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Culture Instead of A State, Culture As A State.

Art, Regime and Transcendence in The Works
of Laibach and Neue Slowenische Kunst.

PhD. Thesis.

Alexei Monroe.

2000.

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Abstract.

The thesis examines the significance and effects of the Slovene art collective NSK (founded 1983), particularly the group Laibach. NSK employ traumatic and controversial imagery (Nazi-Kunst, Socialist Realism) as part of an extremely complex response to various political, historical and aesthetic “regimes” that structure their political and cultural environment. Its interventions are mapped through discussion of specific works in the media it operates within including music, art, philosophy, theatre and design. The subject is approached via an integrated representational strategy that seeks to illustrate NSK’s relation to political and cultural trends (including the disintegration of socialism and the influx of capitalism) through in-depth analysis of the content of its works. The sources of NSK’s aesthetic extremism are located in historical tendencies and the political structures with which the groups interacted. It identifies the sources of the wide range of historical, political and artistic motifs used by NSK, and recounts some of the key works and their significances and effects. The discussion centres on the interplay between state and culture in NSK’s work and the way in which NSK have preserved a space of utopian post-territorial imagination by using the imageries of the totalitarian state and other regimes. The thesis concludes that it is possible for an artistic practice based on the “demasking and recapitulation” of regimes to temporarily disrupt and transcend such systems.

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Acronyms/Glossary.

The Yugoslav federal system entailed separate parties, central Committees and administrations for each of the republics. Youth and other organisations also had republican/provincial and municipal/local sections. These bodies were also represented at the national level via the federal party structure, LCY - League of Communists Yugoslavia.

DELO - Main Slovene Daily Paper.

JNA - Yugoslav National Army.

LCS - League of Communists of Slovenia.

LCY - League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

MLADINA – “Youth”. Originally the magazine of the Slovene Socialist Youth Organisation. Known as the most radical magazine in Yugoslavia during the 1980s.

NSK – “Neue Slowenische Kunst”, New Slovene Art.

NAZI-KUNST – “Nazi Art”. Generic term used to describe the art of the Third Reich.

NK - Novi Kolektivizam (NSK design studio “New Collectivism”).

NSMs - New Social Movements. In Slovenia these included feminist, ecological, pacifist and gay groups.

O.F. - Osvobodilna Fronta (Liberation Front) Slovene Communist-lead wartime resistance.

RADIO ŠTUDENT (RŠ) - Ljubljana student run alternative station, established in 1969.

SAWPY - Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia, non-party forum for approved social and other groups with republican and municipal sections. (SZDL in Slovene, Ljubljana section known as MK SZDL).

ŠKUC - Študentski Kulturni Center, Student Cultural Centre, Ljubljana, established in 1978.

SSOH - Savez Socialističke Omladine Hrvastka, Union of Croatian Socialist Youth.

SSOJ - Federal Yugoslav youth organization, (ZSMJ in Slovene).

TANJUG – Official Yugoslav News Agency.

TSSN - Theatre of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice.

ZKH - Croatian Central Committee.

ZSMS - Zveza Socialistične Mladine Slovenije. Slovene socialist youth organisation.

Chapter One: "Preludium"

"We are corrupted by unrelenting drums, teutonic, orchestral assaults and a commanding, demanding voice of homicidal insistence...

As soon as the music stops and there is actually a chance to think, that's when the first sensation subsides and gives way to something new... unease. Unease because this group do not seem to have the petty concerns and ambitions other groups live by. They seem to see themselves as spokesmen for a movement that has absolutely nothing to do with music and though (because they sing in German and Yugoslavian) the aims of that movement are unclear to us, what is resoundingly clear through the noise and voice is the utter extremity of the ideals and politics involved."

(Nova Akropola 1986).

The musico-political phenomenon that this British review attempted to describe was an album ("Nova Akropola" or New Acropolis) by the Slovene group "Laibach". Laibach's public image is intended to project an image of resolute certainty and militant belief and yet in practice the group issues questions rather than commands, raising far more questions than it answers. A "simple" description of Laibach is a largely illusory notion because it is structured at its most basic level by a series of paradoxes. Having grown up in non-aligned socialist Yugoslavia the group chose a name, "Laibach" (the German term for the Slovene capital, Ljubljana), associated with both the Habsburg Empire and the Nazi occupation of the city from 1943-45. Although Laibach works within popular music but quotes some of the genre's fiercest critics and blends Slovene national symbols with a still politically suspect Germanic image. Therefore quite apart from the controversy its extremity has generated, Laibach is "problematic" at a very basic descriptive level.

Žižek (1993b) has argued that Laibach "... does not function as an answer but as a question" and the group's mode of interaction with its audiences constantly raises fresh questions, precisely because it refuses to be "located" in any camp but its own: the collective of artistic groups known as Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). The researcher confronting Laibach, let alone the wider NSK structure it is part of is confronted by a dense mass of material in several languages and by Laibach's tautological, intimidating language (see next page) all of which have generated widespread speculation and confusion in the media. Laibach stands in the path of a series of historical closures, in relation to both itself and the political and social developments it has commented upon. During the eighties it forcibly inscribed itself into the narration of events in Slovenia, Yugoslavia and beyond (Laibach's disruption of the Slovene political space is discussed in detail in chapter four).

Besides the aesthetic contradictions and complexities a work such as “Nova Akropola” contains (see section 5.6) there are also major problems in categorising the group and its techniques as it carries out a type of negative self-definition, seeking to close down as many possible categorisations of its work as possible. It mimics totalitarian ideology by carrying out a constant process of differentiation, refuting attempts to describe it as an example of phenomena such as Punk, the avant-garde, post-modernism or provocation for provocation’s sake:

“LAIBACH practices provocation on the alienated consciousness, but provocation does not serve its own purpose, nor is it a basic method of our activities. Provocation by LAIBACH is a consequence of the internal vitality of the spirit, the energy which is repeatedly released at every recurrent embodiment of the *Idea* and at every realization of its fertility with each fulfilment within the relevant space.” (NSK 1991, 49).

What Laibach attempts in such statements is to attempt to maintain a space of radical ambiguity that is always somewhere in between recognisable political and artistic tendencies. Examining Laibach statements in detail it is noticeable that whilst it openly lists many of its diverse sources it always refuses definitive political or cultural identification with any one of them. NSK’s discourse is structured so as to be self-recuperative – it absorbs and manipulates the contradictions, paradoxes and opposition it generates turning them into signifiers of consistency and constancy (see chapter 2).

The works of Laibach and their fellow NSK groups are spectacularly multi-referential, full of allusions to obscure historical events and personalities and neglected artistic and political concepts. The range of references on a single album such as “Nova Akropola” is vast. The album’s cover (see illustration in section 5.6) is based on “Die Innere Raum” (The Inner Room) by the German artist Anselm Kiefer, whilst the stag in the foreground is one of numerous repetitions by NSK groups of Sir Edwin Landseer’s famous Highland painting “The Monarch Of The Glen”. The album includes a ghostly “sampled” partisan song, samples of braying stags, hunting horns, atonal noise and the work of (amongst others) Bernard Herrmann¹ and Gustav Holst (“Panorama” – CD track eight). The lyrics include extracts from the Catholic exorcism ceremony (“Vade Retro”) and a speech by Tito (“Panorama”). In effect, the researcher is confronted by what Attali (1996, 19) described in another context as “...the immense forest of noise with which history presents us”. In order to cut through this “forest”, it is essential to try and identify some of the key paradigms at the core of Laibach’s operation and to attempt to construct a narrative from out of these. The composition of

¹ Composer of the score to Hitchcock’s “Psycho”.

these paradigms can only be identified through close analysis of the works and their sources. Laibach's multi-referentiality creates a stockpile of ammunition for both its critics and defenders and the group deliberately incites excessively partisan critical and popular reactions. Having set up a heated debate, the actuality of the group is often lost in the "crossfire" between its supporters and opponents. This is in the group's interests, as it tends to reveal more about the participants in such debates than about Laibach (see chapter 4).

It is not just the conflicting sources of Laibach's work that help it evade definitive classification but the fact of their repetition in new contexts. Taken literally, the repetition of the motifs of Nazi-Kunst seems to provide definitive evidence of Nazism, even taking account of the fact that Laibach juxtapose the Nazi imageries with contradictory elements such as Pop Art or Slovene national symbols. However it is the very repetition of these symbols that makes it possible for Laibach to go beyond them, and to escape definitive identification with them. This effect is based on the nature of repetition, which by its nature, introduces a surplus, excessive element that helps frustrate categorisation and which it is the responsibility of the spectator and not the artist to interpret. Repetition amplifies or distorts the repeated image and combined with juxtaposition, alienates the original from itself (see sections 5.10-5.12). NSK refer to this process (which might equally be termed "reprocessing" or "alienation") as "unmasking and recapitulation", a term that will recur through the thesis. The "unmasking" is a metaphor for the way in which NSK works attempt to render perceptible (audible or visible) normally hidden or repressed aspects of a subject and "recapitulation" amplifies the tensions or contradictions these generate to create a form that in Žižek's terminology is "more X than X itself" (1994a, 92-3). Thus for instance Laibach confused state and public by creating an image of the state that was more totalitarian than the state itself (see chapter four in particular).

1.1 The NSK Problem and Its Significance.

a) Descriptive Problems: Laibach and the NSK groups are structurally “problematic” and the first questions to be addressed are basic descriptive ones. Laibach and NSK have to be defined, as do their contexts, procedures and “intentions”. These issues can only be addressed once a representational strategy has been devised which can communicate the complexity and breadth of the phenomenon. The works discussed contain controversial and provocative elements: the type of extremity involved and the motives behind it have to be discussed. The approach has to allow for the simultaneity of meanings and motives in the works and be able to deal with and explain the ambiguities and paradoxes they contain.

b) Technical Problems: As the discussion of the available literature will make clear there is no precedent for such an extended analysis of the subject (or some of the aesthetic procedures it contains). This problem is the more acute because the subject stands at the intersection of several under-researched fields (Slovene culture and history, alternative music and culture in Central and Eastern Europe, industrial music). Moreover due to its problematic status NSK frustrates and disrupts received wisdom in several of these fields and stands in the way of or exposes oversights in some narratives, particularly those dealing with cultural processes in a non-capitalist context.

c) Significance: NSK is formally distinctive for several reasons, primarily in terms of its techniques and its international success as an ex Yugoslav artistic collective employing totalitarian and other disturbing imageries. This fact in itself gives rise to the question of how it has been possible for it to become established (addressed particularly in chapters three and five) on the domestic, European and international levels and the type of impacts it has had (see chapters 3-6 and chronology). By tracing its wider significances NSK’s value and significance as a subject of research should become clearer.

So the complex of problems NSK represents is greater than for many more fully researched subjects. However once these problems are narrowed down and an attempt is made to identify key processes there are perhaps more opportunities than with other subjects; the chance to devise a new way to read not just a new subject (NSK) but a whole series of otherwise obscure or neglected events and phenomena. In addition there is also the chance to attempt a new reading of more extensively researched subjects, particularly the collapse of Yugoslavia.

1.2. The Yugoslav Context

Whilst since 1991 there has been a massive expansion of research activity on Yugoslav issues, this has focussed heavily on issues of diplomacy, war and nationalism. Other questions such as the ideological nature of self-management and cultural activity in Yugoslavia were relatively obscure before 1991 and generally play even less of a role in contemporary accounts. The indeterminacy and ambiguity that surrounds NSK still persists in relation to many Yugoslav topics. Yugoslavia stood in an intermediate geographical and ideological space between NATO and the Warsaw Pact states. Its institutions and ideology were shaped by the need to maintain a sense of difference in relation to the Eastern and Western blocs and the need to balance centrifugal and centripetal political and national forces within the country (see Ramet 1992). This resulted in an extreme process of institutional proliferation. Institutions had federal, republican and local levels and the party itself was federalised. The ideological imperative to ensure that economic, national, youth and other socio-economic groups were represented found expression in the creation of semi-autonomous cultural and social institutions, each with their own agendas and modes of interpellating the public. This situation often bred confusion and discord since jurisdictions were not clearly demarcated and there was a far more complex command structure than in other socialist states. The decentralisation policies adopted under the 1974 Yugoslav constitution limited the jurisdiction of the federal authorities in Belgrade (which traditionally took a more conservative line) over cultural and other questions specific to the individual Yugoslav republics. In Slovenia these conditions gradually allowed the Slovene youth organisation (ZSMS) to adopt increasingly radical social and cultural policies. Under its protection small but highly important institutions such as Radio Študent and the Ljubljana student cultural centre ŠKUC created marginal spaces of partially tolerated dissent.

Therefore to the extent that a more liberal orientation was possible in Slovenia it was the result not purely of cultural factors but the very structure of the Yugoslav system and its relation to some distinctive Slovene attitudes to culture and politics, which during the eighties became a site of spectacular difference with the other republics. Just as Yugoslavia was in some ways exceptional within Europe Slovenia is (perceived as) exceptional within Yugoslavia. Whilst the Slovene language is related to Serbo-Croat it has many peculiarities and was difficult for other Yugoslavs to

learn (see Tollefson 1981). Another factor that differentiated Slovenia from the rest of Yugoslavia was the heavily Germanised nature of its culture (a legacy of a thousand years of Austrian rule prior to 1918). Laibach's manipulation of the Germanic elements of Slovene identity was one of the most provocative aspects of their work in the eighties and disturbed as many Slovenes as Yugoslavs (see chapters 3 and 4).

At both the republican and federal administrative levels there were constant tensions between authoritarian and libertarian models of the country's self-management ideology. In the early eighties ZSMS and the "New Social Movements" in Slovenia and other forces elsewhere in Yugoslavia argued for a more literal reading of the concepts of self-management that would facilitate rather than repress alternative political and social activity (see section 2.9a, chapter four). The "official" interpretation of self-management was more limited and intended to manage inter-ethnic and other tensions and eliminate the need for alternative practices. Gow (1992, 9) discusses the system (or federation of systems) in terms of its "... endemic multiple contradiction and complexity". Whilst this complexity hardly helps the descriptive problems alluded to above it does play a key role in the present argument. NSK directly incorporate the fearsomely complex ideological and institutional structures of Yugoslavia into their discourse and their works and a large proportion of their alienating nature stems directly from this reprocessing of Yugoslav ideological reality and its combination with other disturbing signifiers (see sections 2.3, 2.4, 2.11).

The economic crisis that began in 1979 exacerbated the tensions within the system, creating catastrophic potentials in culture as well as politics (Sretenović 1996). In fact the cultural response to the process of economic and political polarisation experienced in Yugoslavia in this period echoed that of Britain in the Punk era of the late seventies (section 5.3) and by 1985 Ramet was speaking of an "apocalypse culture" in Yugoslavia that was marked by the presence not just of local Punk and Heavy Metal scenes but of even more provocative phenomena such as Laibach. The Yugoslav music scene was as distinctive as the political system (which allowed it relative autonomy) and as Ramet (1994, 1991, 1987) has argued the distinctiveness of both the context and Laibach challenge Western preconceptions about the status of popular music under socialism. Journalistic accounts of phenomena such as Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution" and the role played by figures such as Frank Zappa tend to colour popular perceptions, creating an image of a "zero sum game" in which the state was the source of all oppression and rock music a "pure"

expression of the desire for freedom. However the situation in Yugoslavia (and to a lesser extent Hungary and East Germany) was a “positive sum game” in which all but the most extreme music was tolerated and to an extent assimilated by the system (Ramet (Ed.) 1994). Besides oppositional rock and commercial music Hungary also produced extreme right-wing music whilst Slovenia produced the so-called “state rock” genre (Vidmar 1983) in which Laibach and Punk groups such as O! Kult incorporated state imagery into their provocations. As a product of the Yugoslav context and in terms of its tactics for working within the music industry (see chapter 5) Laibach represents a challenge to binary narratives that argue that rock in socialist Europe was simply a struggle for the victory and implementation of Western modes of freedom. The situation in eighties Yugoslavia also informed Laibach’s adoption of a fierce strain of cultural pessimism that incorporates the work of authors such as Adorno and Horkheimer as well as Soviet-style critiques of popular culture (section 5.9). It is important to bear these factors in mind when considering NSK since one of the key arguments of this thesis is that the specific form of the state structure with which NSK interacted structured their work at least as much as cultural factors such as the tradition of experimental Yugoslav art that had developed since the sixties. Furthermore it argues for the effectiveness of an artistic practice that “*recapitulates*” and disrupts the symbolic functioning of regimes by confronting them with an intensified representation of their codes and forms.

1.3 Approaching NSK.

The thesis takes the form of a broad historical and archival survey of the subject based on a close interrogation of representative works. Primary documentation of the works’ ideological-political impact is combined with analysis of their symbolic, visual, tonal and ideological elements. This “dialogue” is intended to render perceptible the effects of the works and the regimes they interact with. “Regimes” are understood as any of a series of restrictive systems both literal (governmental, ideological, economic, religious) and abstract (cultural, stylistic). Due to the greater availability of material and its greater impact, most attention is paid to Laibach and to a lesser extent, Irwin. The narrative makes particular use of “the state” as an organising motif. This is useful both in terms of facilitating a reading of the material based on a central theme and also because identification of the core processes underlying NSK helps contextualize the motifs and themes it selects to “demask and recapitulate”. The thesis title refers to a widely noted historical overlap in Slovenia between the

preservation and construction of a national culture and the construction of a national state (see Rupel 1992). A series of case studies are intended to illustrate the major thematic areas in which NSK has been active (artistic and political totalitarianism, national identity, ideology, music and the state) and the media within which these engagements have been carried out (music, art, philosophy, design, theatre). The discussion is simultaneously linked to a series of wider debates about conventional understandings of relationships between art and state in both halves of Europe and beyond.

1.3a) “NSK Studies”: Principal Elements.

The “curriculum” that had to be covered and assimilated for this research is, as will become apparent, partly affected by the structural difficulties of the “Slovene Studies” field. In order to present an at least minimally coherent view of the phenomenon the field of “NSK Studies” has to include the following elements, in variable proportions according to which aspect of NSK is being addressed. The holistic synthesis attempted here includes; the study of totalitarianism (culturally and ideologically), Slovene/Yugoslav Studies, elements of art history (dealing primarily with totalitarian and avant-garde art), psychoanalysis and ideology and, less conventionally, an attempt at a “sonocentric” (Monroe 1998) presentation of (industrial) music. In order to provide a holistic view this study attempts to relate the subject matter to each of the fields as necessary. The obvious danger is of falling into gaps between these fields, but this was judged an acceptable risk in relation to the alternative (a narrow, primarily theoretical study of just one aspect of NSK; history, ideology, art or music). The areas under discussion at any one time are minimised in so far as the subject allows. Chapter two is designed to provide an overview of NSK groupings, their techniques and areas of activity, while subsequent chapters are centred on relatively discrete topics (historical background, Laibach’s domestic political impact, musical activity and the NSK state project).

1.4 Objectives:

1) Initially to justify the choice of a Slovene topic and to attempt a synthesis of the diverse English-language material in the field. Subsequently to establish Laibach and NSK as subjects deserving more extensive theoretical scrutiny than has so far been the case and to attempt to present a holistic view of the NSK “project”. Finally to establish Laibach and its music in particular as no less worthy

of scrutiny than NSK groups working in more “respectable” genres (theatre, philosophy, fine arts).

2) To try and implement a consistent approach based on the application of theory to the analysis of specific works in order to illustrate the wider project. This approach is also intended to reveal via analysis the presence of and development of a common NSK aesthetic (seen particularly in the repetition of generic motifs (eg: “FIAT”, “Kapital” – see section 2.11) by each of the main NSK sections. Supplementary to this is the location of NSK in relation to other musical and artistic phenomena via the identification of some of the artists and tendencies quoted in NSK works (particularly in the fields of music (Laibach), NSK discourse, and art (Irwin). An attempt is made to keep open a space for ambiguity and the role of intuitive, non-rationalizable factors in the creative process via an emphasis on the influence of a combination of diffuse “environmental” factors (the economic, ideological and historical contexts) on the works. Additionally chronological and other discontinuities within the NSK “meta-narrative” are discussed. These illustrate and preserve some critical autonomy in the face of the NSK tactic of presenting its projects as the inevitable outcome of a systematically planned programme.

3) To attempt to demonstrate the aesthetic and political potential and effects of the use of state and power structures (seen in modes of performance and insignia particularly) as the material basis of an aestheto-political praxis. To contextualise and provide a rationale for the use by Laibach in particular of formally negative elements: “Our basic inspiration, ideals which are not ideal through their form but the material of Laibach’s manipulation itself, remains; an industrial production, art of the Third Reich, totalitarianism, Taylorism, bruitism, disco” (Laibach 1984: “Perspektiven”). The thesis aims to examine the impact of these techniques on Slovene and other authority structures and to test such “homeopathic” techniques in the spheres of politics and culture (the use of a concentrated dose of poison against a wider infection).

The key aesthetic-political theme running throughout the thesis is that of the use of the state and its trappings (passports, embassies, rallies, uniforms and the use of force) as an aesthetic material, a technique that creates a transgressive proximity between notions of culture and state. I attempt to relate NSK interventions to a period in which the Yugoslav state was disintegrating and new modes of identity were under debate. The creation of NSK’s own state is presented as a response to regional processes of state disintegration and reformation (see chapter 6). The bureaucratic-ideological tone of Laibach and NSK discourse is emphasised, as is the way in which the groups present a spectral recapitulation of totalitarianism in concerts, speeches, interviews and

performances. The choice and effects of specific motifs will be linked to what I argue is an attempt by NSK to disrupt and transcend the series of regimes it has interacted with and the effectiveness of significance of this approach will be assessed. Hopefully the unusually explicit and sometimes violent interaction between cultural and political forces seen in NSK's work may also form the basis of a new reading of the period in which it has been active and some of its key ideological and cultural features.

1.5 Phases of Research:

In 1992 I wrote an MA dissertation attempting to explain the background to and implications of Slovene independence, particularly in the political sphere. This project was motivated by an initial interest in Laibach (dating from 1987) and related Slovene cultural activity and spurred by Slovenia's recent secession from Yugoslavia (1991). Both my interest in Laibach and Slovenia were preceded by a general interest in Slavic issues, particularly Soviet history (studied at undergraduate level).

During the MA research (which included a first brief visit to Slovenia) I first became aware of how "marginal" and under-reported" a topic Slovenia is in Britain, even within the field of Slavonic Studies (a situation which has not changed). At this time I gathered the first material on Slovene culture such as Erjavec & Gržinić's "Ljubljana Ljubljana" (1991) as well as political and historical material. By 1992 the NSK monograph (NSK 1991) the first comprehensive documentation of NSK works was available. Rather than satisfying curiosity, this work actually posed more questions than it answered. It contains no commentary on the works, which float freely with little contextualization (this is one means by which NSK artists secure fascination, particularly amongst a Western audience unaware of the significance of many of the signifiers present in NSK works.) The more NSK related-material became available the more questions it raised - how had it been possible to produce such provocative work in a state socialist society? why should it prove equally fascinating to a Western audience, and what was its provenance?.

A key concern was the attempt to locate Laibach beyond "mere" pop culture, that is, as a significant cultural phenomenon that has had a tangible impact across Europe and beyond. These concerns began to converge with the "unfinished business" of the MA research on Slovenia

(including the fact that it had been necessary to defend what seems to be perceived not merely as an obscure but an almost perverse choice of country to focus on) as well as a desire to highlight aspects of both the country and its art that seemed of wider importance. Prior to dealing with the questions directly raised by NSK I was therefore concerned to justify and defend the aesthetic worth of works by NSK groups and similar artists and the choice not merely of NSK but of any Slovene research topic.

Research took place in four phases. The first year of research was based on acquiring a thorough knowledge of English language material on Slovene and Yugoslav history and politics, in so far as this was available in Britain. This was then integrated with audio, press and other sources on NSK gathered personally since 1988. This empirical process was an essential means of contextualizing specific historical references made in NSK works, allowing a more than purely aesthetic interpretation of the works. The works could illuminate the history and vice-versa.

1.5a) Initial Problems in Researching Slovene Topics.

The marginality of Slovenia as a topic in English-language scholarship presents constant problems. America produces the journal "Slovene Studies" as well as émigré publications but even within the field of Slavonic Studies (which itself is still to coming to terms with issues of popular culture) Slovene topics remain neglected or subsumed under all-Yugoslav studies approaches that largely overlook Slovenia, which is frequently absent from discussions of both Central Europe and the Balkans. Whilst an understanding of the importance of all-Yugoslav politics is essential for the purposes of this research, the fact that many publications mention Slovenia only in passing made the amassing of material fragmentary and frustrating. A holistic picture had to be formed from a variety of sources that had to be "filleted" for some sparse Slovene references including not just academic work but travelogues (Dunford et al, 1990) and journalism. Neither for Slovenia itself nor for NSK is there one stable body of literature. Therefore one of the key imperatives and difficulties of the project has been to synthesise this diverse material into a coherent resource and to utilise it as effectively as possible as the basis of a new approach appropriate to the problem.

1.6 First Phase Literature.

The literature available in Britain varies widely in its quality and focus and has often been produced by non-academic writers and émigrés with more or less overt political and religious agendas (the anti-Communist and Catholic orientations of the works of Arnez (1958) and Kuhar (1962, 1967) for instance). There is no single contemporary work covering the entire span of Slovene history in English. This reflects the obscurity and scarcity of research on all Slovene topics within British academia in particular. Some Slovene-centred works are highly specialised, dealing with a particular period of Slovene history in intensive detail. The works of Rogel (1977) on early pro-Yugoslavism in Slovenia and Barker (1984) on Slovene Partisans in Carinthia fall into this category. However both were of direct use, not just as general background reading but also in explaining specific NSK references. Rogel's work discussed the visionary Yugoslavist youth group "Preporod" (Renaissance) which turned out to be the basis of early Laibach lyrics such as "Mi Kujemo Bodočnost" (We Build The Future). Barker's work did not explain any specific NSK motifs but revealed the wartime symbolism of the hunting and partisan imageries recapitulated by Laibach (see chapters 3 and 4).

From 1992, in the aftermath of Slovene independence, more English material dealing with the contemporary period became available. "A Paper House" by former "Mladina" correspondent Mark Thompson (1992) devotes as much attention to Slovenia as to the rest of Yugoslavia, an approach that was rare in pre-1991 literature and also integrates a (brief) account of NSK into the Slovene chapter. The collection "Voices From The Slovene Nation" (Huttenbach (Ed.) 1992) presented much new material by American and Slovene academics, not just on history but even on Slovene art. The new information, appearing for the first time in English, was fairly easy to separate from more rhetorical, subtly nationalistic biases of some of the contributors, which are slight compared to equivalent Serbian and Croatian material. In 1994 this was supplemented by a second American publication, "Independent Slovenia" (Benderley, Kraft (Eds.) 1994). This is the key English language source for an overview of developments in Slovenia since the nineteen-eighties and besides history, deals with the labour movement and youth politics in the pre-independence period. However, a comprehensive English-language history of Slovenia has still to be produced.

The problem with these works is that they are not part of a continuous sequence and contain either

broad overviews or specialised micro studies. They are not followed or preceded by other English language material, meaning that some relatively obscure episodes are covered in great detail whilst long periods are almost wholly uncovered. This is not due to a general absence of comprehensive English-language accounts of foreign histories. There is sufficient material, for instance, both in English and the original, to follow a well-defined topic such as “Russian Economic History” from its beginnings to the present. The same cannot be said of Slovenia. There are key themes within Slovene history (assimilation, the influence of Catholicism and Germanic attitudes) which NSK make repeated use of. However to attempt to follow chronologically such compact themes in English is so far still impossible and even in Slovene there are more discontinuities within historical research than might be expected.

1.7 Field Research

a) Documentary Acquisition (2nd Phase Literature).

Gaps left by the English material could only be filled during phase two of the research in Slovenia itself (undertaken 1994-5 and in subsequent visits). The library at the University of Ljubljana attempts to collate all foreign language material on Slovenia and there turned out to be more material than it had previously been possible to access, even through London’s School of Slavonic Studies. These were works in English by Slovene authors not published or distributed abroad such as Stranj’s Trieste-published study of the Slovenes in Italy (1992) and Zwitter’s (1966) University issued typescript.

Similarly, the majority even of English-language material on NSK was only available in Slovenia, either from bookshops and galleries or from the artists themselves. Most Irwin/NSK catalogues are either dual or even triple language publications, normally including English and generally contain theoretical commentaries on the works. The NSK monograph (1991) was only available for a short time in Britain and the English-language version is long out of print. The majority of NSK publications are limited editions not even available via mail order but only from the relevant galleries or NSK archives. As with the historical material the availability of English, let alone Slovene, material was infinitely greater in Ljubljana than in London.

b) Observational Research.

Besides the gathering of literature specific to the location, the other aspect of research in Slovenia was observational. During the year I was able to attend all NSK events in Slovenia as well as an Irwin exhibition in Graz and a Laibach concert in Zagreb. I have continued to attend such events and meet with NSK members on subsequent visits to Ljubljana and in January 1998 was allowed to observe a meeting of the NSK council, the collective decision-making body and form an impression of the collective methodology. I had detailed formal and informal discussions with Laibach, NK Studio, The Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy and, most extensively, with Irwin members.² All were extremely cooperative (although Laibach were most concerned to preserve a certain distance to protect the ambiguity surrounding certain questions) and provided me with much otherwise unavailable material ranging from out of print catalogues to Laibach's archive of Yugoslav (Serb and Croat as well as Slovene) press material. With assistance from Aleš Erjavec and the Slovene academy I also met with several Slovene theorists who have dealt with NSK in their work such as Slavoj Žižek, Tomaž Mastnak and Tomaž Brejc. From these sources I was able to form a picture of the theoretical and social contexts within which NSK was established³: which foreign works were available and discussed in Slovenia in the early eighties and which art-historical and philosophical theories were in the ascendant.

An art historical mode of research was important. I set about acquiring an overview of Slovene art and design history and the work of artists particularly relevant to NSK (Ivan Grohar, August Černigoj, Janez Knez and others). Familiarisation with the work of architects such as Joze Plečnik was also important. Using the library resources of the Modern Gallery and the Academy of Fine

² The Laibach spokesman with whom I dealt was keen to stress that my discussions with him not be presented as an "interview". Within Laibach's methodology interviews are thought of as an integral aspect of the group's public presentation. It was agreed that whilst I was able to tape some discussions they should not be quoted. The implication of this was that the "Laibach interview" format is not primarily informative but performative (although even in informal conversation certain generic phrases or well-known Laibach standpoints would surface in a glimpse of the performative mode. The discussion tended to concentrate on factual queries and the theoretical basis of their operations. Similar restrictions were not requested by Irwin members but again the focus was on background issues and these discussions have not been used as a major source in the present work although they influenced its construction. All such discussions were conducted in English.

³ Again these discussions were extensive but informal and were intended only to supplement and contextualise primary source material and for this reason may well have been more informative than otherwise.

Arts in Ljubljana and talking to local specialists and visiting galleries enabled me to identify several of the artworks that NSK groups “retro-quote” in their projects. Interaction with curators, critics and artists from the same generation as NSK (including those with reservations about NSK’s work) was also useful. Acquiring catalogues, meeting artists and visiting galleries in Budapest⁴, Zagreb and Belgrade have been useful in assessing the regional reception of NSK and comparing artistic development in these similar contexts.

Critical distance was provided by discussion of NSK with “ordinary” Slovene students and others uninvolved in the art or music scenes. Whilst a systematic sociological type survey of attitudes to NSK amongst the Slovene public would be informative it fell outside the primarily aesthetic and ideological concerns of the project and would have required more resources than were available. In fact close observation of NSK was actually most important in terms of “naturalizing” my attitude to their works and enabling a greater dis-identification/externalisation than would otherwise have been possible. Through casual social interaction and exposure to the mundane realities behind the NSK myth its hold was reduced and the possibility of a *durcharbeiten* (working-through) opened up, even to the extent of making the subject-matter (and not merely the scale of the research) seem oppressive for the first time. As Roman Uranjek of Irwin stated in discussion during the NSK Embassy Moscow project in 1992:

“To those who want to cherish the myth of fascination I recommend observing the phenomena [NSK] only from a distance, and to never look behind the stage.” (Čufer (Ed.), 1992, 61)

1.8 Third Phase.

Trying to cement this more distanced post-exposure approach was one of the key issues dealt with in the third, post-field research phase. Inevitably the possibility of too uncritical a stance remains an issue but the awareness of this danger is an incentive to justify claims made for NSK works, either by quoting the work of writers on NSK or the presentation and analysis of supporting visual documentary, audio and video material. The other key issue to be dealt with in the third phase has been the collation and application of the intimidating bulk of new material acquired in Slovenia. During the year in Slovenia I acquired a good passive understanding of the language and built on

⁴ Meetings with the Hungarians Attila Kovacs, whose industrialist works echo those of NSK, and the group B.P.Service, who explore similar sonic territory to Laibach, were especially useful.

this in working through material gathered there. I had been able to photocopy all the material I required from Laibach's press archive and my selection comprises several hundred articles, letters and features giving a comprehensive account of Laibach and the majority of NSK activities from 1980-88.⁵ The assimilation of this material could only begin after leaving Slovenia and has accounted for the majority of research time since then. Within this archive I concentrated on understanding certain key topics that best typify the domestic role of NSK (particularly the Youth Day scandal and the controversy over Laibach's nomenclature). This material, not to my knowledge previously worked through, has hopefully acted as further insurance against subjective value-judgements of NSK activities, grounding those assertions that are made.

1.8b) Chronology/Compilation.

The culmination of this archival research (which integrated the Laibach archive material with British, American and German material gathered by myself and others) has been the production of the chronology. This is intended as an "aide memoire" and a means of placing NSK activity within the context of wider events but inevitably became a major sub-project, as it is the first time such a systemisation has been attempted. The chronology was also a means of illustrating some themes and addressing others not dealt with directly in the body of the text. For instance the documentation of concert tours, exhibitions and (known) media appearances all illustrate the arguments about the domestic and foreign impact of NSK, demonstrating the intensity and geographical extent of their activities and how their timing anticipated and overlapped with political developments in Slovenia and Yugoslavia.

1.9) Slovene Studies: Methodological Issues

Having amassed this material the problem has been to relate it to existing fields and bodies of literature. As has been stated, within the British academic context, there is, in effect, no stable field that might be recognised as "Slovene Studies". Slavonic and Yugoslav studies would be its "parent" disciplines but as has already been pointed out in relation to Slovene historical sources,

⁵ There is as yet no corresponding archive for the period since 1988, however this is balanced by the greater availability of catalogues and other foreign material in this later period in which NSK's domestic status has become comparatively normalised. A number of Serb and Croatian articles were also used.

there is therefore, no fixed body of work to be used. For instance, to my knowledge, there is no comprehensive bibliography of English-language works on Slovenia. As the quality and focus of what material is available varies widely, works from the “parent” disciplines have been used to supplement the Slovene sources. Obviously, much material on Slovenia is available within the much larger body of work discussing Yugoslav historical, social, cultural and political issues, all of which are relevant to this research. However, in common with the other less populous republics of former Yugoslavia, (Macedonia, Montenegro and, until it was forced into prominence in the nineteen-nineties, Bosnia-Herzegovina), Slovenia generally receives far less attention than the “leading” republics of Serbia and Croatia which continue to be dealt with far more extensively. The problem for the Slovene-oriented researcher is often compounded by the organisation of works dealing with Yugoslav topics. The republics and their peoples have generally not been dealt with separately in such works.⁶ Whilst it might be argued that in the light of contemporary developments attempts to present an integrated all-Yugoslav approach had some merit it might be also be argued that they (perhaps unconsciously) reflected a centralist Serbo(-Croatian) bias at work both in the discipline and the country. These all-Yugoslav approaches inevitably structure research on Slovene topics. As with the pre-twentieth century historical literature, it is often necessary to “chase” references to Slovenia as very few of the works deal with it as a discrete topic.⁷

Throughout the research comparisons between Slovak and Slovene experience arose. The two languages retain some similarities and before the arrival of the Magyars their areas of settlement bordered each other, forming a link between the Western and the Southern Slavs.⁸ Both have been marginalized in regional historiographies and the Slovak perspective on this seems highly applicable to the Slovene context. Kirschbaum, author of the first English language history to cover Slovakia from national origins to independence (1996), identifies a bias amongst Western scholars dealing with the Slovaks and other “unhistorical” peoples. He describes a centralistic-assimilationist mode

⁶ It is only in the late nineteen nineties that the first comprehensive English language histories of Bosnia and Kosovo (both by Noel Malcolm) have appeared. Macedonia, still at peace, has no equivalent works to raise its profile.

⁷ This is a structural problem affecting research into many other “unhistorical” peoples, who have only recently emerged from the shadow of larger political entities (Slovenes, Slovaks, Balts, Central Asian and other ex-Soviet nationalities) as well as those still living within larger units (the Welsh, Bretons, and Basques amongst others).

⁸ Linguistically, the Slovenes straddle the two groups.

of historical research that prevailed in the first Czechoslovak republic (1918-1939). Most of the works on “Czechoslovak” history were written by Czechs and reflected the state ideology, meaning that attempts to delineate a discrete Slovak history were, de facto, in opposition to the state and its centralist ideology, a situation largely analogous to that prevalent in Slovenia.⁹ According to Kirschbaum the Slovaks were “considered either as a branch of the ‘Czechoslovak’ nation or else as a minority nation that was neither the object nor the subject of international law” (1996, 245). The legal status of such nations is important - Slovak and other authors argue that foreign authors almost inevitably focus on research centred on federal, rather than provincial or republican capitals. The agendas and perspectives of Prague and Belgrade will generally predominate over those of Bratislava and Ljubljana as those of London or Madrid can relegate those of Cardiff or Barcelona. This is partly the result of a kind of “realpolitik” that finds it easier not to probe beyond official centralist historiography and parallels the preference of Western governments for dealing with larger political entities. Another commentary by Pech (1968) summarises the biases structuring regional history:

“Although Western specialists in Eastern European history have usually regarded it as their task to make the West familiar with the entire ethnic panorama of the polyglot region, they have in practice often been selective in the favours they bestowed on each nation. They have incorporated in their work, in modified form, the outlook and prejudices of the nations which they ‘adopted’. To give the most conspicuous examples, they viewed Slovak history through Czech eyes and Ukrainian history through Polish (or Russian) eyes. In so doing, they have in fact created a second-class status for certain nations. The history of the Slovaks in the West has usually been presented from the point of view of ‘Czechoslovakism’ and has appeared as hardly more than a postscript to Czech history.” (14-15)

There is no equivalent statement by a Slovene historian amongst the literature used in the present research, a fact that may be indicative of a certain resignation among Slovene writers inured to their obscurity. However the use of Slovak references and comparisons, both here and elsewhere in the text is acutely symptomatic of the lack of English-language material addressing Slovene historiographical issues. As the most economically developed republic, Slovenia was in a stronger

⁹ It should be said however that the republican structure within Yugoslavia and the somewhat greater tolerance of the regime meant that the situation in the Slovenia Yugoslav republic was far less oppressive than in Slovakia.

position in relation to Belgrade than (relatively underdeveloped) Bratislava was in relation to Prague. Yet despite the wide republican autonomy enjoyed in post-war Yugoslavia there was a continuous tension between the ideological priorities of pan-Yugoslav history and attempts at national historical knowledge. The threat in the late nineteen-eighties that the Yugoslav educational system would be centralised (including the history curricula) was certainly not an insignificant factor fuelling Slovene separatism.

No Western work on Slovenia or other nations of “second-class status” can be free of these issues. There is huge scope for purely historical (as well as art-historical and cultural studies) research on Slovenia, not least the construction of a framework covering all periods in a minimum of detail for English-speaking researchers. The obscurity of the subject (Slovenia and Slovenes) is such that the work of familiarisation is both necessary and dangerous in that an attempt merely to make the Slovenes [more] “visible” as the subject of historical, cultural and political processes may overwhelm the project as a whole. The “bringing into consciousness” of a little-known group can easily serve as an end in itself, and as the NSK methodology suggests, it is difficult to carry out subtly.¹⁰ The type of centralist prejudice active in such fields serves to “drown out” or ignore smaller voices. The militancy with which Laibach and NSK successfully penetrated the Western market challenged the “natural” order of things in which no music or art from Slovenia could hope to make its voice heard or be perceived (if at all) as anything other than an exotic folk culture. In the same way Yugoslav and foreign authors have tended to perceive not just Slovene but also Macedonian and Bosnian culture as exotic if not perverse variants of the Serbo-Croatian norm. The work of compensating for such biases against colonised or submerged European peoples is still at an early stage and to challenge such is to challenge both geopolitical realities and, in some cases, academic notions of good taste.

There seems to be an implicit attitude that to “adopt” such European¹¹ nations and identities and

¹⁰ I argue in chapter five that Laibach’s work represents a necessarily violent sonic encoding of certain ambivalent archetypes constituting Slovene identity. In this light Laibach’s entire “campaign” within the sphere of Western pop culture might be read as analogous to (and more successful than) historical and contemporary efforts to force awareness of Slovene affairs onto the wider world.

¹¹ None of the same ambivalence is displayed towards research into marginalized non-European nations, particularly if carried out under the banner of Post-Colonial Studies and similar disciplines. This is ironic as the repressed identities and experiences of smaller European nations have much in common with colonised peoples elsewhere.

attempt to re-place them within historical knowledge is, de facto, suspect. This springs from the fact that in such cases there is inevitably a very fine line between disseminating knowledge and nationalist advocacy. However a strong assertion of the right of such peoples to (scholarly) recognition generally sheds light on the far more aggressive nationalisms that try to stifle such identities. Slovenes have been “claimed” for assimilation not just by the ideologies of the Axis powers (German, Italian and Hungarian) but even by some branches of nineteenth Croat nationalist thought that classified Slovenes as an Alpine subset of the Croat nation. The Italians (during 1927-1945) and Hungarians (1941-45) realised that the Slovenes on the territories they occupied were qualitatively different, but this only spurred violent assimilatory campaigns (Magyarisation and Italianisation of place and family names, even of headstones).

The German and Austrian attitude to Slovenes was far more complex. Pan-Germanists believed Slovenes to be a “lost” Germanic volk known as the “Windisch” that had been assimilated by Slavs and should be “rescued” by systematic assimilation. The ideological importance of permanently submerging or if necessary eradicating Slovene identity was apparent during Hitler’s visit to Maribor (Marburg) (26th April 1942). Addressing a crowd there, he gave the explicit instruction to collaborators and the armed forces to “Make this land German for me, as German as is the rest of Styria” (Arnez 1958, 85). According to Barker (1990, 128), in the light of Hitler’s command “Every effort was made to eliminate all elements of Slovene culture and replace them with German culture.” Those Slovenes not deported to Germany (30% of the Slovene population under German control and 90% of the intellectuals were sent to Germany in 1942) were to be assimilated by all means necessary.

The defeat of fascism in 1945 ended such threats within Yugoslavia, but the continuing assimilationist pressures exerted on Italian and Austrian Slovenes indicate that extreme right-wing sentiment in both countries still seeks to deny the existence of a Slovene identity, at least within their state borders, and maintain that Slovene minorities are indulging in a perverse identity fantasy. The difficulty faced is that researchers who leave unquestioned the historiographies of dominant regional nations that seek to submerge smaller peoples are rarely challenged, whilst those seeking to counter these views by insisting on the inconvenient difference of certain groups are accused of siding with nationalism.¹² It is in the nature of such defensive responses that they will not be any the

¹² The extremely fierce and systematic assaults on any scholar presuming to insist that there is a Slav-Macedonian minority in northern Greece and the criminal sanctions applied against Greeks asserting such is

less severe if a scholarly presentation of a small people tries to moderate its tone in response. The mere act of “adopting” such a people as a subject of research will always be condemned in some quarters, academic as well as nationalist, and can actually reinforce sympathy for the regional “overdog”. The danger here is that this provokes an equally strident and uncritical advocacy (even though such could not begin to compete in vehemence with the forces ranged against the recognition of such identities). Only serious academic criticism should cause the researcher to modify his/her presentation of such nations to avoid explicit advocacy. Awareness of this danger might persuade the researcher into an over-apologetic, diffident mode of presentation that begs the academy to tolerate the unavoidable necessity of asserting (however mildly) the experience of an obscure people. Appeasing such opinion may be politically more advantageous but will inevitably disfigure the research. A partial, apologetic picture of a nation whose identity is contested is no more objective than a partial, celebratory advocacy of such a group.

This research aims to steer between these poles and to present an holistic view as the best defence against bias. Thus the Slovenes are presented, not as a heroic, but as a surprisingly resistant people whose identity has been threatened both by their larger neighbours and by domestic repressive ideologies. There is no attempt to conceal the extent of Slovene collaboration with those forces, such as the Nazis, seeking their erasure. On the contrary, an awareness of the Slovene tendency for de-Slovenization is crucial to understanding the mode of Slovenism (culturally centred Slovene self-assertion) presented by Laibach.

Presentation of the facts, negative as well as positive, may still draw accusations of advocacy but to allow this to become an inhibitory factor is to collude with dominant historiographies. The facts are strong enough to make their own claims and even if it were appropriate, there is not necessarily any need for explicit authorial advocacy. The marshalling of the details of a repressed identity inevitably entails a degree of assertiveness in order to overcome the weight of ignorance obscuring such an identity. However, such assertion is not coterminous with advocacy. It is simply an “amplification” process, necessary to pierce the systemic “noise” of dominant historiographies.

It has been apparent from an early stage of the research that in order to establish NSK as a

the most extreme example of such attitudes. Conceptually, there seems to be little to separate the Greeks’ official denial of the existence of this minority with the Nazi denial of a distinct Slovene identity.

legitimate and relevant field of research, Slovenia itself would have to be thus established. Obviously a series of fine balances had to be struck. In order to avoid the danger of the work on Slovenia dominating the entire thesis there is no detailed account of the entire span of Slovene history from the sixth century to the present. Rather, emphasis was placed on recurrent historical themes used by and illustrative of NSK (the Slovene-German relationship, ideological conflict and linguistic-cultural issues). Similarly, discussion of Slovene art history occurs only in relation to concrete references within NSK works. There would be scope for an account of NSK that gave more consideration to Yugoslav factors but there is more scope for original research vis a vis the Slovene context which is comparatively underwritten, or underrepresented.

Given the extent of its under-representation a Slovene-focused work does not seem indefensible; there is certainly far more English-language material on developments in Serbia and Croatia during this period. If the objective of this research was not to single-handedly compensate for all the gaps in the literature on Slovenia, neither was it to provide a direct retelling of events in Yugoslavia with a vague Slovene perspective. One of the objectives of the chronological appendix is to integrate the account of developments within Slovenia with the wider Yugoslav context, which was where relevant Serbian and Croatian press material (hostile, confused and positive) was of use. The account of the 1987 Youth Day scandal is designed to illustrate the impact of NSK within the Yugoslav space and to balance the emphasis on more local Slovene controversies such as that over Laibach's name. Since much of the specific Slovene material was extracted from works dealing with Yugoslavia as a whole it would in any case have been hard to take an exclusively Slovene view.

Of the general Yugoslav literature not discussed below the works by Gow (1992) and Woodward (1995) were particularly useful. Gow's account of the issue of military legitimacy in Yugoslavia includes much detail on the tensions that developed between Slovenia and the Federal authorities in the late eighties and shows how the radicalism of the Slovene youth magazine "Mladina" and the pragmatic attitude of the Slovene leadership affected events at the Yugoslav level. Woodward's is an extensive study of the causes of what she terms the "Balkan Tragedy". The book is perhaps the most extensive account in English of the collapse of Yugoslavia so far and is unusual in placing a strong emphasis on the interaction between Slovene and Serbian republican politics. Although her account devotes more attention to Slovenia than other narratives, she takes a fairly critical attitude

to Slovene politics and this is a useful corrective to the self-justification/congratulation evident in some Slovene narratives (see Nečak (Ed. 1991). "A Paper House" by Thompson (1993) is the product of several years experience of Slovenia in Yugoslavia, notably as a "Mladina" correspondent in the late eighties. The book is episodic and a mixture of travelogue and journalism but makes many perceptive and also somewhat ironic comments on Slovenia and NSK and its account of the role of Punk and the alternative media is particularly useful.

