

**doplgenger** artistic duo consists of Isidora Ilić and Boško Prostran, film/video artists who live and work in Belgrade. Their works deal with the relationship between art and politics by questioning the regime of moving images and the mode of their reception. Drawing on the traditions of experimental film and video, doppleganger intervenes on already existing media products or produces in the form of an extended film. Although the moving image is their main medium, their practice also includes text, spatial installations, performances, lectures and discussions. The doppelganger's works are in public collections, and they have been presented at individual and group exhibitions and at film/video festivals in the country and abroad. They are editors of the publication *Amateri za film* (Belgrade, 2017) and winners of art scholarships and residencies, film festival awards and Politika's "Vladislav Ribnikar" award.



# d o p l g e n g e r

Records: The study for the film  
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curator:  
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Cultural Centre of Belgrade  
Gallery Podroom  
Trg Republike 5/-1, Belgrade

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# Generous Wilderness

In the warm months, a large number of citizens try to find shade and calm from the hustle and bustle of the city in the thick row of plane trees located on one of the largest green areas in New Belgrade. These magnificent trees with intertwined canopy still defiantly illustrate the rather forgotten idea of the creators of this park environment related to the symbolic representation of the struggle for equality and peace of all peoples of the world as a direct consequence of the first conference of the Non-Aligned Movement held more than six decades ago in the capital of the former socialist federation, and the current parliamentary - democratic state.

The Yugoslav heritage, including non-alignment, as one of the most potent ideas after the World War II, based on anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-bloc rhetoric, in contemporary political and ideological discours is like an unrecorded sequence of a worn eight millimeter film. Despite the majority’s rejection, that is, successive attempts to destroy it, that impoverished image can also be seen as a generous wilderness in which new forms of social imagination are possible.

The antinomian pair highlighted through the poetic title of this text implies a pleasant unrestrainedness that characterizes the new chapter of the multi-year artistic practice of the **doplgenger** duo (Isidora Ilić and Boško Prostran). Interested in the ideological as well as technical implications of moving images, they have been diligently jolting images in the words of Pavle Levi for many years; their perceptual system saturated with constant vibration, technical possibilities, but also the political potency of different sequences is the basis for building a fundamentally hybrid visual order, whose recent iteration under the title Records: a study for film makes the observer an active protagonist of a completely different experience.

The entire spatial organization considers the legacy of the mentioned Non-Aligned Movement in the context of articulating their economic, political and cultural consequences then and now. In design terms similar to an inspiration board, and in the art historical wall of the surrealist Marko Ristić, the collage-type intervention woven from various documents, symbols and illustrations executed with the manual technique of paper gluing largely summarizes the aesthetic worldviews of Isidore Ilić and Boško Prostrana, and represents an introduction to the sequence of eight synchronized projections.

Namely, first by compiling the private recordings of cinema amateur Milenko Stefanović (Energoprjekt engineer who worked in Mali 1963-67) and Bogdan Crnobrnja (Yugoslavian ambassador to India in charge of Ceylon and Afghanistan in the period from 1954 to 1961) found at a flea market with that of Zdravko Pečar (Yugoslav ambassador to Mali in the period from 1967 to 1973) and Josip Broz Tito himself, which were ceded by the city’s museum

institutions<sup>1</sup>, the **doplgenger** raises questions of gaze and understanding of the intersection of private lives and the official historical narrative. The hungry eyes of ordinary observers eager to get to know the humane side of the great leader embodied in the first projection (Tito’s footage from Brion that also shows Nasser) actually indicate the diverse experiences of workers<sup>2</sup> acquired during the 1960s in Africa. In addition to sequences of friendly-political meetings, military parades and frequent modernization of decolonized African states, cinematic amateurs record hunting, pulsating urban and rural landscapes<sup>3</sup> often filled with animals typical of those areas.

At the very end of this audio-video labyrinth, in a small, almost hidden room, the sound recording of the story “Legend of the Elephant” is presented with a light object made of film strips that frame by frame show the image of the Earth seen from the Moon. The translation of the film medium of the doplgenger culminates precisely with this setting, and becomes more similar to what Gene Youngblood defined as synastatic film<sup>4</sup>.

It is evident that the exposed elements (texts, recordings, sounds, objects), the accompanying props, the ratio of the light of the projections and the darkness encourage performativity so that the film would be edited and staged by other means. Moving through the exhibition, the viewer experiences a kind of Hitchcock-like suspense as she or he mounts their experience of history, and first of all the development of the Non-Aligned Movement - from the ideals, through the difficulties of their implementation, to their complete collapse.

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1                   The Museum of African Art and the Museum of Yugoslavia

2                   **doplgenger** claim that although two of these three are diplomats, we take into account that in Yugoslavia they were all treated as workers because Yugoslavia was officially made up of working people. Despite the fact that there is no “real proletarian”.

