ESSAY

Transgressions and the Search for New Meaning

[Western] Ukrainian Media Art of the late 1980s and early 1990s

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Video art as a conscious practice appeared in Lviv, the biggest city in Western Ukraine, in 1993. Artworks produced that year became the quintessence of the artistic processes of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the Ukrainian SSR painfully but irrevocably turned into Ukraine. It is not surprising that critics have noted that art of that time was dictated by a need for transgression. Artworks produced in Lviv in 1993 showed artists rethinking the role of the work of art and its relationship with the 'social body', and in many works we can observe the process of transformation or transgression, most starkly apparent in video. This essay is an attempt to retrace and rethink the transgressive character of Ukrainian video art.

Video Art and Medium Specificity

Art historian Oliver Grau has indicated that in order to work with current media phenomena it is essential to understand history: "The present image revolution, which indeed uses new technologies and has also developed a large number of so far unknown visual expressions, cannot be conceived of without our image history."[1] But when we consider European image history, we also encounter certain incongruities. Periodization of art history, and the emergence and medium specificity of video, has been understood differently in different parts of Europe. Marita Sturken acknowledged this:[2]

> The assumption that the aesthetics of video is a direct result of its properties leads us into technologically determinist terrain yet again. Technologies such as television do not simply appear at [a] specific point of history, they arise out of specific desires and ideologies.

However, this distinction does not negate the fact that video has a specific phenomenology, which affects our experience of the medium.

Thus, video has its 'specific phenomenology', which is historically connected to explicit desires, ideologies, or discourses. But again, where does this connection happen? In the West, the evolution of a unique video aesthetic can be read as the story of video's simultaneous self-discovery and self-abnegation as a medium. In the first phase, video struggled for independence from the specificities of television (1950s-1960s), in the second it established an autonomy as a respectable art form (1970s-1980s), and in the third, it returned to indeterminacy as an adjunct technology of multimedia (1990s).[3] But this periodization is not compatible with the history of video art in all parts of Europe. For instance, in the Soviet Union all artistic practices were supervised by the officially recognized unions, and amateur media creativity was also obliged to conform to this model. Therefore, if in the West video became a dominant media in art, reflecting on its important features such as 'non-materiality', 'live streaming' or 'flow', in the USSR individual video cameras were rather rare and scarcely used by artists. However, many people used portable film cameras, still being haunted in the 1970s and 1980s by the cinematic avant-garde. Thus, thinking through the medium in the Soviet context necessarily produces a different periodization and signification than in the West.

Alternative periodizations of video:

USA/Western Europe	USSR
	1: 1960s-1980s – *film amateurs and home video*
1: 1960s – *video = television*	
2: 1970s-1980s – *video as an autonomous medium of the moving image*	2: late 1980s-early 1990s – *VHS revolution*
3: 1990s – *video as an adjunct technology of multimedia*	3: late 1990s – *video as the dominant medium of the moving image*

Although the so-called VHS/home-video revolution coincided in the Socialist block with capitalist advancements,[4] artists' use of video cameras did not develop along the same track as their Western colleagues' reflections on medium specificity. The mere availability of a video camera did not presuppose the appearance of video art, the latter emerging from specific desires and needs more embedded in artistic practices and social systems. As Michael Newman indicates,[5]

The medium of video exists not only as objects and practices, but

also as a shifting constellation of ideas in popular imagination, including ideas about value, authenticity, and legitimacy. We can apprehend video's materiality and its significance only through the mediation of discourses of video technology and the practices and social values associated with it.

However, even if the development of video in the Socialist block or USSR differed from the Western situation, where an art world actively strove to shape the specificity of media-art, there were nonetheless certain consistencies across the board which could be seen as forming a universal anthropology of video. That anthropology would comprise not only the medium's materiality, inherent possibilities, and conventions of usage, but also the everyday, common-sense ideas about its cultural status in a given historical context. Cultural status refers to the ways in which a medium (or any cultural category or artifact) is valued or not, made authentic or inauthentic, legitimate or illegitimate. Furthermore, technology cannot be separated from psychology, or as remarks Sean Cubitt:[6]

> Video is an apparatus, in which the physical machinery and the psychic relations it has with those around it are not just metaphors of one another but to all intents and purposes are models of each other.

Chris Meigh-Andrews indicates in his book on the history of (Western) video art that "a discussion of video's inherent properties has been the predominant method of tracing the medium's history,"[7] privileging determinism (both technical and symptomatic) as opposed to determination (desires and practices). Like the early 20th-century modernists who strove to discover specific features of painting or sculpture, many video artists and critics of the 1960s and 1970s focused heavily on video's specific qualities. Marita Sturken points out that this trend served not only to distinguish it from other fine art media such as film, painting, and sculpture. It also supported the prevailing artistic concerns of the period, especially Conceptual Art, minimal sculpture and performance.[8]

By the mid-1990s, the tradition of video art in the world of contemporary art had already comprised several decades and was one of its most powerful branches. Ukrainian art, which for the time being was outside major art trends, suddenly began to catch up with this general process at a rapid pace. The first video experiments by Ukrainian artists were somewhat naive and often overtly literary, but interest in new media was growing.[9] This growing interest for video art coincided with the visual turn in Ukrainian art, in which literary motifs or sources were slowly replaced by pure visuality.