1.10 Slavic Parallels:

NSK is as much a transnational as a Slovene phenomenon and for this reason the Slovene materials were augmented by relevant comparisons not just with Yugoslavia but also with Slovakia and the wider Slav context. Such comparisons are, besides being informative, contrary to one of the more extreme forms of contemporary Slovene nationalism. Echoing the pan-German nationalists who still interpellate Slovenes as a "lost" Germanic people, some Slovenes have attempted to claim that Slovenes are not Slavs at all but the indigenous inhabitants of the region or even a remnant of the pre-Roman Etruscan civilisation. Very recent historical research may provide more justification for such theories the fact remains that they are seized on by those wishing to downgrade the Slavness of Slovenes. Just as the terms "Balkan" and "Southern" became increasingly pejorative terms in Slovenia from the mid-eighties, a similar desire to dissociate from what is "Eastern" and "Slavic" has been a persistent undercurrent that has culminated in the Etruscan fantasy. This trend makes the situation of Slovenia within the Slav continuum a necessary counterweight to attempts to de-Slavicise the Slovenes.¹³

Just as the Slovak historical experience provides productive comparisons so a Soviet/Russian perspective has proved highly relevant, although primarily for ideological rather than historical reasons. Much of the totalitarian and avant-garde art retro-quoted by NSK is Soviet and naturally Russian authors provide an important perspective on the methodology of artistic totalitarianism. Particularly in the last decade there has been no shortage of material in English providing a Russian

¹³ There are traces of Italian, Hungarian, German as well as Slav cultures in the Slovene language and population. Slovenes may be less obviously "Slavic" than the Russians or others but their collective name symbolises the underlying Slav structure of the identity, even though this has been overwritten and augmented by several other cultures. Irwin texts relating Slovene experience to "Eastern" and "Slavic" themes, such as "Concepts & Relations" and the "Moscow Declaration" (*in* Irwin 1994 and Cufer (Ed.), 1993) might be seen as a response to the (unsuccessful) de-Slavicisation of Slovene identity.

view of issues central to NSK (see Efimova & Manovich, (Eds), 1993). Golomstock's "Totalitarian Art" (1990) is a comparative work addressing Italian, Nazi and Communist Chinese as well as Stalinist art and is important in providing a systematic Slav account of the totalitarian genre as a whole. NSK's rise to prominence coincided with the peak of postmodernism and various authors, notably Erjavec (1991, 1995) deal with NSK from this perspective. The work of Frederic Jameson and the other principal Western postmodernists can certainly be applied to aspects of NSK's praxis but is insufficient to the extent that it makes little reference to cultural conditions in state socialist societies and has, if only by omission, been slow to accept the existence of post-modern conditions and activities in Central and Eastern Europe. It is in this respect that the work of Epstein is indispensable. One of his key theses is that in its eclecticism, Stalinist art and society was already structurally post-modern and thus that postmodernism is at least as much an "Eastern", Slav experience as a Western one. Stalinism's displacement of earlier forms of Marxism was already a displacement of modernist ideology and that Socialist Realism was a variant of postmodernism (1994, 205-8). Extrapolating from Epstein's argument it can be argued that Tito's precocious (1948) discarding of Stalinism and development of self-management took ideological post-modernisation a stage further than elsewhere in the eastern bloc. Epstein's is probably the most comprehensive study available in English of the issues affecting cultural production in the Slavic/ex-socialist context. Erjavec & Gržinić's "Ljubljana Ljubljana" (1991) provides a "tour d' horizon" of Slovene cultural activity in the eighties and some material is available on recent Yugoslav art (see Sretenović and Merenik, 1996) but there is as yet no work as in depth as Epstein's, either on Slovene or Yugoslav culture available in English.

Cultural Studies approaches to Bulgarian and Russian issues were also used in the absence of such approaches in relation to Slovene and Yugoslav questions. Cultural studies and sociological studies of Eastern pop cultural phenomena are still in their infancy and material is sufficiently rare to mean that selection is not an issue. All works I discovered in this emerging field were used. Tschernokoshewa (1993) discusses the tendency of the Western media to present routine events in apocalyptic terms, purely because of their location in Eastern Europe. She gives the example of dramatic reports on German TV about supposedly severe winter weather in Bulgaria that heavily over-dramatised the situation. This tendency is what Laibach were manipulating in the nineteen eighties when they staged Western phobias about the barbaric and monolithic totalitarian "East" (see section 5.12). This phenomenon also corresponds to Pech's (1968) critique of the Western

representation of the smaller Slav peoples.

Pilkington's (1994) sociological study of Russian youth culture was relevant not in terms of its mechanical sociological methodology but in terms of its empirical content. This study is the first to begin to analyse young Russians as consumers of domestic and Western popular culture. Studies of popular music and culture based primarily on an Anglo-Saxon perspective could only be of very limited relevance to the subject of the thesis as the basic principles of transmission, censorship, reception and audience formation in a state socialist context are radically different to those in the West. Pilkington gives an account of the principal Anglo-Saxon models for the study of subcultures but goes on to contrast these with ideological Soviet (and other state socialist) academic approaches. As the work of Tomc (1989, 1994) and Ramet (1987, 1994) shows, the authorities in Yugoslavia extended a far greater degree of tolerance to popular music than elsewhere in Eastern Europe partly so as to differentiate the "progressive" Yugoslav regime from its "Stalinist" neighbours which carried out ideological offensives against rock as a form (and not just the obviously problematic variants such as Punk) well into the eighties. There was heavy policing of controversial concerts in Yugoslavia and "difficult" groups sometimes found it hard (though rarely impossible) to gain contracts yet not only was there no sustained ideological "kulturkampf" against rock as such (but only its "unacceptable" variants), the regime even grew to see it as positively helpful as a transmitter of Yugoslavist ideology (see section 5.2). This made it difficult initially to see what the source of Laibach's ferocious critique of popular culture was. There were few domestic examples of such as Yugoslav writers discussing cultural issues were generally anxious to avoid any possible accusations of Stalinism and thus do not seem to have gone beyond fairly moderate critiques. Only exposure to the examples of Soviet anti-rock polemics quoted by Pilkington placed Laibach's polemic within an ideological context. Laibach were referring back to an archetypal mode of centralised totalitarian popular cultural criticism that had long since become a rarity in Yugoslavia (or was delegated to populist opinion pieces in the media). It is a key contention of the present work that in so doing Laibach acted in place of the state, and was therefore more "faithful" to the Stalinist archetypes on which the regime was originally constructed than the state itself wished to (be seen) to be. Pilkington's detailed account of the activities of the Komsomol youth organisation and their attempt to manage new social trends was also useful as it provided a contrast to the stance of the Slovene youth organisation, ZSMS. ZSMS' strategic decision (see section 2.9a) in the mid nineteen-eighties to defend the alternative differentiated it

from other socialist youth organisations concerned either to neuter (as in the USSR) or to suppress the alternative (Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania).

1.11 Literature on Totalitarianism.

a): Art Historical.

Given that so many of the NSK leitmotifs are direct “retro-quotations” of (primarily German, Italian, Soviet and Yugoslav) totalitarian art and that this account attempts to ground itself in the actual images used, art historical accounts of the subject were crucial. The 1987 poster scandal demonstrated that the identification of the precise source of an NSK work is a part of the methodology and context of the works. (The chance discovery that the design was based on a Nazi Kunst painting had explosive political consequences). Both the key studies used here (Golomstock 1990 and Ades, Benton et al 1995) treat totalitarian art as a coherent genre whose stylistic and methodological similarities outweigh the specific national and ideological contexts of their production. Golomstock’s study is the more comprehensive whereas “Art & Power” is a series of monographs that also highlights Spanish republican art and oppositional art in Germany. Golomstock deals with the development of the genre (in China and the USSR) beyond 1945 and traces the increasingly nationalist turn taken by Socialist Realism (defined as “Socialist in Content, National in Form”). This represented the final traumatic negation of the original revolutionary art¹⁴ and its utopian energies. This negation is both referred to in NSK texts (Irwin/Čufer 1993) and recapitulated in their combination of national themes and (retro)avant-garde techniques (see section 5.7).

The theoretical basis of the repressed continuity between avant-garde and totalitarian art is addressed by Hewitt (1992) who draws attention to the “fascistic potentiality of the avant-garde itself” (43). He disputes the division of Futurism into an early idealism and politically compromised

¹⁴ Golomstock’s account begins with the development of Russian avant-garde art prior to the revolution. In addition more specialist studies of Russian and Slovene avant-garde art (Bowlit 1971, Erjavec et. al 1986) were relevant because of NSK’s frequent use of images from this period. Both studies devote as much attention to the manifestos and ideological programmes of the artists concerned. Extracts from Russian documents were particularly useful as they enabled close textual comparison with NSK texts, revealing the means by which NSK’s “retro-garde” orientation was constructed from out of the raw materials of the historical avant-garde (see chapter 2 for examples).

late phase. The fascistic potential is innate to the project from the outset. This has important implications for the NSK project. It would suggest that even within unapologetically reactionary Nazi works (based on the negation of Futurist-type modernism) a utopic/dystopic duality may persist and be available for recuperation (the success or otherwise of such is a key theme of the present work). Whilst their texts allude to the totalitarian assimilation and suppression of the avant-garde, NSK's praxis implies that such clear-cut divisions are untenable. Both negative and positive aesthetic and political potentialities are, in constantly shifting proportions, always already present from within both avant-garde art and its totalitarian successors. This suggests a re-historicization of twentieth century political art into a continuous spectrum. Whilst NSK works derive force from the juxtaposition of symbols whose sources are in binary opposition to each other (Slovene national motifs and Nazi-Kunst for example) they also demonstrate that this binary division into positive and negative symbols is unsustainable. Both negative and positive moments are simultaneously present in all artwork. Rather than suppress this ambivalence in an uneasy cohesion NSK dramatise it. The dialectic between the reactionary potential of ostensibly progressive art (abstract, avant-garde and folk art) and the progressive potentiality in ostensibly irredeemably reactionary art (Nazi-Kunst, Socialist Realism) structures NSK works and echoes the art-historical theorisation of totalitarian art as a trans-national, trans-systemic over-genre (see section 2.7)

One of the peculiarities of the NSK approach to totalitarian art is that it engages with the genre in its universalist aspect (as a mode of aestheto-political experience common to most European states) despite the relative absence of the form in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. The late socialist-realist works of the sculptor Stojan Batič (source of some Laibach images) and Janez Knez (which are in any case more ambiguous than they appear) stand in contrast to the "official" post-war modernism of most Yugoslav art. Slovenia's exposure to totalitarian art was greatest during the Second World War when the collaborationists and partisans produced their own local variants of the images produced by the Soviets and the Axis powers. The vast majority of totalitarian images used by NSK come not from local sources but from Nazi and, to a lesser extent, Soviet works. This meant that studies of the archetypal codes of totalitarian art and propaganda as such were the most relevant means of deciphering both the sources of NSK images and their modes of operation.

Golomstock (1990, 110) speaks of "a near absolute identity of style" between the art of the Third Reich and the USSR (a form of the "criminal thesis" equating fascism and socialism that NK Studio

were accused of in 1987 - see "Poster Affair" in chronology) and suggests that Nazism and Stalinism had most in common as total socio-aesthetic systems. From Golomstock's Russian perspective and NSK's Slovene perspective the products of the two main totalitarian systems (and their local sub-systems) formed part of an over-genre of total ideological art distinguished more by the ideological and national specificities of their production than any stylistic variations. NSK occupy a paradoxical space in which through juxtaposition they demonstrate this aesthetic kinship without dissipating the tensions caused by the contrasting ideological provenances of the works they combine. NK's "Youth Day" Poster (see section 2.15) managed simultaneously to demonstrate the consistency of the totalitarian over-genre and utilise the contrasting symbolic force of the Yugoslav and Nazi elements.

b) Art and Power.

"Art and Power" (Ades, Benton, Boyd-White and Elliot *et al*, 1995) also takes a comparative approach, using the rival Soviet and Nazi pavilions at the Paris International Exhibition of 1937 as its central metaphor in describing the confrontation of the two systems. Unlike Golomstock it devotes much attention not just to pre-totalitarian avant-gardism but to the oppositional art the regimes generated, particularly that of Spain and Germany. The anti-fascist photo montages of John Heartfield featured more frequently in early Laibach works than any individual totalitarian artists making it equally important to understand the mechanics of anti-totalitarian art. Hobsbawm's foreword says of the new regimes that came to power in the Europe of the nineteen thirties that "They were not landlords of old buildings but architects of new ones" (11). To an extent this statement overlooks the totalitarian trend towards historical pastiche highlighted elsewhere in the volume but it is interesting to compare it with an early Laibach comment. Asked about comparisons between their work and the German group *Einsturzende Neubauten* ("Collapsing New Buildings") they stated that: "The Neubauten are destroying new buildings and we are rebuilding the old ones. At this point we are replenishing each other." (NSK, 60). From a contemporary perspective the "old buildings" to which Laibach referred might be taken as totalitarianism, avant-gardism or traditional national art but actually the works contain shifting proportions of all these styles.¹⁵

¹⁵ This can be compared with the contemporary Laibach statement "The position of LAIBACH on traditional art is *selection*, which must rediscover and re-evaluate history, return power to the institutions and conventions and decrease the distance between artistic expression and collective consensus." (NSK, 48). The apparent discontinuities between these two Laibach statements (and many others) are evidence not of contradiction but of consistency, regulated by a pragmatic principle of structural contradiction that allows the

Hobsbawm stresses the discontinuity of direction between the political and artistic avant-gardes, and that the political avant-garde was populist whilst the artistic avant-garde was based on minority tastes, which inevitably antagonised populist regimes aiming at “mass” forms (14-15).

The “Selectors’ Introduction” describes the evolution of Western attitudes to totalitarian art ranging from a “refusal to see any virtue” (16) in Socialist Realism, Nazi architecture and other totalitarian forms to their more recent reintegration into European art history (although in Germany Nazi works are still treated “exceptionally” and hung separately from other German art). Laibach and NSK are actively engaged in such debates and Laibach’s work in particular challenges the view that sees totalitarian forms as equally worthless (see section 2.7)

The authors date the onset of changed attitudes to the form to the late nineteen sixties, a period which also saw the emergence of Russian artists such as Komar & Melamid, Eric Bulatov & Ilya Kabakov who produced Socialist Realist pastiches and began to “recycle” the form. Kabakov has exhibited in Ljubljana and many works of Irwin’s later period are strongly reminiscent of Kabakov, who is known to the group. If as the authors suggest these Russian artists represented the first major post-totalitarian school, the work of seventies artists such as Anselm Kiefer might be seen as the second phase of the phenomenon and NSK, along with contemporaries such as Hungary’s Attila Kovačs might be seen as its third phase. The introduction lays the ground for this periodisation but makes no reference to third-phase artists such as NSK, suggesting that the integration of their work into the account of artistic post-totalitarianism may be some way off yet.

Ian Boyd-White’s analysis of Nazi architecture describes “The Rationalisation of The Sublime” (260), the characteristically Nazi combination of technical planning and sublime counter-rational forces such as monumentalism and Volkisch signifiers. This oscillation between the technocratic/archaic poles of composition is frequently replayed in NSK works. Boyd-White states that in practice many Nazi buildings nodded to both camps while not explicitly being “of” either of them. Irwin’s artwork manages to contain undiluted examples of both technocratic and Volkisch tendencies within the same work, not disguising these tensions but dramatising them.¹⁶ He links this

totality “Laibach” to appear monolithic whilst generating this appearance from diverse and heterogeneous elements.

¹⁶ See particularly Irwin’s “Red Districts: Sower” (NSK 119) which takes the neo-mediaevalist peasant figure from Oscar Martin-Amorbach’s Nazikunst painting “The Sower”, and sets it in front of a red washed

to the fact that as within Nazism as a whole there was active competition between contradictory tendencies, roughly categorisable as modernist technocracy versus archaicist (neo)traditionalism. He also points out that some Bauhaus architects were able to continue working under the Reich (although they were largely confined to industrial commissions).

The (controlled) stylistic heterogeneity within Nazi art gives another pointer to NSK's compositional practices. In recapitulating the discontinuities present even within what appears to be a monolithic mode of artistic production NSK further problematize the binary classification of such images and challenge the either/or division into "progressive" and "reactionary". "Art & Power" is not as narrowly focussed as Golomstock's work (and thus less useful as a visual reference source) but is an artistic-political chronology, a historical narrative of the period retold via its art, which has obvious parallels with NSK's reshaping of Slovene and European history from within an art-historical context.

c): Ideology, Archetypes and Mechanisms.

Just as there was little tradition of explicitly totalitarian art in the Slovene sphere, Slovenia experienced only three years of total Stalinist rule (1945-8) and Slovenia was at the mildest extreme of the Eastern totalitarian spectrum (with Albania and Romania being at the severest end). It is this demonic, archetypal extreme that is one of the most dramatic, alarming elements in Laibach's work. Indeed the severity of the rhetoric in early texts ("...by obscuring his intellect, the consumer is reduced to a state of humble remorse, which is a state of *collective aphasia*, which in turn is the principle of social organization." (NSK 1991, 44), makes explicit the normally concealed obscene basis of totalitarian power (whilst at the same time employing its propaganda techniques). In this respect it transgressively demasks authority's violent basis. Laibach's violent performance referred to a paradigm of impossible authority (a totalitarianism extrapolated to a degree that would in practice disintegrate) but its rhetoric also referred to the local self-management mode of totalitarian or state socialist power.

Laibach's leaden, jargon-laden mode of rhetoric directly recapitulated the linguistic contortions of self-management discourse ("...The form of social production appears in the manner of production of LAIBACH music itself and the relations within the group. The group functions operationally according to the principle of rational transformation, and its (hierarchical) structure is coherent." – NSK 1991, 18). Not just the content of the discourse but its mode of expression is a violent recapitulation of the totalitarian subject's forced internalisation of the incomprehensible.¹⁷ Besides its totalitarian sources NSK's discourse can also be related to what Hewitt terms the "manifesto art" of Marinetti (1992, 52) described as an "archetypal futurist genre" (53), a reading which introduces yet another stylistic element that has to be factored into a holistic analysis of NSK's

¹⁷ One Slovene anti-Laibach protest letter (Cajhen 1982b) explicitly upbraids the group for the use of highly incomprehensible language, which is presented as being just as transgressive as the other elements of its presentation. Yet since Laibach texts were heavily informed by and frequently incorporated extensive "samples" of official self-management discourse, complaints about Laibach's incomprehensibility were double-edged. A standard aspect of the normative politico-linguistic environment was "made strange" (incomprehensible) by juxtaposition with other modes of discourse. It was the fact that it was not emanating from a "recognized" official source (and to a lesser extent that it referred to a more brutal period) made it so disturbing. However the complaint can also be seen as indicative of the centrality of language to Slovene identity; for a non-official group to manipulate and bureaucratize it was not just transgressive but implicitly anti-national, particularly given the number of Germanic signifiers re-circulated by this same group.

work.

The work of another writer who dealt with totalitarianism, Adorno, is also useful in analysing language as a weapon; "...language itself, devoid of its rational significance, functions in a magical way and furthers those archaic regressions which reduce individuals to members of crowds." (1993, 127) His work not only illuminates the NSK praxis but is also a major source of the condemnatory, pessimistic tone Laibach adopt in relation to popular culture. "The Culture Industry" (1993) not only provides a framework for the analysis of fascistic mobilisation that is directly applicable to Laibach's concerts¹⁸ but also mounts a sustained polemic against popular culture echoed most strongly by Soviet ideologists and Laibach.¹⁹

Whilst Adorno would almost certainly have been horrified²⁰ at NSK's re-circulation of fascistic

¹⁸ See "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda" (1993 114-135) which describes phenomena such as the tendency of the crowds at fascist rallies to "perform their own enthusiasm, and thus participate in their leader's performance" and the "phoniness" of such performances (132).

¹⁹ Textual comparison reveals a strong similarity of tone and whilst these have not been identified, it is very likely that there are specific quotations from Adorno present in Laibach's discourse, in addition to these and several other examples of a similarity of tone:

Adorno (1993, 87)

"Now as ever, the culture industry exists in the "service" of third persons, maintaining its affinity to the declining circulation process of capital, to the commerce from which it came into being. Its ideology above all makes use of the star system, borrowed from individualist art and its commercial exploitation. The more dehumanized its methods of operation and content, the more diligently and successfully the culture industry propagates supposedly great personalities and operates with heart-throbs."

Laibach (NSK 1991, 61)

"The Star system has its own rational foundation: in the fascist form of totalitarianism it helped the people to transcend their immediate traumatic existence by identification with the leader. The Hollywood principle awakens belief and recognition that there is a world in which the fulfillment of dreams is reality."

²⁰ One defence of Laibach against an imagined Adornine critique can be found in the same essay ("Freudian Theory and The Pattern of Fascist Propaganda") that initially seems to provide damning evidence against the group because of Laibach's use of the techniques it describes. However, in at least one respect it provides an argument for the defence. Following on from Freud, Adorno discusses the way in which the concept of love is almost never mentioned in military and fascist discourse and the way in which Nazism transferred love onto the abstract plane of patriotism. Adorno states that fascism needs to keep libidinal energy in check, unmentioned (119). However, in Laibach and NSK texts there are explicit (formalistic) references to familial and libidinal love (NSK 1991, 5,19,61,) which cannot be said to have been demonized or relegated from the NSK project.

signifiers and have drawn attention to Laibach's paradoxical status within the popular culture industry his mode of polemical critique and economic/Freudian analysis does have a contemporary presence beyond the academy in Laibach's discourse as does Adorno's related work with Horkheimer (1993).

In its Marxist emphasis on the economic and ideological structures of repression Adorno's work is also echoed by Althusser's structuralist analyses. The framework set out in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971) has structured this research from its outset. However study of NSK reveals that Althusser's demarcation between ideological and repressive apparatuses is impossible to maintain. Implicitly or explicitly the spectre of the repressive state apparatus is present throughout the NSK canon yet the overall "Gesamtkunstwerk" shares many of the features of an ideological state apparatus and has culminated in the formation of an actual (abstract) state. Thus a slightly revised or post-Althusserianism in which the (recapitulation of) the repressive and ideological functions are often indistinguishable from each other is highly relevant, particularly since whilst Laibach never echo Althusser as explicitly as Adorno there is certainly a recapitulation of his systemic approach to the ideological reproduction of power structures.

d) Orwellian Perspectives.

Whilst Adorno's comments on the fascistic manipulation of language are useful, Thom's systematic work on the Soviet abuse of language, "Newspeak" (1989) is essential to an understanding of Laibach's linguistic terrorism. Thom traces the onset of Newspeak to the mid eighteen thirties, the period when Russia first came under the influence of German philosophy, particularly that of Hegel²¹ which led to the construction of a particularly artificial form of Russian (168) which Soviet ideology accentuated. The gap between Hegelian and Marxist idealism created the need for "praxis", at which point philosophy became ideology and Hegel's dialectics "the mathematics of the revolution" (173). Thom shows how idealism (invested first in nationalism, then Bolshevism, then nationalistic Stalinism and even perestroika) becomes a regime in itself. Most relevantly Thom demonstrates why arbitrariness and violence are essential elements of linguistic totalitarianism (and its recapitulation).

²¹ Hegel is yet another writer whose tone is closely echoed in Laibach statements, particularly the characterisation of NSK's collective "esprit de corps" as an "Immanent Consistent Spirit" (NSK, 50).

“Newspeak does not have just one function - that of linking power and society to ideology. It must give permanent expression to that power; it must show that power is at once arbitrary and limitless and it must also incarnate the violence of power. Newspeak does so in two ways: by flying in the face of all evidence and by not bothering to conceal its own contradictions” (118).

Thom demonstrates that incomprehensibility and violent contradiction are integral to the linguistic transmission and perpetuation of totalitarian power and thus also to its fictional recapitulation. Thom notes that Orwell was the first to codify the condition known as Newspeak and does refer to the magical, irrational elements attached to it but her work is primarily a technical linguistic analysis that only hints at some of the other totalitarian practices anatomised by Orwell. In order to understand NSK’s totalitarian performance at the deepest level, a close examination of Orwell’s dystopia itself and its irrationalities is essential. Gottlieb (1992) presents an overview of “1984”, Orwell’s “dystopian satire” (83) and in the process explicates many of the same archetypal totalitarian mechanisms employed by and alluded to by Laibach. Her methodological-archetypal framework, which borrows from mediaeval theology and alchemy as well as psychological theory, is directly relevant to Laibach’s work which in the light of Gottlieb’s analysis can be seen as a type of sequel to Orwell’s “strikingly accurate satiric ‘anatomy’ of Totalitarianism” (290).

The framework provided by Orwell as codified by Gottlieb provides a means of mapping out even the most intangible, problematic totalitarian elements present in the NSK Gesamtkunstwerk. Many of the power mechanisms codified by Gottlieb are explicitly present in Laibach’s performances and other NSK compositional and presentational methodologies. Describing the manipulative verbal techniques of interrogation she speaks of “... an iron logic that has the same kind of impact as physical torture” (124) providing another explanation for the relentlessness of Laibach discourse²² - that this quality is integral to the recapitulation (disintegrative simulation) of totalitarian terror techniques.

Gottlieb describes the alchemical procedure known as coincidentia/coniunctio oppositorum, the mystical union of opposites, relating it to the use of paradox as a totalitarian tactic even codifiable

²² The early track “Perspektiven” (Laibach 1985) is the most sinister example of this relentlessness. Over a sinister backdrop a voice calmly and coldly lists the materials of Laibach’s self-confessed manipulation and its (apparently unmistakable) totalitarian agenda. (CD track 3).

as a “law of contradiction” (156-7). Abrupt shifts in policy and the severest logical contradictions not only do not damage a regime's power but strengthen it: “... the greater the abnegation of reason and common sense the party demands, the stronger the faith this abnegation generates.” (134). This means that the non-concealment of apparent discontinuities not only does not harm NSK's credibility (as either threat or promise) but actually increases it. Further, the alchemical combination of abstracted opposites and the ritualistic aspects of torture bear numinous/mystical traces even when executed by atheistic regimes. NSK's discursive and compositional procedures are structured by the use of “coniunctio oppositorum” and Laibach's early performances in particular raised the spectre of totalitarian terror:

“Our appearance has a *purifying* (EXORCISM!) and *regenerative* (HONEY + GOLD) function. With a mystical erotic audiovisual constitution of the ambivalence of fear and fascination (which acts on the consciousness in a primeval way), with a ritualized demonstration of political force, and with other manipulative approaches, LAIBACH practices sound/force in the form of a systematic (psychophysical) terror as therapy and as principle of social organisation.” (NSK 1991, 44)

Fascination derives as much from the mysticism present in totalitarian archetypes (“... the mystical dimension of alienation, which reveals the magical component of the industrial process” NSK 1991, 19) as from brute force, and Gottlieb stresses (230) Reich's insistence upon a link between sadism and mysticism, of which Orwell was deeply distrustful.

Gottlieb's work was especially useful in providing a descriptive analytical framework for some of the least tangible and obscure bases of totalitarianism such as the “...marriage of science and terror” (208) that are present in NSK's work. With reference to the cold impassivity displayed in concert by Laibach's singer (a key aspect of the interrogatory tone of the events) Gottlieb's description of the torturer O' Brien as stoking “... the diabolical furnace of the state machine with the cold impersonality of the contemporary efficiency expert” (183) is highly relevant. Like “1984”, Laibach's “Gesamtkunstwerk” is a fictional dystopic environment in which totalitarianism has been extrapolated to an ultimately self-negating extremity so as to “make strange” present trends (although NSK's agenda is far more ambiguous than Orwell's). Gottlieb's analysis of Orwell's “hellscape” uncovers even the most esoteric ingredients of totalitarian power and reveals the procedures that are essential to both a “dystopian satire” and in NSK's terms, a “demasking and recapitulation”.

Pursuit of the “1984” comparison also provides a means of understanding how the most

oppressive, de-humanising elements of NSK's work remain in the realm of the fictional (besides the fact that NSK floats free of any "actual" party or ideology). Not only is there no appropriate apparatus for or attempt to implement any programme beyond manifestations such as the NSK State project (see chapter six) but nowhere in the NSK's work is there any equivalent to Oceania's demonisation of the sexual or the orchestration of hatred. There is terror and fear in Laibach's spectacle but no enemy is shown or named and there is no equivalent to the daily hate sessions of "1984". Laibach audiences are intimidated, interrogated and mobilised but not for any aim beyond the recapitulatory demonstration of the shared techniques of rock music and totalitarianism (see section 2.1). Thus whilst the link with "1984" is a productive one, it is useful only in so far as it describes the most extreme aspects of NSK. It meets its limit when confronted by the simultaneous presence of non- and anti-totalitarian imageries in the works. The appeals to sentiment and idealism these contain help to maintain the fictional nature of the Gesamtkunstwerk and take it beyond the status of a simulated hellscape. Neither "1984" nor NSK's simulation of demonic totalitarianism are intended as blueprints for political action. Orwell implies a socialist-humanist programme via the negation of what is presented in his scenario whilst NSK have used the recapitulation of the dystopian elements to construct a new aestheto-historical praxis, which Irwin have subsequently justified thus:

"Retro avant-garde is the basic artistic procedure of Neue Slowenische Kunst, based on the premise that traumas from the past affecting the present can only be healed by returning to the initial conflicts." (Čufer/Irwin "NSK State In Time", 1993 *in* Irwin 1994)

1.12 Primary Literature on Laibach/NSK and The Slovene Context.

The work of the American based author Sabrina (formerly Pedro) Ramet bridges the gap between Pilkington's account of youth cultural processes in Russia and those authors whose work addresses the issues from a purely Slovene perspective. "Rocking The State" (1994) compiles accounts of the rock scenes across the Eastern Bloc, including Ramet's own work on the Yugoslav scene, which situates Laibach within the wider context. Besides Žižek and Erjavec and Gržinić, Ramet's is the only academic work in English to discuss Laibach (there is no shortage of critical and journalistic literature on the subject). Like Žižek she discusses Laibach briefly and in order to illustrate wider themes but her work provided a possible template for the theoretical discussion and analysis of

Laibach. Her account of Laibach in “Rocking The State (as part of sub-chapter entitled “Domination and The Libido In Slovenia”, 117-125) shares with Žižek a primarily psychoanalytic approach to the subject. Because Ramet first addressed the topic as far back as 1987 and again in 1991 it is possible to trace the evolution of the author’s views and the changing material cited in each account. Unlike Žižek, she has familiarised herself with the subject to the extent of being able to quote and discuss lyrics and specific tracks and posters, giving the account extra weight. However these are only brief accounts and although the author has interviewed Laibach there are some factual errors (or perhaps, repetitions of common misconceptions). Nevertheless the existence of an academic precedent for the discussion of Laibach that blended theory with an empirical-textual approach, certainly aided the present work particularly since it was integrated into wider accounts of Yugoslav culture, society and politics. Crucially Ramet (1991) addresses “the eternal question” concerning Laibach’s political allegiances directly:

“... Laibach’s music unmistakably evokes an interest that is not purely satirical but is best seen as a sublimated form of “pop fascism” enabling aggressive instincts to be channelled innocently, rather than as the literal instrument of a real fascist movement, as Laibach pretends... Whether Laibach intends its message as a critique of communism or as an advocacy of fascism or as thought-energizing art, the authorities (both communist and post-communist) have felt comfortable knowing that Laibach is unlikely to stir up a neofascist movement.” (230)

The Slovene author whose work corresponds most closely to that of Pilkington and Ramet is Gregor Tomc, known in Slovenia as a “Punk Sociologist”. “Druga Slovenija” (The Other Slovenia) (1989) is a sociologically based history of alternative youth culture in Slovenia throughout the present century. It covers the “Preporod” and other Yugoslavist groups, the various generations of jazz fans, the first generation of Communist counter-cultural youth activity, the first incursion of rock n’ roll in the fifties and on to the hippie movements of the sixties, culminating in Punk and the “New Social Movements” (NSMs) of the eighties. It is a largely empirical account of historical processes into which theorising is subtly integrated, as opposed to the more formal theoretical approach of Pilkington to a similar subject. Tomc’s more historical, less theoretical mode of discussion seemed to leave more scope for analysis of actual works, rather than the social status of their audience, and thus seemed more appropriate for the purposes of this research. The English essay “The Politics Of Punk” (1994) provides more extensive coverage of the relevant period and discusses Laibach’s relation to it. In the same collection (“Independent Slovenia”) Tomaž Mastnak, an alternative intellectual who wrote a regular column for “Mladina” in the eighties discusses the fate of the Slovene civil society project that was partly stimulated by the sponsorship of the youth

organisation, ZSMS (see section 2.9a). Mastnak's "Mladina" commentaries provide a contemporary theoretical analysis of controversies such as that over Laibach's name and ZSMS' decision to argue for the group's right to perform in Ljubljana under its controversial name (see chapter four).

Both authors are keen in their English writings to stress the centrality of the political and cultural alternatives to developments within Slovenia. Tomc's personal preference is for the first wave of Slovene punk bands rather than Laibach and he is not closely associated with NSK. However, both Mastnak and particularly Rastko Močnik, a sociologist who lectured at the "NSK Embassy Moscow" project in 1992 (see also his appearance in the film "Predictions Of Fire") exemplify the general rule that those who write about NSK's work are generally at least known to them. Within Slovenia, hostile criticism of NSK tends to be voiced by populist journalists and individual members of the public, whilst the various theorists are generally supportive. This lack of distance is to an extent structural, a reflection of the extreme fluidity of the boundaries between academic and cultural circles in Ljubljana.

This is equally true of Erjavec & Gržinič, authors of the only comprehensive account of Slovene culture (predominantly alternative) in the eighties (1991) and various other texts in both English and Slovene that deal with NSK centrally or in passing. If Mastnak's role as Mladina columnist made him to some extent a protagonist, Gržinič's role as cultural director at ŠKUC, the pre-eminent Ljubljana alternative venue gives her an insider's perspective that is supplemented by her theoretical work. In the nineteen-eighties, she wrote theoretical commentaries on NSK activities, moving on to frequent contributions to NSK catalogues and lengthier essays. Whilst Gržinič's work on NSK certainly cannot be seen as objective, it is strengthened by an internationally recognised academic status. Erjavec is a philosophical aesthetician and authority on the Slovene historical avant-garde and post-socialist art. He was editor of the student paper "Tribuna" in the seventies but was not as directly involved with NSK as Gržinič (although he knows Irwin and Laibach's manager Igor Vidmar well). He was one of the founders of the Slovene Society for Aesthetics (1985) and it was through this forum and its 1988 discussions on the "Gesamtkunstwerk" (see chronology) and other themes of common interest to NSK that he began to address their work in his writing. In contrast to other Slovene theorists (Žižek, Mastnak, Gržinič and others) his theoretical work, broadly situated within the sphere of philosophical aesthetics, is grounded in empirical and historical

detail. His paper on Alpine photography (1994) contextualizes the use of Alpinist imagery by Laibach and other Slovene artists in relation to processes of national identity formation. Erjavec, and to a lesser extent Gržinić, organise their work around references to and analysis of specific videos, paintings and other works. They employ theory to illustrate these, or even construct theory from out of them, as opposed to vague invocations of works used only to illustrate a preformed theoretical agenda. A generally similar approach has structured the present work from the outset. The author has had a primarily empirical training and has throughout the present work attempted to carry out as much analysis of specific works as possible. The existence of work such as that of the authors discussed here reinforces this orientation.

Within the small cultural and intellectual “scenes” of Ljubljana, a city with a population of no more than 300 000, it is impossible to maintain an objective “cordon sanitaire” between cultural and ideological theorists and their subjects. The roles of curator and theorist in particular frequently overlap, Marina Gržinić being the pre-eminent example. This is a structural problem applicable particularly to the study of Irwin, whose members are closest to theoretical and cultural circles. Laibach, however are far more distant from such circles and Slovene commentaries on their work are less informed by personal connections than interest in Laibach as phenomenon. Of the numerous articles on Laibach and NSK, Lisić’s (1985) article on Laibach has been the most useful. Lisić stressed both the demonic and the transcendent aspects of Laibach and I have used the latter as the basis of one of the key paradigms (transcendence) of the thesis although I extend the notion of transcendence in relation to NSK well beyond the original aesthetic sense.

Given that the thesis attempts to demonstrate the role of ideology and popular culture within the recent Slovene context, the work of Žižek has been central. Žižek provides Lacanian and Hegelian influenced psychoanalytic models of political and cultural behaviour such as nationalism and totalitarianism (1994a) as well as more personal psychological and ideological processes. These are frequently illustrated by examples from popular culture, particularly the work of Alfred Hitchcock but also of David Lynch and crime writer Ruth Rendell as well as Wagner and Mozart.

Žižek has addressed Laibach in various articles (Žižek 1987, 1993 c,d) and also referred to them in his books . Žižek is a formally disinterested observer of Laibach since he does not personally “consume” their work. He owns none of their recordings for instance, which are in a style scarcely

correspondent to his personal tastes. His interest in Laibach is as symbolic-ideological phenomenon, which, like the other popular cultural references he makes, can be used to illustrate his theoretical argument.

He directly addresses the topics of Slovene nationalism and Laibach/NSK as illustrations of his wider themes. Despite the fact that he never addresses (or indicates any knowledge of) specific works by Laibach, he has provided the most systematic theoretical codifications of the techniques they use. Žižek is the only commentator apart from Ramet to explicitly address what Laibach refer to as the “eternal question” facing them. “Why are Laibach and NSK not Fascists?” (1993b) is also the clearest summary of his approach to Laibach. What Laibach describes as “demasking and recapitulation” is located by Žižek in a moment of “compulsive overidentification” that exposes the normally hidden obscene reverse of the regime it is applied to. Laibach were able to wrong-foot the authorities via the presentation of an “aggressive, inconsistent mixture” of formally incompatible elements (Nazism, Slovene imagery, Stalinism, Titoist iconography, folk art and others). Žižek’s formula of aggressive inconsistency is the most succinct description of a monumental but constantly shifting performance, the elements of which alter according to tactical need. Almost uniquely among commentators on the subject, Žižek (1987) highlights the distress and confusion Laibach created in the theoretical community. He shows that although many Slovene critics initially welcomed Laibach as an anti-authoritarian phenomenon, many were subsequently affected by doubts, about whether Laibach’s fascistic performance was actually sincere and about the capacity of the public to detect the ambiguity of the works. From an early stage he has stressed that there is a necessarily ambiguous element in the way Laibach are received. Laibach’s “elusiveness” prevents them being definitively assimilated into narratives that would claim them as a wholly progressive force as well as those that claim they actually are Fascists. In acknowledging the fact that projects such New Collectivism’s 1987 Youth Day poster (see chronology) disturbed those who generally defend NSK, as well as its habitual opponents, Žižek is painting a fuller picture than narratives that present them as unambiguously anti-authoritarian allies of the wider alternative scene. The unassimilable surplus or “incredible core of enjoyment” in the NSK spectacle frustrates the attempts of both opponents and defenders to use NSK as a “point of suture” for their own narratives (1987). He insisted in 1987 that the alternative movement had to consider NSK as a foreign body and not repress awareness of its “nightmarish” elements to fit its own agendas.

Žižek seems to imply that the nightmarishness of Laibach derives as much from its elusiveness as from its content and mode of presentation. At different phases and within different works by Laibach and other NSK groups, various elements have predominated. Laibach had a more “Volkisch” corporate image in the late nineteen-eighties, whereas in the early nineties retro-futurism and anti-capitalist rhetoric were the dominant elements (section 5.13). Even without these constant mutations an opponent or defender faces the nightmare of integration and classification of challenging material which by its nature resists easy assimilation. All approaches (including the present work) seek to claim or place Laibach/NSK within a certain narrative and to brand them as (amongst other labels to have been applied) post-modern, anti-authoritarian, reactionary, ironic, or anarchistic. A free-floating entity with an autonomous logic is for many (friends as well as enemies) disturbing as such. Žižek’s emphasis on the traumatic non-categorizability of NSK provided theoretical support for the author’s decision to present NSK as *category-in-itself*, and not to shy away from the elements that provoke NSK’s critics, but to stress its radical ambiguity and to locate any positive effects within this rather than trying to flatten out the terrain for a seamless narrative purged of antagonisms.

Beyond Žižek’s specific engagement with NSK (with whose theoretical and discursive techniques he seems to feel a certain empathy) his wider theoretical framework has proved equally helpful in analysis of the subject. In the section of the present work dealing with German-Slovene relations, Žižek’s formulation of a subject that is “more x than x itself” (Žižek 1994a: 92-3) is particularly relevant (section 3.9). A key theme recurrent in the work of both Žižek and NSK is retroactivity (present in the NSK’s conceptualisation of itself as “retrogarde”. At a wider level “retro” is widely perceived as an integral element of the post-modern cultural “zeitgeist”. NSK self-formulate their artistic orientation as “retrogarde” and Žižek’s frequent analyses of the retroactive nature both of historical and individual identity formation proved a key theoretical tool. His explanation of retroactive processes provided a paradigm that helped shed light on the way in which the teleological development and even the development of NSK’s structure function retroactively (section 2.21).

Ultimately Žižek’s framework, persuasive as it is, was inappropriate for the aims of the present work because of its lack of aesthetic reference to specific works. At times (1994) Žižek has used Laibach as a more or less contingent starting point for the presentation of an abstract theoretical

discourse, which diverges from the specificity of the subject under discussion here. One of the key aims of this work is to include a high proportion of aesthetic analysis, through which the types of mechanism theorised by Žižek could be seen in operation. Therefore an attempt has been made to marry such formulas with detailed knowledge and analysis of the works and their historical context so as to ground the applied and emergent theories and provide a more holistic view of the subject.

1.13 Principal Modes of Interpreting Laibach and NSK.

Having assessed the work of authors dealing with NSK and its wider context it is possible to group them loosely on the basis of their analytical orientation to the subject. In practice there is a degree of overlap between the different approaches but a loose systematisation of their general orientations is possible. The criteria for these groupings are the authors' shared methodologies and/or conclusions. The work of non-Slovene Yugoslav authors has been used but only relatively brief press articles were available. In order to balance too great a focus on positive Slovene authors (who have written more on the subject than others) the Yugoslav media "school" that denounced NSK in the nineteen eighties is considered. Similarly, beyond Ramet and brief references in Thompson (1993) and Silber and Little (1995) there is no substantive work by "Western" authors to consider beyond a few more analytical music press articles. The key approaches of such work as there is will be identified along with problems in the literature that the thesis attempts to compensate for.

a) (The Absence of) Music-Centred Analyses:

Ramet has generally based her brief but fairly detailed analyses of the subject around quotations from Laibach lyrics, but so far has not gone beyond this into an analysis of Laibach's sonic properties. Erjavec & Gržinić (1991) also quote extracts from the lyrics but are primarily concerned with Laibach's relation to Punk and the wider ideological struggle of "the alternative" in Slovenia and do not really discuss music as such, although Erjavec (1995, p.7) has touched on the ideological function of Laibach's arrangements.

The only author to have attempted anything resembling a musicological analysis of Laibach's work and to have listed the musical quotations within it was Barber-Keršovan (1994). Her paper deals not with the technical elements of Laibach's music (metre, tonality) but with its sources and even here discussion of the actual music takes second place to analysis of Laibach's social and political role, which the author judges to have been an invaluable contribution to democratisation. (89)

The lack of attention to Laibach's music in itself is in one sense unsurprising, not least because the group has never concealed its technical unoriginality, preferring to mount a critique of the concept

of “originality” in music as such (“... originality is an illusion of false revolutionaries”, “NSK”, 1991, 44).²³ In one interview (Gray, 1997) Laibach have suggested that “Everything has already been said about music” and have always made it clear that their choice of music was pragmatic, that it was selected as the medium that would achieve the widest possible transmission of their ideas. Furthermore, even articles in the music press have generally tended to focus on the symbolic visual and ideological packaging of the music rather than attempting to locate the same praxis within the choice of sounds themselves (arrangement, tempo, dissonance, duration, mood). On some releases, particularly “NATO” (1994), the concepts accompanying the release are clearly stronger than the music, which is closer to the pop mainstream than any other album. However, I have attempted to pay greater attention than has so far been paid to Laibach’s works as sonic artefacts.

One explanation for this lack of music-centred analysis of Laibach may be the almost total absence of any appropriate theoretical frameworks or precedents for the analysis of Laibach’s style or genre (a variant of electronic and “industrial” music). One characteristic of the industrial genre²⁴ seen particularly in the work of Laibach’s closest counterparts Test Dept. and Belgium’s Front 242 (and also their common predecessors Kraftwerk) is clipped “lyrics” or samples, closer to political declamations or military commands than conventional vocals. Laibach’s pre-1987 (“Opus Dei”) lyrics were largely constructed around “samples” from ideological slogans and speeches, to create a poeticised ideological form (see sections 2.4 and 5.5). Industrial (in the stricter definition mentioned below) has certain stylistic starting points (the use of noise, shock, alienation and oppressiveness) that would be hard to integrate into analytical frameworks heavily structured around traditional modes of meaning construction and audience-performer interaction.

The majority of popular music studies seem based upon the sociological examination of groups with mass followings and close textual analysis of lyrics that mirrors fans’ obsessive scrutiny. From

²³ This critique or relegation of originality is, together with the use of retro-quotation, the most explicitly “postmodern” aspect of Laibach.

²⁴ There are two principal schools of thought on what constitutes industrial music. One school limits it to the music of British electronic groups of the late nineteen seventies such as Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle and their close stylistic successors such as Laibach, NON, Einsturzende Neubauten, SPK and others. The more recent understanding of “industrial” is based on the music of more guitar-oriented and less confrontationally experimental groups such as Nine Inch Nails and Pigface, whose musics are closer to established forms such as heavy metal and use “industrial” instrumentation (noise, electronics, samples) as augmentation. The author’s reference to the industrial genre is based primarily on the former interpretation.

an examination of the “standard” texts of British and American popular music analysis several problematic factors became clear. Work seems to be heavily clustered around certain periods and genres; Punk, Eighties music video and nineties club culture for example. Other periods and styles are largely left unexamined, above all industrial. Just as certain favoured subjects predominate, there are dominant methodologies, principally sociological (audience analysis) and structural-economic both of which are far more concerned with popular musics as social and economic rather than musical phenomena.

However the work of Attali (1986) does help illuminate the use of power mechanisms in the industrial genre. Attali’s account of the political and economic role of music makes explicit the links between state power and noise and its political potentials (for regimentation and sedation or agitation and subversion). Laibach’s intrusion into the body politic can be read as both a literal and metaphorical instance of intrusive, destabilising “noise”. The Attaline politico-musicological framework complements the Althusserian model of ideological and repressive state apparatuses to provide a more rounded picture of music in relation to state construction and deconstruction. As is argued in the chapter discussing Laibach’s use of music the group’s work might even be read as a practical application of Attali’s theories about music as an expression of power.

