. Despite all this, the 'subcultural and alternative scene in Ljubljana' in the mid-1980's was the most widespread cultural movement until that time in Slovenia, developing an exciting cultural and social practice which met with a highly enthusiastic response. A number of exhibitions, performances, multimedia projects, concerts, even symposia and round tables were organized, reflecting the events and the production. Since the foundation of the ŠKUC-Forum video section in 1982, video technology was used for production, distribution and the promotion of video, especially when it received its

first VHS equipment as a gift from a successful Slovenian factory, which was used for documentation as well as for the realization of the first author videos.

Although amateur VHS equipment could not match that owned by television centres and initially editing was possible only on the spot, during filming, it nevertheless had an unanticipated influence on a number of protagonists of the 'alternative scene in Ljubljana'. Besides (polaroid) photography and the photocopier, the video was the one "instant" medium which was accessible, cheap, fast and at the same time not subject to control and censorship. Video projects were linked to rock music, punk and club events, as well as to multimedia practice; they were at the same time a constitutive part of that scene and its (media) effect. Countless author and author-documentary video works were made, with an emphasis on the content and message characterized by interweaving author and documentary material and approach, which was also characteristic of music videos at the time. This fact clearly demonstrates the role and function allocated to the video by the alternative scene protagonists and the effects they wanted to produce. Video was a rather new medium of image and sound for that scene; nevertheless, it had retained certain characteristics of the cinema and photographic alternative

practice, at the same time introducing new ones which derived from technological innovation and different ways of coding meaning. The authors were not interested in technical perfection, they turned to specific resourceful technical solutions and 'crude' form, just like the introduction of new meaning codes content wise through direct messages which produced works of social and cultural critique. Video projects took up marginal and taboo topics whose main references were on the one hand socially endangered groups, unspoken violence and hidden sexuality, the socially unacceptable lifestyle of young people and its particular image, and on the other social events and state rituals, centres and relationships of power, as well as the myths and taboos of the socialist system - all this in order to raise the issue of the relationship between the social mechanisms of power and the libidinous structure of individuals.

The left wing post-structuralist theory of unveiling the ideological apparatus of the state and the theory of representation which was, particularly in the Slovenian context, developed by a circle of Marxist-Lacanian theorists, e.g. Rastko Močnik, Braco Rotar, Slavoj Žižek and others, was directly and mutually related to the "alternative subcultural scene in Ljubljana". Film theory

was also highly developed, reading film as a discourse of symbols, acting at the same time as social critique, since the imagery it researched did not by virtue belong to the medium but was presented in it in a specific way.

The deconstruction of the state ideological apparatus from which art was not excluded, also produced a dialectical confrontation between a certain kind of heroicism of the already defunct system which functioned by means of prohibition and its own unattainability and distance from society, with the first hints of approaching the Western systems of liberal capitalism. The great pride which filled the multiethnic composition of Yugoslavs at the sight of Tito, Nehru and Nasser's handshake at the adoption of the Declaration of Non-alignment in 1956 on the Brioni islands in Yugoslavia could, for example, be compared with humanity's enthusiasm at Neil Armstrong's first step on the moon in 1969. It is therefore not surprising that this shot found a place in the video *American Dream* by Marko Kovačić (1986). The video confronted the principles of the East and West in the form of a non-stop game of the accompaniment of the two main characters (the author in the role of the accompanying and the accompanied: on the one hand an avant-garde performer, on the other a pop businessman) and the usage of state and

popular iconography and products which belonged to the Russian avant-garde art or pop art. Kovačič's video works were all, in fact, specific kinds of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, blending the artist's experiences with constructivist sculpture, experimental film, alternative theatre and new wave music: he created everything in them himself - the set, the costumes and the paraphernalia - and he was also their main protagonist. In his video works, made according to the model of performances, by means of a chroma-key he combined real space and human figures with fabricated scenes and mechanical beings, in order to expose contradictions in social reality and their effect on the individual.