Alexander Soloviev, who often voiced the needs and problems of contemporary Ukrainian art, acknowledged in 1998:[10]

As for the Ukrainian video, it is still a simulation video. Between the "observer" and the "image" the prevailing status quo is still not challenged. Not being yet involved in the latest art trends, Ukrainian video is still an Art (in the traditional meaning of the word) and is described not so much by cyber categories as by categories of Art. The screen here is still a tool, as if entering the palette of an artist who is unable (or unwilling?) to tear himself away from his umbilical cord – fine art. Ukrainian video is a tough, realistic video. The works here do not so much model cyberutopia as reflect psychology and socio-economic reality. "Realistic images," – in the opinion of J.-F. Lyotard, – "can create reality only in a nostalgic or parody form, giving rise to suffering rather than satisfaction." And in this sense, the Ukrainian video is a soulful video.

Obviously, for Soloviev, video art must obey the medium's specificity, and not attempt to mimic existing art; it is incapable of reflecting psychology and socio-economic reality in the way that painting does, and should not try to do so.[11]

Such essentialism reduces video's heterogeneous possibilities to one determined outcome. It conflates ontology and history, by which inherited conventions, such as shooting techniques, are "reified as intrinsic aspects of the video apparatus and [mandate] a rigid set of exclusive rules precluding competing media from pursuing overlapping fields of practice in which both may excel."[12] Artistic video is too fragmentary a medium for any single discourse to explain its fundamental essence. In this regard, I endorse James Moran, who acknowledges that video's identity as a medium remains not in its being but in its use: how it is imagined, designed, marketed, practiced, and represented, rather than what it is.[13] In this regard, the following text places a particular emphasis on the use of video cameras in the artistic works of the early 1990s. And these forms change, as if the early stages of these artistic works were performance art and later developed into video art as we understand it today. The year of 1993 was pivotal for this change, it marked the year when video turned from an instrument of documentation into an instrument of creation.

Late Soviet Art

New, or as we may frame it, contemporary art in Lviv,[14] like contemporary Ukrainian literature,[15] began after 1986, following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.[16] Of course, neither development would have been possible without the reforms implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR, especially the so-called Glasnost[17] and Perestroika.[18] A recent publication by Garage Art Centre in Moscow similarly traces the origins of contemporary Soviet art since 1986, though the authors often conflate Soviet with Russian, omitting the

multicultural and multinational character of the former.[19] Thus, basically two important trends, post-disaster trauma and Soviet political reforms, influenced new Ukrainian art practices of the late 1980s. At that time, in the context of a top-down reorganization of Soviet public life, the party functionaries of the UkrSSR were instructed to work with different groups of young people and to open up a channel of communication with them. The program aimed to win over young people through dialogue, rather than strictly impose ideology.[20] This turn toward dialogue and discussions with the younger generation, the founders of Soviet Socialism believed, had the power to fuel a new flame in the fading fire of Socialist civilization.[21]

The first big exhibition of new and young Soviet art took place in 1987 in Moscow, and was followed by similar artistic shows in other cities, like Lviv ('Invitation to Discussion') and Kyiv ('Youth of the Country'[22]). Soviet displays in 1987 were 'framed' as young art or new art and often had a form of free artistic gatherings (plein-airs), like in the Ukrainian village of Sedniv (Chernihiv oblast).[23] Next year, in 1988, Soviet magazine *Iskusstvo* dedicated its whole 'youth edition' (#10) to this exhibition of 1987, discussing issues of young and contemporary art. The art magazine *Iskusstvo* maintained:[24]

> […] Until now young artists were separated from wider social life by slogans, which claimed that we do not have generational conflict in the USSR. This situation led to an independent youth culture […] We share the party's claim that each generation should say its word in history, but more importantly – young people will have to show and express the vast intellectual potential that was accumulated during Soviet rule.

Young and promising Ukrainian critic Alexander Soloviev wrote in that magazine that the contemporary world was living through an existential crisis and that reflexive contemporary art failed in helping to overcome this crisis. He informed Soviet readers that young Ukrainian art was developing in concert with other international artistic trends, such as 'new image' (USA), 'trans-avanguardia' (Italy), 'new expressionism' (Germany) or 'new subjectivity' (France).[25] As an example of the Ukrainian postmodern trans-avant-garde, Soloviov used works of young artists from Kyiv, especially Arsen Savadov and Yuri Senchenko's *Cleopatra's Sadness*, exhibited in 1987. Soloviov considered this painting to be the epitome of a metaphorical representation of the time. The work bore important references to the past but also made an ironic statement about the present—a common principle in contemporary Ukrainian art.[26] Soloviev's article marked an important framing of Ukrainian young art as a postmodern art related to the 'emotional' painting of the 1980s and distinct from the 'cold' conceptualism of Moscow artists.