Popular (non-academic) electronic music as a sonic form (away from its social and “club” contexts) remained an almost unexplored subject at the inception of this work. An analysis of industrial and early electronic musics and their instrumental successors [sub]genres (sectors of techno, electronica and others) is forced by default away from the established modes of popular music analysis. Furthermore, because so much of the music is structured around the use of noise and electronic atonality a more appropriate framework might be what work has so far been done on electro-acoustic and musique concrete. The lack of writing on the industrial genre may be due to various reasons²⁵ yet the lack of precedent for work on Laibach and similar groups did pose a challenge. However, the application of theoretical models designed for lyric-centred, overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon rock and pop forms would, due to the nature of the genre, have been a artificial strategy of

²⁵ If there is as I argue a pre-existing reluctance to address the sonic aspects of popular music directly, it may be that the alienating otherness of the genre (certainly more extreme than Punk or Heavy Metal) has so far actively deterred analysts from approaching it. This leaves theory-augmented work from *inside* the genre by those already adapted to its norms as the only likely source of analysis beyond that of the groups themselves. (Besides Laibach and Test Dept., Clock DVA, Einsturzende Neubauten and others conspicuously violate the conventions of anti-intellectual informality that govern popular music generally).

very limited utility. The present work tries wherever possible to deal with the subject as *Gesamtkunstwerk* (in that it treats it as a coherent multi-faceted whole). Therefore submersion of the music into the general discussion simply because of the lack of theoretical precedent would have run counter to the basis of the project as a whole.

Forming a view of Laibach based on the analyses discussed above, it would be easy to overlook the fact that at least until 1987 one of what Žižek might term the most unheard-of, scandalous²⁶ elements of Laibach was the sonic aspect, described by Barber-Keršovan as a noise collage structured by “percussive monotony” (90). There were some genre precedents for what Laibach termed “militant classicism”, (NSK 1991, 46) including British industrial music and modernist classical composition but the resulting politicised tonality was, literally, unheard-of. There is no denying the violent and provocative nature of Laibach’s name, appearance and discourse. However none of these conceptual art elements would have penetrated mass consciousness without a music that was equally disturbing or in Žižek’s terms (1987), “nightmarish”. The fundamental, primeval core of the “psycho-physical terror” techniques by which Laibach penetrated the body politic was sound. Laibach’s politicised sonority was the intangible equivalent and support of its brutally dense language and symbolism. Its “danger” and “utter extremity” (Sounds 1986) derived from the actual arrangements and juxtapositions of sounds, based on the same alchemical principle of “*coincidentia oppositorum*” as other NSK forms.

Neither the linguistic-political nor the musical aspects of Laibach are secondary elements of the whole and both are in practice inseparable. However this has not prevented the vast majority of authors from either ignoring the music entirely or according it far less attention than the other elements. The thesis does not attempt to “single out” the music for consideration as a phenomenon in itself but aims to facilitate a holistic analysis of Laibach by considering this neglected aspect *within the context* of the integrated “*Gesamtkunstwerk*”. Laibach’s engagement with popular music is based upon the detection and recapitulation of ideology not just within the form, but within the content, i.e., lyrics and arrangements. Therefore not to address this aspect of Laibach’s work would inevitably distort the overall picture of how the group achieves its effects.

²⁶ Both terms are frequently employed for descriptive purposes by Žižek. See for instance Žižek (1996, p.40).

Laibach's choice of music as the primary medium within which to operate is acknowledgement of its unrivalled power as an interpellator. Particularly in the West, where less is known about Laibach's role in Yugoslav political events, at least as many people initially apprehended Laibach as a *sonic* phenomenon as were drawn to the symbolic/ideological content. Laibach would generally have been heard before being seen (particularly in the early years) and it was the alternately unsettling and/or fascinating sound that led this sector of the audience on to the other content.) In these cases the sonic aspect of Laibach was the decisive interpellator, in the same way that others were drawn by their political role or visual elements. The point is that each of these interpellative elements are integral to the Gesamtkunstwerk and therefore need to receive equal attention. There is a general tendency even within the music media to shy away from analysis of the sonic and the media structures by which popular musics are presented have even been described as "... a colossal machine for maintaining rhythm as an unwritable, ineffable mystery." (Eshun 1998, -007.) There is *always-already* an inherent bias displacing scrutiny away from popular music's sonic base towards its external contexts. This means that much writing "about" a particular artist tends to be dispersed onto biographical, sociological and other aspects that have only come into consideration in the first place because of the music's emergence. Although in the case of Laibach its multi-media activities do make analysis of the external elements more important these should not "drown out" the music.

Music in itself then is a difficult and even discouraged subject to approach, even without the political and other difficulties presented by Laibach. Perhaps one reason for the lack of writing on Laibach's music is a recoiling from the presence of the traumatic in the music itself. But at the subconscious level it seems possible that this reluctance to engage with the interiority of Laibach's operation does not even spring from the sounds themselves. The simple revelation that [popular] music (generally understood as a site of hedonistic consumption or protest) can be the site of archetypal horror and the operation of dehumanising control techniques is, in itself, sufficiently disturbing to intimidate or alienate. Partly because of the un-assimilability of this painful forced awareness it is both easier (more methodologically standard) and less arduous (conceptually demanding and personally threatening) to concentrate on the external, non-musical, aspects. To analyse how a type of music structured around such signifiers and tonalities can be attractive, the analyst must first acknowledge that it is still possible for these "dark" elements to exercise the power of fascination, which has unsettling implications socially and politically (see section 5.15). It is far easier to condemn an (apparently) obviously fascist visual symbol than to condemn a fascistic

sound, as this will lead on to a destabilising interrogation of the form itself and to possible charges of artistic censorship. It is this factor that is used to explain the massive condemnatory effort focussed at Laibach's name and visual appearance rather than its music which is generally dismissed as nothing but noise - there is no attempt to break down the disturbing elements within the noise. Had Laibach's challenge remained solely within the sphere of music it would not have had the same impact but it can equally be said that had Laibach been a purely conceptual art operation its name would never have become such a contested and visible point of schism within the Slovene body politic.

The chapter of the present work dealing with Laibach's music is an attempt to redress the lack of attention to Laibach as sonic phenomenon and to begin to relate it to the Slovene and Yugoslav music scenes and NSK's wider agenda. However since it attempts to provide an overview of NSK as whole and its discursive and symbolic practices across a range of media it cannot treat Laibach's releases in any great depth and only sketches the possibility of a "sonocentric" analysis that would cover Laibach's musical works in depth. The term sonocentric is designed to express the intention to theorise from out of the sounds under consideration, rather than attempting to apply inappropriate external models.

b) Sociological Perspectives.

This is an approach to the subject taken by Slovene authors, familiar with both the events and personalities they discuss, and with their socio-historical context. Mastnak's articles from the mid nineteen-eighties and Tomc's accounts of Laibach in relation to the wider Punk/alternative context are primarily concerned with locating Laibach within the socio-political processes of the period. It is certainly true that the phenomenon would be more prone to mystification in the absence of such materialist analyses. However, neither are concerned with aesthetic factors save at the most generalised levels and see no purpose in making reference to specific works across any of the media NSK are active within.

c) Postmodern/Aesthetic.

Erjavec, both individually and in his work with Gržinić is the key proponent of the view of Laibach

and NSK as practitioners of largely post-modern techniques, heavily informed by the work of the Slovene and European avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. Erjavec argues (1995) that the arrival of post-modern artistic practice in Slovenia can be roughly dated to the first projects by NSK and other young artists in the early nineteen eighties, just as artistic and political modernism lost their grip on Slovenia. However, he is careful to point out the ways in which NSK's postmodernism differs from that of its Western counterparts (principally due to its politicised nature). In fact Erjavec sees NSK's work as the best example of an "Eastern" postmodernism actively engaged with the political realities of its [socialist] environment.

d) Art-Historical/Curatorial.

This paradigm is predominantly based upon discussion of Irwin's work and is largely found in the essays Irwin commission from curators and art historians to accompany their catalogues. Again Gržinić features prominently, both in catalogue texts and media articles, generally taking the wider NSK project (the "Kitchen Consulate" or the Moscow Embassy) as the starting point for a wider theoretical discussion. Other authors, particularly those gathered in the "Kapital" catalogue (1991); (Bussmann, Groys, Finley and Watten) have a more empirical, art-historical approach. Just as Barber-Keršovan breaks down and lists the constitutive elements of Laibach's sound, these authors (in common with Erjavec), list some of the various artists and schools retro-quoted in Irwin works. They then go on to diagnose the presence of the NSK "style" or Slovene and other historical realities within the works, revealing the operation of ideology within the selection and utilisation of specific images.

e) Ideological/Psychoanalytic Approaches.

Žižek's is obviously the most developed psychoanalytic approach, however some other commentators on NSK such as Ramet (see above) and to a lesser extent, Gržinić, Mastnak and Dolar also employ psychoanalytic elements in their handling of the subject. Equally, the NSK discourse is often structured around a recapitulation of psychoanalytic and ideological language, ("*Psycho-historical dislocation* is the problem of collective consciousness in its search of (sic) symbolic forms as collective formulation; it is the inability to exit from the individual's existence as a machine which is the neurosis of death." (NSK 1991, 46) therefore such an approach is directly

relevant. However, unless integrated with at least some degree of aesthetic analysis these approaches can only go so far towards an understanding of the phenomenon as a whole.

1.14 Criticism of Laibach and NSK.

None of the British or American accounts of NSK encountered attempt a systematic theoretical critique of the subject and these appeared most frequently in the Yugoslav press in the nineteen-eighties. Hostile accounts of the subject vary in the degree of their severity but the majority appeared in the format of protest letters and polemical opinion pieces. Much of the criticism within Slovenia came from individual correspondence printed in newspapers and the most persistent collective response was from veterans' groups rather than key state institutions. Similarly the most aggressive media response to Laibach was that of the TV presenter Jure Pengov who concluded his notorious TV interview with the group in June 1983 with a populist call for a forceful response by citizens to Laibach's provocations (chapter 4). The populist tone of the Slovene opposition to Laibach only drew attention to the number of institutions (ZSMS, Radio Študent, ŠKUC) theoreticians and curators speaking in their defence, whereas the most senior Slovene body to denounce Laibach was Ljubljana's municipal assembly. In a polarised, largely inter-generational conflict, these anti-Laibach forces were presented by their opponents as reactionaries or philistines. Equally significantly, when NK Studio came under severe official criticism in 1987 (see chronology) it was primarily from institutions at the Federal level and in the other republics whereas the volume of both official and unofficial criticism within Slovenia was more muted. An undeniable effect of this was to accentuate existing tensions between Slovene youth and their less restive counterparts elsewhere in Yugoslavia (even during the 1988-91 period prior to independence, Slovene youth were more agitated by inter-generational conflict and youth and alternative political issues than by questions of nationality).

a): The "Laibach" Controversy/Germanization.

One early protest letter (Cajhen 1982) ended with an appeal (heard more frequently in 1986 and 1987) for ZSMS and veterans groups to protest against the activities of Laibach. The veterans were to become Laibach's most persistent critics (see section 4.9) but ZSMS never responded to the call to assume its traditional role of ideological supervision of youth activities. The letter, with its

detailed quotations of Laibach texts (a brief but unusually detailed citation) and identification of their sources (paraphrases of Hitler and Stalin) could be seen as both a template for and call for the detailed ideological critique that the author expected the authorities would soon engage in.²⁷ In its title (“Laibachization”) the letter also illustrates the single most persistent theme in Slovene critiques of Laibach; the controversy generated by its name. Concerns about the sully of Ljubljana’s good name and the unearthing of disturbing wartime memories were supplemented by several correspondents who saw Laibach’s name as a sinister instance of a wider Germanisation tendency. This found fullest expression in the title of the veterans’ letter of 21/2/87 (the same letter also reappeared under a similar title on 25/2/87), “The Germanised name is Genocide” (Ponemčevanje imena je genocid).

b): Allegations of Fascism/Anti-Yugoslavism.

The most severe criticism levelled initially at Laibach and later NSK in general was that if not actually fascist or crypto-fascist they were symptoms of fascistic tendencies in Slovenia, particularly amongst youth. This was a line taken by various Serb and Croatian authors and was generally the expression of a wider agenda; to demonise the entire Slovene alternative cultural and political scene as fascistic and anti-Yugoslav. The article by Drakulić-Ilić (1984) is the prime example of this trend, which reached a peak at the time of the “Poster Affair” in 1987 (see chronology). This approach illustrates the contrast between the media in Slovenia and elsewhere in Yugoslavia; the Yugoslav media confronted NSK directly whereas the Slovene media were more circumspect, even when expressing their opposition (almost certainly due to embarrassment). It is tempting to speculate that the media and official organisations in the other republics were glad of the opportunity provided by the poster affair to take a clear unambiguous stance on an issue during a period characterised by confusion and fragmentation. The poster provided its official critics with an un-compromised enjoyment of ideological denunciation. Strikes and even alternative cultural activities were hard to present as unambiguous violations of the formally progressive norms of self-management. The apparent spectre of fascism allowed the media a rare demonstration of ideological rectitude and vigilance at a time when the system was degenerating rapidly and national

²⁷ In fact it was rare not just for opponents of Laibach/NSK but even for their supporters to cite or to analyze textual statements. In the case of their opponents this may have been due to the unease caused by the NSK tactic of including elements of Yugoslav as well as fascist rhetoric and a reluctance to highlight this fact.

factors were coming to predominate over ideological factors.

c): Cultural and Aesthetic Critiques.

Running parallel to the attempt to brand Slovene alternative and youth activities as fascist, there was another more subtle discourse based on a thesis of degeneracy and cultural decline that was implicitly to blame for the general socio-political crisis (ironically the type of polemic frequently pursued by actually fascist movements in relation to alternative movements). In this apocalyptic scenario, homosexuality and avant-gardism are symbols of a wider cultural collapse (Grujić 1987) weakening society and the threat of cultural Germanization is presented as akin to a new form of AIDS which, it is implied will lead to the collapse of an autonomous Slovene culture (Šepetevac 1987a). Seemingly the only Slovene art historian to have presented a (brief) critique of the NSK aesthetic was Dr. Jure Mikuž, a correspondent in a fierce debate conducted in the main Slovene daily "Delo" in autumn 1987. He linked NSK success in Western Europe to the rightward drift in politics there and denounced NSK's work on the basis that what was kitsch in 1937 remains so in 1987 (Mikuž 1987). The most critical Slovene analysis of the poster affair (Meršnik 1987) also used the term "kitsch", commenting that what might be acceptable as a poster for an exhibition was not acceptable as a political poster. It also quoted the opinion of the director of the National Museum of Belgrade, Jevta Jevtović, that what is inexcusable is (therefore) inadmissible, whether the motives behind it are artistic or political. With these brief exceptions, the vast majority of criticism, not just of the poster, but of NSK generally, centred on political rather than aesthetic factors; on the ideological effects produced by the works and not the methodologies employed or the aesthetic value of the works.²⁸ While the situation is not as stark, there is a clear echo of the reluctance of critics to engage with Laibach as a musical rather than a purely ideological phenomenon. The absence of systematic aesthetic critiques is hard to account for although Laibach's "pariah" status may have led some to view as unworthy of any serious comment.

²⁸ Woodward (1995, 75) does not mention Laibach/NSK but claims that Slovene youth "... used forms of expression (including nationalism and neofascism) designed to shock elders into more rapid change." Her comment seems to echo the view of "fascistic" developments in Slovenia presented in the Yugoslav media during the eighties.

1.14) Chapter Sequence:

Having set out some of the basic problems associated with this field and the objectives of the research we can now move on to the subject proper. The following chapters are thematically organised and are structured to present the most acute examples of art-regime interaction in NSK works and the processes that the thesis is concerned with.

Chapter two commences with a description of a Laibach concert that took place in Moscow in 1994. It analyses Laibach performances and the group's language and use of totalitarian art. The ideological contexts of the production and reception of Laibach's work are addressed, as is the response of the Russian audience to it. The discussion then moves on to provide an account of the other groups allied with Laibach in the NSK ("Neue Slowenische Kunst").

Chapter three deals with the "national" (Slovene and German) imageries and historical references present in NSK works. It relates NSK's engagement with these issues to "self-repressive" tendencies within Slovene culture and politics. It identifies Laibach's "Germanicism" as an attempt to assert Slovene identity, examining in detail the way in which Laibach has used Germanic imagery and approached German and Austrian audiences.

Chapter four analyses the controversy over Laibach's name and right to perform in Slovenia (1980-7). Laibach's interaction with the authorities and public in Slovenia is traced through extensive use of contemporary documentation. The official reasons given for the imposition of a ban on Laibach performances in Ljubljana are examined, as are three sets of newspaper correspondence from the period. The material illustrates the confusion and symbolic disruption produced merely by the fact of Laibach's existence and the unease its work instilled in the authorities.

Chapter five concerns Laibach's use of music as a means of "rendering audible" various political, economic and stylistic regimes. Laibach's musical practice is described in relation to the role of Punk in Slovenia as well to electronic and "industrial" styles. Key Laibach recordings are discussed and details such as instrumentation and tempo are briefly related to wider political and ideological processes and power structures.

Chapter six uses the device of the “NSK State In Time” (1992) to “recapitulate” the role of the state and its signifiers in the construction of NSK’s aesthetic. The historical and political contexts of the creation of the state are discussed, as are some of the effects it has produced. An attempt is then made to assess the extent to which NSK’s art has managed to “transcend” the various regimes with which it has interacted and the key findings of the research are summarised. Finally conclusions and the possibilities for future research on the subject are presented.

2: Was Ist Kunst? (What is Art?): The Techniques of Neue Slowenische Kunst

“Reality is too complex for oral communication. The meaning of words is no longer grasped. An isolated word, a detail of a plan can be understood, but the meaning of the whole escapes.”¹ Laibach.

Moscow, December 1994. A young Russian audience has gathered in a sports hall to witness the latest musical sensation to arrive in post-Soviet Moscow. Through clouds of dry-ice spotlights emerge from the back of the dark stage and a techno beat commences. However the beat is soon supplemented by a martial, classical rhythm that seems contextually inappropriate to the format of a mid nineteen-nineties “rock” event. The track Laibach open their concert with is called “NATO” and is a contemporary reworking of the “Mars The Bringer of War” from Gustav Holst’s “The Planets”, composed immediately before the outbreak of the First World War.² After some moments two drummers can be seen at the sides of the stage beating out the aggressive rhythms with an expressionless military zeal. They wear Tyrolean-style Loden jackets of the type favoured in southern Austria and Bavaria. Later they will remove these, revealing blue shirts bearing NATO symbols with the word “Laibach” superimposed over them. At either side of the stage are floor to ceiling banners bearing dual NATO/Laibach insignia.

The NATO symbolism is combined with totalitarian motifs and Germanicisms in a highly formalized and aggressive version of the rock concerts (some) post-Cold War Russians are now free to consume. Some of the songs at the concert will be performed in German and will include lyrics such as “one man, one goal, one solution”³ or “the feeling of the people is the feeling of the land”.⁴ Despite the “blut und boden” (blood and soil) elements of the group’s presentation this is not a neo-Nazi provocation and despite its use of German and English both performers and audience are Slavic. Although Slovenes are the most heavily Germanised and Westernised of the Slavs and the spectacle is not overtly “Slavic” or “Slavophile” in the aggressively politicised Russian sense Laibach does present a recognizably “Eastern” paradigm both live and on record and

¹ From the sleeve text of the album “Kapital” (Laibach 1992c).

² Holst’s “Mars Suite” was originally used by Laibach on the 1985 track “Panorama” (CD track eight).

³ From the original lyrics of Queen’s “One Vision” (1985), translated by Laibach into German and released as “Geburt Einer Nation” (Become One Nation) by Mute Records in 1987. See Laibach (1987a).

⁴ From the 1986 Euro-hit “Live is Life” by the Austrian group Opus, released by Laibach the following year as “Life Is Life” and in German as “Leben Heist Leben” as a single on Mute Records. See Laibach 1987a.

has presented itself as an assault from within on the dominance of Western pop culture. To decode the series of dissonant paradoxes and questions associated with this performance the account has to return some fifteen years to the creation of Laibach.

2.1 The Concert As Totalitarian Spectacle.

“LAIBACH in itself is not a danger; the true danger resides in people, it is implanted in human beings like the age-old fear of punishment, and from it the earthly seed of evil springs. Our evil is its projection, so we are a danger to those who in themselves are dangerous.” (Laibach 1996a)

Laibach was founded in June 1980, shortly after the death of Yugoslavia’s leader, Tito and at the end of the second phase of the Slovene Punk movement (see sections 5.3-5.4). Laibach chose music as the most powerful medium through which to communicate its responses to a series of political, historic and aesthetic regimes. The earliest incarnations of the group had some similarity with post-Punk groups such as Joy Division but its sound was almost immediately augmented by more atonal, experimental elements. The group appeared in paramilitary fatigues and played an increasingly aggressive and martial music that they later termed “militant classicism”.⁵ Using improvised real-time “samples” of classical music and film soundtracks plus industrial sound effects from oscillators, tape recorders and other devices, Laibach laid the basis for the first Slovene, Slavic form able to compete successfully against Western pop culture. Laibach’s early concerts were built on a deliberately nightmarish ambience of smoke bombs, infernal noise and brutal visual imagery that evolved over time into a more highly choreographed spectacle of the type visible in Moscow in 1994.

Writing in 1991 of Laibach’s tenth anniversary concert one British author provided a clear summary of the elements of Laibach’s live concerts:

“Laibach’s approach is to prepare an acid bath for their audience with pile-driver percussion, metal cutter electric guitar, sirens, horns and harsh guttural incantatory vocals....

With apparently fascistic banners and 1940’s clothes, the whole effect is of a ritual or rally. It is highly unpleasant and can be genuinely disturbing, and also for those who can relate to it, very beautiful.” (Honderich 1991)

⁵ Asked about the role of classicism in their music Laibach replied: “*Militant Classicism* as a form of our music is based on reason, order, clarity and on the belief that discipline is an aesthetic as well as moral virtue. And so is LAIBACH.” (NSK 1991, 55)

The “rally-effect” described by Honderich is not accidental; Laibach concerts are deliberately structured to resemble mass meetings that reveal mass-psychological processes (Laibach 1983a). Laibach reproduce the regimentation seen at a totalitarian rally through what they have described as “... sound/force in the form of a systematic (psychophysical) terror as therapy and as principle of social organization” (NSK 1991, 44). During the mid nineteen eighties (generally recognised as Laibach’s severest phase) concerts were often preceded by the taped sounds of barking dogs. Once the concert proper began, audiences were confronted by extreme volume and harsh spotlights. These effects were amplified by the aggressive ferocity of the music and the use of disconcerting or shocking visual elements (for instance propaganda imagery and pornographic clips). At one level these performances re-produced the subjection of the individual in relation to the totalitarian regime and were read by critics as actual totalitarianism, an attempt at hegemonic mass mobilisation.

One of the most infamous Laibach performances took place in Zagreb in April 1983. Police halted the show and Laibach were ejected after pornographic images and Tito’s face were juxtaposed on the venue’s screens. The event created a minor scandal in the Slovene and Croatian media (see chronology, 22.4.83-12.5.83) and on 12th May “Mladina” published a letter from Laibach explaining what it intended to achieve in the concert the contents of which Laibach claimed the organisers were fully aware of. The letter is one of the most open and detailed explanations by Laibach of its methods (although the language retains much of the tautological and intimidating qualities typical of Laibach statements – see section 2.3). Laibach openly states that it is exploring “... mass-psychology and the logic of manipulation through information” (1983a) which would seem to confirm the worst fears of the group’s critics (that for some obscure political purpose, or perhaps worse for the sake of pure provocation, Laibach practices mass manipulation). However Laibach prevents the closure of this narrative through reference to the range of artists, schools and ideologies that inform its “provocative interdisciplinary action”, for instance Fluxus art and bruitism (a contemporary term for Dadaist and Futurist noise musics). Besides totalitarian and national/folk art, Laibach cite amongst numerous others the work of Nam June Paik, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Josef Beuys and claim that the resultant techniques applied to the ideological and historical trauma encourage “...critical awareness” in those exposed to it (Laibach 1983a). These references to Western avant-garde artists are balanced by citations elsewhere of Stalin and Hitler (see NSK 1991,

48). The contradictions within an artistic practice incorporating both John Cage and Nazi-Kunst qualify its “totalitarianism” and provide clues that signify the presence of more subtle processes in the work. In fact these “clues” are present in the concerts as well as the texts if the spectator can preserve sufficient autonomy in relation to the spectacle to note the contradictions between the diverse motifs and styles that constitute the event. The extreme force of the performances and many of the statements would seem to leave no space for audience autonomy but it should be noted that whilst Laibach are highly successful in dominating an audience they at no point issue anything resembling “orders” and there is no coherent “programme” to be followed. Therefore the “duty” Laibach imposes on those confronted by this spectacle is to interpret its unresolved contradictions and, perhaps, to realise its implications and it is in this respect that, despite all appearances, Laibach encourage “critical awareness” of the contradictory elements in its work and their interconnections. Laibach concerts can be summarised as the application of both propaganda techniques and highly sophisticated conceptual art practices to a series of covert and overt “regimes” that are manifested in the event.

Left at this level the account would seem to imply that the full implications of the concerts can only be felt by those national audiences with direct experience of totalitarianism. This overlooks the fact that totalitarianism is equally menacing to those who have not lived under it and that Laibach make a globally applicable link between the concert (and popular music in general) and totalitarianism. The quoted article by Honderich is entitled “Rock and Rally” and Laibach’s concerts re-capitulate the contemporary ritual of the rock concert as a totalitarian ritual. This link had previously been alluded to in Pink Floyd’s “The Wall” (1979), a monumentally ironic presentation of the fascistic potential of the type of epic rock spectacle produced by groups such as Pink Floyd. Laibach’s fusion of the dynamics of the totalitarian rally and a rock concert suggests that totalitarianism is a contemporary force rather than a historical phenomenon and that popular music has an inherent totalitarian potential that various regimes use for their own ends. (This issue is discussed more extensively in chapter five). The potential “beauty” that Honderich perceives in a Laibach concert lies in its transcendence of the (spectacle of) ideological fanaticism and oppression. The performances are structured by an aesthetic of force that allows for the play of elemental political and psychological forces that are normally suppressed.

Apart from its Zagreb performance in 1983 Laibach has staged a series of similarly provocative concerts that have repeatedly scandalised the media and the public in various countries (some media reactions to specific concerts are summarised in the chronology). From 1983-85 Laibach was forbidden from appearing under its own name in Slovenia due to the “alarming and provocative” overtones of its name and imagery (see chapter four). In response Laibach embarked on what was called “The Occupied Europe Tour” which took in both halves of cold-war Europe (see tour poster in chronology, 1.11.83). Besides Western and Yugoslav concerts they played in Budapest, Wrocław, Warsaw, and Cracow. During the tour the group was denied entry to Czechoslovakia by nervous authorities.⁶ Laibach have undertaken a series of such “themed” tours, often independently of album releases and as with any major rock act, the imagery of each tour is meticulously designed and the tour’s overall image makes a very specific symbolic or ideological point (for instance the first German tour (“Die Erste Bombardierung Über Dem Deutschland”) discussed in section 3.10).⁷

⁶ See Lorenčič 1984 for an account of one leg of the tour.

⁷ Other examples of such “themed” tours include 1987’s “United States of Europe” and a tour of Yugoslav industrial cities in 1989.

2.2 Red Districts: The Influence of Place Upon Laibach's Severity.



Trbovlje, Slovenia.

Laibach's origins lie in the bleak Slovene mining town of Trbovlje. Trbovlje lies at the heart of the "Red Districts", the most heavily industrialized and politically polarised area of Slovenia and the ideological traditions and physical experience of this extreme environment lie at the core of the group's work (see Laibach's comments on the significance of Trbovlje's militant tradition, NSK 1991, 43). Trbovlje was the site of the first strike in post-war Yugoslavia and it frequently featured in official propaganda (see the archive sequences in Benson (1995a). Laibach's early music utilized the cacophonous mechanical rhythms of the area to make strange and archaicize the industrially based state ideology. The grating sonic brutism of the earliest recordings⁸ combined with the provocativeness of their name were disturbing enough even without the alienating rhetoric:

"LAIBACH works as a team (the collective spirit), according to the principle of industrial production and totalitarianism, which means that the individual does not speak; the organization does. Our work is industrial, our language political."⁹

⁸ These are compiled on the CD "Ljubljana-Zagreb-Bcograd" (Laibach 1993). See audio track one.

⁹ Point one of the 1982 document "LAIBACH: 10 ITEMS OF THE COVENANT", NSK 1991, 18-19.

Laibach's is a collective, studiously impersonal spectacle that manipulates a series of ideological and conceptual regimes. The depersonalisation evident in its stage performances and discourse reflects the alienation generated by the conjunction of dystopic heavy industry and totalitarianism, a conjunction that is most dramatically visible in the "Red Districts" (Trbovlje, Zagorje and Hrastnik), an area notorious for environmental degradation and violent ideological polarisation. Before 1945 Trbovlje in particular was a hotbed of both communism and fascism and on 1st June 1924 violent clashes took place between fascist militia and local workers. In the immediate post-war decades the area played a key ideological role as a site of industrial progress and was visited by Tito. However, it was also the site of the first strike by workers in post-war Yugoslavia. Whilst the music Laibach played in Moscow is far less severe than what it was known for in the early nineteen-eighties (see chapter five) the nightmarish spirit of the environment within which the group was created is still apparent in the alienating rigour of its concerts.

2.3 Depersonalisation and Linguistic Alienation.

On stage Laibach's singer is a forbidding presence of utter aloofness and the two drummers to either side of him act as de-personalized automatons. Rather than a charismatic "rock God" onto whom to project their fantasies audiences are confronted by a cold inquisitor figure embodying calm at the centre of a storm. The easily assimilable pop classics a post-Soviet Russian audience are now free to consume are returned to them by Laibach in Germanised, quasi-Wagnerian form, bereft of all spontaneity or individuality. Some of the songs seem to evoke the martial tones of Nazi marching songs or the kitsch heroicism of communist anthems, either of which should be anathema to a pop audience in nineties Moscow. Yet the group play unmolested to a positive response. The show (one of two) is broadcast uncut on Russian TV and the spectacle is repeated throughout 1994-5 across ex-Yugoslavia and the former Eastern bloc as well as Western Europe in what is denoted "The Occupied Europe Tour 1994-5". The "coldness" of the group's performances is supplemented by an apparently quasi-totalitarian discourse of a severity rare even in the more hard-line states of the former Eastern bloc:

"LAIBACH is an organism, composed of individuals as its organs. And those organs are subordinated to the whole, which signifies a synthesis of all the forces and ambition of the members of the whole. The aims, life and means of activity of the group are higher-in strength and duration-than the aims, life and means of the individuals which compose it". (NSK 1991, 52)

Statements of this type, which are a key component of the group's activities, raise the same spectres that are visible in the group's stage performances (absolute depersonalisation and totalitarian discipline). In fact the emphasis on the group rather than the individual represents an attempt to evade the Western "star" system and its emphasis on the personal over the conceptual and the collective. It represents an attempt to preserve a certain freedom of action in the face of the "totalitarian" demands of the star system that Laibach have (in common with Adorno (1993) and others) repeatedly condemned (see NSK 1991, 61). Early Laibach interviews took the form of ultra-formal prepared statements given in place of face-to-face meetings. For the first few years of Laibach's activity this was the normal form of "interview" and when Laibach did commence face to face interviews they always tried (with little success) to have quotes attributed simply to "Laibach" or at least to "Laibach's spokesman".

Laibach's discourse is a distillation of a series of competing Western and local theories that were present in Yugoslavia after the liberalisation of the nineteen-sixties. In this period Western philosophy and theory became increasingly influential, with different authors becoming associated with different Yugoslav "schools" and institutions. This trend also affected the party and even the army. Soviet thought was treated with suspicion because of the legacy of the break with Stalin IN 1948 and the party's desire to differentiate itself from "Stalinist" ideologies. All these ideologies supplemented and existed in parallel with the all-pervasive self-management discourse (itself an eclectic mixture of various ideological schools), which was a constant presence in all social institutions (for an account of the pervasiveness of self-management ideology see Thompson 1992, 39). Žižek (1994b, 192-3) depicts a situation in which the various philosophical schools were in competition, within and between the Yugoslav republics. According to Žižek the paramount schools within Slovenia were Heideggerianism amongst the opposition and Frankfurt-School Marxism within the party. In between these two lay an Althusserian school attacked by both camps and the Slovene Lacanian School of which Žižek is the best known figure. One or more of these competing discourses always structured the discourses through which the different institutions communicated with the public and Žižek notes for instance that the army's justifications of its military-ideological doctrines ("General People's Defence"¹⁰) tended to employ Heideggerian

¹⁰ This doctrine was based on a constant state of low-level psychological mobilisation of the population. In the event of war the population was to confront the invader with partisan tactics based on elaborate planning and pre-positioned weapons stores.

language. The situation Žižek describes is effectively one of institutionalised ideological cacophony that amplified the oppressiveness of each theory and presented a far more complex reality than those states with a single totalitarian ideology. Laibach and NSK texts allude to and incorporate elements of most of the principal theories and “recapitulate” the terror instilled in the subject by tautological and contradictory discourse (see Gottlieb 1992, Thom 1989). Laibach combined the competing theories into its own distinctive language. Adorno’s critique of popular culture is strongly present in Laibach statements but its accounts of the role of the mass media also incorporate the work of Althusser and Jacques Attali (see chapter four) and both Hegelian and Heideggerian characteristics are apparent in the texts of the Philosophy Department (see sections 2.14 and 3.11).

Laibach’s synthesis of this ideological cacophony evokes Thom’s (1989, 22) discussion of linguistic totalitarianism and her description of its use of “...pedantry as a means of intellectual terrorism”. Laibach’s use of language is terroristic both in its tautological violation of discursive norms and in that it is explicitly designed for use as a disorientating, alienating device as violent as its sounds and images. Laibach’s language is designed both in its associations and its mode of expression to be oppressive, an analogue to the violence of the concerts. Asked in one early interview about their bureaucratic mode of communication Laibach explicitly stated that their work is based on the linguistic-conceptual terror of ideology:

“Such a form of interview is the limit of comprehension, within which the subject is prevented from feigning ignorance and *communication through non-communication*. The way of its formation is simultaneously also a *process of permanent repression on linguistic models*, and thereby, also on the subjects which construct them. Such a form reduces the possibility of individual influences on the structure of the expression itself to a minimum; it is dictated through the totalitarian structure and understood as the *right to incomprehensibility*. (LAIBACH thus constantly degrades every communication on the level of the word, turning it into ideological phraseology). The assimilating capacity of the consumer is limited and depends on:

- a: the knowledge of the symbol(s)
- b: the level of development of the consumer
- c: the technique of perception (speed-reading)

The consumer can only influence the third factor; LAIBACH recommends a selection of sources of information.” (NSK 1991, 52)

What Laibach refer to above as the “right to incomprehensibility” is a statement of one of the clearest features of the group’s work, a defence of ambiguity and of the right not to have to explain

every detail of an artistic process or adopt clear political stances. Besides ambiguity, Laibach in its texts, images, music and concerts also allows for simultaneity. The texts refer simultaneously to several sources and associations and deliberately leave the resulting paradoxes to be resolved by the “consumer”. They are oriented towards a series of regimes and adopt the linguistic and other codes of these regimes in order to render perceptible characteristics normally kept hidden by such regimes. In this case Laibach simultaneously make use of and draw attention to the repressive and nonsensical, “non-communicative” qualities of ideological discourse.

Whilst Laibach does not conceal the mechanisms structuring its work it never relinquishes ambiguity and insists that responsibility for the assimilation and interpretation of its work lies with the consumer. The texts extrapolate more than explain and provide no easy closure to the questions raised by Laibach’s performance and music. The paradoxes inherent in the juxtaposition of diverse elements prevent straightforward assimilation and problematize enjoyment of the spectacle. This presents inevitable problems of interpretation. Even as the texts are cited it must be remembered that the texts themselves are integral to the performance of ambiguity and paradox which Gottlieb (1992, 134) identifies as key totalitarian tactics used to create confusion and a sense of dependence on those who claim to be able to master such abstractions.

Therefore although over-literal readings of Laibach’s discourse are a constant danger, careful readings of the texts do reveal chinks in the armour of impenetrability. Laibach’s discourse is the result of a neo-Duchampian technique based on the manipulation of discursive “ready-mades” and totalising monodeclarations taken from diverse and contradictory sources, which in juxtaposition generate paradox and ambiguity with the effects Gottlieb alludes to. Early Laibach texts consisted of paraphrases of Soviet and Nazi statements blended with quotations from Tito, Kardelj and other Yugoslav leaders. The official discourse of the Yugoslav self-management system was often fiendishly complex and the convoluted tautologies and paradoxes of Laibach’s discourse were a “recapitulation” of this feature of the group’s political and psychic environment.¹¹ Whilst the statements have very specific political implications (both in Slovenia and beyond) they also possess

¹¹ Thompson (1993, 30) describes Kardelj’s jargon thus:

“Kardelj more than anyone else was responsible for this vocabulary. Like some perverse lexicographer, he obscured the original sense of words and invented barbarous new terms. In mature Kardeljese, a business became an “individual business organ”; a worker, an “associated socialist producer” ... And Edo Kardelj produced this jargon by the yard, as repetitious and prescriptive as board-room minutes.”

the status of an attempt to transcend the inertia and disturbing associations of the source texts and through repetition and conjunction, recycle or reprocess them aesthetically employing all their irrational, metaphysical qualities (which scientific socialism seeks to demonise even as it manipulates). Laibach audiences then are confronted by a corporate entity communicating via a highly paradoxical bricolage of totalitarian discourse, provocative rhetoric and deliberate mystification.

2.4 The Location Of Power:

The violent insertion of such a ponderous discourse into the supposedly apolitical and frivolous sphere of popular music is inevitably transgressive but while it drew on local conditions its severity placed it apart. By 1985 even the USSR began an apparent shift away from the classical Stalinist discourse that Laibach recapitulate and Yugoslav self-management had been attempting since 1948 to refine itself and move away from Stalinist/totalitarian paradigms. Laibach and the other NSK groups' re-presentation of such was not an expression of perverse nihilism but an attempt to spotlight the fact that far from being alien to contemporary Yugoslavia such a discourse was both mimetic and anticipatory. The self-management and Perestroika modes of state power both sought to distance themselves from fanaticist modes of discourse and to present an image of devolved power that actually spread ideology even more pervasively through society than the unreconstructed totalitarian discourses (Thom 1989). Laibach highlighted the totalitarian shadow of the progressive Yugoslav self-image in order to problematize the regime's attempts to obscure and conceal the authoritarian basis of its power:

“Power, to be total, must not be locatable in society; it must avoid clear-cut shape, it must be indivisible, impersonal and all pervasive... In actuality Newspeak does not legitimise power: it serves to spread it through society, and so becomes part of the functioning of the Communist state. Thanks to Newspeak, power, supported by ideology, seeps through the whole of the social body.” (Thom 1989, 115).

Although there was far greater freedom in Yugoslavia than elsewhere in Eastern Europe it is arguable that ideological control there was even more pervasive precisely because it feigned its own absence:

“People lacked arguments against the system. Maximum participation in politics by the maximum number was the explicit goal; and there were no Leftist arguments against that, only liberal ones—which were taboo. From the point of view of power, anyone who opposed the system was still supporting it, as long as he or she

kept participating. Whatever opposition the communists could neither stamp out nor cajole, they could usually pre-empt. It is difficult to confront power that keeps dispersing itself, difficult to attack the monopoly of a system that has already denounced and, apparently, renounced its own monopoly. Likewise, as if mimicking another theological sleight of mind, Kardelj knew it was wiser to tell people that self-management was their right than to instruct them about their duty. (Thompson 1993, 39).

Laibach's early work consisted of the relocation of power, the shift from culture back to politics and the precise unmasking of the loci of power. In the woodcut "The Thrower" (also known as "Metalec" or "The Metal Worker"), which was one of the first images produced by the group (see below) Laibach render visible totalitarian power in a menacing yet simultaneously heroic form.



“The Thrower” remains one of Laibach’s starkest and most ambiguous images. The colossal worker figure activates the spectres of Stakhanovism, shock working and totalitarian industrial discipline, all of which Yugoslavia had formally renounced. After the break with Stalin in 1948

Stalinist and Socialist Realist imagery was treated with a degree of suspicion in Yugoslavia and the fact that this image was produced by a group bearing a name many Slovenes equate with the Nazi occupation of the country heightened its alienating power. The figure personifies the alienation of totalitarianism and industrial production and symbolically alienates power from itself, assigning it a monstrous form that locates terror within contemporary reality. Crucially, the image could not be dismissed out of hand as an alien intrusion because it also refers to the proud industrial tradition of Trbovlje (which was the site of the first strike in post-war Yugoslavia). The poster creates a sense of radical ambiguity, an effect heightened for those aware of it by the similarity of the figure's clenched fist to French revolutionary posters from 1968. Given the systematic ideologization of all social institutions and discourse Laibach reasoned that the only praxis likely to be able to escape this process would have to fully embody linguistic and other types of totalitarianism, to approach power with the codes of power. As Thompson notes, the self-management system was expressly structured in order to conceal and diffuse the bases of power and therefore Laibach's association of signifiers of the system such as Tito and the Partisans (see subsequent discussion) with images of totalitarian terror frustrated the normal obscured self-reproduction of self-management. In common with Stalinism, Nazism and all the most extreme totalitarianisms Laibach felt no obligation to conform to external standards of consistency or logic. Ambiguity and paradox are central to and constitutive of their work. The deployment of non-sequiturs and contradictions within a monumental framework was a necessary part of totalitarian performance but also a means by which they preserve their ambiguity and retain an unsettling effect that can provoke questioning:

"By means of the elusive character of their desire, of the indecidability as to "where they actually stand", Laibach compels us to take up our position and decide upon *our* desire. - Laibach here actually accomplishes the reversal that defines the end of psychoanalytical cure." (Žižek 1993b).

Confronted in an image such as "The Thrower" by a return of the ideologically repressed (the traumatic core of socialist state power) the individual is forced to take a stance in relation to the image and to the group as a whole and the polarisation the image produces makes indifference to the image (and to Laibach) an unlikely outcome. The texts accompanying such images and Laibach performances are integral to the performance and their contradictions are designed-in and should be read in this light as much as explanatory commentaries, pervaded as they are by contradiction, mythicization, self-aggrandisement, tautology and black humour. The iron certainty of Laibach's tone sets up the expectation of a coherent, systematic programme yet the opacity of the whole and

the absence of any literal goals frustrates this. The painfulness of this position for the subject is alluded to in the early work "Apologija Laibach" (CD track 9) which includes the line

"The explanation is the whip and you bleed."¹²

There are no easy answers and radical ambiguity is essential to the project, it is vital that doubts should remain about Laibach's "real" intentions. The shifting paradoxes work against any categorical placement of Laibach and suggest that Laibach can only be included in its own category (because of being sufficiently distinctive from other trends or movements). In presenting a total form Laibach actually incite and necessitate a plurality of positions and responses which themselves add to the works' recapitulativity, even when unfavourable. According to Žižek

"The first reaction of the enlightened Leftist critics was to conceive of Laibach as the ironic imitation of totalitarian rituals; however, their support of Laibach was always accompanied by an uneasy feeling: "What if they really mean it? What if they truly identify with the totalitarian ritual?" - or, a more cunning version of it, transferring one's doubt onto the other: "What if Laibach overestimates their public? What if the public takes seriously what Laibach mockingly imitates, so that Laibach actually strengthens what it purports to undermine?"

In fact Žižek sees such doubts as the result of a misreading, Laibach actually

"... "frustrates" the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic imitation, but over-identification with it - by bringing to light the obscene superego underside of this system, over-identification suspends its efficiency." (Žižek 1993b, 4-5).

Over-identification of the necessary extent requires performance that may cause Laibach to be damned in the process. The track "Perspektiven", (CD track 3) is a dispassionate statement of the materials of Laibach's manipulation; Nazi-Kunst, Taylorism and Disco amongst others. Actual fascists would hardly wish to lay bare the mechanics of their manipulation, but Laibach's effect depends on a continuing degree of suspicion, not least because of the strange fascination exerted by such aesthetics. Thus when presented with "the eternal question"; "are you fascists or not?" Laibach responded "Isn't it evident?"¹³

¹² See NSK 1991, 84.

¹³ Similarly when asked by the German paper "Die Zeit" "Are you fascists or not then?" they replied "We are fascists as much as Hitler was a painter." NSK 1991, 58.

Thus the work constantly emphasizes the responsibility of the “consumer” to decipher the images and undertake the potentially painful process of integrating them into some type of interpretative framework. Laibach actually occupy the position of interrogators, not dictators, “justifying” their stance through the appropriation of totalitarian fiat. Epstein’s (1995, 285) description of Soviet thought applies equally to Laibach’s repetition of totalitarian hubris:

“For many decades, Soviet civilization assumed the right to judge and not be judged, as it described itself in a language of evaluations without objective concepts, which it denigrated as “ideologically harmful and alien”.

2.5 “How The East Sees The East”

To the Western spectator unfamiliar with Laibach’s work the Moscow performances give rise to a series of questions: How could a Russian audience tolerate a collectivist manifestation employing supposedly anathema Germanic and NATO symbolisms and how could Slovenes as victims of quasi-totalitarianism and Germanic oppression perform such a role? Why should Russians embrace such an un-free phenomenon and chose such a form of musical consumption over dominant Anglo-American imports? At the level of choreography and packaging Laibach offer much that is familiar to the Russians and audiences across ex-socialist Europe. Besides the versions of “Life is Life” and “One Vision” discussed above Laibach also perform a version of the Rolling Stones’ “Sympathy For The Devil”¹⁴ and the series of war-oriented songs that make up the “NATO” album including Europe’s “Final Countdown”, Pink Floyd’s “Dogs of War” and Zager and Evans’ “2525”. These cover versions are so far removed¹⁵ from their sources that Laibach present them as superior “copies without the originals” (NSK 1991, 52). Further motivations for this obsessive reworking of the Western pop canon will become apparent later in the discussion. However, one important role of such material is that even in such heavily altered forms the songs serve as a familiar element that

¹⁴ In 1988 Laibach and its “sub-group” 300 000 V.K. released six versions of the song over two singles (Mute Records) including a German version, “Dem Teufel Zugeneigt” (Laibach 1988a).

¹⁵ The Mute Records press release “LAIBACH: NATO” (1994a) explains the rationale behind the use of these songs thus:

“Before NATO, these songs had a different life, carried different meanings.... In [the] context of NATO and the new political-cultural map in which they’re placed, these songs are now weighted with different significances. Yet traces of their original meanings resonate through Laibach’s re-models and understanding Laibach’s original versions (sic).

For the Laibach method is based on the premise that traumas from the past affecting the present and future can only be healed by returning to the initial conflict. Tracking the traces of these original songs brings you to the source of present traumas.”

offsets the potentially alienating Germanic and totalitarian elements in Laibach's presentations. Even an ex-Soviet audience is by now familiar with the omnipresent works of Queen, The Rolling Stones and others. Yet what they are more familiar with is the pervasive presence of ideology in cultural activity in all other spheres. Laibach perform these songs in order to perform what they refer to as a "demasking and recapitulation"¹⁶ of the hidden political power mechanisms at work in the dissemination and reception of popular music. For an "Eastern" audience raised on ideological critiques of "Western cultural imperialism" there is not necessarily anything contradictory in the treatment of pop texts as examples of ideological processes. Neither is there anything unfamiliar in Laibach's written and verbal use of "monodeclarations"¹⁷ that demask and recapitulate totalitarian linguistic strategies (see the above Laibach quotation). Whilst these elements are not unfamiliar they it would naturally be assumed that they might be experienced as traumatic or even unacceptable in the post-socialist context. However this aesthetic totalitarianism is not retrograde but in Laibach's own terms, "retrograde". This is a formulation developed to acknowledge the use of material of the revolutionary avant-gardes whilst differentiating Laibach (and later NSK) from the avant-garde as such (and its eventual fate):

"We are acquainted with the aberrations and contradictions of the disillusioned artistic avant-garde. We have no intention of reproducing or interpreting it. The ideology of *surpassing* has been surpassed and it must never happen again that the spectator-consumer confuses the packaging with art." (NSK 1991, 47)

Laibach and the other Slovene artistic groups allied with it employ what they describe as the "retro-principle" (NSK 1991, 111). Rather than trying to effect avant-garde, revolutionary transformations, Laibach blend the pop elements at will with Nazikunst, Socialist Realism, Pop Art,

¹⁶ From the Laibach statement "Art and Totalitarianism". Reproduced NSK 1991, 21. The full statement reads as follows:

"Art and totalitarianism are not mutually exclusive. Totalitarian regimes abolish the illusion of revolutionary individual artistic freedom. LAIBACH KUNST is the principle of conscious rejection of personal tastes, judgements, convictions (...); free depersonalization, voluntary acceptance of the role of ideology, demasking and recapitulation of the regime "ultramodernism"...

