⬤ Barbara Borčić / DIVA Station and Artists' Archives

In my contribution, I present the **DIVA Station** video/media art archive (SCCA-Ljubljana) and its context, structure and collaboration with artists. This brings us to the notion of "accessibility", which has sparked passionate debates and a sort of "archive fever" about the preservation of media art in the last decade. Here I do not refer to copyright law, but the artist's right to be acquainted with and to have influence on the context, interpretation and ways of presentation of their work. Therefore, the task of an archival institution is not only systematization of the documentation in databases, preservation of art works, and dissemination of knowledge. It also needs to establish effective communication channels between artists and other creators of audiovisual archives and audiences.

Next, I will concentrate on (and screen) two seminal video works in the archive to confront the neo-avant-garde video/media practice by **Miha Vipotnik** from the 1970s with the retro-avant-garde video/media practice by the **Laibach** group in the 1980s. Besides being characterized by a strong performative function, they are both also very inform ative as far as the conditions of production are concerned. Their access to and usage of video equipment/technology was extremely different, juxtaposing an individual/experimental usage of national

television professional video technology in the 1970s on the one hand and the innovative/experimental usage of basic (low-fi VHS) technology in the 1980s, characteristic for the Ljubljana Alternative Scene, on the other.

DIVA Station Video/Media Art Archive (SCCA-Ljubljana)

http://www.scca-ljubljana.si/en/diva-station

DIVA Station has been developed by SCCA–Ljubljana Center for Contemporary Arts since 2005 to archive video works and promote an overall understanding of artistic oeuvres by organizing exhibitions and presentations worldwide, as well as discussions and workshops. It is a compendium of projects that seek to research, document and archive, as well as analyze, present and disseminate Slovenian video/new-media art. All the projects are accessible online and open for cooperation.

DIVA Station is based on two previous SCCA projects:

• **Videodokument: Video Art in Slovenia 1969–1998,** a comprehensive documentation and overview of video art in Slovenia that featured the first systematic study of video art in Slovenia and was important in framing the terminology and establishing the theoretical basis for further research

• **Videospotting,** a series of curated

programmes of Slovene production and presentation worldwide in the form of exhibitions, screenings and lectures (until now).

Besides these two projects, it encompasses a number of research and exhibition programmes **(Video Turn, Between Video and Film)** plus educational seminars **(Archiving Practices).**

The most advanced, accessible and popular is the online archive **DIVA–Digital Video Archive** of over 1,300 units, with a hypertextual database and search engine combined with open access to low-resolution artworks (http://www.e-arhiv.org/diva).

The archive is complemented by a rich **Mediatheque** maintaining a number of international video works and compilations by international research and archival organizations, e.g. ZKM's *40 Years of Video Art in Germany*, Medienwerkstatt's *Video Edition Austria*, Lux's *Rewind + Play: An Anthology of Early British Video Art,* and the community compilation *Paper Tiger TV*. It also holds a collection of books, catalogues and periodicals on contemporary video and new media art and theory (**Library**). All these materials represent an important reference point for users and additional incentive for our professional work and likewise offer a possibility for international exchange.

DIVA Station is a partner in **GAMA–Gateway to Archives of Media Art,** developed as an international internet platform that connected similar European media art archives and enabled them to achieve better visibility and wider accessibility, e.g. Argos centre for art & media (Brussels), Heure Exquise! International centre for video arts (Lille),

Les Instants Video Numériques et Poétiques (Marseille), LI-MA–Former Montevideo/Time Based Arts (Amsterdam), C3 Center for Culture & Communication (Budapest), Filmform Foundation (Stockholm), and Ars electronica (Linz). It continued as a network and project team educating young professionals to work with video and preparing exhibitions, seminars, workshops and public and internal consultations on the topic of research, documentation, archiving and distribution of AV content.

The archive is based on collecting video works within a wider national context. Despite its inevitable incompleteness and the need for continuous upgrading and improvement of the archive, the procedures for treatment of the materials were clearly defined by a typology of terminology, which creates a cartography of conceptual frameworks within which a video artwork is discussed. This typology was defined in collaboration with the GAMA partners by harmonizing keywords and classifying vocabulary entries into three categories: artworks, events, and sources. In addition to detailed data on the artwork and the technical account, special attention is drawn to a short description of an art video on the DIVA internet interface, which forms an index of keywords, enabling a more precise search for artworks and connecting them according to content.

DIVA primarily presents local video art production in order to provide representational and research materials for curators, artists, theorists, students, and the wider interested public. The colection and archive

have been made through research and attentive observation of video production, followed by analysis and interpretation. It has been created with the help of numerous consultations and talks with artists, curators and other experts and international collaborators who are directly confronted with the issue of storing video art and establishing video archives. The possibilities for using the works are determined by agreement with individual artists. The process of documenting and archiving goes from collecting the material to the procedure of archiving. The video archive is based on facsimiles – precise copies of the highest possible quality of video works, which satisfy the need for an archive to be available to professionals and the wider public. However, the primary purpose of the archive seems to be the storage of artistic content as an important segment of tangible and intangible mobile cultural heritage and historic memory.