The predecessors of a certain more narrative kind of video at the time can be identified in the films made by socially engaged directors such as Werner Rainer Fassbinder, Lothar Lambert and Andy Warhol and the films of the so-called Yugoslav Black Wave from the 1960's which were declared "socially unacceptable and undesirable" by the authorities and often ended up in bunkers. These films were all shown in ŠKUC in the 1980's. Through state rituals, social relations and psychical obsessions, the early works of Dušan Makavejev, Živojin Pavlović, Želimir Žilnik, Lazar Stojanović and others emphasized the subject

of death, sexuality and violence and also critically presented those aspects of life which were deemed by general consensus to be negative. The group "Meje kontrole št. 4" ("Limits of control no. 4") - Aina Šmid, Dušan Mandić, Marina Gržinić and Barbara Borčić - active in the early 1980's, critically presented the socially conditioned traumatic story of marginalized individuals in their video works. The story concerning the relationship between the individual and the institutions of power, as well as the visual pleasure experienced from eroticism and sexuality, was built up through dialogues and fabricated scenes, while the products remained on the edge between the documentary and the artificial thus making the state of isolation, helplessness and control was even more striking.

The ŠKUC-Forum video production, which stood against the predominant (post)modernist artistic (also video) creation or television production, became a concept which was deeply etched into the national conscience. It included a number of authors and groups: FV, Meje kontrole št.4, Kolaps, Borghesia, Marjan Osole-Max, Mare Kovačič, Goran Devide, Andrej Lupinc-Keller and Igor Virovac who mainly appeared alone without a precise allotment of roles - they were directors, cinematographers and editors at the same time and they included video in their multimedia projects

and performances. Dušan Mandić, an alternative scene protagonist and video project co-author, who was the only one to write about production at the time, clearly defined the distinguishing traits between the 'formalist approach to the medium' in 1970's video and the 'mass dimension' and 'socially engaged audio-visual research' of the 1980's video. He also warned of the need for textual reflection and the documentation of this production in the social environment and history, particularly due to "undesirable 'effects' which could cause misunderstanding and misinterpretation". He illustrated this 'danger' of exposure to ideological manipulation by citing the example of the effect produced by a TV presenter while introducing the controversial and provocative Slovenian music group *Laibach* on Ljubljana TV, when "the reality of the video tape temporality turned into a political excess", while the program plainly demonstrated the ideological process of social control. What had happened in the studio? The members of *Laibach* transformed the interview form into a performance with manifesto statements, while the presenter declared them enemies of the state, warning the viewers about 'this dangerous group' and rhetorically asked whether we intended to tolerate them in our environment. It is interesting to note that in the sense of mutual

manipulation, the group *Laibach* retrospectively appropriated this television show as one of their most successful video projects. In any case, the period of the aesthetics of boredom was over and the 1980's brought political, entertaining and visually rich fast changing shots, including the media use of video. The events related to video in Ljubljana between 1982 and 1985 were unexpectedly intense as regards the development of the video medium and decisive in the development of video in Yugoslav circumstances. Two international video biennials were held at the Cankarjev Dom cultural centre, video was produced and screened at Disko FV, a Sunday video club was opened; in the ŠKUC Gallery, which had a Saturday Video Box Bar according to the visitors' choice, foreign and local video production was screened such as for example the Australian tandem Randall & Bendinelli. These places, without exception, were constantly full to the brim throughout this period.

The first spectacle-type media program which combined mass entertainment and art through the application of new technology was organised by the FV group at the New Rock musical show in Križanke (Ljubljana) for several thousands of visitors as early as in 1983 and many times after that: there were columns of television sets, which intensified

the events on the stage, with video clips screened during the interval including art video and live interviews with members of the bands.

In order to reach a fuller understanding of the video activities of the FV group and their contribution to the decisive steps forward in the field of the video medium, besides turning to mass culture, we should also note the usage of audio-visual television material. Although it is true that we did not watch much television in the 1980's - here I mean the alternative art scene, since our subculture took place elsewhere: in (disco) clubs, at concerts, through multimedia projects, spectacles, in the street and at the cinema, television - that "hateful medium of manipulation and passivity" - became an object of obsessive contemplation and research. Not only did some of them (e.g. FV members, Neven Korda in particular) watch it for hours - with a purpose, a plan, as their research material for video production, but also at that time there were quite a few things to see on TV, on the screen. Programming varied from alternative video production produced by the stage protagonists themselves to what the mass culture machinery produced around the world - in the segment which was the possible identification point of activities on the alternative scene, e.g. the production of the New York

based "The Kitchen", Laurie Anderson's video clips, PIL, Siouxi and the Banshees, 23 Skidoo and others, as well as the cult film *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* by the Sex Pistols, then *Jubilee* etc. Of course, those video cassettes and recordings as well as long playing records, came from the developed capitalist world to our country through semi-legal channels.