He who has material power has spiritual power, and all art is subject to political manipulation, except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation."

Demasking and recapitulation is a key Laibach method and can be characterized as a disintegrative overidentification, usually enacted in relation to concealed power structures such as the state or the music industry. On the second "Occupied Europe Tour" for instance, Laibach appropriated the NATO symbolism and gave it a paramilitary aura that contradicted the actual institution's attempts to create a less militaristic post-cold war identity.

¹⁷ A term used in relation to Soviet propaganda by Shane (1994, 184).

Slovene Impressionism and other diverse elements. There is no attempt to discard or transcend the past (which the avant-gardes now belong to) but to work through it, exploiting its repressed energies. Laibach open up new possibilities for the future not through revolutionary negation but through the critical interrogation and reworking of past material.

Laibach's (re)use of totalitarian motifs and the "post-modernity" of its approach is also not an innovation or a phenomenon that is out of its time. Laibach argue that the fact of the success of their challenging work is proof that they have captured something of the contemporary "zeitgeist". Similarly to Nazism, Stalinism and also contemporary "Fukuyaman" late capitalism Laibach's discourse contains the performance of a claim to represent the "end of history", the natural and unquestionable culmination of all previous effort. In particular the group's discourse constantly attempts to show that Laibach is always representative of "its" time:

"If the "time" has changed, than LAIBACH will automatically change, because we are "fused to the grid of time". (Laibach 1997a)

Despite this claim the fact that Laibach has gone on to alienate earlier generations of fans and has undergone significant stylistic mutations (particularly in relation to music) problematizes it and illustrates the way in which even the totalitarian claim to have discovered a final solution is itself simply a moment in a mobile and shifting process. The totalitarian motifs used are "retro" and in this respect are absolutely contemporary given the popularity of "retro" styles and designs in post-modern culture. Although there is more obvious correspondence between these techniques and contemporary Western culture, the eclectic juxtaposition of imageries and concepts from different historical contexts is in fact equally characteristic of the post-socialist context. Epstein (1995, 102) argues that Western authors have often overlooked the inherent post-modernity of Eastern totalitarianism, which in some respects anticipated Western postmodernism:

"Far from being antithetical to postmodernism, ideology supplies a unique forum for the post-modern interplay of all conceivable ideas. Paradoxically, Soviet Marxism, the philosophy least expected to be involved in post-modern debate, helps us to provide an explanation. The ideology of Soviet Marxism has always enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most conservative and anti-modern belief systems of the twentieth century. Totalitarianism was assumed to exclude the sort of relativism that flourished in Western culture and laid the basis for the transition to postmodernity. However, glasnost and perestroika have shed new light on this ideological system which, if regarded in the process of its formation, reveals a stunning example of relativism inscribed into totalitarian thinking. Totalitarianism itself may thus be viewed as a specific postmodern model that came to replace the modernist ideological stance elaborated in earlier Marxism."

Epstein draws out a series of lesser-known Russian artistic practices from the pre-Glasnost period to illustrate that as well as a structurally post-modern (Stalinist) ideology Russia has had an (underground) artistic scene producing post-modern culture for far longer than is known in the West. If Epstein's argument about the early postmodernity of much Soviet thought and culture is correct then it should be no surprise that techniques that are to an extent postmodern (eclecticism, retro, irony) had a strong presence in Yugoslavia. Forced to negate and to select elements of both socialism and capitalism self-management was structurally eclectic and Laibach works reveal the way in which the postmodern complexity of the ideology influenced cultural practice (see section 2.3).

Just as Epstein and, through their work, Laibach are concerned to challenge Western pre-conceptions about the "backwardness" of the East, so the Croatian born American sociologist Meštrović is keen to stress that the post socialist societies are not "tabula rasae" or void spaces for the insertion of Western economic and cultural ideologies:

"The East European individual is not lost in a sea of circulating fictions, but is smothered in cultural traditions. Far from being a cultural desert, life in formerly communist nations constitutes a rich and often overwhelming experience of cultural symbols drawn from previously repressed national, religious and other traditional sources." (Meštrović 1995, 60).

Such an individual also exists in a greatly expanded informational sphere in which despite the massive influx of Western culture, communist as well as pre-communist influences survive and compete for attention. The single totalising ideology has been relegated but not disappeared and inevitably forms part of the joint cultural heritage of the eastern bloc. One of the key effects of Laibach's work is to demonstrate that susceptibility to ideology has not disappeared. It finds open expression in Slavophile nationalism and the open fascism of the "Pamyat" movement in Russia or the various extreme militias in Croatia and Serbia. Yet even where these have become the new dominant ideologies that legitimate and enforce post-communist regimes they are not unchallenged. Their competitors for hegemony are the ostensibly neutral or pragmatic Western market and cultural doctrines. Thus ideological struggle in formerly socialist Europe has not ceased but diversified and been renewed. Western popular culture and to a lesser extent the new business mentality present themselves as once-banned guarantors of freedom rather than potentially hegemonic ideological agencies intent on a reactionary depoliticisation of economic issues. As will

become apparent, Laibach's politicised demasking and recapitulation of popular music serves to indicate that the entertainment sphere contains ideological power structures far more refined and less visible than those of totalitarian propaganda. If anything the post-socialist context is more ideologized than ever before, riven by conflicts and fusions between archaic, modern and post-modern ideologies and even ideologies that present themselves as non-ideologies. Each of these ideologies employ their own forms of "Newspeak" (hegemonic ideologized discourse) and with the proliferation of ideologies and signals in the post-socialist context, the numbing, paralysing effects that Thom (1989, 115) attributes to ideological language are multiplying:

"Confronted by the terror of nothingness which ideology brings, man instinctively seeks refuge under the wing of some tyrant, unaware that in so doing he is handing himself over to the very thing he fears. Compared with sheer nothingness, tyranny always looks like the lesser evil".¹⁸

This is the impulse that Laibach manipulates and draws attention to in its work. Thom's analysis and Laibach's success helps explain what the West sees as perverse anti-democratic political choices made in the East. Against the ideologized chaos of the post-socialist context monolithic certainties are attractive and familiar refuges. Totalitarian dogmas provide a point of continuity amidst chaos, even gaining an additional attractiveness. It is important to note at this point that Laibach's illumination of a continued susceptibility to tyranny applies at least as much to Western as to Eastern societies and that its greatest success has been achieved in Western Europe and North America. Laibach manipulate the totalitarianism (or hegemonic drives) latent within every social or ideological system, provoking questions and undermining rather than consolidating existing regimes. For instance, in order to stage an effective demonstration of the power-mechanisms normally concealed or unnoticed in rock concerts Laibach have to recapitulate, or overstatedly simulate, these to such an extent as to provide a dangerously credible representation of tyranny. Laibach's discourse is one of absolute certainty and the stage performances designed as examples of absolutist militancy that are a logical extension of an audience's desire to submit to spectacle. It is above all on stage that Laibach create a paradigm of impossible authority, driven by the iron logic of their concepts. Audience members who seek to identify with what they believe to be the message, typically by saluting, themselves become part of the recapitulation of mass control techniques and the popular need to submerge individuality within a organised mass. Laibach argue

¹⁸ Thom diagnoses the persistence of "Newspeak" techniques even in the ostensibly post-totalitarian discourse of perestroika.

that even overtly fascistic displays by an audience (typically saluting) simply demonstrate its points about popular culture as a site of hegemonic or fascistic mobilisation.

Laibach's art is not a call to action but to (enforced) reflection and an attempt to transcend the series of ideological and cultural regimes with Eastern and Western societies and individuals are confronted. In so far as anything is being preached it is a conceptual-aesthetic approach that simultaneously sets up, illustrates and frustrates the desire for identification but this necessarily entails ambiguity. Laibach present what Žižek (1993b) describes as "...an aggressive inconsistent mixture of Stalinism, Nazism and Blut und Boden ideology" and this is shot through with paradox and mystification. For every Germanic image there is a Slovene or a Communist one, socialist realist elements in their artwork are combined with motifs from pop art, the avant-garde or Nazikunst. The key effects produced by these compounds are fascination through paradox and ambiguity. The difficulty in trying to reconcile such diverse and contrasting elements works to problematize political recuperations and appropriations of Laibach's work (as, for instance, fascist or Communist). The shifting, volatile contents of Laibach's work have at some point offended or threatened Christians, fascists, nationalists, democrats and socialists. The use of contradiction in artistic practice was a practice already noted by Malevich (1988) in his writings on Cubism and its influence on Suprematism. Malevich spoke of a strategy of contradiction that could produce "...a dissonance of maximum force and tension." (Malevich 1988, 131). This dissonant energy, produced by confrontation between (amongst others) Socialist Realism and Nazi-Kunst is what gives Laibach's work its force and momentum yet as Gottlieb (1992, 156-7) points out, this "law of contradiction" is as typical of totalitarian ideology as of the artistic avant-garde.

The totalitarian signifiers are another element of familiarity for the post-socialist audience exposed to Laibach. Whilst these signifiers may have violent or painful associations they also present elements of continuity with an inherent local meaning absent from Western cultural imports. It is the shared, Eastern/Communist heritage that facilitated the acceptance of Laibach in Moscow and the ground for it was laid by a project that took place in 1992.

2.6 NSK in Moscow

Laibach does not act alone but is part of wider artistic collective known as “Neue Slowenische Kunst” (New Slovene Art/NSK) founded in 1983. Like Laibach the other groups involved in the structure employ similar “retro” methodologies and aesthetic practices in fine arts, theatre, design, philosophy, film and other spheres. In May 1992 the NSK painters’ group Irwin¹⁹ together with members from the design studio “New Collectivism” and the “Noordung”²⁰ theatre group established what they called the “NSK Embassy Moscow” in a private apartment. Works by Irwin and Laibach posters were displayed and a series of discussions between ex-Yugoslav and ex-Soviet artists took place in what was Russia’s first physical exposure to the NSK “meme”. The most spectacular action of the project took place in Red Square and was entitled “Black Square on Red Square”. Laibach’s key artistic appropriation was that of Kazimir Malevich’s “Black Square”. It featured on posters used to advertise the first banned concert in 1980 (see chronology) and was used to advertise a Ljubljana concert in 1984 at a time when even the public display of the group’s name was prohibited (see start of section 3.1). Its close resemblance to the black cross used as part of Nazi military insignia rather than its avant-garde lineage was what attracted most attention in the Yugoslav context. It has featured in numerous Laibach posters and sleeve designs and also in the works of Irwin, particularly the early “Laibach: Irwin” series of paintings that documented Laibach’s work.²¹ The square also forms the basis of the NSK logo, together with the German anti-fascist designer John Heartfield’s infamous axe-swastika. Two other generic Laibach signifiers are present in the logo, an industrial cog-wheel and antlers.²²

¹⁹ Irwin is named after a Chicago pharmaceutical factory. The members are Borut Vogeljik, Dusan Mandič, Roman Uranjek, Andrej Savski and Miran Mohar.

²⁰ This is the latest of three NSK theatre formations since 1983, all of which have been lead by Dragan Živadinov. It takes its name from the early twentieth century Slovene theorist of space flight, Herman Potočnik Noordung.

²¹ The black square also forms the basis of the NSK insignia. The Laibach insignia is the black square surrounded by an industrial cogwheel. The square appears on cover of Laibach’s eponymous 1985 album, (see section 4.7) as well as that of “Geburt Einer Nation” (p. 64, “NSK”) and directly in eight other Laibach posters (p. 44-63, “NSK”). It features in Irwin works such as “The Flag” (p. 92), “The Enigma of Revolution” (p. 94), “Holy Bread” (p. 97), “Malevich Between The Two Wars” (p. 101), “The Sacrifice” (p. 105), “INRI” (p. 106) and several more up until the present day. As one of the key NSK motifs it also features in the symbolism of the theatre groups and the design studio New Collectivism. Irwin’s initial role in the NSK structure was the artistic documentation of Laibach activity in artistic form and thus many works are based on Laibach graphics and posters.

²² The logo also features a spinning atom at the base of the design and in place of a torch flame the three peaked insignia of the Slovene wartime resistance movement. The overall visual effect is simultaneously archaic and industrial.



Neue Slowenische Kunst Insignia (From the sleeve of "Macbeth", Laibach 1989).

On 6th June Irwin members and others spread out a 22 metre by 22 metre square of black fabric in Red Square²³ in a recreation of the Malevich's suprematist black square. The action ("Black Square on Red Square") brought contemporary Russians face to face with the almost forgotten work of Malevich and the Russian avant-garde and the rediscovery of this work by Slovene artists. Besides this action the other key result of the interaction between the Russian, Slovene, Serb and Russian artists and critics was the so-called "Moscow Declaration". The text provides clues both to the natural acceptance of Laibach and NSK in the Russian context and to their work more generally:

- A. "The history, experience and time and space of Eastern countries of the 20th century cannot be forgotten, hidden, rejected or suppressed.
- C. This concrete history, this experience and this time and space have created the structure for a specific subjectivity that we want to develop, form, and reform; a subjectivity that reflects the past and future.
- G. This context and developed subjectivity are the real base for our new identity, which is taking a clear

²³ See Čufer (Ed.) 1994, 106-7 and video clip 5.

shape (also in the shape of new social, political, and cultural infrastructures) in the last decade of this century."²⁴

The text represents an insistence on the global value of the totality of the "Eastern" experience (including its totalitarian aspects) and retroactively codifies a series of initiatives enacted since 1980 by the NSK groups and others. It takes an explicit stance in favour of a holistic view of the Eastern cultural heritage and thus runs contrary to the selective, non-holistic narratives of contemporary nationalists (see chapter three). Laibach and the other NSK groups actively challenge the relegation of Eastern art and experience through an unapologetic and forceful assertion of their Eastern identity that fascinates Western audiences. What is confronted in this statement and in NSK's work generally is what Central and Eastern European artists and critics experience as a regime enforcing Western control of the art market and continuing to relegate "Eastern" artists to a secondary position. Although Slovene artists operated under a far less repressive system than their Russian counterparts, there are enough coincidences of interest and experience between them (particularly the fact that both sets of artists operated in a system in which there was no art market) to make the appearance in nineties Moscow of Slovene artistic groups using problematic totalitarian signifiers a natural (if not uncontroversial) event rather than an alien intrusion. The Declaration demonstrates that the use of totalitarian imagery for the creation of an authentic Eastern mode of artistic expression was not seen as an unnatural response to the state socialist context.²⁵

²⁴ Čufer (Ed.) 1994, 46. The quasi-political character of the document is deliberate. Like Laibach, Irwin often adopt the declamatory tone of political statements in order to disseminate their concepts.

²⁵ The work of NSK has a Russian parallel in the work of St. Petersburg's "New Academy of Russian Art" although its work has a far less paradoxical and more straightforwardly nationalist tone. See "Russia's New Radicals" (1997). It should also be noted that NSK's use of totalitarian imageries is pre-dated by Russian artists of the nineteen-seventies such as Komar and Melamid.

2.7 The Question of Totalitarian Art.

“Art and Totalitarianism are not mutually exclusive.” Laibach (NSK 1991, 21).

The text “NSK State In Time” describes the NSK methodology thus:

“Retro avant-garde is the basic artistic procedure of Neue Slowenische Kunst, based on the premise that traumas affecting the present and the future can be healed only by returning to the initial conflicts.” (Irwin/Čufer 1993).

The retro-technique is based upon a return to the ideological conflicts that informed the original works. Through such traumatic returns the NSK works re-activate both dystopian and utopian motifs as an attempt to transcend currently active artistic and cultural regimes. In both work and statements Laibach and NSK have displayed a concern to engage with the totality of the art-historical styles confronting Slovene artists, including the totalitarian styles of Socialist Realism and “Nazi-Kunst”. The groups refuse to recognise any boundary between these and avant-garde or folk styles or to refrain from using imageries that retain a partly-taboo status. Asked in a German interview about the combination of Nazi-Kunst and Socialist Realism in its work Laibach directly engaged with the debate over the aesthetic value of such styles:

“Our work refers to the entire history of art, politics and mankind in general. If anything, Soc Art and Nazi-Kunst have in common the prejudices of art historians who deny both a place in history of art on the grounds that they are not authentic historical styles. They are only allowed to serve art history and its museum keepers as definitions of what art is not. As long as this is the case, art history will only stay a collection of prejudices, and collection of prejudices is only useful if it is not called art.” (Laibach 1997a).

NSK pronouncements on the subject of totalitarian art and their aesthetic manipulation of it refer to a still-active critical debate on the worth of such art. As students of fine art and art history, members of both Laibach and Irwin were fully acquainted with such debates and whilst their work has not to date appeared in any of the literature on totalitarian art, it can be read as a contribution to the ongoing dispute over the value of explicitly ideological art. The collection of essays edited by Golsan (1992) challenges the exclusion of fascist art from the mainstream of art-historical narrative and questions the argument that the presence of fascist ideology automatically negates any possible aesthetic value in a work. In the same volume, Hewitt (1992) dates a shift in the attitude to artistic totalitarianism to the so-called crisis of the avant-garde in the nineteen sixties. Hewitt claims that the supposedly automatic link between political and aesthetic progressiveness ended at this time:

“It was now possible to think of an artist as politically “reactionary” and at the same time aesthetically “progressive”, or vice-versa.” (p. 39)

Despite a wider acceptance of what before had seemed a paradoxical situation and the concomitant creation of a theoretical space in which more complex and ambiguous judgements of totalitarian art are possible, the impulse to make literal and categorical political artistic judgements of such material remains. This approach, which cannot accept that political and aesthetic reaction are non-identical, was used by Laibach in particular as a device with which to challenge assumptions and test the social “defence mechanisms” of society. Rather than attempt to infiltrate the media and society by using less explicitly disturbing examples of Nazi art and propaganda Laibach deliberately selected some of the starkest examples of the form in order to ensure that there could be no possible doubt about what the viewer was confronted by. The sleeve of Laibach’s (1988) version of the Rolling Stones’ “Sympathy For The Devil” transplants a Nazi image of the ideal Aryan family. The addition of a sinister eagle and the presence of Laibach’s name with all of its controversial connotations (see chapter four) combine to produce an image that because it has been given a contemporary gloss is arguably more sinister than the original.



Nazi Propaganda Poster Encouraging Larger Families.



Laibach: Sympathy For The Devil, (1988a).

Through using such images Laibach both differentiates itself from the vast majority of artistic and musical groups and establishes a clear “point of fascination”. Laibach’s discourse is structured so as to accommodate the acceptance or rejection of such images and also serves as an anticipatory commentary on the absence of a response. If they are rejected, the reaction points to the fact that the progressive/reactionary discontinuity Hewitt refers to is not accepted. However the fact that this image was accepted as the cover of a record points both to the possibility that some may be able to differentiate between political and artistic reaction and to the fact that these taboo images remain attractive.

In this way Laibach expose the persistence of fascistic tendencies whilst simultaneously

commenting on and manipulating them (a similar mechanism informed the NSK design that sparked the 1987 “Poster Affair”, see section 2.15 and chronology). The harsh and totalitarian images NSK uses are frequently used to label the groups, (most often as fascists or totalitarians) but also as anarchists and “spiritual terrorists” (NSK 1991, 51). However, in juxtaposition with often diametrically opposed images such as Slovene or Futurist and Socialist Realist ones the images combine in a new form, which acts as the substance of but does not determine the nature of the “body” of NSK. Gržinić was referring to the debate Hewitt addresses when she stressed in her 1992 NSK Embassy Moscow lecture (“Art and Culture in The 80’s The Slovenian Situation”) that:

“Although artistic totality should not be mistaken for totalitarianism, these two phenomena were often and readily confounded, especially in the domain of art and culture (but never in politics). Yet, as NSK taught us and before them also the alternative scene (though in a different way), the “totalitarianism” of art cannot be compared to the totalitarianism of the state and its ideological apparatuses.”²⁶

2.8 IRWIN:

Irwin is a collective of five painters, whose works are attributed only to the collective. They have responsibility for the artistic aspect of NSK operations. The early works of the “Was Ist Kunst? (What is Art?) series are inscribed “Irwin: Laibach” and are based on motifs first used by Laibach²⁷. As time has gone on Irwin have sometimes been the first to use motifs such as “Kapital” only later used by Laibach, providing an example of reverse synergy whereby the various NSK groups rework and recapitulate the works of the other groups in their own media. Irwin’s method of recycling Laibach motifs can be seen in the example below. The image combines an image by the nineteenth century painter Delacroix of Marianne, the symbol of the French Revolution. Below the figure is a scene from a Nazi rally and in the foreground the shadow of Malevich’s Black Square, a signifier of Laibach’s presence.

²⁶ Čufer (Ed) 1994, 37.

²⁷ See also “Second Bombing” (section 3.10), also reproduced in Erjavec & Gržinić 1991,102). This is based on the Laibach graphic “Die Erste Bombardierung” (First Bombing), original reproduced p. 96, *ibid.*) The phrase “Was Ist Kunst?” was previously used by Laibach.



Laibach: Die Freiheit Führt Das Volk (Freedom Guides The People) 1985.



Irwin: Freedom Leads The People, 1987.

Irwin's works are presented in monumental sculpted frames, based partly on the work of the Slovene sculptor Stojan Batič who has produced several monuments based on World War Two atrocities or socialist themes. The framing and rich oil-based colours of the works lend them an iconic quality and the paintings in the "Was Ist Kunst" series are explicitly presented as icons. Another example of Irwin's use of images associated with Laibach is visible in 1985's "Red Districts" series of paintings. These are derived from original 1950s woodcuts of the industry around Trbovlje by Janez, father of Laibach's Dejan Knez, which were first reused in the artwork for Laibach's "Rekapitulacija" album (1985). Irwin reversed the originals, smeared them with pig's blood and placed them in monumental frames, which were then signed by Knez. Irwin built on the techniques fore-grounded in early Laibach Kunst paintings such as the recycling of motifs and the ideological juxtaposition of contradictory images as in the example above. The interventions on Laibach images amplify and supplement the effects both of the images. During the eighties Irwin's discourse also mirrored that of Laibach, although in a slightly less severe form: "In painting we associate a demagogic, popular presentation of themes which constitute LAIBACH as a politically entertaining institution, and existential and ritual relations of an individual in relation to the myth, which are developed by the theaters [sic]." [NSK theatrical groups, see NSK 1991, 120]. Irwin's recycling of Laibach images opens them to a far wider critical and artistic audience, beyond the alternative music scene. The close cooperation between the groups in the eighties was mutually reinforcing. Music audiences who would not normally be exposed to art were led on to Irwin's images and artistic audiences encountering Irwin might subsequently discover Laibach.

Irwin theorized their basic approach as "emphatic eclecticism". The "emphatic" echoes the stridency of Laibach's discourse and distances Irwin from the more playful and frivolous associations of artistic eclecticism. Irwin claim that the concept represents a Slovene development of an "unconscious, unformulated" process within the artistic teleology developed by the American Cubist Joseph Schillinger in the 1920s.²⁸

"EMPHATIC ECLECTICISM draws on the historical experience, in particular the Slovene fine arts, insisting on permanent permutation of the methods of viewing, reinterpreting and re-creating the past and the contemporary pictorial methods."²⁹

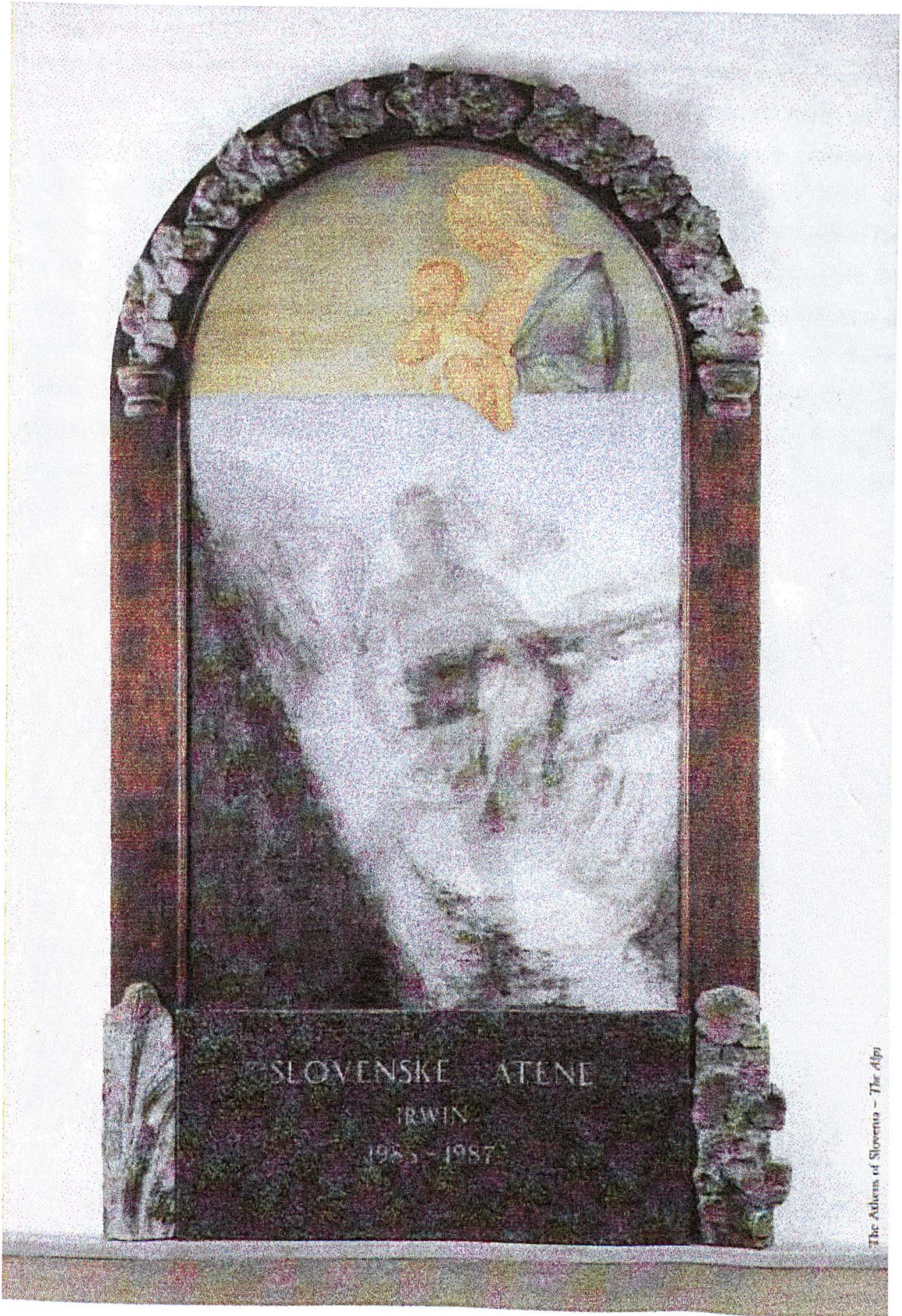
²⁸ See "Retro Principle The Principle of Manipulation With The Memory of The Visible Emphasized Eclecticism-The Platform For National Authenticity", NSK 1991, 111.

²⁹ "The Program of Irwin Group", NSK 1991, 114.

As with Laibach not merely the works but the accompanying discourse are based on the retroactive assimilation of a diverse range of contentious or obscure ideological and theoretical references. The diverse sources of Irwin's actual images include (amongst others) the works of Beuys, Kiefer, Malevich, diverse Constructivist, Stalinist, Nazi, impressionist, romantic, renaissance and mediaeval images, Catholic popular iconography, Pop Art and industrial design and packaging, many of which are also used by Laibach and New Collectivism. The dense totality of these images create what Barret and Watten (1991) refer to as Irwin's "statehood":

"Icons originally designed to make statehood seem eternal and omnipotent are defined in Irwin's work as a series of moments rather than as a total and ongoing condition. The work of IRWIN borrows, it does not appropriate. Images of the past are reused, not to deconstruct them but to reinvest them with their own meaning, which is strengthened when confronted with motifs of contrasting ideologies or imagery from the heartland of the Slovenian countryside."

As well as the "Red Districts" series Irwin have created various monumental works and installations. In 1987 Irwin created a series of five "monumental" paintings entitled "The Athens of Slovenia" each of which measures 340 cm by 160cm. Each painting is an idealistic-archaic representation of the Slovene environment – "Sea", "The Fields", "Karst", "The Forest" and "The Alps".



The Athens of Slovenia - The Alps

Besides the frames and the use of religious motifs in the top section of each image the other common factor is the spectral figure of a sower figure in each painting. The sower motif occurs frequently throughout European and Slovene art and is one of the most common citations by Laibach and Irwin. Irwin's monumental works culminated in the object "The Heart of Transcentrala", an enclosed wooden viewing platform holding dozens of Irwin works. Each of the four walls are mirrored and the works on the opposite walls are cross-reflected on each. Since the reflections also spill upwards onto the ceilings there is very little neutral visual space within what is effectively a gallery within a gallery. The power of the images is re-doubled by the dense visual field created by the lighting and spatial arrangement. Whilst the light coloured wood creates some visual relief and the exit is always visible, the environment is highly regulated. The works create a "fantasy space" akin to that created within a hall by a Laibach concert in which the NSK "thing" can range at will, interacting with its spectators.



Irwin: "The Heart of Transcentrala", Glasgow 1997 (Photograph by the author).

Irwin's juxtapositional retro-quotations and the monumental quality of the works are artistic analogues of the ideological and musical work of Laibach. The motives for Irwin's use of spectacle and forceful images have been most succinctly summarised by the Slovene art historian Tomaž Brejc who taught several members of NSK:

"They have equated the cross with a hunting trophy, high art with kitsch, the avant-garde with Biedermeier.... The IRWIN however, are totally committed to the functional reality of the total. Spectacle is their style for they are aware that there is no need to believe in it because it convinces the viewer by force." (Brejc 1992, 142-3).

2.9 The Intellectual and Artistic Context of NSK.

Laibach and NSK grew out of a unique combination of artistic and theoretical influences and the manner in which these interacted with the Slovene and Yugoslav environments. Bordering Italy and Austria Slovenia was the Yugoslav republic most exposed to Western influence. Slovenes as well as other Yugoslavs worked as “gastarbeiter” in West Germany and elsewhere and borders were more open than at any other point in the socialist states. Western tourism was encouraged and many transited the country en route to Greece and other destinations. Slovenes lived in the most prosperous republic, bordering Austria and Italy and as a result were able to spend more on Western consumer imports than other Yugoslavs. Despite this the main cultural centres of Yugoslavia prior to the nineteen-eighties were Belgrade and Zagreb, which since the liberalisation of the nineteen-sixties had begun to achieve recognition in the West. In this period socialist theories of art were discarded and displaced by contemporary trends, in particular conceptualism. By the mid nineteen-seventies a reassessment of the artists involved in the Slovene historical avant-garde” had commenced. The key Slovene futurists, constructivists and other experimental artists of the nineteen-twenties would return to visibility in the nineteen-eighties in a symbiotic interaction between the use of their motifs by NSK and their reassessment by art historians and aestheticians (see Erjavec *et. al*, 1986).

The Slovene artists most associated with the conceptual style are the group OHO (1966-71) an idealistic collective working in a variety of media from film and photography to design to installation and land art. OHO were arguably the most distinctive Slovene artists of their period and achieved international as well as domestic success and in 1985 Irwin acknowledged OHO’s influence in a series of four paintings entitled “Irwin-OHO Birds of A Feather” (see NSK 1991, 139). In 1978 a retrospective of OHO works was the first exhibition at a new gallery in Ljubljana known as ŠKUC (the Slovene acronym for “Student Cultural Centre”). Performing at the opening of ŠKUC was a group from the next generation of Slovenes. The band “Pankrti” (Bastards) was Slovenia’s first Punk group and its performance symbolised the role ŠKUC’s would play in championing Punk and other alternative forms during the nineteen-eighties. From 1980-82 ŠKUC was run by Dušan Mandič, a member of Irwin and its forerunners and from 1982-7 by Marina Gržinić. ŠKUC hosted Laibach’s earliest projects and its publishing arm issued cassettes by the new Punk groups and catalogues of the work of local and international artists. ŠKUC was controversial

from outset, attracting particular condemnation (and publicity) when it hosted Laibach exhibitions and published albums by Laibach and other “unofficial” groups such as Borghesia. It even published the document “LAIBACH-The Instrumentality of The State Machine”, a collection of early statements which had an overtly totalitarian tone. Thus a para-state institution was publishing and subsidising material and activities which the security and ideological arms of the parent state felt deeply threatened by.

Sometimes operating at the edge of legality ŠKUC was barely tolerated and had a fragile administrative and economic status. During the period 1981-84 when sporadic efforts were still being made to harass and suppress Punk and other alternative phenomena ŠKUC was forced to close several times. Despite these difficulties ŠKUC was able to nurture and promote new initiatives across a range of media and provided a vital institutional support for Laibach and many other musicians and artists. Gržinič (1989, 67) characterises the strategy of ŠKUC and the artists associated with it as one of the “perversion” of the ways in which art was normally received. Just as in the British Punk sub-culture, Xerox played a key role both in the distribution of information and flyers but also in artistic practice and the repetition symbolised by photocopying. ŠKUC actively co-operated with its counterpart in Belgrade, SKC, which also hosted exhibitions and concerts by Laibach. Two Serb artists in particular had an influence on the emerging techniques in Slovenia. “Was Ist Kunst?” was a slogan first used by the Serb artist Raša Todosijević in the seventies for a series of performance actions that took place in Yugoslavia and beyond. Erjavec and Gržinič (1991, 126-27) place especial emphasis on a 1981 exhibition by Belgrade artist Goran Dorđević entitled “Harbingers of Apocalypse” after a painting produced in 1969, which he later disowned. In 1981 he commissioned fifty Yugoslav and foreign artists to produce exact replicas of the original work as a commentary on the value of the copy over the original. The exhibition was highly influential and an emphasis on and manipulation of visual repetition is one of the key distinguishing features of the work of Laibach and NSK and other Slovene and Yugoslav artists of the period.

The other characteristic feature of ŠKUC activities was an emphasis on multimedia projects that blurred the distinctions between artistic techniques and between art and popular culture, with the latter being particularly evident in the exploration of graffiti and video techniques by several artists. These multimedia activities, comprising projects that typically worked within at least three separate

media or techniques and evaded easy categorisation, also influenced the music scene. Laibach has always collaborated with artists in other fields and is itself a multi-media unit working through text, music and art. Conceived as an analytical unit exploring the role of ideology and art, it chose music because of its status as the most ubiquitous contemporary form but from the outset it was active beyond the sphere of music. Its first planned public manifestation was not simply a concert but an exhibition.³⁰ The multimedia aspects of Laibach's work are a reflection of the structure of the alternative cultural scene in Ljubljana and the shared interests amongst many of its leading practitioners. Even if desired the type of strict segregation still frequent in larger creative communities is a structural impossibility within the microcosm of Ljubljana (population 300 000) where networking and cross-fertilization are inevitable. Many Slovene alternative bands such as Borghesia, Videosex and 2227 have had a creative interest in other forms principally theatre, performance art, video and graphics. Even before the outright ban on Laibach performing under its name in Ljubljana (imposed in 1983 and lifted in 1987), it was easier for the group to mount exhibitions of posters and graphics than to stage public performances, which inevitably attracted more official attention due to their greater potential impact and higher profile. Laibach's work in painting, video and text was an integral part of the much wider alternative praxes then emerging but in that when one medium was shut down (music) Laibach was able to continue to maintain a presence in Ljubljana through its work in other media and the alternative infrastructure centred on ŠKUC. However despite the similarities between Laibach and other artists, it only formally allied itself with Dušan Mandič and the other members of what would become Irwin, and otherwise sought to maintain a certain distance. To the extent that it shared methodologies and networks with the wider alternative NSK would at times function as a part of the alternative sector but was always concerned to maintain clear points of differentiation. In this respect the NSK term "retro-garde" was particularly important in suggesting that NSK represented its own school and that while it shared much with other artists it was categorisable primarily as a category in itself.

Laibach members attended art history lectures at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana where they mixed with fellow students, artists and future members of other NSK groups. Theorists, dramatists, artists and other elements of the emerging parallel intelligentsia, whose views were incompatible

³⁰ Laibach's banned first exhibition in Trbovlje in September 1980 which was supported by ŠKUC (see chronology).

with the official career structures gathered around the key alternative networking points such as Radio Študent (established in 1968 and broadcasting to the Ljubljana area) and ŠKUC. The members of all three NSK groups were previously known to each other, the strongest link being that between Roman Uranjek of Irwin and Dejan Knez a founder member of Laibach, both of whom came from Trbovlje and had already collaborated on posters and other graphics. Though the majority of members were actually from outside Ljubljana, all were working or studying there. Apart from social bonds all three groups explored similar areas such as the functioning of ideology, the impossibility of originality and a distinct retro-orientation (a creative praxis based upon the recycling of previous styles and motifs), which made their co-operation seem natural. An institutional, collective form was chosen as an expression of their de-individualized public stance and also as a key motif in what was becoming the dominant strand of Laibach's work, the "demasking and recapitulation" of totalitarian regimes and mechanisms. There were also pragmatic advantages and NSK was one of several parallel structures formed by alternative Slovene groups to provide institutional security, solidarity and resources in the face of their (pre) marginalization by official media and institutions. Gržinić (then director of ŠKUC) and others constantly emphasise this trend of alternative institutionalisation; the fabrication of sympathetic bodies that would serve as safe spaces for experimentation and a more secure base for the penetration of the mainstream than informal dissident type groupings. At her lecture "Art and Culture in the 80's" given at the NSK Embassy Moscow in 1992 she noted that:

"... in the 80's we, in Ljubljana tried to overcome the counter-cultural discourse, the mentality and the attitude towards institutions in general. We were striving for the formation of our own institutions and communication networks. We didn't want to live as small individuals gathering in holes. Instead, we wanted to establish conditions for the survival of our own social and mental structure." (Gržinić 1994a, 43).

Those involved in this new scene were committed to challenging social and political boundaries but were not interested in assuming the traditional role of marginalized dissidents and insisted on the right to mount high-profile projects and to organise themselves as necessary. The self-institutionalising dynamic (which would find its most grandiose expression in the establishment of NSK) symbolised the refusal of the alternative sector to accept the legitimacy of any external (political or conceptual) limitations on its ambitions. The artists associated with ŠKUC acted as if there were no constraints or in the case of Laibach and NSK incorporated external (political) restrictions into the works in an attempt to transcend them. Therefore besides the creation of new networks and autonomous institutions there was also a



concern to create alternative imaginary spaces in which existing social and artistic conditions might be viewed differently.

2.9 a) The Role of ZSMS.

Discussion of NSK relations both to the democratisation process and its constituent institutions has to be informed by a constant awareness of paradox. The extent to which paradox and ambiguity are actually constitutive of the space NSK inhabit is crucial. The issuing of fierce, programmatic (and paradox-laden) statements was integral to the overall NSK “Gesamtkunstwerk” as well as the recapitulation of various authority mechanisms. Their condemnation as Fascists on the one hand and their cooption by liberal Marxist and civil society theorists on the other hand points to the difficulty in separating cause from effect and the extent to which NSK consciously shaped (and were shaped by) events. As Žižek (1987) argued in an article written in the immediate aftermath of the so-called Poster Affair (see section 2.15 and chronology), alternative theorists in particular overlooked a certain unassimilable surplus in NSK which meant it could not definitively be counted a part of the democratising tendencies of the time. Similarly those arguing for the suppression of the controversial poster (and by implication the alternative generally) were using NSK as a point of suture to justify their characterisation of new tendencies in Slovenia as fascist (and thus to justify the enactment of repressive measures). Such an analysis inevitably locates NSK in an ambiguous space of its own. Obviously in practice NSK benefited from, and in functioning as a litmus test of tolerance contributed to, the flourishing of alternative thought and institutions but remained in their own camp, co-operating to mutual advantage but also remaining apart.

Whatever the ambiguities of this relationship, both sides were aware that the fate of this apparently neo-totalitarian cultural movement was implicitly linked to the suppression or otherwise of the various Slovene NSMs (“New Social Movements”; gay, ecologist, pacifist, feminist) whose policies were apparently diametrically opposed to much of the NSK ethos. The interests of the two ran parallel and co-operation was mutually beneficial in the shared aims of re-energising the cultural sphere and public debate. The type of retroactive determinism that characterises NSK as primarily a protagonist in the democratisation process overlooks the complexities both of NSK and of the situation and tends to fall into the set lines of literalist thinking that NSK discourse both incites and recapitulates. NSK applied its “demasking and recapitulation” methodology to its surroundings

consistently and extensively across the maximum number of media and the development and refinement of this was a goal in itself.

Sometimes, as with the Poster Affair the dynamic of their operations would produce concrete socio-political effects but the fact that New Collectivism members themselves were taken aback by the reaction to the poster does not suggest an intention to do more than examine certain issues via their methodology. The complexity of NSK's relation to "the alternative" will only be highlighted here, rather than ironed out, locating NSK as a distinct institution with a complex, non-programmatic set of free interactions with various institutions and processes.

The support NSK received from "Mladina", Radio Študent, liberal theorists and critics and ZSMS provided valuable resources, public exposure and a degree of protection against, or increased status in the eyes of, the authorities. Some of the continued resentment of NSK may be due to a feeling that they received significant assistance and publicity without ever quantifiably contributing much in return or displaying any sense of gratitude or humility. However, this would have been a fundamental breach of their ambiguity and in terms of publicising events in Slovenia and providing semi-sympathetic media with a constant flow of material of genuinely international significance, NSK might argue that they added critical weight to a "scene" which might otherwise have seemed far more local and inconsequential. NSK would argue that their contribution has been made to the cultural life of the "nation" (as a conceptual entity), in spiritual terms which are not fully tangible, yet it is a coherent aspect of their stance that they feel no need to defend themselves via contrition or any explanation that strays far from their standard discursive framework.

This schizophrenic attitude among state institutions is most evident in the activities of ZSMS. Facing grass roots pressure from below and seeking new credibility and legitimacy as a progressive forum in genuine sympathy with youth rather than the state it first enabled discussion and facilitated alternative networks under its protection and later actively promoted and identified itself with the NSMs and alternative culture including NSK and Punk (see chapter four). This sector of the self-management state neutralised and exposed as impotent, state, as opposed to civil, attempts at repression, providing an institutional shelter that could only have been removed under conditions of near martial law. This is not to say that alternative activities were not threatened and restricted but this was on a far smaller scale than elsewhere in Yugoslavia and they had a strong enough base to

be able draw international attention to alternative culture, further insuring against repression.

This accommodation was made easier by the fact that, as Mastnak (1994, 97) describes, most of the alternative institutions consciously shied away from and were suspicious of “vanguardism”. NSK and the historical processes it was built on had already occupied such terrain and made it their own, intentionally or otherwise drawing off some of the venom which might otherwise have been directed against the NSMs which (apart from Punk) did not actively seek to attract hostility for its own sake and which even without the foil of NSK had to operate in a hostile climate. The 1986 ZSMS congress, true to the spirit of self-management more or less enthusiastically aligned itself with “the alternative” in both its political and cultural forms, going as far as to demand the legalisation of Laibach’s name and activities, sparking a furious round of protests from veteran’s groups and others (see chapter four). The decision taken to permit NSMs to register under its umbrella enabled even previously silent potential supporters of alternative values to “come out” without overdue risk, although the majority of Slovenes only “came out” in defence of democratisation under duress, at the time of the “JBTZ” military secrets trial in 1988 (see chronology). On May 25th 1986, Youth Day, ZSMS and Mladina presented the annual “Golden Bird” cultural prize to NSK. As Laibach in particular were still highly contentious the award cannot be seen as a painless attempt to court popularity or as an attempt to boost the credibility of ZSMS. Rather, it demonstrated the ascendancy of those in sympathy with the extreme alternative that the scale of NSK activities, particularly those with a Slovenist tone addressed to the domestic audience, could no longer be ignored:

“If the relation of top LSY [ZSMS] officials to the punk subculture was more or less limited to declarations of intent, it was for the simple reason that ex-punks were of no “use value” to them. Laibach, however, became a love at first sight for the official youths. Laibach and *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK)... were more an artistic avant-garde than a rock movement. Seeking inspiration in historical avant-gardes (above all socialist realism and Nazi art), they used mass culture as a medium to reach a wider audience with their counter-cultural messages. They preached that the West is decadent and the “new man” is needed to save it; that collectivism will triumph over individualism as a result of a cultural revolution spearheaded by NSK shock troops. All this rang a familiar bell for official youths, reminding them of their own not so distant counter-cultural past. On top of that, NSK ideology could always be interpreted as a critique of, rather than an apology for, totalitarianism. Better still, as artists, Laibach and their comrades could represent, as punk rockers could not, a legitimate cultural platform for LSY. Soon the youth organisation began to finance numerous projects of the avant-garde as parts of LSY alternative cultural policy, setting it apart from the party’s political activities.” (Tomc 1994, 126-7).

The organic, natural sympathy between the democratising ambitions of the youth leadership and the

culturo-political alternative (and the hidden nostalgia felt within ZSMS for a vanguardist NSK-type stance) presented the image of a natural and pragmatic partnership in stark contrast to the contemporary situation in the USSR. These informal (unofficial) groups, known as “neformaly”, were also brought under the umbrella of the Komsomol but in a far more mechanical fashion borne not out of shared aims but the Komsomol’s desire to divide and rule, maintaining its traditional vanguard position and attendant privileges. However, as Pilkington (1994, 125) describes, the strategy was differentiated so that groups such as heavy metal fans whom the Komsomol did not find useful and/or acceptable remained beyond the pale and were even further excluded by differentiation tactics:

“For *Komsomol* workers on the ground, this academic work [sociological research on unofficial youth groups] was transformed into what was known as a “differentiated approach” to the *neformaly*. This meant that informal groups were not seen to be inherently opposed to the *Komsomol* or other social organisations, but simply outside officially existing social institutions. Consequently, many co-operated with the *Komsomol* and where this was the case the official youth organization was encouraged to make use of the fact that half the members of informal groups remained *Komsomol* members in order to establish for itself a co-ordinating role. Moreover, informal group leaders who were dedicated to perestroika might even be attracted into full-time *Komsomol* work where they could exercise their authority in the interests of the social good. Where groups were of an anti-social nature, *Komsomol* leaders were instructed to struggle against their leaders.”

Thus whereas in Slovenia the youth organisation openly embraced and aggressively defended “the alternative” as such, the Soviet youth leadership was motivated by a desire either to relegate or assimilate alternative groups. By the mid-eighties even alternative manifestations as extreme as Laibach were seen as inherently progressive by the Slovene youth leadership, due to their democratising effects in enforcing debate. The Slovene alternative was supported as a positive category and not on the basis of internal differentiation between good or bad although inevitably some alternative manifestations were more helpful to ZSMS than others. Under “perestroika”, a less absolutist but more repressive attitude defined the situation. The interests of Soviet youth as defined by the Komsomol and of the wider society were the primary pragmatic motivators of the new policies, rather than the Slovene adherence to non-negotiable principles of civic society and radical tolerance. The Soviet example illustrates how crucial the “enlightened” attitude of the Slovene youth leadership was and the extent to which the alternative stood or fell by this. With democratisation ZSMS attempted to preserve an alternative political position but in practice this proved impossible and the Komsomol proved equally unsuccessful in securing a future for itself. However it can be argued that the supersession of ZSMS was partly a sign of its success. It foreswore “vanguardism” to such an extent as to effectively dissolve itself, folding into the social

field but through its alternative proxies, ZSMS helped establish and defend a space for alternative values within culture.