3                   After the political and scientific revolution in 18th century Europe, conceptions of landscape would transform the bourgeois aesthetics of nature into a science of nature. This bourgeois science was the spatial science of the emerging modern state. It would become consolidated as academic geography and was instrumental in reducing place to (cartographic) space. - taken from, *Jevgeniy Bluwstein, Colonizing landscapes/landscaping colonies: from a global history of landscapism to the contemporary landscape approach in nature conservation*

4                   There is no conflict in harmonious opposites. Nor is there anything that could be called a relationship. There is only a space-time continuum, a mosaic simultaneity. Although it is composed of discrete elements, it is conceived and arranged as a continuation of perceptual experience. A synesthetic film is, in fact, one image that is constantly transformed into other images: metamorphoses. - taken from: *Youngblood, Gene, Expanded Cinema* (1970)

Despite the obvious media hybridity, the given conceptual framework of the doppelganger is also characterized by the issue of gaze, especially from a post-colonial perspective. Implicating a non-white, Western-centric, therefore, colonial way of seeing, this kind of optics excludes Yugoslavia since it is a state creation that did not implement any processes of colonization. Soon after the end of World War II, it showed an exceptional interest in foreign political connections and support for precisely those societies that were still under the cap of the colonizers<sup>5</sup>.

However, the found footage included in this constellation are a direct consequence of the primarily male, one could say, privileged view. The recorded cultural differences should be carefully analyzed and the question should be appointed whether the perception of Yugoslavs at work in Africa moves beyond the established Eurocentric and exoticizing perception; the dehumanizing, colonial view was the same for both humans and animals. In Yugoslavia, on the other hand, that socialist country, the cradle of non-alignment, Africa was seen through extremes - either as something completely unknown, wild, animalistic, potentially dangerous, or as a world saturated with rich culture, knowledge, natural beauty, etc. Responding to a different image of Africa is a not so small number of students who studied first in Belgrade, but also in other cities of the former country, and contributed to multiculturalism in the daily lives of Yugoslavs<sup>6</sup>.

Despite the fact that a decade after the death of Josip Broz Tito, a leading member of the Non-Aligned Movement and former president for life, the best example of a socialist experiment disintegrated, the Non-Aligned Movement did survive, but only formally. The Cold War ended generating completely new geo-political (dis)opportunities, and the idea of a political association based on anti-fascism, anti-colonialism, peace and mutual economic support gradually waned.

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5                   Yugoslavia had the opposite point of view of the two superpowers during the settlement of the Palestinian issue in 1947, when, based on its own experience, together with India and Pakistan (now Iran), it advocated the opinion that Palestine should not be divided, and proposed the creation of a single independent federated state based on the equality and equality of the Arab and Jewish peoples. - taken from: *Bogetić, Dragan, Nonalignment through history. From idea to movement, 2019*

6                   Lou Benny, the Belgrade archivist of social phenomena that he likes to call BeGe funk, revealed to me that the embodiment of the holy grail of African musical creativity in Belgrade is the band Crni Pantheri. It was the first band in Yugoslavia composed exclusively of African students, mainly from the former Republic of Zaire (now Congo). The Panthers were active from 1964 to 1965, but unfortunately, there is no audio recording of their work on the Internet. All that remains about them is the story in the book *Godine na 6*, as well as the fact that one of the members was the father of the popular Belgrade presenter Ivon Jafali. - taken from: <https://www.vice.com/sr/article/kako-su-africki-studenti-doneli-fank-u-jugoslaviju/>

In the decades that followed, a large part of the African continent became the scene of multiple devastation, poverty, hunger, disease, ethnically motivated wars and military dictatorships as direct consequences of centuries of colonialism. No one is spared, especially animals<sup>7</sup>. Tortured, exiled, slaughtered for their skin, bones, reduced to commodities, commodified to satisfy the curiosity of visitors to zoos. The African elephant, the protagonist of the story that the **doplgenger** uses, is an endangered species, as well as the rhinoceros, giraffe and many other animals. Hence the question: how do they see moving images and represented people in the light of global political changes? Would the departure from the anthropocentric and the transition to a non-human gaze mark a new form of non-alignment?

Whether it is a socialist, male or animal gaze, it is certain that in the modern moment, saturated with constant economic, political and ecological tensions on a global level, the wilderness, by all accounts, cannot be generous. The longing for peaceful cohabitation expressed through the idea of non-alignment or for example through the hypothesis of Gaia<sup>8</sup> can only be directed in the form of a unique political rhetoric as the doplgenger wants to suggest to us. Africa as a symbolic representation of the core of the colonial logic, which only changed its form is in function of a reminder of the morbid equality between life and death, without which, it seems, it is unthinkable to understand the contemporary moment.

However, facing the moving images of the past and understanding the importance of archives can inform us to see the world through the eyes of other beings such as ghostly and undoubtedly unaligned human-animal hybrids whose social order in perspective can be a generous wilderness filled with equality that transcends socially constructed notions of race, class and genus. This is precisely why one should go to Africa, as Rastko Petrović wrote, in order to understand a lot about the evolution of the human spirit.

Vladimir Bjeličić,  
Art historian

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7                   The ideology of the superiority of the white race is articulated in the colonialist view in the deliberate pictorial degradation of the photographed indigenous people, who are depicted as objects and equated with animals. – retrieved from: <https://www.dsm.museum/en/museum/exhibitions/seeing-the-other/the-colonialist-gaze>

8                   The Gaia hypothesis, also known as Gaia theory, the Gaia paradigm, or the Gaia principle, proposes that living organisms interact with their inorganic environment on Earth to form a synergistic and self-regulating, complex system that helps maintain and sustain conditions for life on the planet. This theory was first published in the 1960s by climatologist and chemist Sir James Lovelock and named after the Greek goddess Gaia.