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MORE THAN A GAME: TELEVISION ARCHIVES IN TWO ACTS

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Abstract: Television archives are not only illustrations of the past, but also a powerful medium for artistic expression. This audiovisual essay takes an artistic approach to television archives. Producing new and unique pieces of art is one way of exploring the potential of archival footage that is kept in television vaults. The idea of developing artistic work by adding music, new voices and narratives to silent videos in the archives came out of the desire to experiment and bring new experiences of television archives out in the real world, whether in museums, cultural institutions or music clubs. The creative and experimental approach to using television archives started out as a game to motivate archivists to take pleasure in their hard and meticulous work. As part of this experimentation, there was an exploration of the metatextuality and intertextuality found in the archival videos and metadata. Working in imaginative registers took us from finding random words on old archival description cards to creating slam poetry and music. In a nutshell, it led us to creating performance art.

Keywords: archives, art, Circus Adria, electronic music, family, father, nostalgia, poetry, Television Belgrade, slam poetry

As an artist based at Radio Television of Serbia, I had the opportunity to explore the presence of television in our lives through the use of television archives.

To me, working with television archives means engaging in meaningful conversations with the past. I am captivated by the footage I find in the archives, and for this reason I want to show as many people as possible the treasure trove to be found in our collections. In my work, I am inspired to instill new life into archival footage. I believe that archives should step out into the world and cross from the past into the present. I need to show how archives are still relevant today and the many ways in which they matter. While I believe that archives lend themselves well to artistic and academic work, I also imagine they should be popular and exciting. This can help acquaint audiences with old television material that they otherwise would never have seen.

The archives that I used for my two pieces of art spoke to me on a personal level. While reviewing the archival material, I came across some discarded footage that had been left behind on film strips. This material had not been used or needed by anyone. Somehow, those images found their way into my memories and experiences, and into my art. Working in television gave me the opportunity to discover hidden gems and build on content that required little or no copyright clearance. That was the main objective.

Through my work, I have had the opportunity to find amazing collaborators. Together, we formed an artistic circle comprising composers, musicians (Anja Đorđević, Dejan Vučetić, Boris Mladenović, Vladimir Đorđević), animation artists (Dejan Vučetić) and film editors (Miloš Stojanović, Goran Stojanović). We took great pleasure in working together to explore the potential of the archives and create new kinds of art.

1 Eye On the Screen

One of my aims in approaching television as a historical medium and instilling new life into television archives, was to bring archival material into music clubs. To this end, my collaborators and musicians experimented with electronic music and I also created archive-based video artworks for clubbers.

I chose electronic music for a reason. Today we think it has ambiguous connotations, as some still consider it to be a form of anarchy and a signifier of new trends. In reality, electronic music is a powerful display of what composers can achieve with technology. In our archive-based creations, our creative circle used electronic music alongside video and written words. The use of samples in electronic music made it an equal partner to the use of archival videos and written text.

After discovering an interesting archival description card, we decided to use written words to create a slam poem. Slam poetry as an expression of the performer's thoughts as they speak out words. Combined with music created by my fellow artists, my voice serves as both poetry and an instrument for guiding the video material.

The resulting artwork was made of archival footage comprising discarded news clips from the 1960s, which were found in the Television Belgrade vaults. These clips were left unnamed and unconnected, with only a description card listing some of the featured scenes.

In our editing of the artwork, we used video samples in the same way we used music and word samples. We applied sampling on these three different levels and by doing so, we repurposed original archival material to show new interpretations and bring out renewed meanings. In this way, we entered into a direct dialogue with television archives.

We took all this one step further. By re-interpreting archival material, we also created new material and repurposed the original for other uses.



Video 1. *Eye on the Screen*, directed by Nevena Popović (2025).

2 Circus - Monday, Tuesday, Saturday

Another way in which I have attempted to repurpose and bring out renewed meanings in archival material is illustrated by the video artwork *Circus*. This project pays homage to film as both an art form and a way of life. It draws attention to the importance of television archives as historical records that preserve our memories.