2.10 NSK In The Slovene National Context.

“NSK is an umbrella organization uniting stage designers, musicians, painters, designers, architects and philosophers. What was the original unifying idea of all these activities and who was its initiator?”

Most of the authors had met before this collective venture and some were friends. The rock group LAIBACH was the first collective initiative, followed in 1983 by the SCIPION NASICE SISTERS THEATER. IRWIN was also founded in 1983 and joined the two existing groups on the principle of the Liberation Front. This was an expression which was used at the beginning of the Second World War to designate an organization which united all the ideological tendencies which opposed the fascist invasion. Thus the Communists, Socialists, Christian Socialists and the leftist intellectuals banded together with no specific collective features, but with the same collective energy: to liberate the country.

The groups LAIBACH, the SCIPION NASICE SISTERS THEATER (now called COSMOKINETIC THEATER RED PILOT) and IRWIN united in the same fashion in 1984, to work and reflect on the characteristics and possible paths of developing Slovene culture. By using the German language in the name NSK we do away with the debts that both the languages carry.” (NSK 1991, 122)³¹

By making a parallel with the wartime liberation front (known by its initials as the O.F.) Irwin here achieve two ends. Firstly an explicit parallel is drawn between NSK and the O.F. so as to present NSK as an alliance with ambitions on a similar (though symbolic) scale to those of the O.F. By emphasising the different ideological attitudes of the constituent groups of the O.F. (which from late 1943 on was increasingly communist dominated) and inviting comparison with NSK Irwin emphasise that NSK is not dominated by any one of its groups and that they are voluntarily collaborating in a common cause; the definition, exploration and development of a Slovene cultural perspective and the transcendence of the “smallness” of the Slovene space (see NSK 1991, 4) by reaching a wider audience. One of the crucial advantages of the NSK structure is the way it lends itself to re(tro)invention even from the “time” of its creation. The comparison with the O.F. is an example of the approach Irwin formulate as “emphatic eclecticism”, the recombination and juxtaposition of disconnected or mutually exclusive signifiers in a new form. One of the chief materials of this approach is Slovene history and as the O.F. was then the largest single official historiographical myth in the Slovene context it was an obvious source of material (see discussion of Laibach’s use of Partisan imagery in section 4.8). The hagiographies of the Partisan period remained unquestioned up until the late nineteen eighties and to challenge them was a taboo as

³¹ 1988 interview by Anne Tronche for the French review “Opus International”.

strong as that prohibiting the use of the German name for Ljubljana. Therefore the comparison should be seen as aesthetic as much as literal, a brief symbolic engagement with a defining moment when Slovenes took up armed resistance in the face of foreign occupation. It should also be noted that unlike the O.F., NSK is in fact a close knit grouping involving a small number of people with no pretensions as an actual movement. The central similarity is that both organisations were alliances concerned in different ways to protect and assert Slovene identity in the face of external pressure.

Although not nearly as provocative as the allusions to the O.F., the name “New *Slovene* Art was also subtly transgressive. Under socialism the country was known as The Republic *of* Slovenia rather than “The Slovene Republic” and other Slovene institutions used the suffix “of Slovenia” (Erjavec & Gržinić 1991, 156 quote the example of the shift in nomenclature of the pre-war “Slovene Alpine Society” to the post-war “Alpine Association of Slovenia”). During the eighties such semantic issues became highly charged symbols of republican sovereignty, partly because of a tendency amongst the intelligentsia of all the republics to stress such points of difference. Although almost never translated into Slovene NSK’s title, *New Slovene Art*, represented a semantic shift of real significance echoing Irwin’s intention “... to reassert Slovene culture in a monumental and spectacular way.” (NSK 1991, 114).

Despite a certain apparent nationalism in the previously quoted Irwin statement on the foundation of NSK and its implicit comparison with the O.F.’s aim of liberating the country, this should not be read as a nationalist attempt at cultural self promotion as currently practiced by some Serbian artists. Rather, NSK simply explore the possibilities and determining influences, such as the Germanic one, of the Slovene cultural space and thus attempt to find an authentic and productive means of expression (“emphatic eclecticism”) that does not conceal but attempts to transcend the various artistic and political regimes that have shaped Slovene culture.³² This approach does not represent an uncritical import or imposition of western aesthetic norms yet neither is it a xenophobic valorisation of nationalist mythologies. It is important to bear in mind the particularities of the Slovene context when confronted by statements such as this, in which Irwin describes NSK’s

³² Irwin describe the displacement of socialist realism by Western artistic styles in post-war Yugoslavia as a process of one artistic dictatorship (socialist realism) being replaced by another (the Western influence), see NSK 1991, 122). However the statement is more ambiguous than it appears as without the influx of Western styles, NSK’s synthesis would not have been possible. Therefore it is a critique of the largely uncritical reception of Western art in Yugoslavia rather than a more ideological critique of its presence.

role as:

“... an organized political and cultural campaign for the renewal of Slovene national art on the European level, a rigorously planned establishment of an authentic cultural space at the crossroads of two worlds, a negation of spiritual smallness and a deliberate attack on the established cultural monopoly of the West” (NSK 1991, 6)

If in the present context a Croatian or Serb artist speaks of the national renewal of art or attacking the cultural monopoly of the West it is a fairly certain indicator of a nationalist viewpoint. However, for Slovenes, frequent victims of their neighbours' nationalism, to speak in such terms represents a historical break as much as an apparent political regression. Since it was only under Tito that Slovenes acquired more or less complete rights to cultural self expression and freedom from external persecution, seeking to establish their culture on the European level is simply an attempt to overcome its historical marginalization and suppression, preserving (elements of) it through wider exposure.

“... The idea of reviving Slovene national culture is essentially an artistic initiative designed to reinstill art with its historical identity and the artist with his cultural mission.” (NSK 1991, 121)

NSK were aware that a “purely” Slovene ethnic art would have little chance of acquiring anything other than condescending attention as another in a series of more or less marginalized quaint minority cultures and were very conscious of the theoretical and aesthetic limitations of a self-consciously nationalist “ethnic” art which could never integrate some of the elements used by NSK such as pop art or constructivism. NSK concluded that the only way to escape the constrictive aspects of belonging to an obscure culture and its “spiritual smallness” was to deliberately appropriate the strident and violent means by which the same influences that constitute contemporary Slovene culture were imposed upon the Slovene space. The use of German in the name “NSK”, confronted and directly acknowledged the decisive yet highly ambivalent influence of Germanic culture upon the Slovene space, consciously using the sinister aura that still subconsciously attaches itself to the language to achieve a certain fascination while simultaneously adapting itself to Europe's single largest market, which many Slovenes feel closest to politically and culturally. Here comparisons might be made with the way in which by using the language of their colonial overlords, formerly colonised peoples, above all the Irish, have had an influence upon English literature out of all proportion to their numbers. Such people use the language of the colonial “master” to force consciousness of the colonised “servant's” suppressed identity. NSK

expose the working of a similar Hegelian master-slave dialectic (see Mure 1965, 76) and act with the same aggression employed by dominant colonising cultures (see also sections 3.9b, 3.10).³³

NSK successfully transcend the limited horizons of the Slovene context by forcing awareness of a new assertive identity onto the wider market, aided by more generic universal European signifiers such as totalitarian art. However this was as much pragmatic as idealistic since if they were to avoid marginal roles as either producers of shallow national motifs with little external appeal or as Western copyists they had little choice but to proceed as they did. As item six of Laibach's "Ten Items of The Covenant" puts it:

"The principle of work is totally constructed and the compositional process is a dictated "ready-made" (NSK 1991, 18)

Several other early NSK texts state that the choice of motifs was somehow dictated³⁴, i.e., that the combination of the situation described above and the application of NSK's aesthetic logic left little choice but to explore the themes that they did, including the national one. This is what Laibach were addressing in the above statement, as well as in the more limited Duchampian sense of having to utilize the defining found objects or "ready-mades" of their national, political and cultural environment. Therefore the necessary engagement with their national context and its assertion should be seen as the logical consequences of their particular position and their means of dealing with such, rather than an example of a nationalist "will to power" (as opposed to a "recapitulation" of such). Such an assertion (which from a Slovene point of view is far less violent than the active or passive aggressions of local assimilation or Western indifference that have so shaped their historical experience) does not seek to marginalize or dominate other cultures in the process and should be viewed in its own right. Like Laibach, it is important that a degree of ambiguity and paradox remains attached to the NSK structure and that the NSK project can be read *as if* it is an unambiguously nationalistic project. In fact such a reading would also have to integrate the internationalist and cosmopolitan elements of NSK work, as well as their veiled use of humour and absurdity, all of which run counter to the typical structures of nationalist ideologies).

³³ NSK's use of German can also be read in the light of the processes of linguistic appropriation outlined in Deleuze and Guattari's "Kafka Towards A Minor Literature" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986).

³⁴ See for instance "The Program of Irwin Group", (NSK. 1991, 114)

2.11 NSK: Structure and Substance.

“NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) is an organized cultural and political movement and school established in 1984, when the three groups (Laibach, Irwin and Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre) united to form a single organization. NSK was founded as an organization active in the area between ideology and art. In a few years, other groups and sections were formed (New Collectivism, Cosmokinetic Theatre Red Pilot³⁵, Builders, etc.). NSK unites the total experience of Slovene art and politics. Our cultural and political groundwork is the Slovene nation and its history, a nation at the meeting point of Central European, West European and East European Civilizations. NSK is thus an expression of all three powerful cultures as well as that of the fourth one - the Slovene culture. Each group within NSK is active within its own area, that is, its own medium, independently of other NSK groups and has its own program. Nevertheless, we are united by the same thoughts, laws and principles of action.” (NSK 1991, 53)

The three founding NSK units are Laibach (music) the ideological unit or “foundation”³⁶, Irwin (art) “... which has the function of NSK biographers recording NSK archetypes on canvas and in history”³⁷ and the theatre grouping known from 1983-7 as (The Theatre of) Scipion Nasice then as Red Pilot and since the early nineties as “Noordung”³⁸ which explores the religious and ritualistic aspects of NSK. After these three NSK is subdivided into several more subunits and departments.

“NSK began operating in 1984 as a large collective, a union of various groups brought together by their shared way of thinking and similar style of expression through different media.”³⁹

Although they all work within different media there is a reasonable level of coordination between the NSK groups⁴⁰. A common (sense of) purpose is apparent in the fact that the works of all the groups remain display a recognisably “NSK” quality, and that comparison of the groups works generally reveals the presence of some common NSK element, typically similarity of tone or visual details such as the type of typography used. Most obviously there is the constant inter-referentiality and reworking of each other’s motifs as in the case of Irwin’s recycling of Laibach motifs.

³⁵ Named after a Slovene futurist group of the 1920’s.

³⁶ NSK Information Bulletin 1 1994, 2.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Whilst there have been many personnel changes within these three groups, the first of which included Eda Čufer (NSK) dramatist and writer and Miran Mohar from Irwin, its “spiritus movens”, Dragan Živadinov has been present since the creation of Scipion Nasice and its pact with NSK.

³⁹ “NSK Information Bulletin”, number one, 1994, 2.

⁴⁰ There are several motifs used by all the main NSK groups, complementing the others’ works. For instance, the “Fiat” motif which recurred constantly in, amongst others, the Laibach track “Fiat” (1987) the Red Pilot performance of the same year and title and the Irwin piece from 1989. Other such themes include “Kapital” and “Noordung”.

All three groups, especially Laibach had some domestic reputation, but in the international sphere, the penetration of which they all had as an objective from a very early stage, they stood a far greater chance of recognition than as individuals or smaller groups, enjoying the crucial advantage that each NSK section would always publicise the activities of the others and of the whole in a mutually reinforcing cycle. They also achieved a certain critical mass as a unit large enough to carve out its own niche which, with the additional power of the images it was constructed from, was of sufficient size (in terms of its corporate persona) to avoid being overlooked and offer shelter and mutual support to its members. However, as well as the institutional and pragmatic motives the NSK structure itself had very real aesthetic advantages derived from the potential reactions of an audience to such a structure.

Despite the imagery of a tightly collectivist structure (seen in everything from members' public demeanour to the motifs and even the names of NSK groups) and the suspicions their work can produce, NSK is not a "movement" but a closely knit group of twelve permanent members plus various collaborators which despite the frequently bombastic character of its productions operates more like a cottage industry or mediaeval community of artisans (an image NSK were influenced by), than a totalitarian combine or multinational corporation. On paper it is a highly regulated and formal body, yet documents from the "Internal Book of Laws" for example, should be read as an intrinsic part of NSK's collective(ist) discourse, (the "Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members" is deliberately reminiscent of the charters of mediaeval guilds and fraternities) and it should not be inferred that these codes impinge on member's working and personal lives save in the broadest sense of attitudes and group loyalty and there is no formal supervision of personal behaviour. Since membership implies common perspectives and attitudes there is no real necessity to abandon personal religious, aesthetic and political preferences, as the membership regulations state, since if a member held any that were truly incompatible with the organization it would (have) be(en) pointless to apply for membership. The members voluntarily make a formal submission to the whole in awareness of the requirements of membership many of which such as fraternal respect, hard work and comradeship are not so arduous for a group of enthusiastic and like-minded individuals. At some formal occasions members greet each other in formal and ritualistic manner but this was as much for public consumption as anything else.

One of the first collective NSK productions was a special edition (number six) of the independent critical and cultural review "Problem" (Problems) in 1985. The entire issue was dedicated to and produced by NSK and was coordinated by their newly established design studio, New Collectivism. Its editorial board was composed of some of the most influential critical thinkers and poets (Aleš Debeljak) and also included Peter Mlakar who was already sympathetic to NSK and would later join it (see section 2.14). Other figures associated with "Problem" would later write articles for or about NSK (Žižek, Močnik, Mastnak) and Dušan Mandič of Irwin was also involved. Problem received a state cultural subsidy (including this issue) and was published by ZSMS, leading elements of which were sympathetic both to NSK and the new social and intellectual currents then emerging and had decided to adjust itself to these more liberal sensitivities in defiance of the residual cultural conservatism of sections of the party and especially the federal authorities (see Mastnak 1994). The issue reprinted several pages of selections from Laibach interviews as well as early lyrics, poetry and graphics not published elsewhere since. Some of the first works by Irwin are reproduced here as well as early texts, programmes and the announcement of the "retrograde action", "Resurrection" by Scipion Nasice (see section 2.13). The work was produced to catalogue standards in an edition of 1400 copies. It is important as the first coordinated joint presentation of NSK and for the amount of early material it contains and its nature as a totally designed and coordinated collective product. It also shows how Laibach, in presenting itself via the medium of a respected cultural review as part of a professional, theoretically adept cultural grouping (NSK) gained a relatively respectable and efficient medium (though not for the first time)⁴¹ for some of its most disturbing messages. This was the more significant because it took place at a time when self run Punk fanzines were still being censored and positive statements about Laibach were extremely unusual beyond the alternative media (RŠ and "Mladina").

At the NSK Embassy Moscow event, Miran Mohar of Irwin described NSK operations thus:

"The headquarters of NSK is in Ljubljana, which means that all its members live and work in Ljubljana. As for our relations with the outside world I can say the following: NSK has twelve regular members, but many of our projects are carried out in co-operation with various artists or experts. Each group is economically independent, i.e. it raises money for its projects by itself, from various sources (state,⁴² sponsors, etc.) NSK

⁴¹ The periodical "Nova Revija" had published Laibach's programmatic statement "10 Items of The Covenant" in 1983, as well as an essay on the group.

⁴² Excluding early Laibach exhibitions held at ŠKUC, funded partly by ZSMS (funded, though not very successfully controlled by, the government), Laibach is the only part of NSK never to have received any state subsidies for its activities, although it is apparently only Laibach's popular culture status as a commercial institution

has no joint financial fund. Ideologically and politically we define ourselves as artists.” (Čufer (Ed.), 1994, 28)

The emphasis on the economic independence of the groups is suggestive of parallels with the self-managing units of the late Yugoslav political system (see also p.113). However in the case of joint projects such as 1993's "NSK Staat Berlin" event (a three day manifestation of the NSK state to which all the groups contributed) the groups do pool funds according to the extent of each group's involvement. Mohar's explanation of NSK activity simply shows the extent of the individual groups' "sovereignty" within the wider structure and the fact that the groups are not interchangeable and do not cross subsidise each other's activities. Many NSK projects contain acknowledgements of external collaborators and "guest" critics and academics have contributed to NSK publications several times. However, while external collaborators are usually credited, the sources of the images incorporated into individual NSK works are generally not credited and where they are this is often done because of legal requirements, and not out of a desire to credit the original source. In the context of Laibach's "copies without originals"⁴³ the specific identity of the individuals responsible (as opposed to their genres such as "Nazi Kunst" or Slovene expressionism) are of lesser importance or even irrelevant. When asked about the source of an image they will acknowledge an accurate detection but rarely volunteer such information. While they disown originality as such ("LAIBACH excludes any concept of the original idea")⁴⁴ they see no need to

that prevents the Slovene state subsidizing its projects directly. Interestingly, when Irwin applied for cultural funding for the Moscow project the application was supposedly turned down on the basis that at that time Slovenia could not afford to support its own state embassy (see Čufer (Ed.) 1994, 54). However, domestic projects such as the New Collectivism installation "NSK Post Office" in Ljubljana from November 1994 - January 1995 do receive funding. NSK are now in the advantageous position that many of the new post independence elites at the ministries were associated with or involved in the NSMs and or were members of the ZSMS during the eighties and were already familiar with or had even worked with, NSK during the eighties. ZSMS (the core of the contemporary Liberal Democratic Party) commissioned and published Laibach and other posters and in 1986 awarded their annual "Golden Bird" Prize to NSK. Although its first two productions of 1984 and 1985 "Hinkemann" and "Marija Nablocka" were staged in private apartments, by the start of 1986 the Scipion Nasice Theatre was able to produce the monumental "Krst" (Baptism) production at the showpiece Cankarjev Dom venue in Ljubljana a state of the art congress and cultural centre, very heavily dependent on state funds. State subsidies probably do little more than cover losses on ambitious projects such as the complex Noordung performances (see section 2.13), yet can make the difference between a project going ahead or being shelved. Several NSK projects, from Irwin's 1987 London exhibition to the 1992 Moscow Embassy project and beyond have been sponsored by Slovenia's airline Adria Airways, which seems keen to associate itself with Slovenia's principal cultural export.

⁴³ See NSK 1991, 58, question 12.

⁴⁴ Point 7 of Laibach's "Ten Items of The Covenant" (NSK 1991, 18-19). Laibach have never made any pretence to "originality" and such evaluative concepts are irrelevant in the field of retrogardism, which is based on the quotation and recombination of others' works. Whilst their use of historical art imageries especially those of Malevich or previous Slovene painters such as Ivan Grohar is based on a certain respect or theoretical admiration of the originals, in the case of their use of popular culture (such as the music of the Swedish pop group "Europe") they frequently have

acknowledge the specific source(s) of every image, particularly since it serves as another means to keep the audience guessing about what they are confronted with and to prolong their fascination. Ramet's (1991, 230) characterisation of Laibach's work as "thought-energizing art" implicitly refers not merely to the aesthetic complexity but also to the effort required to track down the sources of Laibach images and to contextualize the references they contain.

With the development of its concepts and its public, and the need to distance itself from the newly formed Slovene national state together with the impetus provided by the major international following it has gained since its formation in 1984 NSK has moved on from categorizing itself as a Gesamtkunstwerk, whereby its formal organizational structure was in itself artefact and part of their overall practice, and since 1992 has designated itself a "State in Time", terming collective exhibitions and installations "embassies" and "consulates" and issuing passports to anyone applying for citizenship.⁴⁵ However this discussion is based around the NSK structure as first shown in the 1986 "organigram" (NSK organizational diagram) and with the nature and functioning of the groups shown there. The purpose of this structure was described by Laibach in 1987:

"The NSK *organigram* (organizational diagram showing principles of organization and activities), which has been made public several times on several occasions, clearly shows the hierarchical structure of the *Body*. In (sic) the head of NSK we cooperate on equal footing with Irwin and Cosmokinetic Theatre Red Pilot in a tripartite council led by the ICS (*Immanent Consistent Spirit*). The collective leadership is rotational, the members are interchangeable. The inner structure of the *Body* functions according to the principle of command and symbolizes the relationship between ideology and an individual. Inside the *Body* there is equality. It is absolute and indisputable, and is never questioned by the *Body*. The head is the head, the hand is the hand, and the differences between them are not painful." (NSK 1991, 52)

The organigram (see next page) reflects the trend towards self-institutionalisation referred to by Gržinić (1994a, see above) in her analysis of the dynamics of the alternative cultural scene in Ljubljana. Artists, curators, punks and others were all dissatisfied with the "official" cultural institutions in Slovenia but refused to adopt the clandestine status of extra-institutional dissidents. This meant that institutions (clubs, fanzines etc.) had to be self-created in the image of the alternative. Whilst institutions such as ŠKUC were at the far autonomous end of the spectrum of

no interest in or respect for the original source material as such, rather they are interested simply in what it can be turned into.

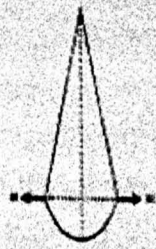
⁴⁵ At present there are more than two thousand citizens.

state organisations, the creation of NSK as a wholly autonomous cultural alliance represented the culmination of the alternative trends towards self-institutionalisation. Such institutional proliferation was easier under late self-management when relatively autonomous self-managing organisations such as publishing houses or galleries making astute use of public funds could function free of the stringent regulations governing the formation of unofficial groupings in some Eastern Bloc states. NSK's appropriation of all the trappings of undiluted state authority took this process of alternative institutionalisation to its (il)logical formal extreme and in the process recapitulated not just the institutional anarchy of the period but the fantastically complex web of state and para-state organizations within the de-centralised Yugoslav system. NSK's collective attempt to recapitulate and transcend the deliberately opaque structure of self-management finds its clearest expression in the so-called "organigram" and it has been observed (Dunford, Holland, Bousfield, Lee 1990) that:

"Diagrams of NSK's organizational structure bear a striking resemblance to those in Yugoslav school textbooks which seek to explain the country's bafflingly complex system of political representation." (p. 244)(see below)

PRINCIPLE OF ORGANIZATION AND ACTION

THE CONVIC PRINCIPLE



IMMANENT, CONSISTENT SPIRIT

ARCHITECT

DRIVE

ECONOMICAL
PRODUCTION

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL HUNST

SOUND AND
MUSIC
DEPARTMENT

THEATRE AND
DANCE
DEPARTMENT

THEATRE, OPERA
AND BALLETT
DEPARTMENT

LITERATURE AND
ESSAYISTIC
DEPARTMENT

ARCHITECTURE
AND CITY-PLANNING
DEPARTMENT

FILM AND
PHOTOGRAPHY
DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR
PURE SCIENTIFIC,
INTELLECTUAL AND
ARTISTIC

DESIGN
DEPARTMENT

ARCHIVES AND
BIBLIOTHECAL
DEPARTMENT

STRATEGY AND
STATISTICAL
DEPARTMENT

BUILDERS

NEW COLLECTIONS

LIBRARY

EMERGENCY
EXERCISES
VERSCHIEDENE
KRAEFTE
↓
GERMANIA

IDEOLOGICAL COUNCIL

PROPAGANDA SECTOR

ECONOMY ASSEMBLY

PROJECTING ASSEMBLY
DELAN PRINCIPLE

ASSEMBLY OF TECHNOLOGY

CONVIC
GENERAL COUNCIL

OPERATIVE BUREAU
ON THE PRINCIPLE OF CONDUCTANCE
THE ORGAN OF COORDINATION AND
ORGANIZATION

EXTERNAL COLLABORATIONS
WITHOUT THE AUTHORITY OF DECISION

EXECUTIVE ORGAN
TECHNICAL BASIS

EXTERNAL FACTOR

Previous Page: NSK Organigram, 1986.

2.12 The “Spirit” of NSK.

NSK functions as a loose hierarchy, with permanent members of the permanent groups (Laibach, Irwin, Noordung, The Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy) supervising other “personnel” (a term NSK themselves have never used). Early NSK statements were always at pains to stress the hierarchical aspect so as to heighten NSK’s authoritarian corporate persona, a key component of the paradigm of impossible authority with which Laibach and NSK confronted state and society.

The aims and methods of NSK can be more fully understood through an explanation of the units shown in the organigram and their functions. Some of the units shown on the plan are fully extant units, some cover occasional activities, some are little more than decorative effects and some are more or less self-explanatory abstractions, for instance “Principle of Organisation and Action”. This will become clear as the status of all these bodies and the relations between them are described.

The most important of these abstractions is the “Immanent Consistent Spirit” which is simply a codification, in quasi-Hegelian language, of the NSK “esprit d’corps”, or “geist”, which members describe as something pivotal, the central (moral) strength that holds together the whole, the collective spirit and *raison d’être* essential to the vitality of any state. Point eight of the document “Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK members” (NSK 1991, 4-5) describes the ICS as:

“the supreme substance... occupying the uppermost position in the hierarchy of NSK”

whilst an early interview describes Laibach as :

“... not the consequence of some kind of intellectual process. It is a fact of the same mechanism (*immanent, consistent spirit*), which forces it to create and to live as it lives; it is a state-action where intuition, as a magical act in the rhythm of people and things, decides the direction, without offering or looking for explanations.” (NSK 1991, 50).

“Immanent Consistent Spirit” is simply a categorization or fleshing out of the attitudes and sympathies that hold together the various NSK bodies and their members, the details of which are

made visible through the works themselves. The ICS is a descriptive quality present in the work of all the groups, which they shape in their own manner whilst the development and direction of the groups is carried out through the NSK general council, which is presented as the supreme manifestation of the "ICS".

Although the "General Council" (shown towards the bottom of the plan) is not a separate grouping it does have real functions of direction and coordination. The council is now composed of the permanent members of NSK and Laibach, Irwin, Noordung, New Collectivism and The Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy. It is the internal decision-making and coordination body at the head of NSK and has the final say on NSK activities. Meetings of the council have sometimes had a degree of ritual attached to them and been held in castles and other resonant locations although they are not in practice as formal as the image suggests. In these meetings the activities of the various groups are presented, discussed and coordinated. Argument is seen as productive and useful, however final consensus is essential and apparently some projects that have not stood up to collective scrutiny here have had to be revised and be resubmitted⁴⁶. A group might request the others to produce works employing a new motif or concept in order to develop this through the media of the other departments to compliment and reinforce the original work(s). Rather than the over bureaucratic or artificial organ the image (deliberately) suggests, the council is an expression of NSK's "corporate" yet informal work ethic. NSK principles are codified in the document the "Internal Book of Laws". The only parts of this "book" to have been publicly issued are the "Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members" along with the briefer statement "Five Principles of Friendship".⁴⁷ The programmatic style of its presentation and even the tone of its prescriptions are highly reminiscent of Soviet avant-garde manifestos, particularly with the program of "The First Working Organization of Artists", the last point of which states:

"Through our practical and cultural activity we are organizing our psychology in accordance with the basic principles of our organization" (Bowl (Ed.), 1988, 243)

There is an obvious correspondence here to the type of self-alignment with the organisation that the

⁴⁶ Conversation with Peter Mlakar, 12th October 1994, Ljubljana. This seems not to mean central approval of all projects of the individual groups, rather it arises if a member feels there is a serious problem with a work and/or that it will somehow affect NSK adversely.

⁴⁷ Reproduced, NSK 1991, 4-5.

NSK member is formally required to make. Point 11 of the “Internal Book Of Laws” states:

“Once a novice has given his pledge of allegiance, he is required to adopt the principle of conscious renunciation regarding his personal tastes, judgement, and beliefs (...); he is required to renounce his personal practices of the past and devote himself to work in the body whose integral element he has become by joining the Organization”.

Formally (its application is irrelevant) this represents a more severe and even more honest form of the Soviet concern to integrate the individual into the organisation. However, (despite appearances) the Book of Laws is not the rigorously enforced dogma of a Jesuitical sect but a series of strong theoretical principles which members voluntarily assume and incorporate and part of the performance of the NSK corporate image. The principles of the organisation do thoroughly penetrate the creative lives of the members but contain no elements of compulsion. The NSK “Laws” are intended at least as much for external consumption as for internal direction, maintaining the spectre of absolute totalitarianism that Laibach and NSK manipulate. Yet at the same time the entire NSK organisational discourse also represents a (paradoxical) exploration of and commentary upon the possibilities of working as a collective, both under self-management and under capitalism.

2.13 Theatre As A State.

The monumentalism, mystification and severity seen in the works of Laibach and Irwin are all present in theatrical form. The work of the three (successive) NSK theatre groups; Scipion Nasice, Red Pilot and Noordung, represents the application of retrogardist techniques to the stage. NSK’s theatrical operations build on both the work of post-war experimental Slovene theatre (such as the group “Oder 57” created in 1957 and suppressed in 1964)⁴⁸ and a series of historical figures made iconic via their incorporation into the productions. A key similarity between the work of Laibach and the theatre groups is the severity of the treatment of the audience. At the second Scipion Nasice production, “Marija Nablocka”, the audience viewed the performance via holes in the stage through which their heads protruded. When performed at the Edinburgh Festival it was almost immediately shut down on safety grounds. Foretić (1991) argues that the theatrical praxis of Dragan Živadinov (the director of all NSK theatrical activity) is based on the totalitarian state and that in Živadinov’s works state violence is replaced by aesthetic violence. As with Laibach the audience is the subject of this violence. Audiences are either captivated (physically through the

⁴⁸ See Dolenc 1994, 86.

restriction of movement or at the sensual level by the scale of the spectacle) or subjugated. This brutality is combined with an explicit sense of mysticism and utopianism and an attempt to insist on the theatre as a heroic form.

The first two Scipion Nasice productions were originally performed in private residences in Ljubljana creating an “underground” atmosphere similar to that of some illegal Laibach performances of the same period. In complete contrast Scipion Nasice’s third production “Krst pod Triglavom” (Baptism Under Triglav, 1986) was performed at Cankarjev Dom, the main arts venue in Ljubljana. Seventy actors were involved and the production is the largest Slovene theatrical performance to have taken place. The presentation took the form of an abstract-monumental dramatisation of the roots of Slovene identity. It is loosely based on works by France Prešeren and Dominik Smole, two of the best-known Slovene writers. Baptism remains the largest (if not the most expensive)⁴⁹ single NSK production to date. The “Retrogarde Event” involved all the then NSK groups and used dynamic movement, sound and scenography. It was based on the Christianisation of the Slovenes by the Germans in the ninth century and comprised 62 monumental “paintings” or scenes based on pagan, ideological and avant-garde motifs including a reconstruction of Tatlin’s proposed monument to the Third International. The original story centres on the fate of the mythical figures of the Slovene prince Črtomir and his lover Bogomila, a pagan priestess. Črtomir is the sole survivor of a last stand against the German warlord Waldung (Valjhun in Slovene), represented on Laibach’s soundtrack by a menacing instrumental piece. Fleeing, Črtomir meets Bogomila who announces that she has been converted and persuades him to do likewise, which he accepts in order to be with her. However she announces after his conversion that she is betrothed to Christ and he is instructed to work as a wandering preacher never to see her again. Thompson (1992) assesses the significance of Prešeren’s play thus:

“Militarily, Valjhun is the winner. By the end of the story his victory has been utterly eclipsed, with the implication that he is a relic, while defeated Črtomir is the man of the future, ancestor of all the Slovene generations whose survival lay through flexibility and submission to *force majeure*. Črtomir escapes Valjhun by becoming a better Christian. For he knows the value of humility, he is able to throw away his sword and live by Christ’s teaching. At a stroke the pagan warrior becomes more Catholic than the German crusader.” (p.17)⁵⁰

⁴⁹ This distinction belongs to the 1999 performance “Gravitacija nič Noordung” (Gravitation Zero Noordung).

⁵⁰ This theme of Slovene victory over the Germans through an over-identification with the Germanic regime is a theme repeated in both the works of Laibach and the Philosophy Department (see section 3.10)



Theatre Of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice: Scenes From Baptism, 1986 .

Besides being a monumental meditation on Slovene national mythologies Baptism is also a discourse on the history of art in Slovenia and Europe and particularly the avant-garde, "...and artists are its protagonists".⁵¹ The design and the music include implicit or explicit references to all of NSK's principal aesthetic sources. Besides Tatlin, Irwin's scenography was also informed by Kandinsky and largely forgotten figures of the Slovene avant-garde such as August Černigoj. "Baptism" re-configures theatre as a national stage for an attempted exorcism of national-historical wounds such as the subjugation of the pagan Slovenes and the suppression of the historical avant-garde. Kršić (1991) has characterised "Baptism" as a depiction of a heroic national mythology paradoxically expressed in the language of abstraction and the international avant-garde. The production subsequently played in Belgrade and was filmed (though not broadcast) by the BBC

⁵¹ See "The Third Sisters Letter" NSK 1991, 176.

and had a major influence on the development of the NSK aesthetic and Slovene theatre.⁵² Foretić (1991) contends that “Baptism” represents the pinnacle of NSK’s collective aesthetic and although it contains no specific references to the state it remains the most intensive manifestation of NSK as total(itarian) “Gesamtkunstwerk.”

The final Scipion Nasice project before its pre-planned self-abolition in 1987 was its proposal for an artistic event to celebrate the Yugoslav Youth Day festival. This was intended to complement the New Collectivism poster design for the event (see section 2.16), which caused an all-Yugoslav scandal. Tatlin’s monument was again to feature in the scenography of this monumental ritual, along with the Slovene architect Jože Plečnik’s un-built design for a Slovene Parliament. A reconstruction of this, surmounted by a red star, was to be placed on an artificial island in Lake Bohinj, a historically resonant Slovene location. The design was rejected as unsuitable and functioned as a provocation as much as a serious proposal, although an attempt would certainly have been made to realize it if approval had been given.⁵³

Scipion Nasice was succeeded by Cosmokinetic Theatre Red Pilot, which is named after a Slovene futurist magazine from 1922. Red Pilot produced the “Drama Observatories” - “FIAT” and “Zenit” (Zenith) and two dance-based “Ballet Observatories” of the same titles. Its final work was the “Opera Observatory Record” which introduces and mysticizes the historical figure of Herman Potočnik Noordung, the pioneering Slovene astrophysicist of the 1920s.⁵⁴ The “Zenit” Ballet Observatory is based on the role of the hero and set against the backdrop of twentieth century science.⁵⁵ The scripts and accompanying texts are highly reminiscent of the utopian heroicism and mystification of some of Laibach’s discourse. This can be seen clearly in the text accompanying the “Zenit” Drama Observatory, the best-known Red Pilot production:

We rose
“In the Zenith of human epochs our steel complexity
was being modified
and it showed us a PROJECTION

⁵² See “Pet let po krstu” (Five Years After Baptism), in “Maska” No. 1, 11.91, Ljubljana.

⁵³ See “The Act of Self-Destruction”, “NSK”, pp. 180-1.

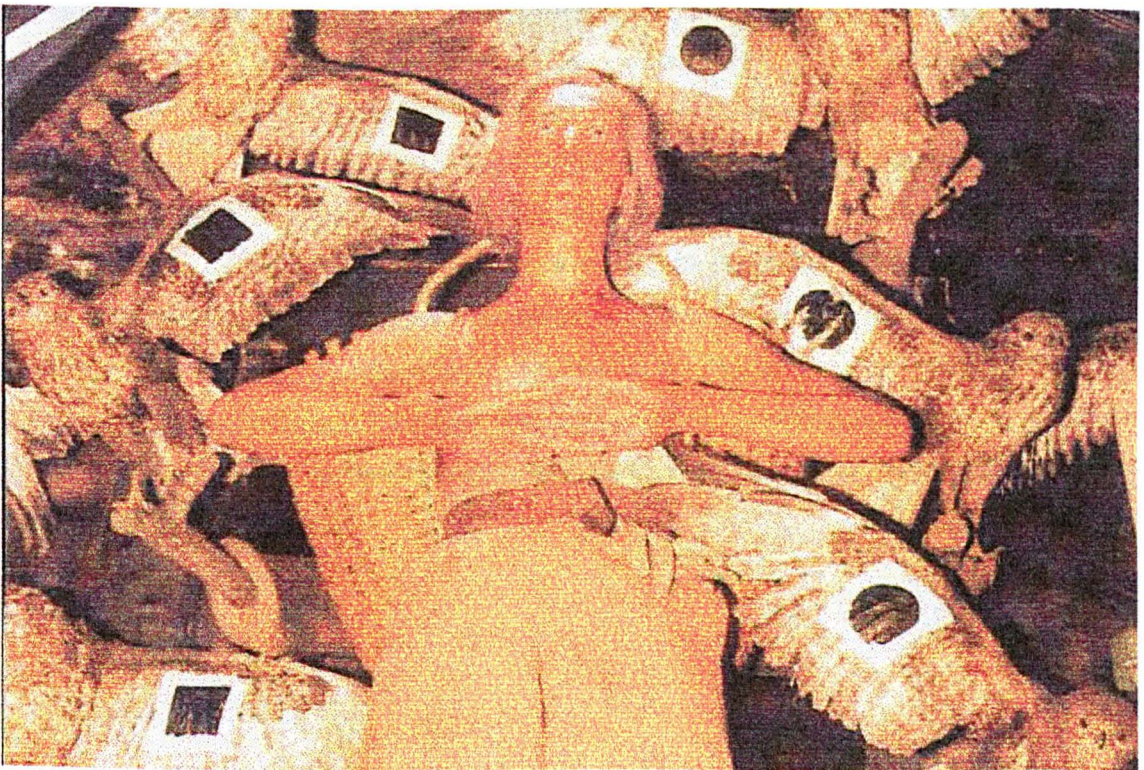
⁵⁴ See “Das Problem Des Befahrung Des Weltraums” (The Problem of Space Travel), Noordung 1993.

⁵⁵ See NSK 1991, 198.

not allowing us to forget about the UNATTAINED.
We were not eagles.
We had but eagle eyes and heart.
We had the courage of crusaders,
we had the courage of guardsmen.
Martyrdom had to become art,
because after repudiating the next world
whose face was then hidden,
our power only enthroned it as a hologram reality.” (NSK 1991, 200)

The first performances took place at Ljubljana station in 1988, in a rail freight carriage converted into a retro-futurist silver rocket (see NSK 1991, 208-9). The audience proceeded one by one into a totally darkened rear section of the carriage. At the door they had been “blessed” by Živadinov before being left for a time packed into the darkness. Without warning voices are barking “schnell!” (quick) in German and the audience are roughly pushed forward into the performance area. They watch the performance from a narrow gallery with room for no more than two abreast through which Živadinov prowls, at times bearing a naked flame. The action takes place on a raised platform to the left side of the gallery. The roof and walls are covered by an Alpine landscape and the scenography incorporates other NSK motifs, particularly falcons⁵⁶ and the exorcistic phrase “Vade Retro” first employed by Laibach and Irwin as well as the ubiquitous black cross motif. The theme of the production is explicitly religious and most of the characters are either priests or nuns and it continues “Baptism’s” examination of the Slovenes’ historical relationship to Christian ideology.

⁵⁶ The same birds can for instance be seen in the Irwin work “Two Angels” (NSK 1991, 95) and as part of Laibach stage sets (see Erjavec & Gržinić 1991, 98).



Red Pilot: Drama Observatory "Zenit".

A similar arrangement to that seen in "Marija Nablocka" dominated the scenography of Noordung's "The Prayer Machine" (1993). The audience put their heads through a wooden grid (designed by the Russian artist Vadim Fishkin) whilst the actors moved amongst them in an imitation of the communion ritual. The spectators are rigidly spaced and have almost no freedom of movement. Although it continued the religious themes, Prayer Machine's elegant design, futuristic costumes and the new Noordung cosmonautical themes place it in contrast to the archaic retrograde aura of previous performances (see Pelko 1993). 1994 saw a performance for children ("1: 10 000000"), in which the young participants donned spacesuits to take part in a choreographed mystical scientific drama complete with brutal electronic soundtrack and NSK symbolism. Adults were forced to watch the action lying prone peering down through a wooden cupola high above the stage. 1995 saw the premiere of "Ena Proti Ena" (One versus one). This Shakespeare-themed play by Vladimir Stojsavljević has the theme of love and the state. It will be repeated in 2005 and thereafter each decade until 2045. As the actors die they will be replaced by symbols and in 2045 Živadinov, the last living member of the company (although older than any of the other actors), is to be launched into space from Russia and will complete the performance in zero gravity. The play is a strange hybrid between conventional theatrical discourse and the space imagery and caused some confusion but the final concept is as hubristic as anything the NSK groups have done previously. However in September 1999, a new performance, "Gravitacija nič Noordung" (Gravitation Zero Noordung) took place, which follows the scenario of the projected 2045 performance fairly closely. It took place in weightless conditions above Russia aboard a special training plane for cosmonauts and is the most ambitious (and expensive) development yet of the Noordung motif by Živadinov (see <http://www.noordung.telekom.si>). Živadinov's work is marked by a fanatical disregard for limitations and a love of scientific-utopian imagery, which has given it a unique place on the international contemporary theatre scene and led to wider recognition for Slovene theatre in general.

2.14 Philosophy and Rhetoric.

The organigram (dating from 1986) shows a “Department for Pure, Practical Philosophy and Rhetoric”. All the NSK groups adept at the production of rhetoric and theoretical texts and so a central body working on this would be superfluous. The body shown on the organigram simply represents the sections’ individual texts and statements and their collaboration on joint NSK texts not ascribed to a particular group. However, the subsequent establishment of a dedicated “Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy” added further intellectual weight to the NSK project. It was created in 1987 during Laibach’s residency at Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg where they were taking part in the “Macbeth” project, by and for the philosopher and editor Peter Mlakar who found a natural affinity between what NSK was doing and his own elemental neo-Hegelian discourse and had already been aware of and on good terms with NSK for some time. Among his influences he lists Hegel and Heidegger and the atmosphere of his hometown, Škofja Loka, a thousand year old castle town north west of Ljubljana⁵⁷. He had contributed a theoretical piece to the anthology “Punk pod Slovenci” (Punk under the Slovenes)⁵⁸ in 1984 and worked with Dušan Mandič of Irwin on the editorial board of the periodical “Problemi” at the time of the publication of the special NSK issue. Initially he worked most closely with Laibach giving addresses as a prologue to their concerts in Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia. The addresses are always relevant to their location or political and historical contexts and are frequently as provocative as the concerts they introduced. Indeed for a rock audience the very fact of being forced to listen to such a complex discourse can itself be experienced as a provocation (see sections 3.10-3.11). The most highly charged speech was given at Belgrade in 1989 (see video clip six). The speech was delivered in German and Serbian and incorporated the nationalist slogans of Slobodan Milošević. The department soon assumed the role of “master of ceremonies” providing

⁵⁷ In conversation 12th October 1994, Ljubljana.

⁵⁸ Skupina Avtorjev, 1985. The first section of the book consists of analytical pieces by authors such as Močnik and Tomc. The documentary section is an extensive collection of interviews with various groups, press articles, examples of graffiti, official statements and transcripts of RŠ debates. Its detail and the fact that it was published so soon after the events it catalogues make it an invaluable document of the Slovene punk scene and reactions to it and shows the extent to which open critical debate concerning topics which state led discourse castigated was possible, especially within the alternative sector. The publisher, Krt, was run by the Ljubljana and university sections of ZSMS. The book is one in a series of anthologies (“Zborniki”) produced by Krt which dealt with various topics such as “socialist civil society”, “Urbanism, social conflict and Planning”, and “Women and the Women’s Movement”, plus translations and of Marx and Reich and works on issues such as “solidarity in the Polish Crisis”. This was an example of the relative autonomy of the Slovene alternative sector and the extent to which it used its institutional resources to tackle and as the eighties went on, give support to alternative viewpoints.

addresses and texts for formal NSK occasions from internal events to gallery openings and record launches.

As well as these addresses⁵⁹ several longer texts have been issued, many addressing themes such as God, the devil and eroticism, as well as several dealing with national questions which have a very Hegelian tone, laden with references to “God”, “spirit” and “essence.” Their essentialist and theatrical tone have much in common with some Laibach texts⁶⁰ and the department has the closest affinity with Laibach. Texts are in line with the NSK ethos but also have the status of a meta-discourse recapitulating previous philosophies rather than being simply a philosophical adjunct to other NSK activities. They consciously explore and emphasise NSK’s interest both in totalitarianism and in spiritual issues and firmly implant an absolute, all encompassing though apersonal, deity within the NSK weltanschauung⁶¹:

“God is Spirit. Spirit is a Being eternally experiencing its own being, creating from nothing. It is a self-applying perfection, infinite and limitless, existing in itself and for itself.”⁶²

In 1992 Mlakar staged a performance together with the Laibach sub-group 300 000 V.K. in Villach/Beljak in Carinthia from where the philosopher Paracelsus came. This grew into the album “Peter Paracelsus” which combined recitations of texts by Mlakar with a self-defined style of “Satanic Techno” (see chronology 31.10.94). The department’s work can be seen as a natural extension of the NSK discourse into an obvious sphere that the other groups occasionally make inroads into but cannot devote full attention to. The texts are a rich combination of aesthetic effect, theory and personal belief and are perhaps more easily read as literary aesthetic works rather than as academic philosophical treatises. Although some of the latest projects such as a collection of erotic short stories and speeches on phone sex and virtual reality are not official NSK products as

⁵⁹ Most of these addresses from 1987-1992 are published in “Reden An Der Deutsche Nation” (Speeches to the German Nation), (Mlakar 1993) and “Spiši od Nadnaravnem” (Thoughts on the Supernatural) (Mlakar 1992).

⁶⁰ See for instance the excessively Laibach-like statement from the text “Chips” (NSK 1991, 217): “We consider order and discipline sacred; we completely submit ourselves to the law and may even be cruel if profit so commands. We are delighted to see healthy young bodies performing perfectly drilled exercises.”

⁶¹ This aspect contradicts the socialist realist, modernist and Stalinist elements in NSK works and deliberately evokes a more archetypal pre-modern discourse.

⁶² From the text “God”, NSK 1991, 213.

such but they retain traces of an NSK provenance. The most significant speeches of the nineties took place in Sarajevo (1995) and Belgrade (1997) in which the Bosnians were asked to conquer evil by forgiving their enemies and the Serbs to admit their guilt and to be open to the possibility of forgiveness. These speeches echo the Department's least unambiguous mission statement given to date:

"Our mission is to make evil lose its nerves."⁶³

2.15 New Collectivism/Design Activities.

The "design department" is basically a conflation of external designers taken on to produce items such as stage sets⁶⁴ and one of the two bodies shown below it on the "organigram", "New Collectivism", NSK's in house design studio, commonly referred to by its Slovene initials, NK. Active since 1983, it is headed by a professional designer, Darko Pokorn, editor of the NSK monograph (1991) and includes one member each from Laibach and Noordung plus two members of Irwin. It coordinates all NSK designs ranging from posters to press events to Laibach merchandise to exhibitions. Its work has been exhibited several times, both on its own and in conjunction with Irwin or collective NSK exhibitions. In addition to NSK work it constantly undertakes external commissions, particularly theatre and opera posters and programmes but also including projects such as the logos for the childrens' programmes of Slovene Television.⁶⁵ A press resume of their work from 1987 listed commissions including the design of record covers, book sleeves and the design of several theatrical, youth and cultural festivals in Slovenia and Croatia⁶⁶. In

⁶³ "Chips", NSK 1991, 217.

⁶⁴ For instance the Russian Vadim Fishkin, designer of Noordung's most recent productions.

