

WHICH MAN RUNS, WHICH MAN SITS STILL AT HOME?

JEANNE C. FINLEY AND MARINA GRZINIC

Jeanne C. Finley and Marina Grzinic (in collaboration with Aina Smid) have spent the last 11 years in dialogue about the art produced in and around the Balkans. Grzinic, a resident of Slovenia, and Finley, a resident of the United States, have organized exhibitions that have travelled between the former Yugoslavia and the United States and have created individual work in both regions of the world.

Originally working with video, both artists now also experiment with interactive and Internet media. Finley was an artist-in-residence at Xerox Parc with her collaborator, John Muse, and Grzinic was active as an artist, curator and writer in the former Yugoslavia. As the war erupted between the republics of Yugoslavia, much of the dialogue between these artists was centered around the body—both the metaphorical and the literal dislocation—"bilocation"—of a people who began moving between their pasts and futures in unexpected ways. The simultaneous mapping and connecting of the virtual world through the Internet served as a way of following the dislocated and as a canvas on which to invent new ways to explore and represent the issues surrounding the changing geography. Central to the dialogue between Finley and Grzinic is curator Dunja Blazevic, who has facilitated the work of artists in the former Yugoslavia for 25 years. She has continued her work after being forced from Belgrade into exile in Paris and then relocating in 1996 to Sarajevo, Bosnia.

The following text traces reflections and mediations between Blazevic, Finley and Grzinic about individual video works, writings and collaborations over the past 11 years. It is centered around the production of works that reflects the issues and questions produced by the upheaval in the Balkans, yet extends beyond its borders both physically and conceptually.

MARINA GRZINIC: A possible departure from this rhetorical question of who stays and who is forced to run is that all three corners of this unstable triangle of artists (Blazevic, Finley and Grzinic/Smid) are also producers, writers, nomads and squatters of different intersecting territories—TV broadcast companies, Internet sites and situations. But we can also spend some comfortable time at home, since we have one. So in this scenario, "Who runs, who sits still at home?"

The war raging in the territories of former Yugoslavia, from Croatia to Kosovo, has forced millions to move and created thousands of refugees, immigrants and displaced persons. A period of 11 years now marks the instability of the Balkan region and demands a fundamental portion of the mental and geographical resources of the residents of ex-Yugoslavia. The theme of nomads and residents is present in a number of video works that were produced in the territory of the former Yugoslavia state.

In 1989 Ljubljana, capital of Slovenia, and at that time one of the ex-Yugoslav republics (from 1991 an independent country on the map of New Europe), presented the last edition of the International Yugoslav Video Biennial Festival. As the artistic director of the International Video Biennial, I invited Finley as one of the artists to show a retrospective program.

The fictional/non-fictional narratives presented in Finley's videos investigate the tension between individual identity and cultural and social institutions that shape that identity



Frame enlargement from *The Flies of the Market Place* (1999) by Marina Grzinic and Aina Smid.

such as family, religion and media. Finley's videos are characterized by a narrative curve created by the storyteller's first-person voice that simultaneously opposes and is shaped by the cultural institutions. In an examination of how traditional concepts of authority, sex, political freedom and tradition have influenced the structure of individuality in American society, Finley also examines how these concepts themselves have changed.

This molding of individuality by a different set of parameters than the Balkans was the point of rupture and eclipse of the relations, bodies, concepts and territories of people living in ex-Yugoslavia. Finley's work fit perfectly in the context, and the documentary style of her work brought a refreshing aesthetic to a common thematic interest between artists in ex-Yugoslavia and an American vision.

At this time, I was bound to this location, working with Smid in Ljubljana, making a video entitled *Bilocation* (1990). In our almost 20-year-long collaborative period we produced more than 30 art and documentary videos, installations, multi-media and Internet projects. The position of the body in relation to history and theory in post-Socialist, post-Communist or post-Capitalist context can be grasped precisely in *Bilocation*.

Bilocation is the simultaneous residence of the body and soul in two different places. The term is perfect for delineating the process of the video medium and for describing history in relation to the body. In *Bilocation*, original documentary footage shot by TV Slovenia during the "civil war" in Kosovo in 1989 was juxtaposed with the imaginary world of synthetic video images. The documentary footage, which had not been shown previously on national TV, is overlapped onto the image of a ballet dancer (e.g., inserted into her eye, encrusted in her intestines, etc.). These are images about (historical) places where our own memories become at once psychotic and erotic.

