

SATURDAY, APRIL 13
SESSION 8
09:00 - 10:00

ROOM B - SALÓN DE GRADOS

Miljana Niković

Belgrade on Screens

DDr statement / importance and role of EXPERIMENTATION in the research project:

In the early stages of my doctoral research, my agenda was clear. First, I would read "all relevant theories" that would give me important insights on the philosophical aspects of my topic. Then, once my theoretical approach refined, I would start collecting the required material and clarify the copyrights. Only after these steps, I would consider experimenting with the material. Fortunately, one of the most important advices that was given to me – at my first CA2RE presentation – was to start experimenting as soon as possible, to avoid bad surprises later. Indeed, the theoretical part of the research can be indefinite, as it evolves and grows constantly, based on our affinities, comprehension, and choices on the directions that we undertake.

When I started experimenting with the material, putting aside the copyrights or other administrative concerns that were previously limiting me, I immediately felt free: to explore, discover, self-educate and even fail. We have already discussed how crucial "learning-by-doing" methods are, especially in art-driven research and experimental cinema. Therefore, I understand the process of experimentation in my research as a series of tests where I can playfully "expect the unexpected", and welcome even the "mistakes" to happen. During the actual experimentation – in my case, video montage and editing – I observe new phenomena, led by intuitive and speculative (re)actions, making invisible connections visible, often leading to "tacit knowledge". In other words, experimentation gives me the ability to suddenly see something that I would have missed without the experiment.

Belgrade on Screens:

Movement, Time, Difference, Repetition

Within the framework of my art-driven doctoral research, "Belgrade on Screens: Visions of Continuous Discontinuities", I explore the audiovisual representations of Belgrade. The main questions revolve around the impact of moving images on cognitive awareness, collective versus individual memories, and how they produce new interpretations of urban, historical and sociopolitical transformations through one specific location: the Terazije Square.

By mixing different film genres and by activating the film archives, the concept is to bring the collected material in an immersive environment. Experimenting with forms of Expanded Cinema and diverse montage techniques, my goal is to connect, de- and recontextualize fragmented past narratives in a spatial arrangement for phenomenological experiences, through a series of speculative multi-channel video installations. Once "released" from their institutional boxes – where they might be forgotten, hidden, lost, unaccessible – the films get a physical reality, in touch with broader audiences.

Motivated by the outcomes of my previous contribution at CA2RE Zagreb,¹ which was a result of reflections that happened during earlier presentations – Hamburg, Ljubljana, and Delft – I plan to continue exploring further with the same type of format: a multichannel experimental lecture-performance. Given that Valencia's edition explicitly encourages innovative configurations, in a "most varied and open way possible", I would like to take this opportunity as an invitation to develop alternative techniques and methods. Consequently, I rely on minimal technical support as I intend to intervene again with at least three screens. Their size and type can differ, and if any additional screens are available, I will be happy to use them and test unique spatial settings according to the location where the event will take place. The exhibition area(s) should be as dark as possible to allow the best perceptibility of the projected images. Ideally, the audience will have the option to walk around the screens.

While the lecture-performance held in Zagreb was my first experiment of that kind, the result was a sort of "making-of" showing the "behind the scenes" of the research. The main concern was to address institutional, financial and technological obstacles related to the questions of re-appropriation through found footage and film archives. In my opinion, being preoccupied with these issues makes any research more challenging, because it tends to distract the researcher from the initial topic. On the other hand, such a "diversion" can be rewarding because a systemic degradation can be detected. In that sense, although the tone of my work was rather self-ironic, the problems evoked through a series of mise-en-abyme situations opened a new set of research gaps in the fields of film theory, film history and practices in contemporary video art.

1 - The extended abstract and my lecture-performance CITIES ON SCREENS OR SCREENS OF CITIES, as well as my 3-channel video ALMOST WHITE CITY ON BARELY BLACK SCREENS, can be accessed on the following link: <https://vimeo.com/miljananikovic/cities-on-screens-lecture>

As an example, it became clear that to collaborate with most of the public services who "possess" cultural heritage, the best way is often within an informal agreement. This means that all types of footage or documents are kept behind the locked doors of mainly national or privatized film archives, controlled by individuals who are unwilling to follow their own policies. Struggling to establish an effective contact with most of Serbian institutions where films are being stored, my experimental methods are inspired by avant-garde and amateur filmmakers who work with low or no budget. Paradoxically, even internationally acclaimed filmmakers have to find an ally – an enthusiastic "insider" – who wants to help despite formal or technical constraints.

Consequently, being confronted to these complexities, new forms of political, historical, economic and aesthetic "dis/continuity" appeared, but on a typical meta-level. It is also why my 3-channel video "Almost White City On Barely Black Screens" acts as a DIY-intersection of tutorials, desktop cinema, and image manipulation. In fact, the multiple layers of this meta-level as acts of self-awareness – in my case deliberately obsessive and subjective – were also noted during the panel in Zagreb. One of these modalities consisted of deforming the original footage through different tools in the editing phase: mirroring, slowmotion, pixelation, distortion, multiplication, filters, etc. This oversaturation of effects and overwhelming input provoked reactions of "surprising captivation, confusion, joyful frustration, entanglement, and estrangement" — which was a stimulating feedback for me because it was my first lecture-performance, that I considered as a new type of experiment. Indeed, what if the "final product" or the "basis of my practice" evolves as a set of multi-channel video installations *and* lecture-performances?

Lastly, by experimenting with the audiovisual (formal) aspects of the footage as described above, not only do I avoid the bureaucratic complexities around copyright and budget, but I also "demystify" the images for a deeper interpretation. For instance, as implied in my DDr statement, my perception of a same scene or sequence can totally change during montage, and I can then attribute new meanings to its intrinsic value.

Although I have many examples, I can briefly describe one typical moment of "discovery" that I also gave during the exchange at the previous panel. It is the opening scene of a cult movie, filmed as a pan shot.²

While the camera moves from right to left, we recognize Belgrade's cityscape through several distinctive elements among generic buildings and their rooftops: the St. Mark's Church, the Parliament, the Trade Union Hall, and finally, the Terazije Square. Once I put the original next to its backwards version (played in reverse, from left to right), I realized that the "meeting point" – when the same frame appears on both screens – is the Parliament. This is no surprise, because it appears exactly in the middle of the 40 second pan shot, 20 seconds after the first frame. But this evidence is not perceived due to the continuity of the camera flow and the continuity of these specific locations, despite the discontinuity of their functional, urban, architectural and sociopolitical significance.

For the upcoming conference in Valencia, I propose a different approach, purely focused on Deleuzian philosophy that can be applied in the context of my research. For this, I will primarily refer to ideas described in "Cinema 1: The Movement-Image" (1983) and "Cinema 2: The Time-Image" (1985) where Gilles Deleuze dissects polarities representing two modes of cinematic expression – the first linked to the sensory-motor system, the second intervening in this system. A third volume that I will explore and incorporate in my experiment is "Difference and Repetition" (1968), where Deleuze questions the circular movement of time and the events that occur within these cycles. By merging these theories to the concepts of *continuity* (as repetition and time) and *discontinuity* (as difference and movement), I intend to transpose their respective "junctions" on the screens, by using collected film material. Finally, I will shortly introduce some of the virtual 3D models that I have recently started extending with the open-source software Blender, as I believe that it is a powerful tool to experiment countless types of scenography.



Lecture-performance at the CA2RE Zagreb, November 2023

2 - Panning is a camera movement where the camera pivots left or right on a horizontal axis while its base remains in a fixed location. It can be used to follow a moving character or to fit into a frame, such as panning across a landscape to create a sense of place and contextualize the story.