⁶⁵ These are entirely innocuous variations on the motif of a bowler hat connected to a computer mouse and unlike the majority of their works display no visible trace of their connection with NSK, see "Sinteza" (1989), 138-139.

⁶⁶ See "Biografija studia Novi Kolektivizem", (Biography of Studio New Collectivism) from the feature published in "Mladina" on 13th March 1987, "Tvoj je vstajenja dan okrogla miza o plakatni aferi" (Yours is the Day of Rising A Round Table (discussion) Of the Poster Affair" (Suhadolnik, G, ZavrI, F. (Eds.) 1987). This included the transcript of a discussion on Radio Student that featured amongst others Igor Vidmar, concert promoter, Laibach manager and RŠ disc jockey and two leading theoreticians (still) closely associated with the new social movements, Rastko Močnik and Tomaž Mastnak. Also featured was an interview with NK studio and a piece by Peter Mlakar. The feature reflects the seriousness of debate surrounding the affair and the degree to which Mladina (and RŠ) continued to provide spaces in which NSK were assured of a fair hearing and could put across their views directly.

1994 their designs for Laibach merchandise won first prize at “BIO”, the Ljubljana Biennale of Industrial Design. NK studio has also overseen the design construction of the NSK state. It produced and designed the passports, stamps and other insignia. It has partial responsibility for the operation of the NSK information centre set up in 1992 and production and supervision of merchandising operations. Its NSK designs and many of its other commissions make free play of an eclectic and provocative range of sources from the insignia of the wartime Slovene Liberation Front (which it appropriated for its own insignia, simply substituting the initials “NK” for “OF,”⁶⁷) to Heartfield motifs to classicism. NK established a visual vocabulary of the “retro” look to complement the visual rhetoric of Laibach and Irwin. Often the sources of the designs are comparatively innocent non-political sources yet the designs frequently have a subtly sinister ambience that evokes the typographic and visual styles of the thirties and forties. NK have produced several of the most provocative “Mladina” front covers, featuring controversial Laibach and NSK images (see 25th May “Mladina” cover, below).

NK studio is best known for sparking off one of the greatest scandals in the lead up to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In that year it was commissioned by ZSMS, the Slovene Union of Socialist Youth (an increasingly autonomous para state organisation) to produce a design for that year’s “day of youth” festival (25th May, Tito’s official birthday). The commissioners were fully aware of the character of NK work having previously published several designs and supported NSK publicly and their decision to commission NK has been seen partly as a protest against being forced to host that year’s youth festival which many in Slovenia believed had now become an anachronism. In Tomc’s (1994, 127) account ZSMS commissioned the design in order to maintain the new boundary of differentiation from mainstream politics provided by alternative culture and forestall the gap being closed by the increasingly progressive party leadership and preserve its counter-cultural mystique. Scipion Nasice’s rally proposal (see p. 119) was rejected, ostensibly due to its expense, but NK’s Youth Day poster went on to win the prize as best design and was adopted at all Yugoslav level. However, shortly after its adoption a retired engineer living in Belgrade pointed out that the heroic torch brandishing figure it depicted was taken from a 1936 painting entitled “A Heroic Allegory of The Third Reich” by Richard Klein.

⁶⁷ Reproduced in NSK 1991, 271.



New Collectivism: Dan Mladosti (Day of Youth), 1987.

The Nazi banner in the original was replaced by the Yugoslav one and the eagle by a dove. Almost as provocatively (although this was not the main issue of controversy) the blazing torch carried by the Nazi figure was replaced by the shadowy profile of the Slovene architect Jože Plečnik's un-built design 1947 for a Slovene parliament (the blueprint for this structure is visible on the cover of Laibach's 1987 Yugoslav-only "Slovenska Akropola" album). The resulting media storm dominated headlines across Yugoslavia for some time (see chronology) and NSK press archives contain over a hundred articles concerning the affair (though this includes only those from Slovene and a selection of Croatian and Serbian papers) and the affair was even reported in "The Economist" (see NSK 1991, 275, "Clash Go The Symbols", 1987). The most embarrassing aspect of the affair was that in choosing the design the regime had revealed its latent sympathies for totalitarian imagery and was as instinctively attracted to right as to left wing imagery. NK were surprised at the severity of the reaction and were officially summoned for questioning by the police and subject to surveillance for a time. However, no charges were pressed partly because it would have been hard to know precisely what to charge them with (Article 133 of the Yugoslav penal code, dealing with "verbal offence" was already a controversial issue in Slovenia and use of it might well have made martyrs of NK). A trial would also have drawn even more attention to the embarrassing fact that this image had been chosen by party representatives as the most appropriate representation of socialist youth and further discussion of this would draw attention to the equation between Nazism and the NK's critics accused it of making⁶⁸. The prosecution of artists went against the instincts of the Slovene republican leadership who had no wish to alienate potential allies among more liberal members of the youth leadership and intelligentsia and all the fiercest

⁶⁸ NK presented the poster as a symbolization of the victory over totalitarianism per se. They issued a defence of their work which was published in the official (though increasingly independent) Slovene daily "Delo" (work) under the title "Izjava studia NK (Novi Kolektivizem) ob plakata za dan mladosti", (Declaration of NK Studio on the Poster for Youth Day) (Novi Kolektivizem 1987a). However in its "Proclamation" of 21st March (1987b) it stated rather less apologetically (there had been sufficient time to draw up a more considered response):

"The political poster must be like a blow into an open wound..
The political poster YOUTH DAY by New Collectivism has a soothing influence on stable minds and is a disturbing appeal to the masses. A poster of New Collectivism is a text, and the text of New Collectivism is a poster!
Its slogan is - humanist propaganda"

The text reveals both its kinship with other NSK texts and the fact that even at what could potentially have been a dangerous time for the members, then still under investigation, NK could neither relinquish provocation nor defend itself in any terms other than its own, even though the use of such language could only serve to worsen their reputation in the eyes of many. The references to posters as texts are clearly designed to suggest that a variety of readings or interpretations of the work are possible and that it should be judged as much (con)textually as symbolically. The final phrase might seem like a belated attempt to dampen the authoritarian nature of the discourse but when its implications are confronted, for instance that there is no inherent discrepancy between humanism and propaganda it is hardly less challenging than the rest of the text.

demands for action came from elsewhere in Yugoslavia (see chronology, 28.2.87). The Slovene prosecutor resisted calls for a trial that would have represented a damaging federal incursion into Slovene sovereignty⁶⁹. The clearest result of the affair was the demise of the entire youth day festival, the details and design of which had to be hastily reorganised and which was never held again after 1987⁷⁰. Despite the furore NK used the image again to promote their exhibitions in Holland, Britain and elsewhere during the year and produced an equally provocative front cover for the "Mladina" issue of 27th May 1988 as an ironic reference to the previous year's scandal. (see next page).

⁶⁹ The trial in a military court in 1988 of three journalists and an NCO accused of leaking military secrets was perceived as just such a violation of the Republic's internal sovereignty and led to the creation of a 100 000 strong civil rights association out of which grew the democratic parties that would be established in 1989. (For an account of both affairs and their implications see Mastnak 1994, 101-5). Many Slovenes, particularly ex partisans were as offended as their fellow Yugoslavs by NK's "provocation" and the trial of the members of NSK certainly would not have led to a massive groundswell of support throughout society as a whole and indeed some would have welcomed the punishment of such an irritating group (see "Komunist" the journal of the Slovene party, 27th February 1987 which features a letter concerning the affair and NSK as a whole entitled "Protest Koroških Partizanov" (Protest by Carinthian Partisans) (SKPS 1987). The fierce polemics conducted in the Slovene press reveal that the lack of consensus on the issue. Several writers defended NK and a full scale criminal trial with heavy penalties would not only have been politically embarrassing but could have been perceived (or presented as) state persecution of artists.

⁷⁰ See Mastnak 1994, 101.



New Collectivism: Mladina Front Cover, 25th May 1988.

At the time of the affair and as part of its attempt at self-justification NK produced the most explicit formulation of the retro principle and this description (Novi Kolektivizem 1987b) is applicable to the working methods and basic principles of all NSK sections:

“The retrogardist is an artist guided by the desire and ability to analyze with an unerring eye the relations of the beautiful, the raw, the exalted, the holy and the terrible in current events throughout the world. The retrogardist combats using design and all the means at his disposal. He applies the method of the retro principle, the way an automobile designer assembles the parts of a car - wheels, steering wheel, engine...The creative processes of reversed perspective, metaphors, hyperboles, time and space warp, unite and link everything that mankind has squeezed from its veins until now. Content and form are only tools which combine themes and symbols into dynamics, tension, excitement and drama.”

In June 1991 Slovenia declared independence and came under attack from the forces of the JNA (Yugoslav federal army). NK was the only NSK group to respond directly to these events. Three posters were produced and displayed across Ljubljana. The first of these “Buy Victory” was posted on the 28th June. It takes its title and slogan (“In the strength of great hope we must shoulder our common load.”) from an earlier Laibach poster (see NSK 1991, 59, illustration 28). The figure wears the familiar Laibach headdress and its torso is formed from the distinctive black cross.



New Collectivism: Buy Victory 1991.

The second image, posted on the 4th of July takes its title (which translates as “Bloody Ground Fertile Soil”) from a track on Laibach’s album “Nova Akropola” (1986a) and in the background the black square is again visible. The image exemplifies the way in which NK’s designs incorporate motifs and concepts from other NSK works. It is also an example of NK incorporating Nazi images

in the same way as Laibach and Irwin. The figure in the NK image wears a winged “Mercury” helmet of the type Laibach would later employ in their “Kapital” era imagery (see “Wirtschaft Ist Tot” video and thesis CD sleeve).



New Collectivism: Krvava Gruda, plodna zemlja (Bloody Ground, Fertile Soil), 1991.

However the image’s original source is an original German recruitment poster for the Reichswehr (German armed forces - see below). Whilst the “Krvava Gruda” and “Buy Victory” posters do represent the group’s artistic response to the attack on their country, which they naturally hoped would be defeated,⁷¹ the image cannot be dismissed as unambiguously patriotic and in fact the mechanisms they contain are as complex as those in other NK/NSK images. Although the posters did not produce a scandal akin to the Day of Youth poster they remained provocative. Their militaristic imagery was completely odds with the democratic image Slovenia was attempting to present to the world to justify its claims to independence and the presence of the Laibach figure will have been offensive to Slovene nationalists and others who had criticised Laibach during the previous decade. The ambiguous and disturbing aura surrounding the images distances them from many Slovenes and is an expression of NSK’s commitment to radical ambiguity even in moments of great political and national tension. What they also comment upon is the fact that no nation (including Slovenia) is immune from the tendencies the images represent – as a group formally committed to the re-establishment of Slovene culture the work of NK cannot be dismissed as “foreign”. More positively (if still ambiguously) the images reflect upon Slovenia as a country sophisticated enough to not to suppress potentially provocative images even in emergency

⁷¹ It is important at this point to note that despite the logistical and other difficulties caused by the collapse of Yugoslavia all NSK groups continue active cooperation with theorists, curators and artists from the other ex-

conditions and which has an artistic sector capable of producing politically acute and challenging work.



Reichswehr Recruitment Poster.

The same pointing figure (the original source of which is the famous British recruitment poster

from 1916 featuring Kitchener) occurred for the third time in the poster with the Croatian title “Ja se hoću boriti za novu Europu!” (I Want To Fight For The New Europe), posted on 29th November.



New Collectivism: “Ja se hoću boriti za novu Europu!”, 1991.

This image is the most ambiguous of the series. The cross in the background bears a chess board pattern similar to that used in the Croatia’s new flag which itself is based on the flag of the wartime Ustaše regime. The face of the statesman figure is severely distorted in a manner reminiscent of Heartfield’s anti-fascist montages. The overall visual look of these posters, augmented here by the presence of a zeppelin in the background clearly evokes the propaganda of the thirties and forties and thus alienates the slogan “I want to fight for the *new* Europe” (emphasis added), suggesting that the “new” Europe is in fact the old Europe of war and terror. In line with NSK’s constant repetition of its own motifs the powerful image of the pointing figure was later recurred in the Laibach posters “Tesla” (which is almost identical to “Ja se hoću boriti za novu Europu”) and “Become a Citizen” (see “Become A Citizen” image at start of chapter six). The series of NK designs is a commentary on both national mobilisation in time of war and the return to former Yugoslavia and Europe of phenomena not experienced since the defeat of fascism in 1945.

Despite these actions and the number of its commissions NK is perhaps the least known of all the NSK groups although probably the most prolific. This is due to the fact that the scandal was not widely reported outside Yugoslavia and contemporary Western articles about Laibach, Irwin or Red Pilot from the same year made no reference to the affair. As a result only those who take a more serious interest in NSK as a whole are really aware of NK and the scope of its activities. The

other factor working against a higher profile for NK is the fact that much of its output (it is the most consistently productive section) consists of external commissions where there is no obvious indication of any NSK connection and few will notice the NK design credit although when examples of such commissions are compared⁷² it is possible, as NK claim to (retrospectively)

“... discern a consistency and purpose in the message of each poster, book design and overall image”⁷³.

This is principally visible through devices such as typescript, the inclusion of classical or totalitarian (type) motifs and the presence of a retro aura. In its low profile NK and the other non-founding NSK groups are actually closer to the abstract NSK paradigm of de-personalization, collective authorship and anonymity than Laibach, Irwin or Noordung. While texts by the three principal groups are always attributed to “Laibach” or “Irwin” members of these and of Noordung are frequently named, especially in the case of Laibach who have been unable to escape the demands of a “rock” audience for information about members (to fulfil the audience’s needs for identification as much as information) so that Laibach’s spokesman is usually named in interviews although he is speaking for Laibach as a whole, meaning that the rule (or aspiration) of anonymity is honoured more in the breach than in the observance. However, beyond the Slovene and Yugoslav press⁷⁴ the names of the individual members of NK are rarely referred to although their identities are no secret. In the above quoted 1987 interview NK recapitulate the classic Laibach/NSK collective credo suggesting that they take full advantage of the lower profile their type of work affords to try to remain true both to the spirit of their name and of NSK’s formal stance in this area.

“You act as a group. What role does the individual play in your homogeneous organization?”

“New Collectivism is a group, composed of individuals. Each individual is subordinated to the whole, which is a synthesis of the forces and desires of all members.”⁷⁵ (NSK 1991, 273)

⁷² See for instance those reproduced in NSK 1991, 278-85.

⁷³ See NSK 1991, 273.

⁷⁴ Even at the height of the poster affair only the name of Irwin’s Roman Uranjek was mentioned and this was because he was acting as a group spokesman. Unlike Irwin, the names of all NK members were not listed and only have begun to appear more frequently in recent years.

⁷⁵ This may be compared with the Laibach statement: “LAIBACH is an organism, composed of individuals as its organs. And these organs are subordinated to the whole, which signifies a synthesis of all the forces and ambitions of the members of the whole. The aims, life and means of activity of the group are higher - in strength and duration - than the aims, life and means of the individuals which compose it”. NSK 1991, 52.

2.16 State Commissions and NSK's National Vocation.

ZSMS was one of NSK's key institutional patrons during the nineteen eighties and commissioned New Collectivism designs several times from 1985 (a poster for Youth Work Brigades) until the infamous "Youth Day" commission. Both NSK and ZSMS found something valuable in their informal partnership. The new designs were a major factor in ZSMS' reinvention of its image and its identification with alternative culture, undertaken even at the price of alienating sectors of the public opinion. In designing for ZSMS and other public bodies such as the National Theatre, NSK was receiving an official seal of approval that implicitly extended to its ideological agenda, (NSK imagery is so entirely suffused by its ideology that approval of an NSK image symbolically entails acceptance of NSK as a whole, or at least of its controversial aesthetics). State commissions also enhanced the NSK self image as a nascent state in equal partnership with the actual one, thus establishing a further point of difference between NSK and the alternative scene.

Under socialism a commission from a state body carries far more significance and either kudos or discredit than in capitalist systems. The question of what alternative activities were financed and how was the subject of much debate in Slovenia. On 16th March 1987 "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" published the details of parliamentary discussions on cultural financing by state cultural institutions (O financiranju Nove Revije, Gledališča sester Scipion Nasice i.dr., 1987) The report stated that none of the NSK groups were members of ZKOS, the Slovene Federation of Cultural Organisations and that Laibach received no funding for its work either in Slovenia or abroad. New Collectivism operated on a commercial basis, although it received many official commissions. There were no specific grants to either Nova Revija or Scipion Nasice however both of these had received funds from general cultural programs, notably for the production of "Krst Pod Triglavom" via Cankarjev Dom.

The favour shown to New Collectivism, and thus to NSK, by ZSMS and various other arms of the (self-managing) state was highly significant. NSK and Laibach in particular could no longer be so straightforwardly demonized once they were so incorporated into mainstream cultural activity. Theatre and political posters and the high profile "Baptism" production could not be ignored or dismissed as marginal provocations when commissioned by state bodies and performed in subsidised national venues. The symbolic-performative *vocation* of NSK personnel, expressed in a

desire for a role on the “national” stage (which they had first reconstituted) was also acknowledged. The creation of a national stage upon which to satisfy this vocation and provide its recognition was made literal by the “Theatre of the Sisters of Scipion Nasice”. Scipion Nasice acted as a self appointed national theatre in that it provided a metaphorical stage upon which the most elemental forces of the national psyche could be unleashed (culminating in “Baptism”). The first “Letter” of the Sisters in 1983 declared “Theater is a *State*”, (Document E6, NSK 1991, 163) that is, a theatre of or for both the imminent (1984) NSK state and the nation(al state). In 1984 Scipion Nasice staged a “retrogarde event” entitled “Resurrection” described thus:

“With this action the Scipion Nasice Sisters summon all Slovene theater institutions to a collective renewal of the dramatic arts”.⁷⁶

Simultaneous with the performance was a proposal to unite all Slovene theatre institutions, including the *actual* Slovene National Theatre, “into a unified national theater”, stressing that Scipion Nasice’s membership includes all those active within the named Slovene theatres and asks for their participation in the manifestations of Laibach and Irwin, an ideal realised in “Baptism”. Such was the effect of this self aggrandisement that it has sometimes been taken at face value and it was even reported that the NSK body had been made the national theatre of Yugoslavia, a misunderstanding that was probably deeply satisfying to NSK, apparently justifying their claims to a vital role in the cultural affairs of the nation. Such tactics and the collaboration of semi-official organs enabled NSK groups (with the exception of Laibach) to make a gradual transition from a marginal to a central role in Slovene cultural life without any artistic compromise.

Much of the NSK mystique derives from the fact that it has neither been finally condemned nor wholly rehabilitated and so multiple interpretations of its position proliferate, enhancing the sense of ambiguity from which NSK derives so much of its power, exercised through (appalled) bemusement. The passage from damnation to fear to grudging acceptance mirrored the literal incorporation of NSK into the body of the nation. Whilst state patronage, even in the most indirect form would be considered a mortal blow by the most non-mainstream cultural groups, to NSK it was an inevitable recognition of their status and a significant impetus to their work. Consequent accusations of collusion and pro regime manipulation fully complemented their aims and imagery. In public at least, NSK will not concede that any accusation levelled against them can cause

⁷⁶ “Resurrection”, Document D4, 1984. NSK 1991, 169.

significant damage and in the majority of cases denunciation suits their purpose very well in implicitly reflecting on the accusers' motives.

2.17 Other NSK Units.

Of the bodies shown on the “organigram”, the majority are abstractions, whilst the titles of other sections (“Literature and Essayistic Department”) are more expressions of intent, covering areas into which NSK might (wish to) extend its operations, fleshing out these empty institutional categories at will. All the groups from the “Ideological Council” downward, with the exception of the “Convent/General Council” are not actual bodies but schematic codifications designed to present a (very opaque and abstract) illustration of various NSK procedures (the “Strategy and Spiritual Department” for instance). The three “assemblies” shown (technology, economy, projecting) are integral to the creation of a spectral state-image, intended to suggest that NSK is a large-scale technocratic-hierarchical formation⁷⁷. There are also some bodies such as the “Archives and Bibliographic Department”⁷⁸ that simply formalize activities carried out jointly and individually by the actual NSK groups. Other categories seem to be little more than decorative affects that increase the aura of mystery surrounding the bureaucratic facade. Some, such as “Fiat” (NSK images, plays and songs have all had this title) or the “Sava Club” (named after a much mythologized Slovene river) are part of a process of mystification used to add ambiguous depth, heightening and exposing the possibilities of literal identification with an abstract identity or ideology. There is no final definition of the scope or function of these more shadowy groups, and different NSK members will alternately explain or dismiss them as empty categories or hint at some obscure function they carry out. Whilst it is not possible to finally resolve the status of these groups the question is to an extent irrelevant as their primary function is to deepen the illusions generated by the spectral structure. The organigram is not simply a conceptual device but an artwork created in the image of the technocratic-industrial state.

⁷⁷ The fact that the plan has a primarily abstract nature is confirmed by the fact that the opportunity has not been taken to update the plan since its first appearance in 1986 to reflect new NSK developments and activities; there would now be scope for a passport office or postal bureau for example yet since the plan was never intended as a literal descriptive device altering it would be irrelevant or possibly counterproductive.

⁷⁸ The majority of work in this area is undertaken by NK Studio although each section maintains its own records or asks outsiders to carry out such tasks. There is no single complete archive of all records and press materials and producing one would be a mammoth task, although there is a complete record of all Slovene and some Croatian and Serbian press articles on Laibach and NSK running from 1980-88.

2.18 Vacuum and Content: NSK As Projective Apparatus.

The opacity of the proto-state organigram structure illustrates how ambiguity is used by NSK as an infinitely malleable and recyclable material with which to flesh out concepts and to form part of the “substance” of NSK. The structure deliberately heightens the onlooker’s sense of mystification - s/he is both mystified and potentially aware of the (performance of) the process of mystification). In fact NSK was consciously designed as an ambiguous and highly flexible container of the literal and psychic investments and projections of both its audience and its members. The structure deliberately includes “grey areas” and bodies without precisely defined functions, enabling a multiplicity of interpretations and projections, while decreasing the likelihood that any of them will decisively penetrate it. The NSK structure (organigram) can be viewed projective apparatus or a “fantasy structure”⁷⁹ The maximum membership of NSK, which often contracts, could never hope to staff even all the departments shown on the organigram, let alone carry out wider political tasks. However, the vehemence with which NSK’s image has been transmitted has been powerful enough to mislead fans, critics, and some within the Slovene and Yugoslav governments into believing they were faced with a literal structure. From NSK’s perspective these onlookers have been lead into projecting their unconscious fantasies or fears onto a partly hollow structure that has far more subtle designs than its appearance suggests.

The apparent idealisation and aestheticization of the state in NSK works evokes both traditional Russian political philosophy and its reading of Hegel’s views on the state, and a historical Slovene tendency toward conformism. The thoroughness with which NSK played out its role can be related to historical incarnations of Slovene fanaticism and over-identification with authority (see section 3.8). Yet by setting a paradigm of impossible authority which no existing Slovene state, Stalinist or Catholic, could ever have matched NSK paradoxically (or symbolically) *forestalled* the creation of a state embodying any total doctrine within the Slovene space (see section 3.14). The paradigm of absolute authority opens ground behind or *above* which fantasies of an absolute state emanate. This inevitably wrong-footed the socialist authorities since it could never (even wished to be) as absolute as NSK appeared to be during the eighties.

Questioning or parodying the bases of authority *over* the nation, is bound to raise otherwise

⁷⁹ Conversation with Roman Uranjek, Ljubljana, 28th July 1994.

unvoiced questions about actual as well as symbolic power structures. In terms of political science, the works of NSK might be seen as a classic dramatisation, or first diagnosis of, a “legitimation crisis” (Habermas 1970). The appropriation of state attributes by a cultural body itself fashioned to resemble a state is a clear symptom of such a crisis. Laibach’s claim to symbolic authority represents an attempt to posit a new paradigm of power distinct from both the existent regime in Yugoslavia and market-based Western democracy. The NSK State can be read as the culmination of this process (see chapter six).

It would be incorrect to see this policy of confronting the state with its own desires via a hyper authoritarian paradigm as applicable only to formal one party states. In terms of regional autonomy, France and Britain (even post-devolution) remain more centralised than post 1974 Yugoslavia. In Britain the wearing even of fictional uniforms in public is a technical offence and it is interesting to speculate what the British authorities might have done if confronted by an equivalent phenomenon appropriating the trappings of state power. Thus this ultra etatiste manifestation is implicitly at least, equally critical of Western states, and has the potential to touch the same raw nerves, both East and West.⁸⁰ Challenging state authority is generally seen as one of the most subversive of acts. However the NSK example suggests that when such a challenge is apparently based upon a more stringent ethos than that of the state itself authority is nonplussed.

Once NSK operations are considered in detail the gap between how NSK members actually work and the expectations set up by a literal reading of the organigram become apparent. It is into this gap between structure and reality that the audience are able to project whatever reactions they may have to the structure. The organigram is primarily an aestheticized apparatus, supporting not some officially sanctioned para-state organization or totalitarian sect, but the projections of audiences that wish to imagine it as such.

2.19 Aesthetic Functions.

⁸⁰ One artist who has collaborated with NSK had his NSK passport confiscated by customs officials on his return to the US even though he had not attempted to use it to gain entry (see Krafft 1997).

“We believe that our [NSK] structure is a twin of the state, a revised repetition of the state.” Irwin, 1988. (NSK 1991, 123)

As an example of an NSK artwork the structure clearly fits into the pattern of those Laibach and NSK works that recapitulate elements of state authority. In this category are Laibach’s totalitarian imageries and demeanour, the monumentality of some Irwin pieces, the oppressiveness of some NSK texts. NSK projects all tend to hint at some ultimate source of authority lying behind and directing their work. The earliest Laibach texts suggested a degree of de-individualization and subordination so complete and so blatantly unapologetic that no actual state apparatus would be able to conform to it without attempting the degree of control only achieved in North Korea.⁸¹ Although it contained subtle decoders such as open talk of tautology and discussion of their brutalizing techniques Laibach’s harsh treatment of audiences and unrelenting, stark language all added depth to a paradigm that only Laibach could plausibly inhabit. Pre-annexing all the most extreme options in the fields of (aesthetic) repression and propaganda techniques Laibach denied this ground to others by creating and defining the limits of an extreme paradigm only they could embody since they set their own norms determining the intensity of the image required to carve out their niche and establish their own paradigm.

Discussing the interrelationship between terror and propaganda in the Third Reich, Bramstedt (1945) laid much emphasis upon “the importance of the display of power as an intermediate link between propaganda and pressure through fear” (166) and spoke of “a direct propaganda appeal based on fear of the might of the regime, hidden behind eulogies of its power and splendour, its present grandeur and its eternal glory”(168)⁸². Laibach have described their performances as “a

⁸¹ Even North Korea would fall short of the Laibach paradigm since although it has probably taken depersonalization and subordination as far as it is possible within a coherent society it remains based on an all pervasive personality cult and even this would be easier for subjects to relate to and identify with than the type of anonymous regime that a literal political application of NSK rhetoric might suggest.

⁸² In discussing the Nazi theory of control which held that the mere possession of power was insufficient, he quotes from a 1933 book by E. Hadamovsky, “Propaganda und Nationale Macht” (Propaganda and National Power):

“All the power one has, even more than one has [sic!], has to be displayed and demonstrated. One hundred speeches, five hundred newspaper articles, radio talks, films and plays are unable to produce the same effect as a procession of gigantic masses of people taking place with discipline and active participation or as a demonstration of the means of power and weapons of the state as embodied in its military, its police and its political cadres.”

In order to construct such a daunting image what Laibach did was precisely to demonstrate (or suggest they

ritualised demonstration of political force”⁸³ and the NSK state structure represents the ultimate (abstract) embodiment of NSK’s symbolic power display that is also apparent in statements such as as:

“Only God can subdue LAIBACH. People and things never can”.⁸⁴

The “fantasy structure” of the organigram is a crucial element adding *depth* to the illusion that might otherwise be in danger of seeming a facade without substance. The “Immanent Consistent Spirit” consists in large part of the confidence necessary to play the role NSK members assumed. Yet even backed by a strong and generally reliable institution and a complex theoretical and methodological framework this confidence would seem shallow if it had not been used to create a sufficiently thorough illusion for the NSK architecture section Graditelji (Builders) to speak semi-seriously of building cities in the Alps. Ultimately this confidence made possible NSK’s decision to launch itself as the world’s first global, non-territorial state in 1992. The structure added depth to the facade of all the groups, providing a framework covering all fields of activity necessary to give a sense of completeness and self-sufficiency to the organisation and thus to the groups within it. Covering all foreseeable areas of cultural activity and inscribing in its facade some of the formal accoutrements of an actual state such as Economic and Technology “Assemblies”, the structure predated by several years NSK’s moves into areas such as passports, currency and stamps. Therefore the organigram was just as crucial in lending an impression of depth and weight to NSK as prestigious exhibitions, treatises or its discussion in academic and critical fora since read in the context of all the other NSK activities and works of the time something that would otherwise have made less impact embodied the paradigm NSK was constructing. It announced the definitive establishment of the institution and provided a framework for future activities.

The organigram was an explicit recapitulation and appropriation of the notion/image of a

possessed) more power than they had (or wished to have), thus demonstrating that the state lacked and could not embody such power. Similarly the Nazi SA (Stormtroopers) or the Bolsheviks had to embody more power than they yet (legally) possessed prior to their coming to power when they repeatedly undermined the authority of the actual state by acting as if already in possession of full state authority in order to present the actual government as the illegitimate usurper or pretender government.

⁸³ NSK 1991, 44.

⁸⁴ NSK 1991, 52. See also the comment “*Defeat*” is a word which does not exist in our vocabulary”, printed on the same page.

technocratic state structure, not just its propagandist images or control techniques. It can be seen to resemble the category of political, military and corporate hierarchies in general and thus represents an interaction at both the specific (the hyper bureaucratic self management regime) and the general levels.

The top heavy, convoluted system shown on the organigram is one of the most literal expressions of the way in which NSK use the state as a raw material both in their works and in the construction of the collective facade⁸⁵. The design makes no attempt at contemporaneity, employing a rather dated typeface and a strict modernistic linearity. The sections are not precisely symmetrical but are arranged along a rigid grid, lending coherence to what would otherwise appear a very awkward structure. Rather than being a simplification of a complex structure this is closer to a “complexification”, if not a mystification of, a relatively simple, though highly ambiguous structure. The whole is deliberately opaque and ponderous, if not oppressive.

This aura evokes the weighty oppressiveness of the Laibach discourse. The slightly stilted, definitely unnatural language used in the organigram; “Projecting Assembly (Plan Principle)” and especially “Operative Bureau (On the Principle of Conjuncture) (The Organ of Coordination and Organization)” (see organigram image), mimics some of the unwieldy institutional nomenclature of Yugoslav federal units and the difficulty in grasping such concepts can be seen as an alienating device. However, this mystification can actually aid the practical functioning of the structure as an aid to identification with it.

2.20 Structural Investment.

⁸⁵ At a more abstracted level the state or state power features as an influence in a whole range of NSK works such as Irwin’s 1988 object “L’Etat” (see NSK 1991, 151) and the Laibach poster and eponymous publication of 1983 “The Instrumentality of the State Machine” (see NSK 1991, 47). The poster showing a regimented mass meeting being addressed by a leader in a hall decorated with the Laibach cog-wheel motif was an advertisement for their notorious show at the Zagreb Biennale in April 1983 (see also chronology).

Such mystification is not simply an aesthetic effect to increase the aura of fascination around the structure but a recapitulation of the mystifying practices surrounding actual totalitarian ideologies. It can be seen both as mimetic recapitulation and (ab)use of totalitarian practice in order to heighten the impenetrable, unquestionable aura around the state. The fluent dissemination of paradox and other mystifying elements confront logic so that it becomes ever more difficult to formulate a critique in rational terms due to the opacity or “slipperiness” of the phenomenon, since rational criteria can only have a limited or even irrelevant effect upon sometimes openly irrational phenomena which do not derive their power from appeals to reason⁸⁶. Under totalitarian systems incomprehensibility can assist faith since an act of faith is required to accept the paradoxes and contradictions of the ruling ideology. Alternatively it can awe subjects into confusion, resignation or apathy as Arendt describes (see Gottlieb 1992, 186). Of course tactics of deliberate mystification as an integral part of image building are not only practiced by totalitarian regimes. The construction of mythic personality cults and the corporate imageries of rock groups as well as the nationalist reinvention of national histories employ many of the same techniques.

The organigram and now the actual state also serve as a projective apparatus for the emotions produced through mystification. If the individual groups can be taken as analogues of Althusser’s (1971) “ideological state apparatuses”, carrying out interpellation on behalf of NSK in their respective media, the structure represents the sum of this work and the vessel into which the emotions produced by their work can be directed. NSK activities produce and recapitulate certain audience responses to produce a momentum of “brand loyalty”. Apart from certain texts of the mid eighties (The Golden Bird Prize Address for example – see NSK 1991, 4-5), which orient themselves against Western cultural dominance, the NSK discourse contains no antagonistic other, no named, demonized “enemy” upon whom to project negative emotions. Therefore the strong emotions produced in reaction to the works are denied the usual totalitarian outlet of oppressive action on behalf of the ideology.⁸⁷ In its absence audience reaction can flow in two directions:

⁸⁶ Laibach in particular make a point of calling attention to their use and demonstration of fear, fascination, manipulation and mystification, qualities that characterize and help to constitute their actual works. However underlying what could otherwise be seen as a perverse celebration of such tactics and their effects is a finely tuned analytical framework which does possess its own particular rationality as seen in the consistency of approach between the groups (see Laibach 1983a in which the group provides a detailed theoretical rationale for its traumatic mode of presentation).

⁸⁷ This is not to say that some sections of the Laibach audience do not assimilate the group’s work as a confirmation of their preexisting negative projections against their own “other”. However, they are denied the

either towards the structure, creating loyalty or aversion to it, or back onto the audience member for whom the position as neutral observer is made extremely problematic. To project either (reluctant or otherwise) fascination or disgust onto the structure, either of which amplify its presence, is easier than to remain in the ambiguous state of having had certain emotions roused but having only the self to project them onto. To construct the structure in a more positive or interesting light or to demonise it are both constructive options compared to the undermining effects of being burdened by emotions without an outlet.⁸⁸ As has previously been noted, no texts refer directly to or fully explain the significance or functions of what is depicted in the organigram and this deliberately leaves a crucial space for projection and psychic investment that a fully defined structure lacks.⁸⁹ Although the structure appears rigid the fact that many of its constituent elements are little more than ciphers leaves ample space to hold and contain the projections and investments of those confronted by it.

satisfaction of *being told* who they should direct their negative energies against, leaving room for doubt about whether they have mis-interpellated the “message” they (want to) believe they are being given, bringing their experience into question. In this respect see the interview conducted with Greek Fascists (displaying the German Imperial flag) outside Laibach’s 1992 Athens concert in Benson’s film “Predictions of Fire” (1995a). Benson allows the camera to run and the fascists to speak freely. Their awkward demeanor recalls Adorno’s (1993) comment about fascist audiences having to perform their own enthusiasm. Apart from the absence of the other, the absence of any specific program or set of actions to be implemented, even at the most general level can only have limited appeal to the type of audience desperate to be able to internalize and execute whatever orders they are given. In this sense Laibach exercise (and demonstrate) command and control over their audiences but do not actually lead them to a specific objective or viewpoint but hopefully to a questioning.

⁸⁸ Here Žižek’s (1993b) remarks on Laibach’s interrogative function are relevant. An obvious implication that might be drawn from the fact that audience members are left without an outlet for their emotions would be that they subsequently expel them in some form of aggression after their exposure. Yet so far as I am aware there are no recorded instances of serious violence following Laibach shows and the degree of media scrutiny they have frequently been under makes it almost inevitable that had such incidents taken place they would have been exhaustively reported.

⁸⁹ The ambiguities or grey areas that attach to the European Union are the zones into which either negative (or more rarely positive) projections are made. Despite the mass of documentation and attempts at clarifying EU activities even this resolutely rational structure attracts a vast number of psycho-political projections. The fact that a fundamentalist section of the Norwegian electorate has been able to project atavistic fears about the resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire or the EU flag representing the mark of the beast, demonstrates the way in which political structures as much as beliefs or policies always attract such projections.

2.21 Retro-Construction.

“The Lacanian answer to the question: From where does the repressed return? is, therefore, paradoxically: From the future... As soon as we enter the symbolic order, the past is always present in the form of historical tradition and the meaning of these traces is not given; it changes continually with the transformations of the signifier’s network. Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way.” (Žižek 1995, 55-6).

There is one aspect of NSK (the temporal) not so far addressed in this discussion. If it is clear what NSK is it not clear *when* it is. This question refers to the need to explain the means by which NSK make use of and manipulate historical consciousness both in general and in relation to the NSK structure. NSK statements allude to the way in which the non-closedness seen in works such as the organigram manifests itself as a temporal phenomenon:

“The retro principle supports constant alteration of language and shifting from one pictorial expression to another... It makes use of various already existing language models, modifies itself through the past on the formal level, but remains intact on the conceptual one.”(NSK 1991, 111)⁹⁰

The retro principle is crucial to NSK, built in to the abstract NSK structure. By the time the “organigram” was circulated NSK had been extant for two years. The design retrospectively gave NSK bodily representation. Given this temporal lapse it would be tempting to theorize the organigram as equivalent to a Lacanian “mirror stage” in the development of NSK’s (bodily) self consciousness, a first (representation of) its initial self recognition (see Lacan 1994, 227). Whilst it is metaphorically useful such a characterization would again overlook the temporal element since, as an entity structured by the retro principle, models of linear development are of limited use in describing NSK. It might as easily be said of NSK as of the retro principle (another infinitely flexible category) that in Irwin’s words it “...modifies itself through the past on the formal level but remains intact on the conceptual level.” (NSK 1991, 111).

Only the original NSK “core” extant at the time of its formation can have remained unstructured by such constant alteration or retro-construction. Further, because of the gap NSK maintain between themselves and their discourse even the original concepts presented at the time of NSK’s formation have inevitably been mediated by their transmission from the members through the mesh of the new

⁹⁰ From the 1984 Irwin document “Retro Principle The Principle of Manipulation With The Memory of The Visible Emphasized Eclecticism - The Platform For National Authenticity”.

structure to the public. Therefore only the original pre-transmitted intentions of those who formed NSK can be seen as completely unaltered. The initial (non public) founding acts of NSK were mediated by transmission while all that has been produced since then is open to temporal re-formation and their temporal location is the potential subject of constant negotiation. The NSK issue of "Problem!" (1985) was the first collective product and was one of earliest appearances of the NSK logo. Even at this initial stage there were two temporal gaps in the (re)-presentation of the structure, that between NSK's private foundation and its public debut and that between the creators themselves and their audience (actually the gap between the latter and their own discourse) in which ambiguities could develop. These gaps could easily be closed but are instead left open. The gap between formation and debut could as easily be overcome by some deft temporal retro engineering of the type the retro principle (potentially) facilitates. NSK could easily have waited to formally institute itself until its public debut was prepared or have retrospectively falsified the date of this to coincide with its appearance. Whilst this would have been perfectly feasible (and symbolically appropriate as a recapitulation of totalitarian practice) NSK did not (feel any need to) do so because of the potent manipulability of such a gap in the structure which provides a constantly revisable space for re (or de) invention and the (re)-production of alternative mythologies or genealogies, even if these are not used.

Besides being post facto, the organigram is also partly pre facto, in that it covered areas in which activities were intended or might take place, not only those in which they had or were taking place. Paradoxically what is fashioned to seem like a highly formal bureaucratic regulative system actually serves as an open framework for future development rather than a confining regulatory mechanism. In seeming to inscribe upon what Laibach (NSK 1991, 53) refer to as the "body" of NSK a regime that seemed (physically) restrictive and (appeared) to limit its freedom of (conceptual) movement to the fields shown in the organigram, NSK simultaneously opened up scope to transcend such a regime through subsequent (and previous) developments. This is possible not just because of the skill with which such a deep illusion was created but because in Laibach's terms the "head" (hierarchy) remains in control.

"The retrospective character of man's spiritual sight is particularly indicative of such periods as ours, i.e., the age of utter confusion. And the disintegrated *sub-object*⁹¹ who, in the chaos of modern times, can neither find

⁹¹ An NSK neologism first employed by Laibach in a 1983 interview (NSK 1991, 51) to describe what they termed a "TV personality", a personality worn down by exposure to TV into a humbled member of the mass.

nor give support, turns his eyes back into the past, where, so he believes, the solution to the riddle lies hidden." Statement at the opening of an NSK Exhibition in Ljubljana, 16th September 1988. (NSK 1991, 8-10)

This quotation hints at the factors that make the organigram such a potent potential projective apparatus and help to create and maintain a fascination with the (apparent) structure in itself. The audience is kept engaged attempting to decipher the structure (which regulates their expectations) whilst behind this screen NSK itself is left relatively free to develop as it wishes, with a greater autonomy than many artists manage to secure from the demands of "their" market. As a result of the structure and the framework of the "retro principle" NSK are well placed to attempt to represent subsequent developments as the fulfilment of previously (placed) plans. The 1987 speech made to celebrate the Yugoslav release of Laibach's album acknowledges the flexibility built into the structure and simultaneously exemplifies how allusion to the fulfilment of privately set, previously unannounced, and still obscure, goals furthers the corporate image of resolute purposefulness and efficiency:

"At the very beginning of our activities we shook off all illusions about free artistic activities: we drafted a program for several years ahead and carried it out with maximum effort and discipline. We established a method of work and stuck to it, without being rigidly bound to it. It did provide, however, a solid foundation for a structure with enough breathing space to allow for all paradoxes and inventions in thinking." (NSK 1991, 67).

NSK successfully manages to (retro)-project itself as something eternal, or at least timeless, despite the fact that it did not come onto the scene as a fully formed entity but was retroactively structured from its inception. When the organigram was produced many of the sections shown were empty categories which from NSK's ideal-theoretical position of planners of their own history had already been retroactively filled out at some (unknown) future date and the same is true of the structure as a whole, which is retrospectively given the meaning(s) it had always (immanently) possessed by the anticipated (retro) projections of its audience.

Since only a relatively small number of people have followed NSK since its inception and perhaps not even the members themselves can detect every temporal inconsistency in later accounts of its history it would hardly be impossible to doctor its history. This is especially true in the West where information about NSK filtered through slowly via numerous, frequently rumour-laden, sources. There is no shortage of information concerning NSK. Since 1991 there have been several NSK

publications containing increasingly accessible texts as well as an immense quantity of foreign and domestic press material. However to date there has been no serious attempt to synthesize this material into a coherent chronological account and this situation enables parallel (yet scarcely connected) accounts to survive, mutate and proliferate. Therefore NSK have little need for falsification since these parallel and sometimes contradictory, information streams, plus NSK's mystificatory pronouncements maintain a space in which constant self-modification and alteration can always be made to coincide with the facade, as in mutational totalitarian historiographies. Due to the plausibility of the NSK aura (corporate facade) and the fact that they are not particularly concerned if anyone is perseverant enough to detect discontinuities, actual falsification (as opposed to dissimulation and concealment) is irrelevant and unnecessary.

NSK has constructed itself so that it appears to embody the authority necessary to manipulate or alter its history at will. It can also plausibly dismiss any exposure of such a practice as irrelevant on the grounds that its "authority" (and its success) is not founded on any pretence of rationality or veracity but largely upon irrationality and ambiguity. This recapitulates the (possibility of) the absolute arbitrariness with which totalitarian regimes attempt to manipulate history. The almost fiendish level of complexity attached even to the possibility of the use of such an techniques evokes the warning given by Gottlieb (1992, 120) that:

"... the proper exercise of historical consciousness is our antidote to the threat of totalitarian ideologies."

On one level the fact that NSK makes little attempt to demystify itself or kill off rumours (except occasionally for the most damaging ones accusing them of fascism) can be seen as an attempt to frustrate the (proper) exercise of historical consciousness. Yet NSK simultaneously encourages the application of historical consciousness in relation to the historical figures and motifs that are the bases of its "retro-quotations". NSK's temporal manipulations also demonstrate that without constant vigilance it is possible for any authority, legitimate or otherwise to pervert or even eliminate historical consciousness. Whilst NSK is passively secretive in deliberately keeping its own history relatively obscure or at least never providing a full account of it, it simultaneously forces a new historical consciousness, both of the sources of its previously neglected or suppressed aesthetic and historical motifs, and implicitly of the possibility that contemporary regimes (both local and foreign) might be employing tactics of the type summarized by Gottlieb (1992) in her description of Orwell's "1984":

“In the long run, what the Party insists on is the demonisation of historical time so that it can create a sense of its own timelessness.” (p. 92)

Where NSK has consciously made use of this dictatorial approach to time as a manipulable entity is in establishing the structure as a vessel for the authority that would retrospectively be vested in it. Through the very precise symbolism of the NSK logo and the systematic nature of its joint manifestations it was able to present itself as a fully formed body even at the start of its development. From the perspective of those who first became aware of NSK some time after the initial 1984-5 period it might well seem that NSK did arrive on the scene as a pre-formed or “ready made” entity, but as Irwin sees it⁹² the NSK structure was expressly designed to encourage, receive and form such retro-projections. Thus the foundation of NSK was very much anticipatory in character in that it could only retrospectively gain the “authority” (prestige, influence and a following), which it persuasively embodied from the outset. It is in this light that comments about the production of time⁹³ and the stress on the temporal character of the NSK state (“in time”) should be read.

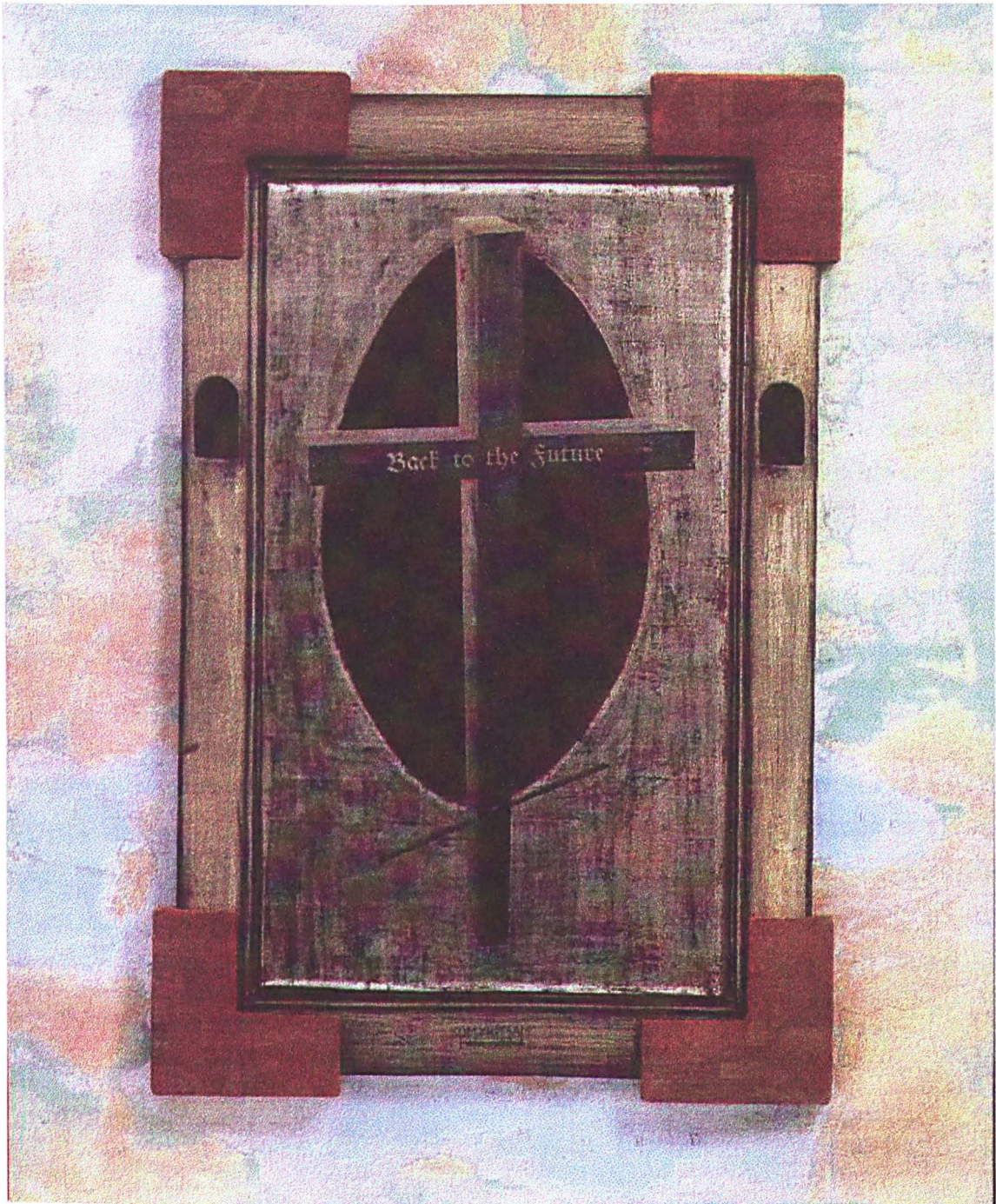
Retroactivity has been a constant NSK theme, particularly in the works and texts of Irwin. Generally it is present as a background theme, alluded to or brought into works or texts⁹⁴. However it also featured more explicitly as a motif in works such as Irwin’s (1991) work “Communism” (see below), which has at its centre a cross bearing the inscription “Back to The Future”⁹⁵.