In brief, this period was marked by a move from the question what (damage) the medium does to the viewer to the question what a (potential) reader of the television "text" can do with the medium. The viewer was able to select television shots, appropriate them, truncate them, recode them and change their meaning. There were unanticipated possibilities of problematisation at the level of media message with the usage of ready-made television segments. As if it was literally taken for granted that a television program is not a concept, but rather an object which breaks into segments, while its message is created only by means of a communicational relationship with the viewer and his reception.

In the FV video projects shots were taken from national television - recognizable political personalities, rituals and manifestations, including Tito's funeral, or popular Yugoslav music stars were screened through methods of

fragmentation and serial repetitions, by means of an editing approach with counter pointed shorts from pornographic movies recorded from private Italian television programs which could be followed in Slovenia thanks to geographic proximity. An important element of these videos were the "live" appearances of the members themselves in scenes of 'unnatural' sexuality, sado-masochism, homosexuality, violence, solitude and despair. The chosen shots were thus transformed and re-edited, reinterpreted and placed and also screened in a different context. In other words, not within the framework of family TV at home, but in the "space of difference" as an event which essentially targeted the viewers who knew what they wanted and at the same time "strengthened" their position. It was, above all, a position of creative critical distance which strengthens the conscience about the functioning of state apparatus ideological mechanisms, about the relationship between ideology and aesthetic effect, about the social contingency of artistic practice; it was also a position of rebellion which was perhaps best expressed by phrases such as "No fear! No hope! No solution!" Or, if we sum up the words of Dušan Mandić: "Artists are producers of culture - they produce the giving of meaning. All societies produce and cultivate conditions in which they cultivate

forms of cultural practice - art and artists - which are a necessary support to ideologies of particular systems whose function, among other things, is to make the system of supervision invisible. In such a situation artists who stand up against the dominant 'view' of "their own society have no other choice but to attempt to present the supervision and thus make it 'visible' for analysis."⁶

Thus on the alternative scene the television set was at the same time despised and loved and this antagonistic attitude penetrated through several screens, producing intertextuality and investment in artistic desire and at the same time marking the interpellation of the participants in the alternative scene as the most overwhelming cultural movement in Slovenia to date. Of course, the range of such video projects, as well as the alternative art practice as a whole, was very limited. The viewers identified as a specific social group during the spectacle/exhibition/club event could hardly be compared with a television group in terms of their numbers. Certain video productions were not included in the first international video biennials in Ljubljana as they appeared too radical and inappropriate even to the organizers. The utopia that video, as an appropriate means for expressing radical viewpoints, could arouse the wider masses was

simply confronted with the impossibility of penetrating the main mass media. Here we should also mention the interest and great expectations personified by ATV as the first independent Yugoslav television house in the mid-1980's

Marjan Osole - Max, author of numerous videos, including some musical and documentary videos about the group *Laibach*, co-produced and edited a great number of alternative video works in his Studio Brut during the 1980's. In cooperation with Bogdan Lešnik, president of the cultural and artistic association, ŠKUC-Forum, he elaborated the programming scheme for the first alternative i.e. autonomous television house in Yugoslavia named ATV, which was supposed to be based on the authorship principle thus enabling anyone to create a program and broadcast it. The concept derived from the recognition that a certain social, cultural, artistic and theoretical practice was destined to marginalisation and that even in the future it could not be adequately represented in the official media. A three-and-a-half hour promotional program was produced in Studio Brut in 1987 as the embryo of a future programming scheme. Unfortunately, despite an interesting concept and economic subsidies, ATV never really started working as a real television station because it encountered incomprehension from the power structures.

Another aspect of the mass usage of the video in the 1980's were musical video spots. The mutual influence between music and video in Yugoslavia produced a series of video clips; almost all Yugoslav rock, punk, new wave and other groups presented themselves through this medium, e.g. *Laibach*, *Disciplina kičme*, *Film*, *Borghesia*, *Niet* and *Idoli*. Despite the fact that they were based on urban iconography and everyday reality, they differed from the video clips shown on MTV (Music Television) - which could not be watched in Yugoslavia at the time as there was no cable or satellite TV. In urban milieus in Yugoslavia, music was the rhythm of life, especially nightclub life, as well as the domain of opposition to the ruling ideology, and the music clip, which did not depend on the (non-existing) market was not subjected to its demands and, as an integral part of the artistic concept, it offered a platform for experimentation. 1985 saw the release of the first Yugoslav video cassette - *Tako mladi* ("So Young") by the multimedia music group *Borghesia* produced by the FV publishing house; it was more a product of media research than a market/commercial accomplishment. Nevertheless, it was distributed both within and outside Yugoslavia through private channels and independent networks, since the rock and punk scenes in Yugoslavia were very well connected, so

the infrastructure of independent distribution was well developed.