The most complex presentation of DIVA Station – a model of a possible permanent installation of the archive – was a study exhibition entitled **DIVA at Škuc Gallery** in Ljubljana (2009), curated by Barbara Borčić (http://www.scca-ljubljana.si/arhiv/diva-skuc-eng.htm). It was envisioned in the form of a "live and open archive" offered to the public for free viewing. On the one hand, it displayed the historical context and the understanding and usage of AV technology as well as representative video works and curatorial selections. On the other hand, it was conceived as an educational platform with practical demonstrations, audiovisual performances, workshops, and theoretical contributions. The exhibition **Race with Time: Performance in a Rear-view Mirror,** curated by Borčić at the National Theatre Museum/Institute in Ljubljana (2014), featured the multilayered relationship between performance and video (http://www.scca-ljubljana.si/arhiv/news-en_14-19.htm). While the thematic exhibition **Projected Visions: From Art in the Urban Context to Fiction and Dystopia,** curated by Borčić and installed at Apollonia, échanges artistiques européens in Strasbourg (2018), was bound to the theme of urban and public space in their everyday dimension but also in their utopian and dystopic aspects (http://www.scca-ljubljana.si/en/e-city-ljubljana-projected-visions-2).

In AV seminars **(Archiving Practices),** SCCA hosted panel discussions, presentations and screenings of international artists, critics and institutions/archives, e.g. NIMk – Montevideo (Amsterdam), Lux (London), Transitland (Sofia, Berlin), Transmediale (Berlin), ZKM (Karlsruhe), Ludwig Boltzmann Institute (Linz), imediathek (Bremen), AV-arkki (Helsinki), Argos (Brussels), Ursula Blickle Video Archiv (Vienna); lectures by S. Kovats, R. Pape, G. Wijers, M. Schieren, H. Helfert, A. Pezelj, D. Fritz and S. Kačunko; exhibitions and performances by D. Martinis and Dan Oki; and workshops by G. Couty, C. Vanderborght, N. Korda, D. Kracina and W. Seuskens.

In this way, SCCA-Ljubljana tried to introduce and emphasize the meaning of AV archives and their accessibility and present the local circumstances, compare them to successful international practices, and establish long-term collaborations.

1. *DIVA at Škuc Gallery,* Škuc Gallery, Ljubljana, 2009 (photo: Dejan Habicht), exhibition view

2. *DIVA at Škuc Gallery,* Škuc Gallery, Ljubljana, 2009 (photo: Dejan Habicht), exhibition view

We have to note that we have not yet come to an agreement with the state cultural policy, neither concerning a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of AV archives nor state support for this unstable media archiving. We are one of the vast majority of organizations worldwide dealing with AV archives of contemporary art facing a lack of support by national cultural authorities which could assure sustainable and professional work in this field. The archives are endangered not just because of the fragile and vulnerable material, subject to rapid chemical decay and technological obsolescence, but mostly due to a lack of recognition of their importance by the (national) authorities. Nevertheless, we are stubbornly certain of the positive and constructive outcome that the future will bring, including through exchange of experiences and collaboration.

Miha Vipotnik, Videogram 4 (1976–79)
Online DIVA:

http://www.e-arhiv.org/diva/index.php?opt=work&id=217

From very early on (1975), **Miha Vipotnik** used video as his main medium of expression, either through a single-channel video or as a constitutive part of his multimedia and interdisciplinary projects and art installations. Moreover, he was co-director of the renowned international video biennial VIDEO CD in Ljubljana (1983–1997).

Electronic media experimenting and the actual performative process are among the key features of his artistic practices, through which he explores the impact of such image transformations within his narratives. His artistic language includes elements of performance with an emphasis on the significance of timing and the gradual unfolding of enigmatic personal stories into a palimpsest of images, inscriptions and speech.

Vipotnik was also the first video artist who succeeded in transmitting professional video technology from institutional television into individual usage. Namely, although not openly presenting itself as a repressive ideological state apparatus, television in Yugoslavia in the 1970s 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 national TV Ljubljana broadcast Vipotnik's artistic video entitled **Videogram 4** during a late-night experimental programme in 1979, announcing it as "a very rare television event or even a new experience" and warning viewers that "any interference or unusual features in the image or tone are part of the programme, 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 exposure, solarization, 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 at the TV studios as follows:

On the music score for synthesizer and script for their activities,

3. Miha Vipotnik: Videogram 4, 1976-79, still from video

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.

Laibach & Marijan Osole, *Max: Morte ai sciavi* (1983)
Online DIVA: http://www.e-arhiv.org/diva/index.php?opt=work&id=378

The Laibach Group are known particularly for their concert appearances and music recordings. Less is known about their visual production within the 1980s Ljubljana Alternative Scene, comprising also media performances and music video clips. Laibach incorporated appropriation and montage into their art practice, naming it Retro-Avant-Garde. They started to make moving images by exploiting the possibilities of photocopies, tape recorder and video devices. With their techniques of cutting up and re-editing found footage,

and layering images with the chroma-key procedure, they enabled the use and collaging of readymade images, and a parallel embedding of different ideological and cultural codes, sources and iconographic motifs and symbols with complex referential backgrounds.

In Laibach's videos, the shots were appropriated from films and national television – recognizable political personalities, rituals and manifestations, edited through methods of fragmentation and serial repetitions, combined with sexual scenes from porn movies. An important element of these videos was the "live" appearances of the members themselves in concerts, with a stressed performative and *Gesamtkunstwerk* staging. **Morte ai sciavi** is a montage of Laibach's early concerts in 1982 and 1983 combined with shots played on TV screens and scenes from their earlier video *Documents of Oppression,* and is characterized by a specific dark atmosphere. It employs all of the possibilities (VHS and partly U-matic) for image manipulation known at the time: multiple reshooting from tape or shooting from the screen, colouring, solarization, negative, camera travelling across screens, zoom, slow motion, cuttings, freeze-frame shots, counterpoint between the actors and the audience, and repetitive rhythmical editing.

4. Laibach & Marijan Osole – Max: Morte ai sciavi, 1983, still from video