⁹² Conversation with Borut Vogelnik, 1/8/95, Ljubljana.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ For instance the four point statement “The Future is The Seed of The Past” by Irwin, reproduced NSK 1991,131.

⁹⁵ See Irwin 1991b.



Irwin: "Communism", 1991.

Above all though it is the NSK structure itself, which embodies and is the result of retroactivity. One of Irwin's aims is the creation or construction of time. This can be interpreted as reflective of a (purely symbolic) discursive attempt to (re) create time as a manipulable substance. As Gottlieb

(1992) argues, control over both the past and future (which under totalitarian conditions can largely be achieved) acts as a de facto abolition of the present by removing the subject's freedom to autonomously remember and reconstruct the past.

The hermetic, retro-constructed NSK structure does seriously obstruct (and implicitly question the need for) independent chronologies, due both to these built in paradoxes and the sheer mass of uncollated (even by NSK) source material. The effort required to overcome the self-mystification, rumours and dispersal of information is actually so disproportionate as to throw into question the value of the exercise. In fact as Irwin's previously-quoted description of the retro principle (NSK 1991, 111) suggests, to seek a definitive answer or a definitive historical account shorn of all ambiguities is to fall into the trap NSK sets by manipulating temporal perception. However the "production of time" has another more positive facet. At a certain level it overcomes the post-modern dominance of spatial logic diagnosed by Jameson:

"The crisis in historicity now dictates a return, in a new way, to the question of temporal organization in general in the postmodern force field, and indeed, to the problem of the form that time, temporality and the syntagmatic will be able to take in a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic." (1991, 25)

Under spatial domination teleology disappears, stasis becomes the dominant factor. The (re)production of time unfreezes this situation enabling disruption, change and reformation. Yet this is not an avant-gardist attempt to construct a new future based on negation of the past. Rather retrogardism attempts to free the present and change the future via the reworking of past utopianisms and historical wounds. What now has to be considered is the nature of the national and ideological past that NSK seek to rework.

3: Slovenija/Germania: NSK, Nation and State.

(See Video Clip Two)

3.1 Context

What is the source of Laibach's violence and conceptual extremism? The national image used to promote Slovenia (a cultured peaceful nation that has suffered violence repeatedly) provides few clues and appears to support the accusation made by some of Laibach's opponents that it was basically an alien or foreign contaminant of the national cultural space (Šepetevac 1987a). Nationalist arguments tend towards selectivity, overemphasising those national characteristics seen as most positive and most likely to appeal both to the domestic population and to potential foreign supporters. The mainstream pro-independence narrative in Slovenia sought to externalise the violence and oppression within Slovene history onto Nazism and Communism in particular and to present Slovenes as peaceful victims of alien totalitarianisms bent on the suppression, or even elimination of, autonomous Slovene culture and national life.¹ There is no doubt that Slovenes suffered several attempts at "culturecide" prior to 1945 and that Slovene minorities in Austria and Italy remain in a marginal position (Varga-Novljan 1999, Stranj, 1992). However what is missing from this narrative is the extent to which the authoritarianism, violence and ideological conflict associated with the various occupiers of Slovene territory all had domestic counterparts. If the Slovene national(ist) narrative is accepted, Laibach's performance of militaristic hyper-authoritarianism might seem like some alien intrusion into the Slovene cultural space, particularly due to its Germanic aspects. However Laibach was alienating precisely because even in its choice of name it re-integrated phenomena such as fanatical Germanophilia, ideological extremism and violence into the heart of Slovene identity whilst simultaneously utilising the positive folkloric qualities valorised by the nationalists. The mere fact of the existence of a Slovene group employing such extreme methods implicitly challenges the model of Slovenes as wholly innocent victims of

¹ The Slovene President's statement on the declaration of independence (Kučan 1991, 86) represents a rhetorical attempt to reinforce an unbroken narrative of a consistent pro-democratic spirit amongst the Slovenes:

"Democracy, freedom, respect for human dignity and rights, respect for ethnic minorities and immigrants, openness and cooperation with others - to these values we will always remain faithful. Generations of Slovenes before us believed in them, just as all free and democratic peoples in the world have always believed in them."

external aggression, and, in the language used to justify the ban on Laibach performances, “unearths disturbing memories” of collaboration and self-assimilation as much as external aggression. Where the Slovene-Yugoslav and the Slovene-nationalist narratives overlapped was in this wish to externalise violence and anti-democratic sentiment and, when, their presence among the Slovenes was acknowledged, to present them as the aberrant result of foreign oppression rather than domestic collaboration.

Officially, Ljubljana was Yugoslavia’s first “hero city” which had boldly resisted the occupiers. Laibach’s name was disturbing not only because it evoked memories of the Nazi occupation but also of the active collaboration of General Rupnik’s Ljubljana-based government (1943-45)². Laibach therefore represented the spectre of militantly anti-democratic forces within Slovene society.³

According to Thompson (1993) Laibach made inevitable a return to the dark period represented by the collaborationist poster shown above:

“When a rock band calling itself Laibach kitted itself in peaked caps, jackets and jodphurs, and barked songs about “strong men of the nation” and so forth (often in German), it was evoking the Second World War, when the city was occupied by the Nazis for a year and a half. Open discussion of this period was taboo because it would have begged the question of fascist collaboration in wartime Slovenia.” (Thompson 1993, 43).

To be reminded of this period in this manner was severely offensive in itself, but Laibach’s Germanic imagery contained another perhaps even more unacceptable claim – that there is a necessary organic relationship between Slovene identity and the Germanism that repeatedly attempted to eradicate it, or the fact that neither identity is complete without its antagonistic other. It was this interrelatedness that made collaboration with Nazism and self-assimilation viable for many Slovenes. The presence of Germanic imageries and the German language in NSK works refers back to this and was among the most disturbing elements of the overall NSK “Gesamtkunstwerk”. As it is associated with a project asserting Slovene culture NSK’s use of Germanic imagery does not

² From 1941 to 1943 Ljubljana (“Lubiana”) was under Italian occupation. When the Italian regime collapsed in 1943 German forces occupied the sector previously controlled by the Italians.

³ For an example of wartime collaborationist propaganda, see the website of the Slovene museum of modern history (<http://www2.arnes.si/~ljmuzejnz-ika9.jpg>.) One image “Tod Oder Leben?” (Death or Life) is split into two sections. On the left a scene of death under the hammer and sickle whilst on the right a smiling woman in Slovene national costume stands in front of a sunlit village where the swastika flies.

imply a continuation of the Slovene tendency to pro-German supplicancy (see section 3.10) but to fully understand NSK's mode of engagement with Slovene and German national imageries it is necessary to examine traditional modes of both nationalism and authoritarianism in Slovenia.

3.2 Slovenism as Reactive Cultural Nationalism.

Laibach and NSK efforts seemed to be or were perceived as oriented towards (re)awakening national consciousness via cultural construction and this refers directly to the "Slovenist" strand of cultural activities and political thought which has traditionally been peaceful and anti-authoritarian. Visually, a "Slovenist" (culturally assertive) element was apparent from an early stage in Laibach and NSK projects and long predated (or (un)consciously anticipated), the more general reawakening of Slovene national sentiment in the late eighties.⁴

"Neue Slowenische Kunst is an organized cultural political campaign for the renewal of Slovene national art on the European level, a rigorously planned establishment of an authentic cultural space at the crossroads of two worlds, a negation of spiritual smallness and a deliberate attack on the established cultural monopoly of the West." NSK Statement 1986. (NSK 1991, 6-7).

Traditionally, Slovenist strands were always in opposition to the dominant socio-political ethos, but this dissent was expressed in cultured and peaceful forms that from a Marxist perspective are irredeemably "bourgeois". The Slovene emphasis on cultural rather than state construction, (see Rupel 1992), the development of a native intelligentsia and the language were all vital to Slovene survival but the general deference of the cultural nationalists had limited utility in protecting Slovenes from assimilation and political pressures.

The Habsburgs, Yugoslav Royal regime and to a much lesser extent the Titoist system all sought to curb Slovene self-expression once it passed beyond the tolerance level of the particular system. The Third Reich and Fascist Italy went beyond suppression to systematic eradication; massacres, deportations, forced assimilation and the physical eradication of Slovene cultural heritage as in the destruction of libraries and the Italianisation even of names on gravestones. A brutal Italianisation programme against Slovenes and Croats on post-first world war Italian territory characterised by

⁴ One of the earliest examples of this was the Kozolec (distinctive Slovene hay rack) featured on the sleeve of "Rekapitulacija", (Laibach 1985 - see section 3.7 below). Other images in this category include the five monumental paintings of Irwin's "Slovenske Atene" (Slovene Athens) series (see section p. 95). The repeated NSK use of the sower motif first Slovenized by the impressionist Ivan Grohar also falls into this category of cultural Slovenism (see

Rusinow (1969, 270) as “the attempt to liquidate the Slavs”⁵ commenced as early as 1927. When German forces occupied “their” zone of Slovenia in April nineteen forty-one, hundreds of thousands of volumes were destroyed⁶ and monuments were either demolished or had their inscriptions Germanised, together with all family names.

Slovenism rarely took a physical form prior to World War Two.⁷ It was primarily reactive in character and almost never matched the vehemence of the anti-Slovene forces. Barker (1990, 77), notes that “Under Totalitarian rule many took up physical resistance who might otherwise have resigned themselves to assimilation.” Nazi and Italian violence then actually reinforced a sense of Sloveneness, which might actually have been more vulnerable to less brutal assimilation tactics. Yet although forced to react as Slovenes in defence of their right to be such, the nationalist character of this mobilisation was soon overshadowed once the Slovene partisans subscribed to the 1943 Jajce Agreement on the creation of a post-war Communist Yugoslavia. Communist dominance of the O.F. (Osvobodilna Fronta/Liberation Front) meant that, despite its active support for Slovene claims in Italy and Austria the class struggle against internal enemies was often the main priority. The resistance was nationally organised but fought for a federal, multi-national state rather than a Slovene, Croat or Serb national state. (Had the resistance been more representative of popular opinion such a decision might not have been taken). IRWIN (NSK 1991, 122) have compared the founding of the O.F. to that of NSK and Laibach made frequent references to the partisan movement in the eighties. In fact, large sectors of the population, overtly and covertly encouraged by the Church hierarchy (see Roter 1993), actively collaborated in an anti-Communist struggle that took priority over the defence of Slovene national interests.⁸ The collaborationist ideologues saw

Erjavec & Gržinić, 1991, 94-5).

⁵ Rusinow gives a detailed account of the treatment of the Slav and German populations incorporated into Italy after the first world war, following events through to the settlement of the Trieste dispute (1954).

⁶ Arnez (1958, 93) quotes a figure of 1.2 million books destroyed by German forces.

⁷ One rare exception to this was a little-known disturbance in Ljubljana in September 1908, which had to be quelled by the army and left two dead. During the riot German street-names and other public signs were removed and in 1909 a legal struggle for Slovene-only street signs that had run since 1892 was won by the Slovene camp (seen Melik 1989, 149). Rogel's (1977) is the only major account in English of nineteenth century Slovene nationalist thought, albeit in relation to Yugoslavism. Particularly in the introduction Rogel stresses the unthinkability of independence for Slovenes, due to their small numbers and the fierce resistance even civic nationalism attracted from the Germans and their Slovene allies. As she states (1977, v) “Slovenes could not be daring and demanding in their nationalism”.

⁸ The Vaška Straža (Village Guards) formations were often recruited from the most devout church goers, and the movement was actively encouraged by the clergy. However many were pressed into service and defected to the partisans when the opportunity arose. Partly this was a pragmatic expression of resistance to Communist anti-religiosity and food expropriations but often also took the form of explicit ideological validation of collaborationist activities by the hierarchy - Bishop Grigorij Rožman of Ljubljana even blessed Slovene SS auxiliaries in a 1944

the O.F. as a communist menace to European, Christian values from which only Germany could protect Slovenia.

The O.F. represented the greatest show of defiance by Slovenes since their original military subjugation and conversion by the Germans at the end of the ninth century. Rusinow (1969, 277) presents a view of the O.F.'s significance that challenges the collaborationist view that communism was inimical to the nation:

"... in its ranks and in its spirit, the Slovene people, one of the most "unhistorical" of Europe's nations, found themselves at last and laid the ground for the Slovene national renaissance that has played a vital role in the history of post 1945 Yugoslavia"

The comment may seem to overstate the case or betray the naive enthusiasm of a Slovenophile foreigner but it is interesting in that it refutes contemporary nationalists who claim that Slovene development was entirely stifled under communism.⁹ The situation of Slovenes in terms of the development of their culture (so long as it was not explicitly nationalist) improved immeasurably after the war and Laibach (1995c) have often stressed this fairly explicitly:

"The Slovenians, as former German farm hands, adhered to a victorious coalition in World War II, and were consequently free from the frustrations of guilt and defeat. Safely in the lap of Yugoslavia, we were able to consider the key issues of our common metaphysics unburdened and with certain (self-) critical historical distance. The favourable liberal-communist climate and innate discipline made it possible for the Slovenians - in spite of the socio-economic blockades of the socialist self-management system to reach enviable spiritual and satisfactory material prosperity with regard to other European nations."¹⁰

ceremony.

⁹ Around the time of the attack on Slovenia by the Yugoslav army this thesis took on an increasingly excessive tone that implied nothing positive had come from the entire Yugoslav era: "Seventy years of togetherness have taught us a bitter lesson; a lesson which is culminating in these days of national trial, when the "brotherly love" is on the other side understood as rape." (Ježernik 1991).

¹⁰ The equation of Slovenes and "German farm-hands" again evokes the Slovene experience of historical

3.3 Modes of Slovenist Dissent

Ever since the revolution of 1848 it has been the Slovene Liberal movement and its successors, rather than the extreme right, which has been the strongest advocate of Slovene national rights. This is not to say that the clerical party was anti-nationalist, simply that it was predominantly Austro-loyalist. The ideologists behind the Slovene quisling formations and Partisans both played the national card only when tactically opportune, and found overt or spontaneous national sentiment inconvenient and even threatening. In practice, the right wing in Slovenia was as likely to put ideology before the nation as the Communists.

Catholicism is a key component of Slovene identity but this obscures contribution made by the reformation to the development of a Slovene cultural identity. The reformation's emphasis on the production of religious texts in the vernacular accelerated the development of written Slovene. The reformer Primož Trubar (1508-1586) produced the first Slovene grammar (paradoxically published in Germany). One author, Loud (1981) describes the reformation period as the true beginning of a distinct Slovene spiritual and intellectual life. By the time of the reformation the Slovene ethnic base was beginning to stabilise after five hundred years' attrition from assimilation and the southward spread of German colonisation. The beginnings of this recovery coincided with the reformation and the development of a written culture of international standard, beyond the documentation of peasant folklore.

Significantly, Trubar chose Latin script in preference to Gothic for printed Slovene. Perhaps in recognition of the national implications of this religious dissent the Counter Reformation seems to have taken especial care to suppress the new culture emerging in the Slovene lands. Loud (1981) states that nearly all copies of Slovene works produced during the reformation were destroyed except for the first Slovene bible of 1584 which survived and was even used even by Catholics due to the quality of the translation.

Roter (1992, 71) states that the reformation "... did not leave behind any large or decisive traces due to the systematic and violent counter-reformation". However the re-imposition of orthodoxy was a gradual process, initially using subtle pressures such as economic exclusion rather than force,

subordination and can be compared to the Slovene writer Ivan Cankar's references to Slovene servility.

and small numbers of Slovene Protestants held out, preserving their knowledge in tiny mountain settlements or within closed noble families who were the last people permitted to practice the new faith (see Kann & David, 1984, 43-9). The imperial authorities were far more concerned with the politico-religious dissent in the Czech lands that led to the Thirty Years War than the purely religious cultural dissent of the Slovenes. The Slovene reformation was also a fusion of religious and national awakening, yet the Slovenes knew better than to stray far beyond economic and religious dissent and were unable and unwilling to formulate any national demands at this time. Although the reformation had obvious national implications no national demands were made. The Slovenes were at a very early stage of national reorientation that the reformation only had a limited impact on prior to its suppression. The reformation did not permanently alter the Catholic status of Slovenia as it did in the Czech and Slovak lands (Kirschbaum 1995) but it did have a lasting linguistic-cultural legacy. It also set a pattern to the extent that even very modest efforts at natural cultural development were from this time linked to dissent, initially religious and subsequently political.

Since the development of Slovene written culture had become so closely associated with Protestantism, the restoration of orthodoxy inevitably had a negative impact on this process. However the linguistic legacy of the reformation was not entirely eliminated, and was reactivated from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. The suppression of Slovene cultural development and the association of piety with loyalty were necessary from the Imperial point of view but were also ethnically advantageous to the dominant Germans as a strong Slovene self awareness was bound to hinder assimilation. For these reasons later Slovene nationalists would view the re-catholicisation of popular sentiment as in effect an aid to Germanization, just as the final conversion of the independent Slovene pagans would come to be viewed as much an enslaving as an enlightening process.¹¹ This theme played an important part in NSK's "Baptism" production and the military component of the conversion process is symbolised in the 1985 Laibach poster in which a military chaplain baptises subdued-looking peasants:

¹¹ Kuhar's (1962) account of Slovene Christianization clearly shows the extent to which, at least on the peripheries of Slovene-inhabited territory, conversion was often tantamount to de-Slovenization. As a Catholic priest himself, Kuhar may even have played down the extent of the conversions' military, ethnic and economic motivations and effects. This same reading of the conversion experience informed Prešeren's epic nineteenth-century poem "Baptism on the Savica" and NSK's "Baptism Under Triglav" (section 5.7).



Laibach: "Baptism Below Triglav" Poster, 1985.

The national reawakening of the nineteenth century was undertaken by a German-schooled intelligentsia and in the manner of romantic nationalism idealised the surviving traditions of the uneducated, and thus partially un-Germanised, peasantry. However as elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe, the peasants, the nominated guardians of the national spirit, were, initially, far more exercised by economic issues such as land reform than by the national question and this attitude

was even more prevalent among the church hierarchy.¹² Slovene political nationalism took the form of progressive bourgeois liberalism with a national programme more radical than their rivals of left and right. However the Catholic Clerical party always commanded the majority of popular support and the Liberals' power base never spread beyond the municipal administration of Ljubljana. Clerical-oriented intellectuals had a deeply ambiguous attitude to the national revival, as Thompson (1993) points out:

“When they came, the first stirrings of Slovenian consciousness were not greeted with a chorus of welcome by the educated class. Not everyone agreed with Prešeren's and other liberals' belief that a modern literary idiom was the most urgent priority, so that Slovenes would not be obliged to use German for sophisticated communication. Church-oriented intellectuals argued that vigorous assertion of native language and culture was bound to create severe difficulties with Vienna.”
(p. 19)

3.4 Slovenism under Yugoslavia.

Under the first Yugoslavia the Clerical Party retained its dominance and won considerable autonomy for Slovenia by employing a conciliatory approach towards the first Yugoslav regime.¹³ During the war Slovenes were forced by the policies of the Axis occupiers into a national liberation struggle. However the struggle was as much civil war (against anti-Communists and collaborators) as an expression of Slovenism. Subscription to the Yugoslav resistance movement meant that the Yugoslav ideal was paramount and Slovene territorial ambitions in Carinthia and Italy were sacrificed to political expediency at the end of the war. Thus although at one level the O.F. was an expression of militant national assertion it cannot really be related to the Slovenist tradition as such. The victory of the partisans saw the expulsion or elimination of Catholic politicians, many of whom had been active collaborators in the Nazi “struggle against Bolshevism”. After the war the Yugoslavist “Brotherhood and Unity” ideology set the ultimate limits on Slovenist cultural expression. Under post-war political and economic stability Slovene deference meant that national issues played little part until 1969 when Slovenia became the first republic to challenge Federal supremacy in what is known as “The Slovene Roads Affair”. When it was announced that the previously agreed construction of some major roads in Slovenia was being shelved in favour of work in other republics the Slovene reaction was strong. Demonstrations and meetings were held and the Republican assembly publicly protested at the decision. The Slovene party was

¹² From the late eighteenth century the church encouraged literacy amongst the peasants but politically it stressed loyalty to the church and the empire (See Roter 1993), preferring to argue for economic reform.

subsequently rebuked and had to accept the decision. Ramet (1992, 94-97) notes that the leader of LCS felt it necessary to issue a statement that Slovenia had no intention of secession. However such nationalism as there was in Slovenia during this period was primarily economic and far less assertive than that experienced in Croatia during this period (open expression of national sentiment had always been problematic for Slovenes, whereas as the Croats and particularly the Serbs had not had to disown their identity to such an extent as recently in their history and had at least some experience of their own states). In terms of national-political (as opposed to cultural) self-expression, the second half of the seventies was in some ways one of the most a-national (and apparently quiescent) in Slovene history, perhaps comparable to the period between the Counter Reformation and the national revival of the nineteenth century. Even after greater Republican autonomy in 1974, "bourgeois nationalism" remained as inimical to the authorities in Ljubljana as to those in Belgrade¹⁴ If anything the politico-cultural climate after 1974 was harsher than previously and Tomc (1989, 121-22) even states that at least in terms of rock and student subculture the climate was as harsh as it had been in the immediate post-war years. However he stresses the extent to which the repressiveness of the seventies derived at least as much from a repressive social climate as from state action. Similarly, Mastnak (1994) argues in the early nineteen-eighties the authorities undertook a "delegation of repression". The repressive potential of mainstream opinion was encouraged through residents' associations and other social institutions to help suppress alternative cultural and social activities (see page 224).

Whatever the tensions of the second Yugoslavia its creation did finally halt the forces of forcible Germanization and assimilation. Even before Tito's decentralisation of power to the republics, real advances were being made in restoring and promoting Slovene culture after the setbacks of the war. Whilst "bourgeois nationalism", as defined by the regime was punished within Slovenia and Croatia in the early seventies, Slovenes were no longer persecuted purely for promoting or defending their cultural identity but only when this activity took on a political edge. Prior to the second half of the last decade there was no threat to Slovene culture as such but only to those elements that directly contradicted the pan-Yugoslav doctrines of Brotherhood and Unity and self-management. As a result, until the late eighties romantic "Slovenist" nationalism was confined to a

¹³ See Vodopivec 1994, 31-2.

¹⁴ Dolenc (1994, 87) sums up the contradictory effects of decentralization thus: "A new Yugoslav constitution in 1974 emphasized the integrative role of the LCY in the state order... At the same time however, secessionism of Croats, Slovenes, and Albanians was ruled unacceptable. Ideological control over education, science, and to a minor extent, art intensified once again."

few artists and academics and the anti-communist exiles.

Those in Slovenia who did present nationalist arguments constantly sought to attribute Slovenes' real and imagined lack of national progress to Belgrade. Anti-Communist exiles and some of the intellectuals associated with "Nova Revija" made consistent claims about the alleged threats to Slovene culture but it was only in the late nineteen eighties when the Federal authorities attempted to prevent further Slovenization (the use of Slovene in the army) and threatened existing Slovene cultural rights (proposing a standard educational curriculum with a heavy Serbo-Croatian emphasis at the expense of Slovene and other "minority" languages - see Magaš 1993, 133) that a genuine threat to national culture was again perceived.¹⁵ The neo-centralism propounded in Belgrade helped stimulate mass national protest and was one of the most frequent grievances both amongst ideological nationalists and the proponents of civil society and the alternative.

NSK statements speak both of national (cultural) assertion and acknowledged the real national advances made possible by communism (intentionally or otherwise) as in the address at the annual "Zlata Ptica" prize award ceremony in 1986:

"Extraordinary historical circumstances have shaped our generation, instilling in us the awareness that the youth of a physically small nation such as ours must muster up greater creative energy than the youth of larger nations, that the post-revolution youth must be the most creative generation in the history of Slovenia; previous generations were too concerned with the elementary historical requirements of a small nation; the struggle for liberty, indiscriminate oppression and enslaving, the fight to preserve its own language, which was not given its homeland rights, the fight for a geographically unified state, and finally, the fight for basic human and political rights. We are aware that we belong to that generation of Slovenes which does not have to waste precious energy on the struggles for the basic rights of our nation, but that we can entirely devote our time first and foremost to artistic production. We also know that nothing was bestowed upon us with the intention that it be forgotten, but that it be preserved and nurtured - for the eternal proclamation of the independence of Slovenia at home and abroad. Thus, a precondition for every creative action is organized consciousness and the knowledge of history." (author's emphasis) (NSK 1991, pp. 6-7)

Whilst determined to break the pattern of Slovene reticence and create an assertively Slovene cultural form NSK also took advantage of the fact that the post-war period was the first in which Slovenes had dealt with a regime concerned only to ensure that a distinct Slovene identity was not overemphasised at the expense of Yugoslav consciousness, rather than trying to eliminate it entirely through assimilation and suppression. NSK explain their concentration on political activity through

¹⁵ Ironically the nationalist thesis about the inherent repressiveness of Belgrade was partly self-fulfilling. The nationalism of "Nova Revija" and the ever-wider spectrum of opinion permitted in the Slovene media helping provoke Belgrade into attempting to curb Slovene autonomy.

artistic production in the light of their claim that their generation must preserve their identity in the face of relegation by *Western* cultural hegemony, rather than the destructive efforts of neighbouring and domestic regimes that had previously attempted this. In particular Laibach's emphasis on the hegemonic potentials of Western popular culture directly contradicted the nationalist claim that threats to Slovene culture came exclusively from "the south", from Belgrade (see chapter five). The fact that NSK were able to operate and achieve success within Yugoslavia suggested that the centre was weaker and less monolithic than some feared and the references to Western cultural hegemony were a warning that a total shift of orientation from Belgrade to the West also contained threats to Slovene cultural autonomy.

3.5 NSK's Relation To Contemporary Slovene Nationalism.

The presence in the collective memory of historically-recent violence against Slovene culture makes the shift from cultural, "respectable" to militantly assertive Slovenism of the type NSK seemed to represent, appear far less radical than it would otherwise have done. It can be argued that NSK's disturbing introduction of force and militancy into the Slovenist tradition stems directly from the violence employed against a primarily passive¹⁶ Slovene culture during the war. Much of the shock associated with Laibach's emergence into the Slovene cultural space derived not just from the almost unprecedented militancy of their Slovenism¹⁷ but the juxtaposition of Slovene national archetypes with imageries of the fascist ideology that had so recently tried to extinguish Slovene national consciousness.¹⁸ Despite the ambiguous inclusion of Fascist, Communist and avant-

16 Official Slovene attempts to secure greater protection for their minorities in Austria and Italy have a deferential air and like the minorities themselves are primarily reactive rather than proactive, never matching the vehemence of their opponents. See Barker 1984 and Stranj 1992 for more detailed discussion of these issues; typically it is the outsider Barker who takes a stronger line on the situation of the minority in Carinthia than Slovene representatives and authors themselves).

17 A theme not generally discussed by Laibach's critics.

18 Some members of the Nova Revija circle associated with the "57" issue argued that Slovene self assertion and consciousness were heavily suppressed by Tito's regime. While it is certainly true that the most archetypal symbols or those with a large potential for national mobilisation were obscured during this period and that this leant them some of their power when they reemerged in the eighties, it is also acknowledged by many that Slovene culture made significant advances after world war two since for the first time it was free from threats of assimilation or suppression by an ethnically hostile state or one with an entrenched anti-Slovene bias. It was only within the cultural security of the Yugoslav framework (even before self management) that Slovene culture was able to recover and develop enough to reassert itself as Yugoslavia began to disintegrate. To some extent folklorism and historical revisionism were at odds with the Slovene image of modernity (as a modern technological nation) as with the collective Yugoslav ideology. It was only when the prosperity of the seventies turned into the economic crisis of the eighties that national signifiers

garde/internationalist iconographies it remains the most dynamic expression of Slovene identity yet seen. This was a new mode of national expression in a country with little tradition of such militant national expression. The outrage provoked by Laibach's engagement with Slovene national archetypes exposed the degree of self-censorship and repression surrounding explicit national symbolism in the more authoritarian climate prevailing after 1974. Subscription to the Yugoslav narrative entailed suspicion of direct assertive engagement with national archetypes (as opposed to folklorist activity). It should also be stressed that whilst the economy remained out of crisis and affection for Tito was still a political factor, the absence of national assertiveness cannot be attributed primarily to either external or internal repression. Modernist aspects of socialism such as internationalism and brotherhood and unity were ideals many found easy to accept, even if only in return for stability and prosperity. While state repression was always a background threat (which youth tended to have more experience of), the degree of acceptance of or acquiescence to the regime meant that assertive Slovenism was seen to an extent distasteful or even primitive, especially in the eyes of more committed supporters of the status quo. However, the violence of Laibach's intrusion into Slovene culture suggests that whether conscious or unconscious, involuntary or voluntary, the discarding of national imageries was premature. Laibach and NSK made obvious that the archetypes of national identity still carried a strong charge that despite surface appearances had not been dealt with. The exclusion of these from social and historical narratives meant that when what the system would characterise as atavistic or chauvinist symbols did return to circulation it was in an extreme and un-assimilable form, as shocking to most Slovenes as to other Yugoslavs.¹⁹

NSK's engagement with the national can in some respects be related back to Slovenism. It works within the sphere of cultural nationalism, approaching processes of state construction (and deconstruction) through culture in the traditional Slovene pattern. However its militancy and concern to spread as far beyond Slovene borders as possible appear to break with this tradition and may seem to relate to it to hegemonic nationalism. Yet despite its aggression it is a pragmatic, theorised response to external and internal cultural pressures faced by those searching for a Slovene mode of expression under both socialism and the market. The transcendent qualities of the works should not be overlooked. They represent a transcendence of the nation through the national and its inherent limitations, an imperative apparent in the following 1986 statement. "Neue Slowenische

began to exercise a renewed fascination.

¹⁹ One of the paradoxes surrounding Laibach's ambivalent (re)presentation of Slovene archetypes was that the only people actively in favour of it were members of alternative groupings and intellectuals rather than nationalists or the

Kunst is... a negation of spiritual smallness and a deliberate attack on the established cultural monopoly of the West.” (NSK 1991, 6-7). Unlike nationalists, who generally have little interest in the assertion of Slovene culture abroad, NSK texts suggest that the national stage is too small and limiting a stage for the assertion of Slovene culture and must be transcended. An assertive national art produced purely for the domestic audience would be vulnerable both to appropriation by political nationalism and marginalization abroad. The concern to create a Slovene mode of addressing international audiences runs contrary to the concerns of actual political nationalism in Slovenia. Similarly the mode of assertion in relation to the foreign audience represents a pragmatic cultural response to the pressures faced by a small Slav culture (this is examined in more detail in the subsequent discussion of NSK’s approach to Germany and Austria). Neither the internal nor the external assertiveness of NSK is centred on “enemies” or demonisation. The forces NSK establishes itself in opposition to are those, which as they see it limit the Slovene cultural space and creative potential, rather than named individuals, groups, or nations.

3.6 NSK and The Poles Of Germanophilia and Nationalism.

“Since your intention is to reconstruct Slovene culture, how do you think that your work can influence the political scene?”

“We believe that every generation must construct the best history possible. Each nation is created to produce culture. We want to make a new Athens on our soil, a cultural space where art will be integrated with the social and spiritual order. In this project we want to work together with Slovene politics and for its benefit. However our field is art; therefore we have no specific political intentions.” 1988 Irwin Interview (NSK 1991, 120).

Although there is no shortage of assertively Slovene images in NSK work that do much to problematize accusations of Germanophilia, the simultaneity of the Slovene and Germanic imageries had embarrassing implications. Due to the inextricability of the two strands NSK’s Slovenicism cannot be discussed in isolation from its Germanicism. Therefore despite the monumentality of the Slovene images any recuperation of NSK even as cultural nationalists is problematic. The actual Slovene nationalists often attempt to brush over the wounds and paradoxes of Slovene identity that works such as “Baptism” (1986) and “Slovenska Akropola” (1987) make explicit. Yet despite the ambiguities of NSK’s position within Slovenia, NSK’s monumental re-workings of Slovene motifs were seen by many Yugoslav critics as a basically fascistic vanguard of

the Slovene nationalist project (see the “Poster Affair” section of the chronology) which even in 1987 was actually far less cohesive than it was claimed in the Yugoslav media.

It is certainly feasible to construct an account which views NSK as nationalist agitators, at least to the extent that they contributed to an atmosphere in which Slovene self-identity and basic narratives underwent re-negotiation and reassessment. There is no doubt that the extent to which NSK discourse centred around the Slovene nation contributed to this atmosphere but its complexities also lend it the status of a more distanced conceptual engagement with the overtly nationalist trends.²⁰ The actual status of NSK’s engagement with the national is probably even more ambiguous than it is possible to represent here because of the range of concurrent but contradictory elements within it. NSK works (many of which are not directly related to Slovene national concerns) often simultaneously refer to both the most intense poles of Slovene identity: Germanic self-assimilation and “Slovenist” self-assertion.

3.7 Laibach’s Commentary on the Radical Ambiguities of National Mobilisation

Slovenes’ economic status and modern image within Yugoslavia tended to make them suspicious of archaic national symbolism as a threat to their modern, international(ist) self image. The initial condemnation directed at Laibach’s hyper-Slovenist poses by the Slovene media seemed to contain significant elements of envy and fear. The violence and shock associated with Laibach and NSK may derive from the extent to which Slovenes had suppressed a sense of national identity. As a result of this when Slovenia’s quaint folk heritage (of almost no intrinsic significance outside Slovenia) reappeared it was in an extreme form that explicitly manifested the ever present demonic aspects of any (national) psyche which can be so catastrophic when unleashed).

These issues were referred to in the 1988 polemic between the sociologist Tomaž Mastnak and journalist Miha Kovač of the Slovene weekly “Teleks” concerning the extent to which the national mobilisation that occurred at the time of the “JBTZ” trial in 1988 (see chronology) was actually democratic. During the course of this Kovač stated that a Slovene democratic nationalism that presented post war history as repeated attempts by Belgrade to suppress Slovenes’ natural

²⁰ The situation was actually even more paradoxical in that the actual political nationalists in Slovenia presented their claims in the form of a civic, pragmatic discourse in sharp contrast to Laibach’s severity which it will be argued preemptively abstracted the violence and para-militarism associated with contemporary Yugoslav nationalism into the

democratic tendencies was misleading as it would

“...be blind to the deeply undemocratic character of post war Slovene history and to the rich contribution of Slovene national ideology to the formation of the existing Yugoslav socio-political system.” (Translated Magaš 1994, 149)

Mastnak had sought to characterise contemporary Slovene nationalism as democratic in contrast to other, “totalitarian” nationalisms. Kovač’s stance echoed the NSK approach in drawing attention to the authoritarian side of Slovene society which as often as not contributed to, as well as enthusiastically collaborated with, the authoritarianism of the regime. Such approaches presented an antidote to the views of both nationalists and civil society activists who in the eighties attempted to argue that Slovenes enjoyed immunity from the authoritarianism and nationalism present “elsewhere” in Yugoslavia. If nothing else, such denials overlooked the major role of the Slovene Edvard Kardelj (Tito’s deputy and chief ideologist) in creating and refining the theological complexities of self-management.



cultural sphere.

Above - Laibach: "Rekapitulacija", cover of first Western album release (1985).

The verse reads:

"The Judgement of The Age
And The Aspirations of Our Days Are Drawing Near
And a Great Nation Will Arise
In Powerful Rejuvenation!"

Even a folk symbol apparently as innocuous as the "kozolec"²¹ (Slovene hay-rack) was "made strange" by Laibach's intervention. In its use of such images Laibach para-militarized the claims to nationally-based moral authority made by poets, folklorists, and intellectuals across nineteenth century Central and Eastern Europe. Laibach can also be seen to have anticipated the para-militarization of Yugoslav politics in the late nineteen-eighties. The presence of the Laibach symbol (with its industrial, Germanic and other disturbing associations) in the above image disturbs the national-pastoral idyll of the scene (originally by the Slovene artist Božidar Jakac) and throws into question the mode of enjoyment behind such folk symbolism, exposing the persistent continuity between folklorism and totalitarianism. By including these idyllic signifiers in a presentation that also contains much that is disturbing and irrational (spectral fascistic mobilisation, noise, mysticism) Laibach deny the possibility of a national mobilisation based "purely" on positive elements and together with other representatives of Yugoslavia's "apocalypse culture" (Ramet 1987) foresaw a violent return to the fanatical consumption of national symbolisms. Laibach's irrationalist performance of national interpellation was actually a suppressed desire immanent within the Yugoslav Republican system and its ruling elites. NSK performed a direct *national* appeal to the more atavistic national-spiritual constituency the authorities were unable to address and which right wing opinion accused them of eroding. The smoothness with which the LCS (League of Communists Slovenia) made the transition from a Yugoslav republican institution to a role in post-Yugoslav politics suggests that for some time there may have been a frustrated political desire to address Slovenes (primarily though not necessarily exclusively) as Slovenes rather than as Slovene Yugoslavs. Laibach hit such a raw nerve because they addressed an emotionally (if not historically) authentic constituency.

²¹ Laibach's first singer, Tomaž Hostnik is reputed to have hung himself from a kozolec.

Whilst its opponents criticise Laibach as an alien, contaminating element within the national space Laibach unapologetically claims a central place within it. "Država" (The State – video clip 7) is a recapitulation of the role of the totalitarian state but its concluding line "Oblast je pri naš ljudska" (Our authority is that of the people) may also be read as referring to Laibach's "right" to manipulate national symbols. That is, like actual totalitarian movements, Laibach claim that their right to appropriate the artworks of Jakac, the architecture of Plečnik or the poetry of Prešeren actually derives *from the people*. Rhetorically, Laibach based its claim to authority over audiences on strong but suppressed desires in the national audience; "the people" whose authority they claim to embody.

NSK symbolically ended the dysfunctional or schismatic relations between Slovenism and authority. Thus Laibach's "holistic" approach to national imagery and its refusal to accept the label of dissidents distinguishes it from the "Slovenist" tradition of romantic national assertion. The Protestant reformers, nineteenth century liberals and intellectuals and pre nineteen-eighties nationalists all shared a (formally) dissenting stance, not only in relation to "foreign" regimes, but also toward the conservative majority of the population they saw as putting the national heritage at risk through indifference or over-compliance with non-Slovene authorities.

Whilst in some respects it would be possible to make a plausible case for Laibach as dissenters because of their links to alternative society and culture, they vehemently deny comparisons with the paradigms of dissidence in Communist states which are based on a binary distinction between regime and opposition. Laibach occupy an indeterminate space between the two camps, its over-identification with symbols and notions of state power leaving little space for conventional paradigms of dissidence²². Anarchist paradigms might be more appropriate than those of dissidence, yet although "demasking and recapitulation" has an obvious anarchic potential to confront regimes, NSK's paradoxical discourse contains many comments that appear counter to the spirit of anarchism as such:

"The substance of totalitarian equality stimulates the will to bestow well-being on everybody without exception. Woe to those who don't respect its real essence. They will be happy if they end only in anarchy and nihilism!" (NSK 1991, 60)

²² In fact all NSK groups, Irwin in particular are on good terms with and sometimes work with many of the former "dissident" artists of Russia and the former eastern bloc such as those behind the "Apt-Art" movement. The ferocity of the rhetoric was a device designed to open a new discursive space within which the denotation of a new cultural praxis in relation to state power might be designated.

It might in fact be argued that it is actually anarchism in the guise of its opposite (totalitarianism) but again this suggestion seems too clearly-defined and convenient to account for the full ambiguity of the phenomenon. Laibach's position of radical ambiguity casts the quoted Mastnak-Kovač polemic in a different light. Mastnak wrote frequent commentaries on Laibach for "Mladina" and was one of the alternative theorists closely associated with NSK and yet Laibach's links to the alternative actually reinforce Kovač's point. The civic mode of national democratic mobilisation theorised by Mastnak could not be separated from the anti-democratic undercurrents of Slovene society and romantic nationalism, which were dramatically exposed in Laibach's presentation. To the extent that Laibach remained un-assimilable (see Žižek 1987) they "tainted" all elements of the Slovene political spectrum - those who identified with the state, the nation and even the alternative. Slovenism had always been able to claim credit for a dissident stance, for having a position opposed by the powers that be. Like the communists²³, Laibach saw that in fact there was no inherent connection between romantic nationalism and democracy or social justice. Through its manipulation of folk symbols Laibach broke the historical association between Slovenism and a dissident stance.

Laibach has repeatedly described itself in political terms (as "statesmen" within the rock medium for instance). This is part of Laibach's attempt to distance itself from avant-garde, revolutionary or hedonistic-nihilistic positions in relation to authority as such. In this way Laibach re-emphasize the dishonesty of oppositional trends that claim to be unaffected by the ideology and history that has already structurally contaminated them. In agreement with Kovač, Laibach imply that any stance claiming to be situated outside and diametrically opposed to the regime is committing the same kind of unhealthy falsification practised by the regime it formally opposes. The structural impossibility of creating any sort of autonomous "pure" space in such a small socio-political environment as the Slovene one makes such a stance all the more dishonest although this has not prevented populist politicians such as Janez Janša attempting such ideological quarantining by his constant denunciation of the machinations of an "Udbo mafia"²⁴ composed of "Yugo nostalgics" thwarting

²³ Nineteenth century Slovene socialism opposed liberal nationalism because it embodied a bourgeois mode of authority (see Rogel 1977).

²⁴ This refers to the former Yugoslav internal security agency and the various conspiracy theories based upon the presupposition that elements of the old nomenklatura and security forces have maintained their hold on power and are interested only in perpetuating their hegemony and persecuting political opponents. Its credibility is severely undermined given that many making such claims were themselves happily working within the system until a relatively late stage and in the case of Janša by the fact that he lost his ministerial post after a scandal which revealed

Slovene progress. One reason for this is probably the painful nature of acknowledging this fact that in the Slovene environment such an ideologically detached, or clean stance is structurally impossible and the only healthy way to deal with structural pre-incorporation is to acknowledge it and to use it. The NSK statement "... only art which speaks the language of political manipulation can escape such manipulation"²⁵ can be seen as referring to the position of any (Slovene) political subject, as well as the mechanisms of the political assimilation of culture.

"Politics is the highest and all embracing-form of art, and we who create contemporary Slovene art *consider ourselves politicians*". (Emphasis Added) (Laibach, NSK 1991, 52)²⁶

In discussing the social messianic role accorded to nineteenth century German and Russian artists Golomstock (1990) reveals the source of Laibach's statement:

"The mission of the politician, more dangerously still, was similar to that of the artist. Hitler saw himself as the architect of the Third Reich, who "creates according to the laws of beauty", and Goebbels had Hitler in mind and was paraphrasing him only slightly when he said: The true politician stands in the same relationship to his nation as the sculptor does to his marble". Walter Benjamin referred to this synthesis as Hitler's aestheticizing of politics." (p.166)

Laibach undoubtedly indulges in an aestheticization of politics and force, but it differs from its totalitarian forebears in that it is not carried out in the service of a political formation or national cause. Laibach employ the same symbolism as their Slovenist predecessors, yet work under an entirely authoritarian national paradigm, based upon the state, apparently at odds with civil models of national reconstruction and in this way "demask and recapitulate" the totalitarian potential of both the state and the opposition. The timing of Laibach's first interventions at the start of the

that he had created his own security force within the defence ministry, principally occupied with surveillance of the president.

²⁵ From "LAIBACH: 10 Items of The Covenant", NSK 1991, 18-19.

²⁶ This was a response to a question in a RŠ interview. The first part of the response reveals its ancestry:

"I am an artist and not a politician. When the Polish question is finally settled, I want to end my life as an artist" Adolf Hitler, 1939.

Irwin adopted the phrase for their statement on the back cover of the NSK monograph (1991):

"We are artists and not politicians. When the Slavic question is resolved once and for all, we want to finish our lives as artists"

A less Slovene-oriented version of Laibach's statement appears in the same place:

"Politics is the highest form of popular culture, and we who create the contemporary European pop culture consider ourselves politicians".

eighties make it among the first (and certainly most visible) symptoms of an accelerating process of de-Yugoslavization/re-Slovenization of culture and politics after Tito's death. NSK both contributed to these processes (as in the "Poster Affair") and contradicted them (the use of Germanic and even industrial signifiers which were experienced as being anti-Slovene). If anything the Yugoslav imageries were more provocative to nationalist sentiment than the Germanic ones, even though the use of these was highly ambiguous and just as easily read as anti-Yugoslav. By the late eighties inter-republican politics in Yugoslavia were so polarised that increasing numbers of Slovenes were coming to view anything remotely similar to (Yugo)Slavophilia as almost as inimical to the Slovene cultural survival as the older Germanophilias. Although Laibach presentations had a deeply disintegrative effect as the veterans protests (see chronology) against the group showed, such opposition tended to overlook Laibach's simultaneous retransmission in some works of pan-Yugoslav signifiers (Titoist and partisan iconography) together with Slovene and Germanic national archetypes.²⁷ Irwin's "emphatic eclecticism" which holds that all the artistic and political influences on Slovenia are of equal creative value in the development of Slovene culture is anathema to those who argue that the communist, industrial and Germanic influences are inimical to Slovene culture. Only by covering all the political and artistic strands that have shaped Slovene culture and by not concealing the antagonisms these generate could NSK recapitulate the radical inconsistencies of totalitarian and nationalist projects while continuing to provoke uncertainty and questioning across the political spectrum as to where they "really" stood.

3.8 Slovene Self-Oppression.

"The renouncement of slavery blazons a phony mask; born is the slavery of slaves that have been slaves since time immemorial and have gotten so thoroughly used to slavery that it has become their flesh and blood. Eagerly and without inquiries (sic) as to its master or its orders, servility spreads its shadow over the world. Slaves, selling themselves willingly, *are more eager than the master himself*. Eagerness and solemn artistic pride spring forth." (NSK 1991, 126).

This Irwin statement is probably the clearest statement of NSK's thematization of the self-oppressive aspects of the Slovene character. In seeking to produce a historically contextualized reading of the violence and authoritarianism in the works of NSK and Laibach, examples of Slovene self-oppression have been particularly relevant.

²⁷ "Baptism" (1986) is the most charged example of such juxtaposition (see sections 2.13, 5.7).