In 1987 the first Yugoslav music video clip festival was organized in Zagreb under the name *Videomix 001*, comprising both author video and international rock video shots and films during its five day program. It was an important platform for presentations and encounters, and at the same time it attempted to set up criteria for the evaluation and discovery of author approaches. The festival was held for several years in sequence and was regularly covered by Zagreb Television. Thanks to this and also to their fairly regular screening on Yugoslav television stations, music video clips occupied an important place in the shaping of visual culture and public opinion.

The Eighties: Narrative and Aesthetic Usage

The second half of the 1980's can be labelled as the period which saw the professionalisation of video. Video works were often produced in cooperation with television stations or in private studios. Video was included in national cultural programs under the heading 'film', and there were even state subsidies for production, albeit rarely. There was no art market for more classic art disciplines, let

alone the video, which was not acquired by state museums and galleries for their collections. Nor were video studios and workshops publicly available. Therefore production conditions were still not ideal and continuous work was almost impossible. This explains why certain Yugoslav video makers, e.g. Dalibor Martinis, Sanja Iveković and the tandems Breda Beban/Hrvoje Horvatić and Marina Gržinić/Aina Šmid were driven to a nomadic life spent in video centres, galleries and festivals around the world, where it was possible for them to work.

However, those were also the years which saw numerous presentations of Yugoslav video art in European and American centres, prepared by Biljana Tomić, Bojana Pejić, Dunja Blažević, Miha Vipotnik and Kathy Rae Huffman, and also by Nuša and Srečo Dragan, Marina Gržinić and others. They included the program *Deconstruction, Quotation & Subversion: Video from Yugoslavia*, prepared in 1989 by Kathy Rae Huffman after her active participation in the Belgrade Video Encounters and the Ljubljana Biennial Video CD 87. It was shown at the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art) in Boston and in Artists Space in New York, where it has been kept and can be borrowed for viewing. There were still regular annual Video Encounters at the Belgrade Student Cultural Centre, at the Academy Film Centre there

was the Yugoslav Alternative Film and Video Festival, there were programs showing video works at the ŠKUC in Ljubljana and the Zagreb Multimedia Centre SKUC and the International Video Biennial in Ljubljana was held for the fourth time in 1989. However, it no longer aroused such great attention as the previous ones and it was the last one to be held.

An occasional focus on video during various exhibitions, encounters and workshops created an impression of lively events and great interest in video, but it did not produce a matching theoretical and critical reflection. Reasons for this may be found in the lack of trust on the part of experts, especially art historians and critics, toward any new technology or (conceptually) different artistic practice, i.e. unconventional artistic and cultural strategies and methods, as well as in the lack of interest and knowledge of the video as a medium.

It was characteristic of the position of the video in Yugoslavia that production circumstances dictated the reception, which was limited to a rather narrow circle of creators, producers and sympathizers. It is true that they were closely linked and that they regularly cooperated in the fields of organization and production. However, with rare exceptions, until the mid-1970's it was above all the video makers who wrote about and represented the video both

locally and abroad, trying to set up an aesthetic value and social relevance of their own artistic practice. It was only in 1986 that the first book dedicated to video art was published in Belgrade: *Videosfera: video/društvo/umetnost* ("Videosphere: video/society/art") edited by the video maker Mihailo Ristić with theoretical texts on the video and contributions by international and local video authors. However, there was no institution which systematically and continuously dealt with the video, collecting, filing, analysing, presenting or interpreting video art. For this reason until 2000 there was no comprehensive documentation on video authors and video works. It was only with the previously mentioned SCCA-Ljubljana project entitled *Videodokument: Videoart in Slovenia 1969-1998* (catalogue, book of essays, CD-ROM) edited by myself, and the Belgrade Centre for Contemporary Arts entitled *Video Art in Serbia* that the video in these two cultural milieus acquired its history. However, there are still no effective information and distribution networks, or professional archives and publicly available video studios.

Toward the end of the 1980's a highly developed technology of generating and manipulating images was no longer fascinating in itself, and one can often recognize a certain artism in the works. Video works are made as

complex stories, less often involving experimentation with digital technology. In a way they approached the film form or theatre representation, and at the same time they became an inevitable part of intermedia and visual practices, which made it possible for the video to enter galleries and theatres.

The period of relative collectivism, when it was sometimes impossible to name all the co-authors and collaborators of one video work, was over - including the concern for the fate of the subcultural scene and new social movements. What came to the foreground was individual authorship, detailed preparations, a long term process, collaboration with professional actors and dancers, and post-production became increasingly complex and decisive. Amateur equipment was almost left behind and the period of VHS and U-matic gradually shifted into the Beta format period. Video makers were emancipated in the production and presentational sense, in most cases they worked in professional (private) video studios, they collaborated with national television channels and regularly personally participated in international video festivals around the world. At the same time video artists themselves took care of the mass presentation of their work (on television), and thus a more noticeable presence of the

expressive approach of the video in a wider media space evolved.

However, exclusive specialization in video was still rare. Video authors came from various backgrounds, they were visual artists, film workers, sociologists, designers and journalists... and to them video meant just one of the possibilities of expression within the total creative practice, which is why their starting bases were broader and their forms of presentation more diverse. Video was often one of the elements in multimedia projects, performances, installations and (dance) spectacles and it broadened the boundaries of visual culture. It was less and less frequently an independent medium which combined specific topics and content or technical and aesthetic solutions. Video projects were a product of created scenarios and film directors' books, numerous collaborators and high technology. The application of 'chroma key' methods for combining shots became almost the rule, as well as the retro principle of referring to visual history, and combined ready-made (documentary) shots and images directly from television or from film was still frequent, particularly the narrative and dance components (performance art, dance, theatre). Various video genres were formed through mutual dependence with other art

practices, e.g. video dance, video film, video documentary, video clip, video sculpture, video installation, video ambience and video performance and they approached the performance, theatre, television or film language. It turned out that the video was generally usable, while the term 'intertextuality' replaced the term 'autonomy'.

It may be concluded that the development of the video medium within Yugoslavia from the beginning to the end of the 1980's presents an outstanding leap from the aspects of technology, content and expression: from the virtually bare, unprocessed and immediate images (gestures, actions) which followed suit in a slow rhythm, to fast changing shots, special effects and invented stories. Video approached film or theatre, while the post-production process became increasingly complex and decisive.

For this reason certain video works can also be understood as the desire for a great cinema artistic form which is expensive and requires professional knowledge. The video - the electronic image - in that sense loses the battle with film, because it has no depth, it is only a surface which facilitates countless holes which do not include stories and sentiments. At the same time a new generation emerged, one which saw the usage of video technology as an integral segment of artistic methods which

led to the realization of a contemporary work of art. The earlier, rebellious attitude toward the mass media, their institutions (state television) and other ideological state apparatus slowly faded away.

However, video technology, as announced by the early 1980's, did not become accessible to a wider circle of people. It was rather the contrary, as is confirmed by the relatively narrow circle of video authors until the beginning of the 1990's, a period marked by the disintegration of Yugoslavia as a federal political creation. The classification of video based on certain art schools and visual art was also a kind of paradox. A developed technology, without which it seemed video could no longer be made, was still linked to national television stations or rare video studios. In any case, numerous video works by Yugoslav authors at international (video) festivals and exhibitions were successfully presented and granted awards, and some video makers became and remained recognizable by their poetics on the international arena.

- ¹.Marijan Susovski, »Video u Jugoslaviji«, *Spot*, no. 10, Zagreb 1977.
- ².Raša Todosijević, *Video, Videosfera: video/društvo/umetnost* ("The Video: Videosphere: video/society/art"), Studentski izdavački centar, ed. Mihailo Ristić, Belgrade 1986.
- ³.Marijan Susovski, "Video u Jugoslaviji", *Spot*, no.10, Zagreb 1977.
- ⁴.Zemira Alajbegović and Igor Španjol, »In the technological grip of a television station: an interview with Miha Vipotnik«, in: *Videodokument: Video Art in Slovenia 1969-1998*, ed. Barbara Borčič, SCC - Ljubljana, Ljubljana, 1999.
- ⁵.Igor Španjol, »An artistic evening: television presentation and production of art video«, in: *Videodokument: Video Art in Slovenia 1969-1998*, ed. Barbara Borčič, SCCA-Ljubljana, Ljubljana, 1999.
- ⁶.Dušan Mandić, »ŠKUC-Forumova video produkcija«, *Ekran*, no. 1-2, Ljubljana, 1984

Barbara Borčič, *Video Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism, /Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991/*, // (eds. Dubravka Djurić, Miško Šuvaković), MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2003, pp. 490-520