Ukrainian fine art of the late 1980s developed in close dialogue with art

practices of the Soviet capital and Western art. It was shaped by the Soviet 1970s; its main tropes and ideas were born in this period.[27] While the appearance of contemporary Ukrainian art was acknowledged by local and central (Moscow or Kyiv) critics, the models and tropes for these artistic practices were still being borrowed from abroad. The post-traumatic (Chernobyl disaster) and post-Soviet (the need to construct an own identity) situation would distinctly influence the practices of Ukrainian artists, many of whom would make heavy use of irony and *stiob*.[28] Contemporary art in Lviv sprang from organized dialogues and discussions,[29] which, though not perceived as serious by the authorities at the time, proved to have a large impact in changing the cultural situation not only in the city but across the entire country. The situation unfolded rapidly: between 1987, when the famous exhibition Invitation to Discussion took place in Lviv (at the Museum of Photography, which ceased to exist after the collapse of the USSR), and the year 1990, when a festival of a new culture, "Vyvykh", was staged by the Lviv Student Brotherhood, numerous events occurred that shook the whole Soviet system. These events were marked by both a cultural and political character, and the political responses often borrowed from mass or popular culture, to include mass mobilization of the public through festivals and massive collective singing.[30]

Contemporary art in Lviv thus went through a rapid evolution: 1993 can be considered the 'peak year' for the formation of new genres and approaches to the making of art. Of course, two *Vyvykhs*—one held in Soviet Lviv in 1990 (with the performance *Waking Up With Poetry* in the Lviv Opera House), and the next in independent Lviv in 1992 (with the poetry opera *Chrysler Imperial*[31] in the same setting)—could not but affect the articulation of a new vision of art of that time. At that time, local artists were already boldly working in such new art genres as performance, installation, happenings, land art, graphic projections, kinetic art, land art and video art. Such forms of art as *works in progress* (not in the sense of incompleteness but rather of process), became part of the creative apparatus of some 'new' so-called postmodern artists.

Other 'contemporary' artists, often aligning with the metamodern art movement, addressed long-standing issues: what 'is' art and what 'is not' art? What is the relationship between the work and its recipient? Is the quality of a work of art still important, or should we rather value its essence? What is 'new media' and should art use new tools? Should art be practiced only as aesthetics or is art still to become a form of life? How does art relate to the world and the author, and does the work continue to belong to the author? Is the author still 'dead'? There was much discussion about the colonial position of Ukrainian culture within the USSR and its present post-Soviet state—discussions that extended from the time of dissident *samizdat*. The strategies to establish an identity 'proper' to Ukrainian video art varied: while some groups of artists sought to legitimize their creativity through references to the local or national past, others found legitimacy through appealing to global trends or entirely

subjective experiences. As a result, a split occurred within the artistic circles of Lviv, which arbitrarily divided the artists into 'svoi' (own, local), rooted in the national tradition; and non-'svoi', namely cosmopolites. Both groups staunchly advocated their difference and their right to speak on behalf of the 'people' and 'art' in general.

An important feature of art in Lviv of the early 1990s was the absence of formal confrontation within the creative environment, since cultural institutions belonged to the state and simply changed their names after the fall of the USSR. So-called 'new' or 'young' artists had no desire to enter these institutions precisely because they were still associated with Soviet practices. Lacking the financial means, they could also not, or did not want to, create their own institutions. There was, then, no desire or action to reform the established schools of Soviet Ukraine art from within. Rather, Neo-Dada (or Bakhtinian carnivalesque) performances and aesthetics were used as a means of liberation. Artists who approached art not as emotional activity but as cognitive creativity argued about the problems of technological art and fantasized about the virtual space and the relationship between new and old media. Nevertheless, the only technological art that had emerged in Lviv was video art; computers and digital art had just arrived, and had not yet influenced local artistic practices.