In *Bilocation*, the body is prepared and embalmed similarly to the way in which a body was prepared for a Socialist parade, or, for example, that of a man condemned to death, before he is taken to the scaffold. It is as if the culmination of every parade was not the excitement it aroused, but rather the culmination was the product: the embalmed, glazed body, made up as its victim. When dressing for the parade, we are actually adorning the body, which is soon to be destroyed by lust. The body is re-picturing the visual rituals of the body in the East and West. Are we remaking the body of history? No, it is rather a simulation of its political and emotional coordinates. The body is used against amnesia, shifting tenses in a way that deepens our understanding of memory and history beyond the video medium. However, it is the way the body is presented in *Bilocation* that clearly shows that the body in video is only the video resolution.

Blazevic is the third node in the unstable triangle. At that time (1989-90) Blazevic was the editor of TV Gallery—a series of art TV shows broadcast by Belgrade Television. The TV Gallery program was dedicated to the German artist Garry Schumm, who had contributed much toward presenting new art on television, as well as broadcasting his own TV Gallery program since 1963. Blazevic devoted her particular attention to the relationship between television and video. TV Gallery was not a chronicle of events in the visual field, though it tried to recognize, present and analyze the most contemporary and topical processes in art. After the International Video Biennial in 1989, Finley began working with Blazevic at the TV Gallery.

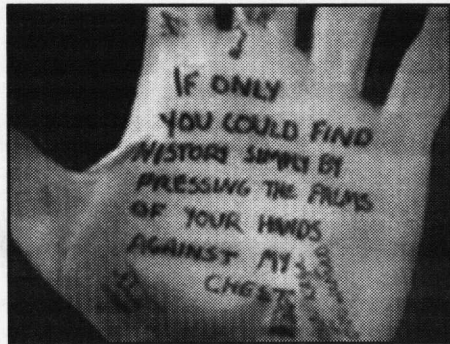
JEANNE FINLEY: In 1989 I was invited by Blazevic and the Fulbright Commission to work for a year with her visionary program, TV Gallery. This television show produced original artwork and hour-long documentaries about art that were nationally broadcast throughout the former Yugoslavia on the last Sunday of every month. This unique program recognized video as well as nationally broadcast television as a forum for artists work, reflecting the radical and feminist art culture fomenting in Belgrade during the 1970s as well as the contemporary work of artists in Slovenia and Yugoslavia's other republics. Marina Abromovic, Grzinic, Sanja Ivekovic, Dalibar Martinis and Bill Viola were among the many artists who created original work for the show. Since this work was being produced in Eastern Europe prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, the shows were infused with a veiled radical aesthetic unlike any broadcast of video art in Western Europe or the U.S. Artists producing for TV Gallery were offered the opportunity to work with state-of-the-art editing facilities and a flexible attitude on source material. These opportunities would have been liberating to artists in the U.S., who were forced to work under imposing "broadcast standards" that were used as a means to keep material off the air. TV Gallery flew below the radar until 1990 when Slobodan Milosevic took over all Serbian media, forcing Blazevic to leave her Belgrade residence and become a nomad. She lived in Paris organizing artists' antiwar work until October of 1996 when she moved to Sarajevo to work as director of the gallery of the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts (SCCA).

generation of artists who had not run from Sarajevo, had not left home, had not been killed, or brutally forced into exile.

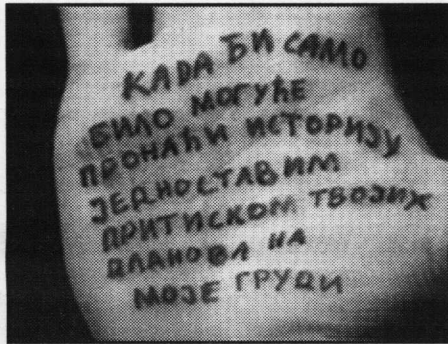
To understand the representations and actions in the space of ex-Yugoslavia, and the involvement of any media—new media, video and Internet artist—it is necessary to decode the intersection of cultural, political and theoretical strategies lying beneath such representations. We have to think about the body immersed in the specific totalitarian context of former Eastern Europe's Socialism and Communism, and we have to address the common heritage of totalitarianism in the same way that we address the common platform of European and American democracy.

