Dreams of a Better Life: Reusing Video Letters in Post-Socialist Film and Videoart
Clea Wanner

"Well, after a long time I'm sending you a tape again. You can see the apartment where I live now. And we can remind ourselves how we look like." Sitting on his couch, a man addresses the camera directly. The scene comes from Mila Panić's multimedia project *We Have a Wonderful Life*, in which the artist reuses VHS tapes sent to her family by relatives who emigrated to Australia in the late 1990s. Panić reflects on postwar migration from Bosnia and Herzegovina, hopes for a better life abroad, and the longing for family reunification.

This presentation examines recent films and audiovisual installations that, like *We Have a Wonderful Life*, collect and reuse video letters exchanged between family members who had emigrated and those who remained back home. Taking a transregional perspective, Wanner will bring these artistic engagements with the audiovisual heritage of the post-Yugoslav diaspora into dialogue with examples from Moldova and Romania.

Against the backdrop of post-Yugoslav epistolary film practices, Wanner will explore how the reuse of private video correspondence addresses both experiences of migration and displacement and the neoliberal transformations of the post-socialist period. Particular attention is given to how artistic appropriation reveals and negotiates the affective dimensions of migration, labor, and consumption—from hopes, dreams, and desires to shame, weariness, and anxieties about loss.



Clea Wanner is an Associate Scholar at the Slavic Seminar, University of Basel, and an SNSF Postdoc Mobility Fellow, currently a visiting scholar at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University. Her current postdoctoral project examines the artistic reuse of private amateur footage in contemporary filmmaking in the post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav regions. She completed her PhD on corporeal aesthetics in the cinema of the Russian Tsarist Empire. Her first book, *Entfesselte Körper. Ästhetische Reflexionen zum modernen Menschen im frühen russischen Film*, was published in 2023 by Schüren (Marburg, Germany). She also works as a film critic and curates film programs.