One Year in the Life of Lviv's Art World

All these aspects of art in Lviv in the late USSR and early Ukraine coalesced in 1993. In the spring of that year, several performances brought musicians, artists and poets together. In the summer of 1993, a new art institution called *"Dzyga"* ("spinning top") appeared in the city, which would turn into an alternative space for the creation of contemporary art for years to come. The first exhibition at *Dzyga* featured Andriy Sahaydakovsky, the 'emotional conceptualist' and proclaimed genius of new Ukrainian art. In the same year, Andrei Sahaidakovsky's installation and Vasyl Bazhai's abstractionist paintings were presented at the famous Ukrainian art exhibition in Warsaw (Zamek Ujazdowski) under the metaphorical title *"Steppes of Europe"* (curated by Jerzy Onuch). In 1993, video art finally received a 'residence permit' in Lviv, and for the first time a work was created that combined camera shoots and paintings hanging on the walls. Finally, the *Masoch Fund,* a new art association founded in Lviv in 1991, created its epoch-making artwork *Art in Space* in 1993, now considered an important point in Central-Eastern European art history.

The *Masoch Fund* (*Fond Mazokha*) was founded by well-known Lvivites. Ihor Podolchak, who graduated from the Lviv Academy of Arts in 1984 (where he studied Ukrainian artists Oleh Tistol and Mykola Matsenko) and spent the late 1980s and early 1990s working at the Lviv Museum of Religion History. Podolchak was known in Lviv as a graphic artist, and featured among the

organizers of *Interprint*, an international biennale of graphic art that was held in the museum halls. The association took its name from the well-known Lviv writer, Sacher von Masoch. Among the Fund's founders were two other renowned Lviv artists: theater director Roman Viktiuk and Ihor Diurych. This trio formed the ideological skeleton of the group, whose purpose, as the late Yurko Pokalchuk stated, was "to raise all that was on the bottom" – that is, to appeal to the marginal zones of culture and psyche. Artistic actionism, particularly in line with Nicolas Bourriaud's aesthetics of electronic interaction, became the primary method of the newly founded creative association, and soon produced interesting results.

The *Art in Space* project envisaged two stages. The first stage was the launch of the first art exhibition in outer space. Ihor Podolchak's graphic works were transmitted to the space station Mir, and the exhibition was held on January 25, 1993.[32] Artists asked Russian cosmonauts Sergei Avdeiev and Anatolii Soloviov to tape the exhibit on a video camera, so that Diurych and Podolchak could edit the five-minute video that was later 'exhibited' on Earth. In 1994, this work, entitled "Art in Space" and curated by Marta Kuzma, then director of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Kyiv, represented Ukrainian contemporary art in the São Paulo Art Biennial (Brazil). The second stage was to send a book by 16th century mystic Jakob Böhme to the same space station, and then to eject it into orbit. The action envisioned the transformation, or the transgression, of a book as a cultural artifact into a *shtuchnyi suputnyk* (an artificial satellite) of the Earth. The work also hinged on a play on words: "*shtuka*" in Ukrainian also means art, while "*shtuchnyi*" means artificial. Therefore, the satellite was both an artistic (fictional) and artificial (material/non-material) object of humans. This second stage of the project was never realized, and the space station *Mir* would itself soon be deorbited and become a pile of scrap metal, no longer a majestic achievement of human thought and technology.

As the artists themselves argued, *Art in Space* posed the problem of the existence of a work of art outside of its cultural context. The question they asked was, "Does a work of art continue to be a work of art in space, beyond Earth?" This work is often displayed in video art exhibits, even though the camera was only a recording device for the artists and not a full 'participant' in the performance. The artists did not intend this work to be considered video art; it was much more influenced by actionism or conceptualism. The central subject of this project was the concept of the collective, and even despite incomplete implementation, the project remained an important piece of Lviv conceptual art.

The *Masoch Fund* project, despite being created by Lviv residents and garnering international recognition, fell short of resonating with audiences in Lviv. Nevertheless, there were also more local initiatives. The artistic happening *Der Winter Kaput* ("Winter's Done"), held in March 1993 in Petro Starukh's workshop in the village of Obroshyno, near Lviv, also appealed to

domestic audiences. The young poet Serhii Zhadan came to Lviv from Kharkiv, and along with Viktor Neborak accompanied Starukh in his performance. Taras Chubai agreed to document the action on the video camera, making it possible for us to analyze this project now.[33] Starukh conceived his artistic-shamanic action around the persistent spring snow: dressed in a foil spacesuit and accompanied by Neborak's poetry, the artist draws and paints on the snow cover. As the snow melts, the artwork naturally dissolves. The work was supposed to return to the ground with rain, marking the end of winter.

This happening received less attention from researchers than the *Masoch Fund*'s *Mystetstvo v Kosmosi*. However, both projects are somewhat united: in both artworks, a traditional work of art (graphics or painting) ends up in the hands of a cosmonaut, representing the very image of transgression of natural boundaries that might also be embodied by a hero of a magical fairy-tale.

In both artworks, the camera importantly remains an observer and not a co-creator of artistic meaning, although Taras Chubai mediates with spoken comments about what is happening in front of his lens. Interestingly, in the absence of theoretical explanation, Starukh's work comes across as more viscerally transgressive than the well-planned and conceptually sanctioned *Art in Space*. It is important to note that the Obroshyno video-happening remained in the zone of "pure art", liberated from the market or the need to be exhibited in the artistic space. Starukh never showed it as a work of art in any exhibition, and the video remains a fortuitous record.

A month after the aesthetic and shamanic action in Obroshyno, Starukh moved his performances to Lviv. In May of 1993, using the same cosmic costumes, Petro Starukh and two colleagues launched another artistic action entitled "Manna", held in the newly formed municipal theater, Resurrection. The idea behind the project was to reflect light from the street into the enclosed theater, with the performers bouncing the sun from mirror to mirror in the square outside—the mirror functioning as a classical metaphor of the work of art as a reflection of reality. However, the initial plan did not succeed, and the artists, dressed in their spacesuits, proceeded to smash the mirrors and rebuild new reflective surfaces from the fragments. The reflective gesture having failed—and with it, the old model of art, destroyed—the artists undertake the only sensible course: to construct a new model (new mirror) from the broken fragments.

The performance can be read as a direct confrontation with the legacy of Soviet art: by violating the enclosed, darkened and mysterious artistic space (theater), a metaphor for the totalizing and universalizing intent of Soviet art, the Lviv artists comment on the failure to fulfill such goals, and the absurdity of the goals themselves. The artists' spacesuits also make subversive reference to an important Soviet symbol of modernity. In bridging these iconic traditions with local subjects, the Lviv artists were clearly seeking out their own artistic

language within the contemporary art space.

During Soviet times, the Lviv Art Gallery had a special exhibition wing dedicated solely to Soviet art. It was located in the former church of a female monastery, now the Johann Georg Pinsel Museum. After works of Soviet art were removed from exhibition in 1993, this space on Mytna Square was transformed into a local museum for contemporary art, taking on new and controversial artworks and allowing local artists to experiment and perform as never before.

Among the participants of the 1990 and 1992 *Vyvykh* festivals were artists Yurko Kokh, Vlodko Kaufman, and Vlodko Kostyrko. In 1993, painter and graphic artist Kaufman, frustrated by the limitations of traditional media, set out to create a new work combining diverse forms and genres of art. Feeling that performance and installation art did not sufficiently describe his plans, Kaufman coined the neologism "*vydyvo*", which denotes a synthetic combination of space, sound, performative action and installation.

Kaufman's first *vydyvo* work, *Letters to Earthlings or the Eighth Seal*, was overtly biblical, referring to the revelation of John the Apostle. The idea sprung from a visit to an artistic hangout in the east of Ukraine, organized by Tiberii Silvashi, one of the pioneers of contemporary Ukrainian art. Kaufman, a proponent of conceptual art, drew on the biblical Book of Revelation to restage the end of the world through surrealistic allusion: to the Seven Seals leading to apocalypse, Kaufman added an eighth, representing human society and consumption.

The action was fittingly staged in the former church, now another art space. Soviet maps of the square were positioned at the entrance to the exhibit, where Neborak hawked Kaufman's old works to visitors, claiming that the artist would no longer draw and paint and that this was the last chance to acquire.[34] Neborak gave a similar prelude to other Lviv art projects, fashioning himself like Dante's Virgil, guide to the impending journey through Hell. Visitors to the exposition were furnished with a special cap (reminiscent of the other space-themed projects) and one of eight special seals designed for this exhibit. Visitors entered across a foam-lined floor, soaked through with paint, such that maps strewn across the exhibit space were progressively marked by the passing footsteps. Thus, all the visitors to the exhibit contributed to a painting, taking collective blame for the action. Kaufman himself carved the sign of the eighth seal into his forehead and dressed up in a traditional female outfit, echoing a practice of costuming common among Lviv's young artists.

All these actions were intended to turn the spectator into an active participant of the happening. When visitors entered the exhibition, they did not see pictures on the walls, as in traditional exhibitions, but surrealistic performances: a ballerina fishing in a heap of glass; eight easels, on which children painted invisible paintings; small paper chairs, placed on a big map,

trampled by Taras Chubai as he played the violin; a naked woman wrapped in cellophane, lying in hay and chained to a doghouse; etc. Petro Starukh wandered throughout the exhibition, with an alarm clock that would periodically ring, heralding the impending apocalypse. At the end of the exhibition, the spectators were confronted with a trap: spectators were forced to walk over religious icons in order to exit the exhibition. Not everyone was willing to participate in this, especially with paint-covered shoes.

Kaufman's exhibition counted among the most provocative happenings in Ukrainian contemporary art. Nevertheless, his art was clearly anchored in European modernism, as well as on the carnivalesque thinking of postmodern aesthetics. The fishing ballerina in Kaufman's performance not only draws on a favorite modernist motif, but reflects on the artist (since Kaufman drew fish all his life) while also mocking one of the most prized Russian art forms. Thus, Kaufman's metaphors display both a preoccupation with their Russo-European past, and a vision toward a present specific to Ukraine. The *vydyvo* thus continues with many of the traits of Ukrainian 'young art' of the late 1980s: transgression, performances verging on carnival, and the involvement of the spectator in the experience of the artwork.

Letters was also bound to be turned into a video work. The action was recorded by several cameras, with the intention of broadcasting it on Ukrainian television (as was done with the *Vyvykh* festival in 1992), but these tapes mysteriously disappeared, with only fragments remaining. That same summer of 1993 Kaufman co-founded the new Lviv creative association, *Dziga*, for which he is still the head of art projects in 2019.

After Vlodko Kaufman's *vydyvo*, Petro Starukh continued to expand his artistic activities in Lviv. Some independent galleries (such as the 'Center of Europe' in Hotel Dnister or 'Try Krapky' on Str. Ivana Franka 46) had already opened in 1988, during the Soviet era. Five years later, however, Lviv was still lacking a major center for new art. Many artists, including Starukh, believed that Lviv Art Gallery on Mytna Square could potentially become such a space. Starukh conceived of a syncretic artwork for the space, combining happening, installation, performance, choreography, music, visual art and sculpture. The title for the work was "*7×7*"—an acronym for "*Sim Sim*", or "Open Sesame", a magical phrase from the story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* in *One Thousand and One Nights*. In the context of the gallery, the incantation was meant to "open" traditional art galleries to contemporary artists.

Various objects, like graphic prints on perforated paper, Soviet computers, scraps of film from regional television, radio recordings on tape, wooden sculptures, etc., were placed in the naves of the church. Starukh asked a professional choreographer from Lviv Opera to teach him to dance with a metal saw. In addition to performing this choreography, he recorded sounds of him playing the piano and asked local saxophonist Yurii Yaremchuk to improvise

live over the recording. Starukh made his own performance using trumpet sounds in the likeness of Biblical Jericho or a Tibetan monastery, as if reproducing some ancient ritualistic practice.

This artistic event at the Lviv Art Gallery on Mytna Square was not to be considered a video work by Starukh, even though the artist extensively used media objects (film, television and radio tapes, recordings of ephemeral broadcast media) in his performance and installations. However, it was subsequently turned into video art by curator Uta Kilter and videographer Viktor Maliarenko, from Odessa, who visited Lviv en route back to Ukraine from an art festival in France. Like Kaufman in his *vydyvo Lysty do Zemlian*, Starukh's *7×7* did not consider video as an artistic medium; live performance, installation, sound, sculpture, and visual graphics still held the power of art, but video did not. However, both Starukh and Kaufman allowed someone distant from their 'artistic ideology' to make a video about their art projects. Kaufman's *vydyvo* was recorded by a television operator with the intention of broadcasting it on TV, while Starukh's installation/performance was recorded by Odesa's art activists, who also planned to edit it into a short film for TV. Therefore, video in these projects functioned both as a screen and as an intervention.

The constant use of video cameras for documenting artistic actions would lead to the emergence of works in which the camera would develop beyond a passive recording device and become a co-creator of the image, forming a new artistic medium: video art. It was in 1993 that Lviv saw its first videos conceived not as a document, but as a new artistic medium, created by students at the Lviv Academy of Arts who were assisted by their professor, Alfred Maksymenko. Maksymenko's wife worked at the Lviv Art Gallery (Mytna Square branch), where the Kauffman 'exhibition' took place, and the entire group wanted to make a project for this space. Maksymenko had received a video camera—an expensive gift from an American family—which he used with his students to conduct a variety of video experiments. Again, it is interesting to note that these experiments resulted from a performance staged in the context of an art exhibition of the minimalist paintings of Akuvido. These paintings were inspired by Malevich's Suprematism, and intended to transform 'reality' into a series of sign-images playing on the theme of the cross. Maksymenko's resulting video is appropriately titled *"Crosses"*. Maksymenko taught his students to regard the black square of the TV as a metaphor, a premonition by Malevich, predicting 'the death of painting.' This concept opened up a clear track for video as art in Lviv. The video produced by Maksymenko and his students relied on a script and was constructed through a series of cinematographic shots, manifesting, for the artist, situational dependence on the aesthetics of cinema. While this work was still far from pure video-art, it was an important step towards establishing video art as a specific medium.[35] An important moment in the project was the artistic performance by Anna Kuts and Viktor Dovhaliuk, which took place at night and was not

intended for the 'live' viewers of the gallery. It was made exclusively for the camera, and had to be viewed from a TV set.

Unlike Kaufman's project, which was also scripted but anticipated spontaneous actions, Akuvido's project had a thoughtfully articulated concept, albeit somewhat confusing. It can still be read on the group's website, which was created after the artist moved to Germany to study media art:[36]

> Each generation seeks [a] new expression of space in form, line, colour, music, relationships. [...] [The] [c]reation of new unions, new institutions, new relationships between people gives new forms, new semantic combinations, new words, new pleasure from life, new hypnosis.

As we see from this text, the artists were well aware that the new era, after the fall of the USSR and of the state-ordered aesthetics of socialist realism, created new forms that manifested themselves in lines, colors, sounds, and attitudes. In this new art, the artist was not simply the creator of an image or a work; the artist became the center of this work, part of it. This is why, in the performance among paintings, the bodies of Anna and Viktor were positioned as figures or signs: the artists disappeared as they themselves transformed into a work of art. The cross motif was meant not only to evoke its Christian sense, but also its formal quality: it was "the philosophy of horizontal and vertical, life and death; the philosophy of resistance". The cross transformed into a compositional image of reality, eternity, harmony, and truth.

The artists understood their actions (performances and paintings) as a kind of game that was related to life. "Life is a game. Every person is inventing his/her own fun/pleasure and plays the game." This post-Soviet game was about "creating new unions, new institutions, new relationships between people and giving new forms, new semantic connections, new words, new life pleasures, new hypnosis". This analytical text reads like a manifesto for the new and contemporary art of the early 1990s. The project *Crosses* was of great importance for Akuvido. It resembled the transgressive work of Vlodko Kaufman, made several months before, especially in the transition from one type of artistic creativity—namely painting—into another, which in Akuvido's case was video. Kaufman turned into a performance and installation artist, while Akuvido transitioned from being a painter to a media artist. This change of mediums happened just like in a fairy-tale, with its rituals of transition.[37] Subsequently, the video *Crosses* allowed young artists to go on to study media art in Berlin, where they would make their best works, combining computer programming, sound and the virtual space of the Internet. But the sign-images, which were developed in the video *Crosses*, remained: they turned into icons, digital signs, and the interface of artistic programs. These crosses permanently linked Akuvido's computer-based media-art with the first video-art created in

Lviv in 1993.

Artworks produced in 1993 in Lviv now stand as the quintessence of the Ukrainian artistic processes of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the Ukrainian SSR turned into Ukraine. It is not surprising that critics have noted that the major works of that time were dictated by a desire for transgression. This transformation of the Soviet space into a new space, and European nostalgia for a forgotten past or a peripheral experience, were present concerns for these artists. Their works, however, took the form of burlesque rituals and carnivalesque buffoonery. In Lviv, the best manifestations of such cultural rituals were festivals of alternative culture called "*Vyvykh*", held in 1990 and 1992. The artistic projects produced in the city in 1993 show artists rethinking the role of the work of art and its relationship with the 'social body', and in many works, tendencies for transformation and transgression were at work.

New forms of art that appeared in Lviv in the late 1980s—performances, happenings, installations—firmly established themselves as part of the local artistic process. With the desire to document these new art forms emerged video-art, first as a means to record artistic processes and then as an independent form of artistic expression. The exhibition by the *Masoch Fund*, the shamanistic rituals of Petro Starukh that aimed to transform nature and urban space, *vydyvo* and the performative surrealism of Vlodko Kaufman, painterly minimalism, and the media art of Akuvido are all works that experimented with form. The video work *Crosses* was not made for 'real' visitors but for imaginary viewers. But more importantly, this artwork initiated a discourse on artistic video in Lviv. While the multiple transgressions and transformations in the Lviv art world that led to the emergence of video art in 1993 have since become common practice, video art is still not considered a proper art form. Thus museums in Ukraine do not collect or archive video art. For this to happen, Ukraine still needs another art revolution: a revolution within the institutions of culture.

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9. Александр Соловьев and Алиса Ложкина, "Новейшая История Современного Искусства. Point Zero. Середина 90-х. Диалоги с Экраном и Рождение Грантового Сознания,'' livejournal.com, Top10_kiev (blog), April 13, 2010, http://top10-kiev.livejournal.com/293622.html.
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12. Moran, There's No Place like Home Video, 5.
13. Moran, 32.
14. Lviv is the biggest city in the Ukrainian west and among the few in Ukraine which has an art education institution, that is an Academy of Fine Arts (former Institute of Applied and Decorative Arts).
15. Hundorova claims that Ukrainian literature of this period exemplified tropes of transition and transgressive characteristics, see: Tamara Hundorova, Tranzytna kul'tura: symptomy postkolonial'noï travmy, De profundis (Kyiv: Hrani-T, 2013).
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17. See an exhibition in Moscow in 2018, which discussed the issue of Glasnost and a famous art auction that took place in USSR in 1988: Vika Dushkina and Andrey Misiano, "Bidding for Glasnost: Sotheby's 1988 Auction in Moscow,'' Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Museum (blog), January 28, 2018, https://garagemca.org/en/exhibition/bidding-for-glasnost-sotheby-s-1988-auction-in-moscow [Accessed on June 6th 2020].

18. See a review on an exhibition held in Kyiv (PinchukArtCentre) in 2015, which tried to argue that `new art' in Soviet Ukraine was born in the context of Perestroika, Alisa Lozhkina, "Diagnoz `Perestroika': istoriia ukrainskoho iskusstva po versii PinchukArtCentre,'' ART Ukraine, June 5, 2015, http://artukraine.com.ua/a/diagnoz-perestroyka–istoriya-ukrainskogo-iskusstva-po-versii-pinchukartcentre/ [Accessed on June 6th 2020]. This exhibition tried to unfold a narrative on contemporary Ukrainian art mainly shaped by Kyiv and around `central figures', heavily ignoring what was happening in that time on the peripheries of Soviet Ukraine.

19. Viktor Misiano, Andrei Kovalev, and Andrei Erofeev, Exhibit Russia: The New International Decade 1986-1996, ed. Kate Fowle, Ruth Addison, and Schroth Mary-Angela, Garage Archive Collection (Moscow: Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016).

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21. Amir Weiner claims that Soviet socialism was already different after 1945, turning from `robust' to `retiring', but final decomposition only took place in the second half of 1980s, see: Amir Weiner, "Robust Revolution to Retiring Revolution: The Life Cycle of the Soviet Revolution, 1945–1968,'' The Slavonic and East European Review 86, no. 2 (April 2008): 24.

22. See interview with Alexandr Soloviev: Ukrayins'ka Nova Khvylia. Mystetstvo Druhoyi Polovyny 1980-Kh – Pochatku 1990-Kh Rokiv (Kyiv: National Art Museum of Ukraine, 2009), 31–32.

23. Valeria Shiller, "Sednivski plenery,'' Online magazine, Korydor (blog), May 26, 2017, http://www.korydor.in.ua/ua/glossary/sednev-plenery.html [Accessed on June 6th 2020].

24. "Molodyie o Molodykh,'' Iskusstvo, no. 10 (1988): 1.

25. Alexandr Soloviev, "Po Tu Storonu Ochevidnosti,'' Iskusstvo, no. 10 (1988): 36.

26. See an interview with one of the pioneers of new art after 1986, Arsen Savadov: `My characters are personalities with a vague understanding of reality', interview by Alisa Lozhkina, November 8, 2011, http://artukraine.com.ua/eng/a/arsen-savadov-moi-geroi-eto-personazhi-s-razmytym-ponyatiem-realnosti/#.XDSrci17F-U [Accessed on June 6th 2020].

27. See recollections of artists: Georgii Kizelvater, Eti Strannyie Semidisiatyie, Ili Poteria Nevinnosti: Esse, Interview, Vospominaniia (Moscow: Novoie literaturnoie obozrenie, 2010).

28. On late Soviet `stiob' see this highly influential work of American anthropology: Alexei Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation (Princeton University Press, 2013).

29. Some of the posters from the important Lviv exhibition `Invitation to Discussion' (1987) were exhibited in Kyiv in 2018 at the show `Red Book: Soviet Art in Lviv in 80s – 90s' curated by Yurii Sokolov

(PinchukArtCentre), see:
https://pinchukartcentre.org/en/exhibitions/red-book [Accessed on June
6th 2020].

30. Stefan Sokolowski, "The Myth of Volodymyr Ivasiuk During the Perestroika
Era'' (MA Thesis, University of Alberta, 2008); Bohdan Klid, "Popular Music,
National Culture and the First Chervona Ruta Festival of 1989,'' East/West:
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"Nationalism on Stage: Music and Change in Soviet Ukraine,'' in Retuning
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(Duke University Press, 1996).

31. Both events in Lviv opera house were highly influential for new Ukrainian
art, though not actively discussed in academic publications, more often
being treated as rituals of resistance. See: Alexandra Hrycak, "The Coming
of `Chrysler Imperial': Ukrainian Youth and Rituals of Resistance,'' Harvard
Ukrainian Studies, 1997, 63–91.

32. Moscow's technical center that managed space travels received three
graphic works of Podolchak, however only two reached the cosmos, since
the third image was censored because of it overtly erotic content.

33. The record is kept at the Urban Media Archive, Centre for Urban History in
Lviv, www.lvivcenter.org [Accessed on June 6th 2020].

34. The crowd which addresses Neborak featured famous Lvivians, like Hanna
Herman, Herhii Gongadze, George Grabowicz (Ukrainian scholar from
USA), Voktor Morozov and many others.

35. Later Akuvido would free themselves from the concerns of film and shifted
completely to the realm of digital art.

36. I kept the original transliteration into English used by the authors, see:
http://www.akuvido.de/cv/index.htm [Accessed on June 6th 2020].

37. See: Arnold van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (Psychology Press, 1960).