I propose to reflect on Communism as an oppositional, differential setting, and to do the same with the body. Moreover, let us think about the body under Communism in a non-literal sense, in other words as a paradigm and a model with which to grasp the cultural tactics and practices of the Eastern European context, and not merely as a historical accident that ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall. In short, the body under Communism denotes specific tactics and practices in art and media in the Eastern European context.

However, this reading will be partly utopian as we are investigating the concept of the so-called rudimentary body that lived in the Communist context, firstly as a political body, to trace out the interference between the body and the Socialist/Communist system, and then to focus ourselves on the body as a topos of different deformations and usurpation. In this period Smid and I developed *Axis of Life*, a site developed and designed specifically for the Web.²



Frame enlargements from *Which Man Runs, Which Man Sits Still at Home?* (1989) by Jeanne C. Finley and John H. Muse.

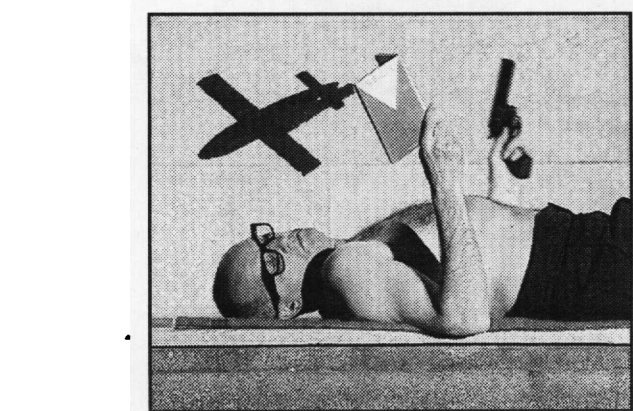


During the year prior to Milosevic's takeover I created three programs, each distinct in character and content: a documentary on an exhibition of new media art, a classical music video for Mozart's requiem commissioned by a separate cultural program at TV Belgrade, and a 10-minute original work entitled *Which Man Runs, Which Man Sits Still at Home* (1990). This title was taken from Nobel Prize winning novelist Ivo Andric's *The Travnik Chronicles* (1945), which is set in the early nineteenth century, a time when Bosnia was perched between the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires and their religions, creating nomads and residents throughout the region.¹ The tape navigates this desire: "If only I could find history simply by pressing the palms of my hands against your chest." These words are written on hands and then pressed into another's chest until the body collapses. The history and the body are searched for, desired, yet impenetrable and the process of the hands on the chest is repeated throughout the work.

Muse and I created an installation of the same title in the windows of the Belgrade American Cultural Center that included a videotape as well as photographs and approximately 1000 shoe lathes. These foot-shaped plastic molds used for shoe manufacturing were available in abundance because of the large number of American shoe companies with factories throughout the former Yugoslav republics. Which man runs, which man sits still at home?

Axis of Life paraphrases the so-called fast food consumer Web community. On the "menu" of *Axis of Life* the user finds the following topics: birth, body, love, art, media, history, geography, community and death. The new form of imaginary community is generated virtually through the specific way in which these different topics are selected and surfed. The site is an attempt to reintegrate in a critical, almost political and diacritical way, the content of the art material distributed through the Web. If the World Wide Web is a specific community, where millions are wired and searching for new information or fulfillment of desires or attempting to discover possible interfaces, new shifts and paths—one of the questions we pose, as artists, social activists and cyborg/political entities, is how can we define the basic elements of this wired condition? How is it possible to construct a new individual responsibility without a superficial morality and pathos? These two questions are at the base of the concept developed in the Web site *Axis of Life*. What is additionally important is that most of the topics listed on this specific site offer a new visual experience for the "waste" members of the Web community—we use some type of iconography, historical facts, references and visualizations that are specific to the history and life in former Eastern Europe. In this project, we challenge the idea of the Internet as a world without borders; *Axis of Life* questions these concepts of political and social borders along with the shifts generated in the field of art that drive both our minds and bodies. The site is structured using specific images concerning the so called "East" post-Socialist context: the history, art, media and life of Eastern Europe.

Within the site we pose the question of the possible concept of art on the Internet. *Axis of Life* brings the netsurfer to two crucial borders: Virtual Bread and Antarctica. Virtual Bread is the significant sign of an anti-community and a counter element of the technoscape abundance, while Antarctica is a community without an image or a dystopic geographical site.



Frame enlargement from *The Flies of the Market Place* (1999) by Marina Grzinic and Aina Smid.

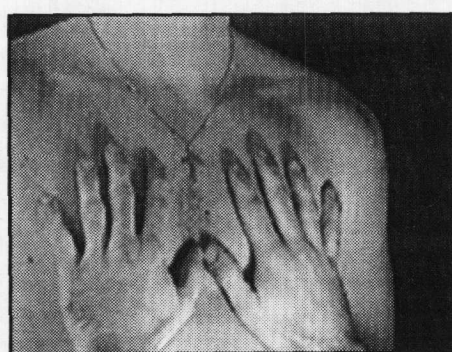
JF: I have been invited to return to work with Blazevec in the summer of 2001—this time in Sarajevo, her new residence—this time with the Internet, a medium that did not exist 10 years ago. With Lynne Sachs of Baltimore, along with artists from and in Sarajevo we will create a home on the Web where all of us—those who run and those who sit still—can reside. How does the body rest, how does it run?

Grzinic and Smid's work sets the standard and precedent for any Internet project that touches within the borders of the former Yugoslavia. Using her work as the foundation, we wish to build a virtual architectural space, a home of rooms with views of many different cities. Inhabited by the imaginations of people who have been separated from the intimacy of their past, this virtual space between nomads and residents will be linked to the city of Sarajevo and its turbulent history. The virtual architecture will be shaped by fictional characters who exchange letters, music, drawings, photographs and video over the Internet. Through this epistolary environment a description of the intersection between domestic lives and the cities gazed at from the windows will be evoked.

MG: At the First Annual Exhibition of the SCCA in Sarajevo in 1997, with the symbolic title "Meeting Point" as a reversal of the idea of nodes in space that divide, put together, cut and shape our lives—similarly to the former check point between East and West Berlin, an important number of video works by young artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina were produced. Blazevec, with her team of collaborators, produced not only a reflection of the Sarajevo space, but a powerful number of electronic works. Artists Nedžad Begovic, Timur Makarevic, Nebojsa Seric-Soba, Dejan Vekic, Jasmila Zbanic and Enes Zlatar to name a few, entered the arena of communication, reflection and deterritorialization. Perhaps now they can sit still and let go of their identities in a hybrid travel of no return. As Jean Narboni put it, "Discordant are not only perceptions and emotions, but also the faces, which are real territories."³ Yet to transform a face does not mean only to use it as a territory along which one can stroll. A face can also be doubled (or multiplied, for instance, in the triplication of one actress within the same image) or borrowed.

"Everything, everywhere, everybody" is the slogan of the '90s that results in a confusion of bodies, concepts and strategies—a type of out-of-joint situation for the subject. We find ourselves within all media, in all bodies, in all possible spaces at once. This puts into question some fundamental arguments concerning art and culture. Operating in the new mode the positions of identity also reveal to us other internal media and social processes. We are faced with leaving a historically defined position that imitates the natural world of our senses. With new media and technology we have the possibility of an artificial interface that is dominated by non-identity or difference.⁴ Instead of producing a new identity, something much more radical is produced—the total loss of identity. The subject is forced to assume that s/he is not what s/he thought her/himself to be, but somebody, or something, else.

Luna 10 (1994, by Grzinic/Smid), clips from neo-avant-garde films by Emir Kusturica, Zivojin Pavlovic and Zelimir Zilnik, made in the so-called Yugoslav film period of the 1970s-'80s, are re-read, re-worked and re-coded in a



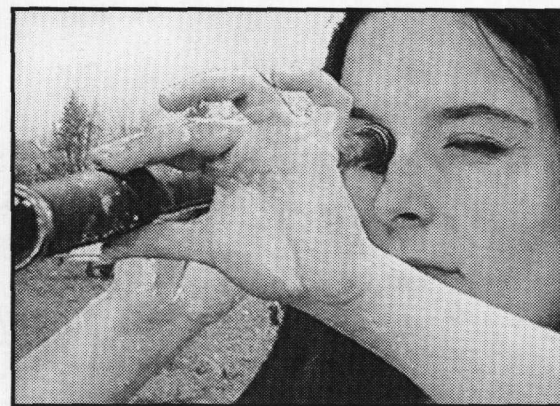
Frame enlargement from *Which Man Runs, Which Man Sits Still at Home?* (1989) by Jeanne C. Finley and John H. Muse.

video story contemplating the roles of the different media in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the time of world Internet communications, cyborg theory and world-spread computer nets. If it is true that we are all part of a giant hypertext, coded by adapted and shortened CD-ROM histories, then why not try to display the video picture as hypertext, but one that will show the hidden spots of our history and our present?

The mass of new technology today gives us completely shiny, glossy images. VHS technology, on the other hand, allows us to produce an almost wounded surface of the electronic image. To put the body back in the image is actually possible through scratches and dirty things—not through shiny surfaces. It is possible, through mistakes and errors in the image, to get a physical body—the senses, the moment when you put your body into action. Mistakes in the image are something like a fingerprint on the film, or a scratch, or scars on the skin, that are the evidence of the real humanity of the image. To make a mistake is to find a place in time. A mistake is like a wound in the image, an error in the body. It is a situation when we produce an open moment, a gap, a hiatus, where we can insert not only a proper body, but an interpretation. You can actually point with your finger and say "Here, in this mistake, there is something beneath." Such a mistake is the symptom.

In the 1999 video *On the Flies of the Market Place*, we dealt with the idea of the European space—divided and sacrificed. In an exemplary video of a visually constructed surrealistic world of facts and emotions, the use of documents from books and magazines raised the question of rereading the European space as it is traditionally defined—East and West Europe. With references to history, philosophy and arts, the video elaborates on the idea of Eastern Europe as the indivisible remainder of all European atrocities. Eastern Europe is a piece of shit and the bloody symptom of the political, cultural and epistemological failures of this century.

JF: The artists working in and around the Balkans over the last 10 years have been pioneers in the creation of artworks for the virtual environment. The work begun more than a decade ago and, nationally broadcast throughout former Yugoslavia on TV Gallery, has continued despite the upheavals in the region. But the one country is now four—the body has been fragmented and it is through the work of artists traveling through cyberspace that it is able to meet and reinvent itself. Dialogue and communication between artists staying and those leaving the territory



Frame enlargement from *Luna 10* (1994) by Marina Grzinic and Aina Smid.

defined a methodology of work that pushed through borders by means of technological and aesthetic innovation. Grzinic/Smid and Blazevec have created forums for their work to root itself in the ravaged ex-Yugoslav soil and the new methodology defines an original aesthetic. This aesthetic questions the relationship between East and West and asks how the body is now shaped as it is redefined within the new spaces of both the political and virtual environment.

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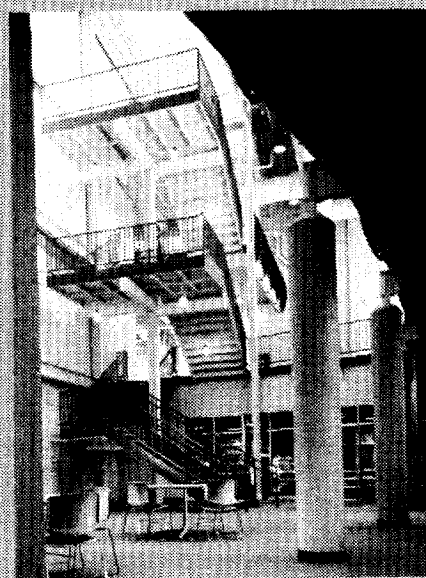
NOTES

1. "Even so, none of this could entirely remove or protect them from the events, which like fire or the plague, overtook alike the man who ran from them and the man who sat still at home." Ivo Andric, *The Travnik Chronicles* (Sarajevo: Svetlost, 1945).
2. See www.ljudmila.org/quantum.east.
3. Jean Narboni in Pascal Bonitzer, *Le Champ Aveugle* (Paris: Edition Cahiers du Cinema, Gallimard, 1982).
4. Peter Weibel, "Ways of Contextualisation or The Exhibition as a Discrete Machine," in Ine Gevers, ed., *Place, Position, Presentation, Public* (Maastricht and Amsterdam: Jan van Eyck Akademie and De Balie, 1992).



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