The video's narrative highlights the temporal nature of television, ranging from prosaic aspects of everyday life ('Monday', 'Tuesday') to the extraordinary days of television ('Saturday', the day of special programs that everyone looked forward to). In the beginning, television was something of a *grand spectacle*, much like when circuses used to come to town. In its early days, television constituted an event in people's daily lives, and it all built up to that special day: Saturday.

The voice-over narration in the video introduces the circus as something that has *come and gone*, imbuing it with a sense of ephemerality and nostalgia. The archival footage depicts the circus as an enthralling event and this duality often shifts from nostalgia to excitement.

The circus serves as a metaphor demonstrating that entertainment and remembrance are television's most vital components. This explains the recurring leitmotifs in the artwork: 'I remember; my memories; they would forget about me...'

Music plays a key role in intensifying words, images and feelings, and in guiding spectators through realms of connection that defy strict definition, projecting reality onto imaginative levels. It is rare to find a collaborator, partner and kindred spirit such as Anja Đorđević, the composer, whose music I have been fortunate enough to experience.

For this artwork, I have found it motivating to work with an archival video about the Yugoslav International Circus, which ceased to exist in 1967. It was called Circus Adria. The video shows footage that had been filmed but never used in a 1960s Television Belgrade news report. The sound in the original video was not preserved. Consisting of eight minutes of unedited footage, the material shows not only brief glimpses of the main event, but also intimate scenes of everyday life in the circus.

It immediately struck me that the circus was one of the first places where films were shown to audiences. By going to the circus at the beginning of the 20th century and watching 'pictures', spectators could visually experience different worlds and immerse themselves in other realities.

Circus - Monday, Tuesday, Saturday is both a poetic audiovisual essay and an archive-based experimental film. Spanning three segments, it explores and creates three different narratives. These are superimposed on the same video. Each narrative alters the original archival footage. The original video is no longer just archival footage. It becomes fiction, poetry, drama.

The visual triptych I have created draws inspiration from original circus footage. It is both an expression and an analysis of my life, feelings, childhood. Through this poetic approach, I wanted to create a metalanguage with which to explore metatextuality and metafiction.

Inspired by the images, I did not just study or contemplate the subject. I wanted to experience it with my body, mind and soul, to understand it and immerse myself in it.

A random sequence of scenes that were excluded from a television report over sixty years ago evoked something in me. I decided to enhance this experimental film with footage from my personal video archives that features people who have been important to me. Spanning almost two decades, this private archival footage dominates the final part of the film.



Video 2. *Circus – Monday, Tuesday, Saturday*, directed by Nevena Popović (2025).

This is where metalanguage, metatextuality and metafiction come into play. The first part transitions into a second part that gradually deconstructs itself. This deconstruction is inspired by an intimate response to the imagery and memories evoked by the story in the original archival footage. These are eventually brought back to life by fragments of sentences from a book that shaped my childhood and which I vividly remember: *Early Sorrows* by Danilo Kiš. The second part evolves into a third: a deeply personal reaction and sublimation. It is a creation born out of a process of opening myself up and laying my thoughts and feelings bare before the viewer.

The sentence at the end constitutes a rhythm, a bond, a bridge that connects all three narratives, all three segments together: 'Breathe, breathe, you are not alone'. Offering solace, this sentence speaks both to the author and the viewers. It points to a fear of abandonment. It comforts us, shelters us and connects us all as we reminisce and remember the things that have made an impact on us.

Biography

Nevena Popović currently works as an editor in the Music and Contemporary Arts Department at RTS 3, a Serbian national television channel that focuses on arts and culture. She also works as a program editor at the RTS Centre for Digitization. Throughout her career, she has created documentaries about art and literature, docu-fictional series about avant-garde art and TV shows about classical, jazz, and contemporary music and art. She has adapted a TV monodrama series based on novels and co-authored a program called *Studio 6*, a series of live TV and radio concerts. Nevena directed and wrote scripts for experimental art films. Her work covers a variety of contemporary art and music genres and styles. Through her work, she explores the impact and influence of art on society today and throughout history. She is an active performance artist with a particular interest in electronic music, free jazz and musical improvisation. A graduate harpist, Nevena holds an MA from the Belgrade Music Academy. She also has a degree in comparative literature and literary theory from the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade.