We live in a time of post-history, post-colonialism, post-humanism, post-Yugoslavia. The prefix “post-“ pervades almost every discourse conducted in contemporary humanities and signifies a symptom of a time interpreted as secondary to the ongoing course of history. This prefix, defined as the phenomenon of simultaneous absence and presence, marks approaching but, at the same time, also detachment from the concept. No matter how much we separate ourselves from the word following “post-“, we sustain it with this prefix in an almost naive refusal to abandon the understanding of a world we no longer even believe in. [[1]](#footnote-1)

In Stanko Gagrčin’s work *Yugowave*, the key “post-“ expression in these areas – Post-Yugoslavia – is almost omnipresent. Centred around the perspective of the generation born after the wars of the 1990s and the breakup of Yugoslavia, this work is a confusing wandering; it does not offer a clear overview of the content. For the generation born after the war, there is almost an invisible barrier between the expressions “Yugoslavia” and “the 1990s wars”. It is impossible to form a clear picture of a narrative that encompasses utopian unity and the subsequent destruction and violence. These two terms evoke entirely different connotations. The first one carries an almost nostalgic undertone, while the second one is similar to that of a conversation with a child: “You had to be there to understand.” However, what happens with the generation born without first-hand experience, without sitting by the television and following the news, without queueing for milk due to inflation, without the fear of death?

In his work, Stanko Gagrčin attempted to portray the disorientation in perceiving recent history. *Yugowave* is an installation in the form of a video game, where visitors of the exhibition navigate through an abandoned industrial space and find flooded rooms, television screens, vegetation, and objects reminiscent of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. By combining dystopian spaces with objects of nostalgia, the artist creates a sense of sleepwalking – we are not walking, we are floating through the game, and our presence does not alter anything. In this game, we are not active protagonists aiming to solve or overcome obstacles in order to reach the end of the narrative. We, the participants , are given the opportunity to explore. On television screens scattered around the space, music videos from the 1980s are displayed. The songs these videos were created for, which can still be heard on radio stations today, serve as markers of longing for the past, for the “carefree”. In addition, the visual segments of the videos make a kind of cultural map of the time in which they were produced, since they depict what was trendy, what was subversive and what was aesthetically appealing. In contrast to them, there are audio recordings from the Yugoslav wars, speeches of generals and politicians, and testimonies of civilians. The space is responsive, it seems like the sound recordings that accompany us are played randomly, and navigating through the apocalyptic rooms on our own triggers a sense of discomfort. These scenes are not something we can merely observe passively; we must navigate through them. Joined in a single space, the music videos juxtaposed with the audio recordings create an anthropological whole, combining elements that contemporary society still values with devastations that it would rather avoid talking about. The complexity arising from the creative potential on the one hand, and political matrices that generate conflict and a state of constant social crisis on the other, becomes even more potent through the examples of the Yugoslav heritage and the wars of the 1990s, considering the short time span that separates them. The spatial structure within the game is a labyrinth. It is fixed, but the movement of participants is not; they themselves decide how quickly or slowly they pass by the things they see and hear, where they pause, and what they pay attention to. When we reach the end, the game takes us back to the beginning, blocking any potential to move into the future.

*Yugowave* calls for a dialogue and confrontation with the past by encouraging the generations born during and after the Yugoslav wars to initiate the process of exploration and opinion formation about the phenomena that have shaped them. The generation excluded from dialogue was raised amidst the aftermath of war, with phrases like “Be careful” before every journey to previously warring countries. The need for understanding and open dialogue is becoming increasingly pronounced, therefore *Yugowave* does not provide answers and commentary but, instead, creates a dystopian archaeology of the future that participants must dig through. In Gagrčin’s work, reality is replaced by its symbols, of both culture and suffering. Despite the high realism in depicting scenes, there’s still a sense that participants traverse the uncanny valley, far from what has been experienced. In the abandoned industrial space that presents a distant future to the viewer, we encounter scenes which take on the quality of artefacts, bearing witness to a civilization that no longer exists. The work simultaneously conveys the need to preserve memories of culture, and the necessity of remembering what has been lost. History is not concluded; its ruins continue to pile up towards the sky.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The agony of the real and the rational is ushered into the era of simulation. Numerous generations lived on the trail of history, anticipating – with euphoric or catastrophic anxiety – some kind of revolution, while today we have the impression that history has withdrawn. It has left behind a sort of indifferent nebulousness, interspersed with certain currents, but lacking its references. [[3]](#footnote-3) *Yugowave* is a sea of symbols, where utopianism and destruction go hand in hand, but not coexisting; instead, there is a sense of confusion between them. We are left with abstract ideas, simulations and ambiguous realms of information, with a feeling that we are always on the brink of understanding, on the brink of an answer. We wander through the circular labyrinth of history, hoping to eventually find an exit, to reach that point. Perhaps it does not exist, but in the era of simulation and the “post-“ prefix, the searching itself is a revolutionary act.

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1. Štajerl, Hito, *Duty Free Art - Umetnost u doba planetarnog građanskog rata,* [Steyerl, Hito, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*], Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade 2019, page 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., page 106 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bodrijar, Žan, *Simulakrumi i simulacija* [*Baudrillard, Jean*, *Simulacra and Simulation*],Svetovi, Novi Sad 1991, page 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)