Discussing the attitudes of other Yugoslavs towards Slovenes, Thompson (1993) quotes Professor Djordji Marjanović of Macedonia's League for Democracy:

"Slovenia is something quite exceptional... The "Slovene Syndrome", we call it. It is an axiom of penology that you must not imprison anyone longer than ten years. Then people stop being citizens, they become another kind of human being, mentally so altered that they can't survive outside of prison. So it is with nations. The Slovenes lived under German domination too long. If a people is to keep its pride, the maximum is 500 years, like the Macedonians. More than that is insupportable. ... They have the mentality of servants, and now they dream of returning to the breast that nurtured them. If they separate from Yugoslavia, they may well disappear within two generations, assimilated by the German nation." (pp. 20-21).

According to Ramet (1992) the renewed nationalist sentiment felt in Yugoslavia in the late sixties and early seventies reached Slovenia more belatedly and in milder form than elsewhere:

"Nationalism even made certain inroads in Slovenia, though, lacking any tradition as a separate state, the Slovenes were somewhat more disposed to docility." (p.116).

A historical inhibition from acting in defence of national and cultural self-interests even when under extreme duress is to an extent explicable. Small in numbers and with no forces of their own Slovenes alone stood little chance of successfully rebelling against any of the regimes on Slovene inhabited-territory. Fears of retaliation against such acts also inhibited action and Ramet is certainly correct to stress the state factor in this respect. The "foreignness" of the states Slovenes lived under has even been cited as a cause of high rates of exile and suicide (Jančar 1992) and has made it harder to imagine political alternatives²⁸. However, the conformist behaviour referred to by Marjanović and the Irwin statement above cannot be assigned to tactical pragmatism and the lack of a national state, just as the violence and authoritarianism in Slovene history cannot wholly be attributed to foreign occupiers. It is not just that tactical pragmatism is an inadequate explanation for Slovene conformism but that there is a type of over-zealous conformity amongst Slovenes that has taken the form of militant collaboration with domestic and foreign authoritarianism, even to the extent of identifying with states with no interest in the preservation of Slovene identity. Until Slovene independence all the state authorities on Slovene-inhabited territory have been able to rely on this tendency to help assure that Slovenes remain within the boundaries assigned to them by the

²⁸One of the key ideological themes of self-management was dis-estrangement between state and subject. The republican structures of federal Yugoslavia were intended to erase as far as possible this potentially alienating gap. Thus the otherness or foreignness not just of the state Slovenes lived under but of the state per se was concealed. This may be one reason for the greater quiescence of Slovenes in relation to other Yugoslavs. In appearing to present the public with the spectre of absolute totalitarianism Laibach made visible again the alienating otherness of the state which self-management was designed to conceal.

particular regime. A survey of Slovene history shows that the violence and authoritarianism of Laibach and NSK are not alien, aberrational phenomena but references to a repeated Slovene tendency towards self-oppression and collaboration. This can be seen more clearly with reference to two of the most extreme examples of Slovene self-oppression; the role of the church in national life and, most relevantly, Germanophone self-assimilation by Slovenes.

3.9 Reactionary Currents Within Slovene Catholicism.

The nineteenth century Catholic Clerical Party always looked to, and co-operated with, Vienna as the best guarantor of national interests. Many in the church and party hierarchies had a mystical view of a sacred Austro-Christian mission and sought to make Slovenes identify with an ultra Catholic world view associated with the empire. Yet as Rogel observes (1977, 35) the Clericals frequently pronounced themselves to be “more nationalist than the nationalists” as they believed that loyal conformism rather than nationalist agitation would best serve Slovene interests. Church-led rural co-operatives and initiatives in peasant education formed the practical basis for their claims. This approach had a significant political influence, inhibiting more assertive approaches. Yet even Clerical pragmatism was resisted when it conflicted with (ethnic) German political or economic interests. Such loyalty may have ameliorated the treatment of Slovenes but it never gained them decisive influence in Vienna, even on local issues such as bilingual schools. Paradoxically it was only in Carinthia and Italian run Slovene areas, at the most threatened extremities of the national cultural space that the church was active in defending Slovene identity even if this entailed what the Ljubljana clergy might perceive as disloyalty to Vienna. The Slovene case was perceived as being so bound up with clericalism that it was opposed not just by the German nationalists but also the Austrian Liberals who were in any case in favour of Greater Germanism. Despite these frustrations and the fact that the actual conduct of Vienna could never match its idealisation by the Clericals, their loyalty held almost until the final Habsburg collapse in 1918.

Given the church’s substantive record of collaboration²⁹ the post-war peak of repression could be considered relatively brief and not as fierce as it might have been. Since the war the church has been sufficiently confined to (sometimes grudgingly) accept a secondary role. However whilst its hold is

²⁹ See Roter (1992).

declining it is popularly suspected that elements in the hierarchy still aspire to the degree of influence the church exerts upon politics in countries such as Poland. The church was ambivalent about the NSMs (New Social Movements) and is inherently suspicious of the cosmopolitanism centred in Ljubljana. The ambiguous record of the church as a national advocate in Slovenia means that (even) NSK seeks to distance itself from this strand of domestic authoritarianism and its traditionally regressive impact on national energies. Laibach has taken a relatively unambiguous stance against religion:

“Religion represented the obsessive neurosis of humanity, and Christian ideology, with its religious activity in critical periods of history, is the most important mass-psychological means of preparing the ground for a takeover by Fascist ideology.” (Laibach 1996c)

The NSK “Internal Book of Laws” (IBL), point 16 (“Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK members”) states:

“Concerning one’s love for one’s neighbour (one’s friends, family, wife and neighbourhood), IBL exceptionally permits members of NSK to practice Christian relations, if these comply with the social system and its system of values, yet advises them to exercise caution in their good deeds”(NSK 1991, 4-5).

In the view of nineteenth century romantics like Prešeren the conversions forced upon them by the Germans (as opposed to the Slavic missions of Saints Cyril and Methodius) were synonymous with enslavement.³⁰ However, NSK, particularly Irwin, do employ the imageries of the Christian power system. Virgin and child motifs are often employed and even juxtaposed with communist symbols.³¹ Exorcism and baptism are recurring themes and the title of the Laibach track “Vade Retro (Satanas)” features in exorcistic ritual. Christian symbolisms have shaped the Slovenes at least as much as the successor ideologies of communism and capitalism. Therefore it is essential to a complete “retro-quotation” of the national past and its dominant ideologies although it features less in NSK works than totalitarian and national signifiers. NSK utilise religious symbolisms and allusions and the repressive power the church lost and still aspires to, recapitulating the church’s position as a formally extra political institution.

NSK is deeply wary of Christianity but is certainly not a-spiritual as the works of the theatre groups demonstrate (section 2.13). NSK texts are sometimes explicitly spiritual in tone but such (actually

³⁰ See section 2.13.

³¹ See the works “Two Of Us”, NSK 1991, 91, “The Ljubljana Trial”, (p. 107 *ibid.*) “Bloody Soil” (Illustration 8, p.112, *ibid.*) and “Slovene Athens” (p. 95)

informal) spirituality is entirely vested in the performance and members with external spiritual affiliations (Christianity) might prejudice this. These examples of what can be classified as Slovene hyper conformism and self-damaging authoritarianism qualify independent Slovenia's democratic self-image and demonstrate the concrete (as opposed to cultural) sources of authoritarianism that Laibach drew upon. These repressive energies are exorcised by NSK via their acknowledgement and productive reworking. They are the source of much of Laibach's power and both necessitated and facilitated their use of force as cultural response to the problems of Slovene identity. The element of NSK's work experienced as most disturbing in Slovenia was not the totalitarian elements so much as the Germanic ones (and their juxtaposition with Slovenist symbolism) and the most extreme examples of Slovene self-repression are associated with the threat and reality of Germanic assimilation. The full resonance of the Germanic elements within NSK works will only become apparent through an examination of the difficult Slovene relationship with German culture.

3.9a) The Germanic Elements of Slovene Identity.

Amez (1958) argues that the relationship with the Germans has been the main influence on Slovene history. This would imply that the dynamic remains active within all Slovene attempts at self-imaging and the force of Laibach's Germanism can be read as evidence of the continued influence of the Slovene-German dynamic. Like Laibach the playwright Ivan Cankar was far from being an advocate of assimilation but in discussing the Yugoslav political option in 1913 he stressed the extent to which Slovenes were in the Germanic sphere, despite their ties with the other Yugoslav peoples:

"By blood we are brothers; by language cousins; but by culture, which is the fruit of the separate upbringing of several centuries - there we are less familiar to one another than one of our Upper Carniolan peasants to a Tiroler"³²

This echoes Ramet's (1992) summary of a 1972 survey of ethnic stereotyping in Yugoslavia:

"The Slovenes' self-image contains some feelings of superiority (love of order, efficiency at work, and cleanliness) and of inferiority (principally in connection with their lack of a historical tradition of independent statehood). The Slovenes also have a tendency to look down on other Yugoslavs for their inefficiency and alleged irrational use of resources. The Slovenes themselves are viewed by other Yugoslavs as unsociable, unfriendly, "Germans". (p. 22)

To an extent Laibach conformed to the ethnic stereotype of Slovenes as Germanic, performing the role assigned to Slovenes as the “Germans” of the country and the role of self-assimilatory Slovenes who chose to adopt German ethnicity (the so-called “nemškutarji”, discussed below). Yet Laibach problematized the “Slovenes as Germans” paradigm even as they manipulated it. The Slovene inferiority complex referred to by Marjanović (p. 179) was entirely erased from Laibach’s militant (though paradoxical) presentation of Sloveneness. Though it might be argued the militant confidence of Laibach and NSK were themselves a distorted expression of Slovene inferiority, the need to present the spectre of totalitarianism demanded such confidence and the stereotype of Slovenes as unassertive provincials was radically challenged by NSK. Laibach’s enactment of this Germanic role was combined with an equally intense enactment of Slovene national archetypes that would be inimical to those actually engaged in or advocating Germanization, a point not conceded by those who accused Laibach of such. However this apparent paradox actually reflects the complex nature of Slovene identity, lying somewhere in between mutually antagonistic Slav and Germanic poles and embodying the connections between the two identities, which are denied both by Slovene and pan-German nationalists. Discussing the role of the reformation in advancing Slovene cultural development Barker (1984) summarises the dialectical, mutually interdependent relationship between the Slovene and German cultures:

“There is, however, a certain irony in the German influence upon the Slovenes. By transmitting intellectual fuel and stimulating the development of a national language and literature, Germany helped to anchor their national existence more firmly. It was, moreover, not the last time that a German thesis would invoke a Slovene antithesis.” (p. 45).

The vast majority of Laibach’s work up until 1994 (the release of NATO) exemplified such ironies. The Germanic spectre in Laibach’s work illustrated the extent to which Slovene cultural and national assertion depended to a dramatic extent on the legacy of the same Germanic culture that had historically sought to absorb or suppress Slovene identity. Since the reformation the framework for the development of Slovene identity has been (the negation of) a Germanic one. Yet Barker’s formula can be extended not just to NSK’s manipulation of Germanic archetypes but to the “nemškutarji” who responded to the Slovene nationalist thesis by collaborating with or even adopting wholesale the German nationalist antithesis.

³² Quoted in Vodopivec (1994, 25).

3.9h Self-Negating Germanization in Slovenia.

“LAIBACH and NSK analyzed nationalism through the aesthetic dimension. By placing “national and subnational” symbols alongside each other, we demonstrated their “universality”. That is, in the very process of one nation defining its difference against the other, it frequently uses the same, or almost the same, kind of symbols and rhetoric as the other. In short, nations are not very original at all when it comes to defining their own originality - their “raison d’etre” - against each other. Indeed, they often use exactly the same arguments and symbols (compare, for instance, the use of the eagle symbol by the Germans, Americans, Albanians, Austrians, Poles, etc.). Paradoxically, then, nationalistic conflicts between nations are usually not the result of differences, but because the differences are too small (for instance, only a few English people know that they’re essentially an English-speaking Germanic tribe). Such nationalism is based on “the narcissism of small differences”. It is the most popular, most European and most fatal.” (Laibach 1996a)

Germanization was an active cultural and political force amongst Slovenes until the creation of the first Yugoslavia and again during the German occupation from 1941-5 when collaborationist propaganda stressed Slovenes’ place in the Germanic cultural sphere. In the Slovene-speaking areas of Austrian-controlled Carinthia, self-Germanization (the adoption of an identity that demands and entails the negation of Sloveneness) still occurs as does Italianisation amongst the Slovenes and Croats on Italian territory. Many Slovenes Germanised themselves (as opposed to those without any real choice but to submit) for pragmatic rather than idealistic motives, principally the greater possibilities of socio-economic advancement. The ideological rationale of this position was enunciated by the most notorious “nemškutar” (a derogatory term for assimilatory Germanophiles), Dragotin Dežman (1821-1889) in an 1869 article for the German paper “Laibacher Tagblatt” (Ljubljana Weekly). The author argued that trade connections with neighbouring German provinces maintained through the language were more useful than those with the still partially civilised Slavic south whose peoples still pursued blood feuds. According to Dežman the Nemškutar did not want to renounce the Slovene heritage yet treasured German culture and wished his children to learn both languages at school (an argument against monolingual Slovene schooling). Dežman also argued that Slovene literature had sprung from the German educated, German speaking Slovenes, influenced by the reformation (see Vodopivec 1988, 94). Reviled by most Slovene opinion and used as an argument for Germanization by others, Dežman’s argument echoes Barker’s observation about Slovene cultural life having been largely facilitated by German influences. Dežman’s argument for the inseparability of the two cultures has a central place in NSK works in which the Slovene is transmitted via the Germanic. However NSK make no specific reference to the nemškutar ideology and the militant assertion of Slovene culture seen in NSK works directly contradicts even the mildest forms of the self-assimilatory ideology.

Once the self-assimilatory decision is made the process has to be carried out zealously. This expressed itself in a desire to so thoroughly assimilate as to naturally embody Germanicism and to negate the assimilant's pre-Germanic lineage. Laibach's Germanicism refers both to this but also to the equally unbalanced post-war de-Germanization of Slovene identity. Laibach dramatises the distortion operative at both the pro and anti-German poles of Slovene identity and its vehemence and excessive amplification of certain elements reflects real historical processes in the constitution and negation of Slovene identity. In late nineteenth century Ljubljana Slovene nationalist meetings were broken up and violently disrupted primarily by zealous pro-German Slovenes rather than the authorities (see Rogel 1977). Here the previously quoted Irwin statement about slaves "... more eager than the master himself" (NSK 1991, 126) is again relevant, not least because it also evokes the Hegelian master-slave dialectic (see Mure 1965, 76). Laibach's spectral zeal for its notions of state and nation and its manipulation of the Slovene zeal for self-assimilation disturbed both socialists and nationalists. The ferocity of Slovene self-assimilation and NSK Germanicism (one of the most spectacular, scandalous elements in NSK's presentation) may be explained with reference to Žižek's (1994a) notion of an element which actually "out-embodies" another element. He identifies:

"... an (actual) element which, although it is not a member of the genus X, is "more X than X itself". This dialectic is often referred in everyday expressions, as when we say of a resolute woman that she is "more man than men themselves", or of a religious convert that he is "more Catholic than the Pope", or of the legal plundering via stock exchange transactions that it "outcrimes crime itself". (pp.92-3)

Extending Žižek's framework to the "nemškutarji" and to Laibach's hyper-Germanism, a certain logic becomes apparent. Paraphrasing him we can say that within the culturally and historically grounded Laibach project, "the Slovene" manifests itself as a quality "more Germanic than the Germanic itself". The "more X than X" formula implies an excessive, if not fanatical quality and represents the over-fulfilment of a notion and also contains the implication that the original, imitated "X" is a weaker version of itself than the imitative, over-compensatory one. The "nemškutarji" had to be "more X than the German X" in order to conceal the fact that they have consciously *adopted* a Germanic identity. Laibach realise a certain un-modernised notion of Germanicist triumphalism and in the process subvert it entirely, transforming it into something apparently completely contradictory; a Germanically tinged assertion of Slovene culture, even more disturbing to German nationalism than a straightforward assertion of Slovene identity. Laibach (as the "X" which is more

German the German itself) taunts notions of German supremacy and claims that only unapologetic Slovenes have the capacity to occupy such a thoroughly Germanic, (and long since proscribed), role:

“We have already stated that the contemporary Germans are an inferior sort of Slovenes, so it doesn't surprise us if they took us for their own.”³³

3.9c) Carinthia: Most/Least German, Most/Least Slovene.

“The closer one gets to either the Eastern or Southern fringe of the German-speaking world - the closer one gets, in other words, to the threatening and more numerous Slavs - the more insecure and dangerous German nationalism becomes. On the German world's Eastern frontier, Pomeranian and Silesian Germans question the legitimacy of the Polish border. To the south, in Austria, where blood from the Slavic world actually flows in “German” veins, denial of this elemental fact takes the form of unreconstructed, pan-Germanic paranoia.”³⁴(Kaplan 1993, xxiv)

All the tensions between the two cultures, dramatised by NSK, are present in their most intense form in Carinthia, the mixed Slovene-German area of southern Austria. Many of the most notorious Nazi ideologues and war criminals come from the area and its current governor is Joerg Haider. In the attempted Nazi putsch of 1934 and at the time of the Anschluss Carinthia was the most pro-Nazi part of Austria.³⁵ Yet as well as being a hotbed of Nazism, Carinthia, (“the watchman of the Reich”), was the ancient heart of Slovenedom. The independent Slovene kingdom of Karantania was based in Carinthia prior to the German conquests of the ninth century.³⁶ Prior to assimilation and contraction this region and not Ljubljana was the geographical and political centre of Slovenedom. In much the same way Kosovo, once the Serbian heartland, became peripheral due to military defeats and population movements. There is no lost heartland ideology concerning Carinthia as there is with Kosovo but it is perceived as retaining some quintessential Slovene quality and some still mourn its loss. Although the proportion of Slovenes within Carinthia is approaching that of Serbs remaining in Kosovo, many Carinthian Slovenes' acceptance of assimilation means that Slovenes have to restrict their ambitions regarding the historic heartland.

³³ Interview with “Ljubljanski Dnevnik” NSK 1991, 54.

³⁴ Žižek (1994b, 222-3) also recognises the role of the southern frontier in Austrian nationalism, arguing that it acts as a kind of civilisational marker, beyond which lies “the rule of Slavic hordes”. However he goes on to demonstrate that the Slovenes in their turn and subsequently the Croats and Serbs also ideologize their frontiers. For Slovenes Western civilisation ends on the Croatian border, for the Croats on their borders with the Bosnian Muslims and the Serbs, and for the Serbs on their borders with the Albanians and Bosnian Muslims.

³⁵ Barker (1990, 11) describes Carinthia as “... the most loyal of the Fuhrer's Alpine fiefdoms”.

³⁶ See “Državnost Karantanije” (Karantanian Statehood), pp. 73-81, Šavli 1994.

Carinthia is the territory upon which German culture has made its most intense efforts to interpellate Slovenes, both in order to ensure ethnic homogeneity but also to produce the ideological justification for ethno-territorial expansion (fears that were stirred up by Laibach). In fact all the surrounding nations, even to an extent the Croats and the Serbs have at times made attempts to claim Slovenes as their own and to work towards the erasure of Slovene specificity, generally for political-territorial ends. The persistence of this phenomenon actually stimulated the Slovene nationalist counter-argument and was invoked by the President of the Slovene Parliament on 26th December 1990 after the announcement of the results of the Slovene independence plebiscite:

“We have often been denied these opportunities in the past, also by some larger neighbouring nations. They have tried to prove that we, the Slovenes, are not a historical nation, and that we therefore do not have the right to live an independent national life in an independent state. Some people have even tried to prove this in quasi-scientific ways, and pointed to us with contempt, saying we were unable to live shoulder to shoulder with other culturally and economically developed nations.”(Grafenauer (Ed.), 1991, 173).

Within the *weltanschauung* of extreme Austrian nationalism (and its Italian counterparts) those who believe themselves to be Slovenes are victims of an ethnic false consciousness that blinds them to their actual national status. In Carinthia the phenomenon took on a particularly spectral form based on the assertion that Slovenes were not actually a Slavic but a “lost” Germanic people, the “Windisch”, who with help could recover their natural Germanness. Arnez (1958, 87) stresses the fantastical status of the Windisch as the embodiment of pan-Germanic nationalist fantasy.

“As such, the Wender do not actually exist, but only in German theories so as to prove a right to political expansion and to found the Germanization policy upon an imaginary will of a further imaginary “Wendic” population.”

Due to the insubstantiality of the Wendic identity those Slovenes who adopted this role through which they might justify their self-Germanization (some never adopted the intermediate Windisch identity and directly adopted a German identity) had to demonstrate publicly their adoption of this new mode of identity. Some of the most aggressively pro-German individuals with the strongest contempt for all things Slovene came from formerly Slovene families which had only recently assimilated. The fanatical extent of such individuals’ Germanophilia was necessarily more intense than that of the actual Austrians.³⁷ Those denoted as Windisch (effectively “German”) yet who

³⁷ The “Germania” of such Slovenes had a later counterpart in the backgrounds of some of the most fanatical Nazis. SS Standartenführer Otto Globočnik is associated with atrocities in Poland, Carinthia and is notorious among

were recalcitrant enough to persist in speaking Slovene were seen as in need of the harshest treatment in the cause of Germanization.³⁸ To themselves and their “fellow Germans” the self-assimilators saw the recalcitrant rump of Slovenes as Slovenized Wends: a historically German tribe which had been swamped in the Slavic sea and could be redeemed were it not so stubborn. Such *nemškutarji* were often the most enthusiastic participants in protests against bilingualism and administration in Slovene, both in Carinthia and in Slovenia proper (see Barker 1984 and Rogel 1977). They organised pro-Austrian demonstrations and in 1914 blocked a pilgrimage to the Ducal Chair; symbol of the ancient Slovene proto-democracy at Gospotsveske Polje outside Klagenfurt/Celovec.³⁹ Such extremists were the most hysterically insistent on their own Germanism and on the historically German nature of the area and most of Slovenia itself. However their vehemence was in inverse proportion to the historically deeply Slovene character of the area⁴⁰ and this accounts for the ideological attractiveness of Nazism within the region. Caught in the polarised struggle between this camp and the Slovene nationalist factions lay a relatively passive group still attached to their Slovene identity but too fearful to assert it or to actively resist Germanization.

When the plebiscite to determine if Carinthia should join Yugoslavia or the new Austrian state was held in 1920, pro-Austrian propaganda reconstituted the *Windisch* as an ancient people, historic pro-Austrian allies of the Germans against “Balkan” ambitions (Yugoslav troops fought Austrian forces in Carinthia immediately after the First World War). The loss of Carinthia to Austria in the

Slovenes for the ferocity of the anti-partisan operations he conducted around Trieste from 1943-5 (see Novak 1970). He was a fanatical Nazi ideologue and Barker (1990, 11) describes him as “... at least in a cultural and ideological sense, one of the principal artificers of the holocaust.” However he still bore a Slovene surname, a trace left over from the Germanization of his family. As Kaplan (1994) suggests some of the most vehement pan-Germanists come from Carinthia and are motivated by the fear that their pure German status is compromised by the persistent stain of a Slovene presence in the region. Hitler, himself, as an Austrian conspicuously unable to trace a pure German family line, is the most spectacular example of such over-compensatory Germanophilia. Like the “*nemškutarji*” his vehemence was intended to erase the ambiguities of his actual identity. The psychological discipline necessary to assume the new identity is akin to the Orwellian procedure of “doublethink”. Even the memory of the discardment of the self-assimilator’s original identity has to be repressed so that it is apparent neither to the individual nor to others, and aggressive vehemence is the agency used to effect the necessary erasure of personal history.

³⁸ Arnez (1958, 17) states of the Nazi ideological mission in Slovene areas: “Violence, forced Germanization, expulsion, killing, imprisonment, and like measures against the Slovenes were considered by the Germans as civilized acts of their cultural mission”.

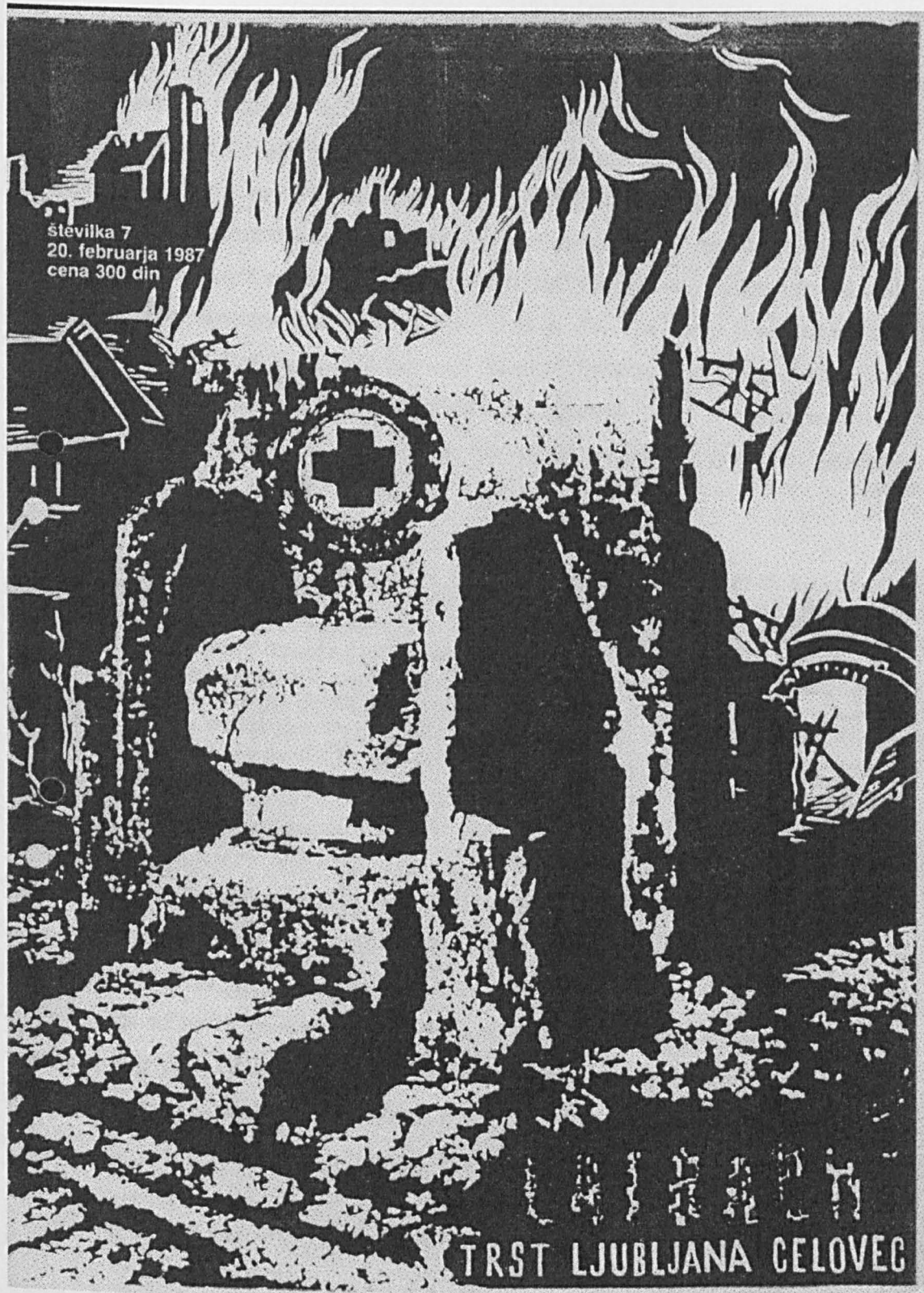
³⁹ See Barker (1984, 89). This stone throne was the site of a unique ducal induction ceremony in which the lord was acclaimed by the people in a Slovene ritual that lasted until the fifteenth century. For its symbolic importance see “*Knežni kamen, priča slovenska državnosti*” (The Ducal Chair, Witness of Slovene Statehood”), pp. 73-81 in Savli (1994).

⁴⁰ Arnez (1958) gives a figure for the southward spread of the German-Slovene linguistic frontier of thirty kilometres a century. Passive and active assimilation and self-assimilation combined with a policy of settling the Slovene-speaking areas with German settlers preceded the outright assault on Slovene nationality after the Anschluss in 1938.

plebiscite of October 1920, reconfirmed after the Second World War, is a blow which still rankles. Many Slovenes were alienated from both Yugoslavias by their perceived failure to adequately or competently press Slovene claims to Carinthia or to ensure stronger protection of the minority there. However it is uncertain whether the conservative Carinthian Slovenes would have voted for reunion at either plebiscite, even without the Austrian pressures placed upon them and their fears of communism or Serb dominance. Other factors affecting the 1920 result included the more or less open Italian threat of military action in the event of a pro-Yugoslav vote (see Barker 1984). What was most difficult for political circles and others in Ljubljana to accept was that many Carinthians were already too far alienated from their culture and fellow Slovenes to choose reunion and ethno-cultural security over economic and political security. Such a “better the devil you know” sentiment, together with biased election procedures (see Barker 1984), ensured that only in the far south of Carinthia nearest Slovenia did more than fifty per cent vote for Yugoslavia in 1920. From the perspective of most Slovenes south of the Karawanken mountain range the choice was perverse but the devoutly Catholic, largely rural Slovene Carinthians preferred the certainty of dealing with Austrian rather than Yugoslav authority. Thompson (1993, 20) summarises the factors behind the decision thus:

“No people would choose to live as a minority inside Austria; yet the pressures on Carinthian Slovenes have been uniquely strong. Austria is the heir of Habsburg civilisation, bulwark against Balkan chaos and defender of the faith. Slovene identity is not counter-posed to that of the old imperial master. Quite the opposite; the Slovene nation hatched within Austria, which retains an aura of parental authority”.

It is now hoped that with the disappearance of the ideological frontier and Slovenia’s prospective inclusion in the EU borders will become less relevant and that the Austrians will no longer feel the need to assimilate Slovenes and marginalize their culture. However with the election of the nationalist Joerg Haider to head of the Carinthian regional government pressure on the Slovene minority is once more increasing (see Varga-Novljan 1999).



Laibach: Trst-Ljubljana-Celovec (Trieste-Ljubljana-Klagenfurt), 1987.

Laibach allude to events in Carinthia only obliquely as in the poster “Trst Ljubljana Celovec”. Set amongst the burning buildings the Slovene Ducal Chair, one of the key Slovene national symbols, which is branded with Laibach’s insignia. The image resembles the woodcuts of wartime atrocities projected by Laibach during their concerts and the names of the three locations might be read as a reference to atrocities committed by Italian and German forces in these places and as a symbol of the loss of Trieste and Klagenfurt. The ambivalence of the image also reflects the unresolved tensions between Slovenes and Germans in Carinthia. Perhaps more provocative (though ambiguous) was the title of the “United Slovenia” video of a Laibach concert staged at the Slovene Grammar School in Klagenfurt in 1988. This was preceded by an address from the NSK Philosophy Dept. which addressed this Slovene-German dynamic which though problematic can also be productive:

“... Therefore, we can say that the German and Slovene nations are related, precisely because of this dependence on the will of the Supreme One, the arbitrator of their joy or pain through blood. They are related in blood and their linguistic differences are only an element showing how their transcendental foundation in Good develops into a mutually dependent, complementary regime.

... Only that nation which places its true value in the surpassing of its special essence may attain the grace of the Supreme One. This is how the deathbound pose of a nation, claiming to be the chosen one, is overcome. Namely, the transnational principle is the constituent principle of existence of a particular nation. That is to say that the transnational as a form of the universal dimension of blood is the foundation and safeguard of sovereignty and freedom of a particular nation.

Long live the German-Slovene covenant!”⁴¹

Austrian nationalists would support this statement’s assertion of the relatedness of the German and Slovene⁴² nations yet do not accept that there is a distinct Slovene nationality within Carinthia and would be bound ideologically to resist a concept such as a “German-Slovene covenant”. Its implication that the two nations are of equal, mutually dependent status is anathema. Any talk of trans-nationalism is an obstacle to assimilation and an affront to ideological constructions of Germanic superiority. Thus while the emphasis on the relatedness of the nations and much else in the NSK discourse appeared to some in Slovenia to collaborate with or even advocate

⁴¹ “Speech Delivered At The Concert of Laibach At Slovene Grammar School, Klagenfurt, March 1988”, NSK 1991, 219.

⁴² Some of the more extreme pan-Germanists continue to subscribe to the Windisch thesis applied to Slovenia as a whole not just the Carinthian minority, and nationalist politicians such as Joerg Haider insist on the rights of Germans in Slovenia and attempt to frustrate Slovenia’s entry into the EU (which would be a final recognition of Slovenia’s autonomous post-Habsburg identity as an international subject able to enter international agreements)

Germanization, neither was it recuperable by Austrian nationalists as an argument for the assimilation of Carinthian Slovenes. It advocated neither the denial of a Germanic element in Slovene identity nor Slovene unassertiveness. NSK's Germanic mode of presentation was a means of smuggling in statements that allowed them to assert Slovene claims to recognition as an autonomous (though partly Germanic) culture in a more aggressive fashion than is safe for Carinthian Slovenes themselves to undertake.

3.10 Germania: The Spectre of Germanophilia in NSK Works.

"The widespread use of the German language and terminology in the works of NSK is based on the specific evocative quality of the language which, to non-German speakers, sounds decisive, curt, domineering and frightening, and automatically activates traumas buried deep in subconscious and history. The activation of the Germanic trauma in turn activates the undifferentiated, unidentified, passive, nightmare-filled Slavic dream." (Irwin/Čufer 1994)

How is it possible even for Germans let alone Slovenes to resurrect Germanic archetypes now seen as irredeemably reactionary?. Some clues may be found in a key passage from Syberberg's monumental meditation on Germanic identity and aesthetics, "Hitler A Film From Germany" (1977). In one scene in Part IV: "We, The Children of Hell", a young intellectual (played by Andre Heller) sits at a table rebuking Hitler (present as an inanimate puppet) for the damage he has caused to Germany whilst in the background the German national anthem plays softly:

"Let me speak of the lost life... you've made kitsch of the old Germany with your simplified crafts and peasant pictures... you've occupied everything else and contaminated it with your touch... everything... honour, loyalty, country life, zest for work, films, dignity, fatherland, pride, belief... The words "magic", "myth" and "serve" and "rule", "leader", "authority" are finished and done, banned for ever and we are extinguished.⁴³ Nothing will grow after us. A whole people has ceased to exist in the sphere of the spirit and the elite. The new men were designed, developed, the New Man is here, the plague of materialism has conquered East and West."⁴⁴ (Syberberg 1977).

This lament mourns many of the Germanic (and thus also Slovene) characteristics in Laibach's work. Laibach explicitly or implicitly make generally positive reference to country life, film, zest for work, honour, myth, belief and many other signifiers taboo in the post-war context. The

⁴³ Terms such as "honour", "order", "belief" and others that are now almost absent from mainstream political discourse in Europe feature frequently in NSK texts, particularly in those of the Philosophy Dept. In the Dusseldorf concert address (Mlakar 1992, 77) discipline is described as "... a bad word for a good thing".

⁴⁴ The fact that one Laibach video is entitled "Laibach A Film From Slovenia", plus visual and other references present in their work and Benson's "Predictions of Fire" (1995a) illustrate the film's relevance to and influence upon the Laibach/NSK aesthetic. Like Laibach, Syberberg has been criticised for the fostering of an apparent nostalgia for traditional Germanic traits that the Nazis are seen to have irreparably tarnished (see Sandford 1992, 11).

Wagnerian⁴⁵ and other archetypal Germanic aesthetics explored in Syberberg's film also feature in the works of Anselm Kiefer⁴⁶ and the Dusseldorf group Kraftwerk, among the first German artists to reintroduce certain retro-technological images tainted by Nazism (the Autobahn system, the development of radio) and create a contemporary German sound.⁴⁷ These re-circulating Germanic imageries have found their most intense expression in the works of Laibach and NSK, which have enjoyed greatest success in Germany. Laibach argue that the basis of this success is the inter-relatedness of the two cultures:

"What we are bringing back to Germany is its substantive essence that has been banished from its territory for a certain time. In Slovenia, we have discovered a firm, unchangeable basis that allows us the joy of life, pride and welfare. Therefore, we essentially maintain that both countries share a common ground binding them in a joyful union of rich and mutually dependent existence. For that reason, our appearances in Germany and Slovenia are identical." (NSK 1991, 54)

This "substantive essence" consisted of the same aesthetically encoded Germanic signifiers Syberberg mourned the loss of. Laibach made available these for mass consumption yet did not free them of their guilt. The totalitarian recapitulation they formed part of questioned the relation of the subject to such imageries even while breaking the absolute taboo on their aesthetic use. It might be argued that in Laibach's hands these "volkisch" signifiers were damned again but the questioning potential in the works and the use of such imageries in the construction of a universal super-national state demonstrates not just the continuing appeal of such signifiers but that used carefully they can have positive effects. Laibach's "durcharbeiten" (working through) of these images demonstrated that it was as unnatural for Germans to abstain from any reference to entire emotional and aesthetic categories as for Slovenes to deny the Germanic component of their identity. They did not provide answers to these dilemmas but unfroze the historical process of examining these questions in the two countries.

⁴⁵ Laibach's music is frequently described thus by critics.

⁴⁶ Kiefer's "Die Innere Raum" features on the cover of "Nova Akropola" and the rear sleeve of Laibach's "Slovenska Akropola" (Slovene Athens) album (NSK 1991, 66). The image also features in Irwin's monumental painting "The Resurrection of The Scipion Nasice Sisters" (see NSK 1991, 127).

⁴⁷ Early critics described their work as "Industrielle Volksmusik" (Industrial Folk Music), a description that might equally be applied to the industrial-pastoral ambience of Laibach's "Rekapitulacija" album (section 5.6) - see Bussy 1993, 64. Discussing the artwork of 1978's "Man Machine" where the four members' red-shirted paramilitary image anticipates Laibach's demeanour Bussy (1993, 100) compares such ironic re(tro)quotations to the contemporary work of Kiefer and Gilbert and George. Kraftwerk's influence upon Laibach specifically (their retro-futurism and corporate image) and electronic/industrial music generally is immense.

Although the victory over fascism and the security provided by the second Yugoslavia did make a huge contribution to the development of a full Slovene cultural life it had a price. The polarised struggle between partisans and their enemies led to executions, imprisonments and exiles⁴⁸ and a historiographical split. The Germanic-Catholic orientation that had made collaboration a natural option for many was almost entirely relegated from the public expression of Slovene identity and culture. Thus despite the concealed shame of collaboration the anti-fascist credentials provided by Communist victory enabled the Slovene artists of NSK access to Germanicisms still taboo for all but openly fascist Germans: "The Slovenes, as former German farm hands, adhered to a victorious coalition in World War II and were consequently free of the frustrations of guilt and defeat" (Laibach 1995c).

As Syberberg suggests, some Germans are frustrated by the continuing contamination of and the impossibility of pleasure in certain historic cultural signifiers. A "return of the repressed" in both countries was inevitable and NSK's praxis represents a simultaneous attempt to examine and to channel such potentially fascist forces into a non-hegemonic cultural space. Laibach demonstrated that history has made such repressed Germanicisms just as much "Slovenicisms", giving Slovenes the right to explore their potential and the knowledge to perform them fluently. Yet even as they appear to be moving such value-systems back towards respectability (with the obvious dangers that these would infiltrate mainstream politics) Laibach also problematize any such attempt. After Laibach's intervention these Germanic signifiers are, to those who have been exposed to the group's work, indelibly associated with the underground, taboo nature of Laibach and thus it might be argued that Laibach's use of them actually shifts these signifiers further away from the boundaries of acceptability. The association of compromised Germanic imageries with totalitarianism by Laibach (and Syberberg) also contains an implied warning: if the Germans cannot find for themselves a safe cultural mode of relating to and critically engaging with these archetypes they will re-emerge in literal form as hegemonic political forces. NSK recapitulate the strength of tendencies towards nationalist extremism in Germany as much as they contribute to them. Laibach's comment about Germans as an inferior type of Slovenes (see section 3.9b) might thus be read as a reference to what appears to be the greater sense of shame attached to the explicit use of nationalist imagery in Slovenia. The fact that Laibach has enjoyed greatest success in Germany would appear to support the assertion that Germans remain far more susceptible to the extreme

⁴⁸ Had the collaborationist forces been victorious they would certainly have been at least as severe in their treatment of the defeated communists and other opponents of the new order.

imageries than the group use than the Slovenes and that in this respect Germans are “inferior” to the Slovenes.

The fact that these imageries were re-circulated by a group engaged in an assertion of Slovene culture that took a patronising tone towards German audiences further complicates the picture. It will be argued subsequently that Laibach’s manipulation of Slovene national archetypes may have had an influence on the lack of overt nationalist extremism in Slovenia precisely through the association of such imageries with a body as contentious and paradoxical as Laibach. In Germany, the success of NSK might be taken as symptomatic of the still abundant potential for extremism but also of the need for audiences to find a cultural mode of relating to these imageries without translating them into political action. German audiences are allowed by NSK to indulge in this proscribed mode of enjoyment but only at the price of accepting the simultaneous presence of assertively Slovene symbolism and tolerating Laibach’s adoption of a forcefully superior stance in relation to the Germans. This found its most extreme expression in the title of Laibach’s 1985 German tour “Die Erste Bombardierung Uber Dem Deutschland” (The First Bombing Over Germany). In the tour poster Laibach members stand implacable against a backdrop of a sky filled with bombers. In this image Laibach adopt a superior threatening stance, deliberately evoking painful memories of the Allied bombing of Germany. Laibach not only made no concessions to German sensibilities, they actively confronted them, achieving great success in the process.



Laibach: Die Erste Bombardierung, 1985.

A maximalist claim for the Germanophile approach might claim it as an attempted warning or inoculation against what it appears to endorse. Viewed less deterministically it is certainly apparent that NSK successfully sensitised the general population in Slovenia to the real and imagined threat of Germanization and forced it into public discussion. The issue of Laibach's name and right to perform in public and the international success of NSK provoked two rounds of heated correspondence amongst the readers of the main Slovene paper "Delo" in 1986 and 1987 (the "Partisan Protests" and "Laibach and Occupied Europe" series - see chronology and chapter four). The spectre of militant Germanophilia was no less disturbing in Germany, as it appeared to negate the post-war effort to de-Teutonize German identity and its popularity raised concerns about the

sophistication or otherwise of the audience⁴⁹, meaning that some Germans were no less alarmed by NSK than the Slovenes and other Yugoslavs. The spectres brought into visibility by the Germanicism of NSK brought into play the “demasking and recapitulation” mechanism in relation to both nations.⁵⁰ The hurt and fear aroused by these spectres arises not simply from the historical associations brought into play but by the problematic, semi-proscribed status of Germanophilia as such in the post-war context. It is not just that primeval Germanic archetypes offend contemporary notions of political and cultural taste and that their continued popularity challenges official narratives. The reason for the unease and distaste is that Germanophilia in itself represents a sort of violence by virtue of the Germanic’s strong associations with force and fanaticism. In the case of NSK the (sensory and conceptual) violence of its transmission amplifies its impact. The violent extremes of attraction and repulsion aroused by the Germanic make it one of the most powerful elements in the NSK presentation around which other themes are deployed.⁵¹

The ultra-Germanic representation of the most contentious aesthetic symbols of Germanicism may seem initially to suggest NSK are expressing a sincere and largely uncritical Germanophilia. However Germanophilia as a term is inadequate as it renders the phenomenon too simplistic and excludes its multi-dimensionality. As the examples discussed below will illustrate it was important that NSK’s tactics should appear to represent Germanophilia because of its disturbing implications. In the Slovene context (apparent) Germanophilia raised the spectre of cultural and linguistic self-assimilation returning to haunt the Slovenes. Like the Trbovlje exhibition in 1980 and Laibach’s TV interview in 1983 (see chronology), NSK’s apparent Germanophilia could be read as another attempt to probe the ideological vigilance and historical consciousness of Slovene society.⁵² However, apart from the complexities involved, there are other factors in NSK’s use of the Germanic that problematize its classification as unreconstructed Germanophilia. The Germanic references reflect historical authoritarian-Germanophile trends within Slovene society but cannot be equated with the self-negatory tradition of Slovene Germanophilia as NSK monumentally asserts the entire range of Slovene identity, in Slav as well Germanic components. Germanophile sentiment

⁴⁹ A summary of some German reactions to Laibach may be found in Zajc (1987).

⁵⁰ On a wider front the performance of militant Germanicism has disturbing implications across Europe and beyond and the Germanic elements continue to be one of the key paradigms used to represent and understand NSK. This is typified by the frequent use of descriptors such as “Wagnerian” and “blut und boden” (blood and soil) to describe Laibach in particular.

⁵¹ The Germanic element in the work of Laibach declined sharply after the release of “Kapital” (1992) and largely disappeared from the work of the other NSK sections. It reached a peak from approximately 1985-1989.

⁵² Both incidents were described by Laibach as tests of ideological preparedness and social defence mechanisms. See NSK 1991, 50, 51 and Lenard 1982.

was the ethnic expression of both pragmatic self-assimilation and political reaction. Not only do several NSK works, particularly "Baptism" (1986) monumentally assert Slovenism they do so by means of, and simultaneously with, the Germanic.

It might be objected that Slovenophilia does not in fact preclude Germanophilia but particularly in the case of Laibach the engagement with the Germanic is both more dispassionate and more ironic than the term "Germanophilia" implies. Affectionately or otherwise Laibach parody Germanicism while manipulating (though not advocating) it. At least in retrospect some of the scenes of Laibach's travels in Germany in Gajić's (1987) documentary "Pobjeda pod soncem" (Victory Under the Sun) play with the ludicrous elements of Germanic identity.⁵³ There are also clues in the musical arrangements of some of Laibach's more Germanic tracks, particularly their arrangement of two "wanderlieder" (traditional German hiking songs) into a single track: "Auf Der Lunenburger Heide und Was Gleicht Wohl Auf Der Erde" (On Lunenburg Heath and What is Quite Similar On The Earth). Whilst it begins with martial drums and a bierkeller atmosphere it gradually becomes more frenzied but also subtly ironic as the tempo races slightly ahead of itself and the brass samples are stretched into wild squeals (CD track 13). The dispassionate relation to the Germanic manifests itself not only in the humour but in the strange archaic style of German used by Laibach and the Philosophy Department which even native speakers sometimes encounter problems with. The German language itself is "made strange" by NSK, opening up a certain distance at apparent moments of closest engagement with the Germanic. A Germanophilic use of the language and musical archetypes would be both more respectful and more fluent, unable to conceal its unqualified ardour.

Germanophilia then is an inappropriate and misleading term for NSK's engagement with the Germanic that overlooks several important factors. In place of "Germanophilia" the name of one of the Laibach sub-groups; "Germania" is appropriate. The spectre of the German as manic phenomenon that has to be severely restrained continues to agitate many across Europe and beyond. "Germania" (German mania) has a further association in that it was the name Berlin was to have adopted had the Third Reich been victorious in World War Two, an association Laibach were certainly aware of. A similar reference was made in 1990 by German industrial band "Die Krupps" with the single "Germaniac". The lyrics take the opposite approach to Syberberg and warn against

⁵³ In one scene Laibach visit a Gasthaus in full Alpine costume and drink beer in a manner so solemn as to approach frivolity.

a continued desire for world domination and the problematic characteristics of the Germanic (precision, force, zeal)⁵⁴. Due to the relevance of these associations and the complexities discussed above the term “Germania” will be used in preference to “Germanophilia” in relation to NSK. However, despite the zeal that some works seem to imply, the “-mania” should be kept in context and read as a controlled conceptually fore-grounded deployment of the Germanic rather than an unbridled “lust” for it.⁵⁵

3.11 NSK's Shift in The Slovene-German Relationship.

Epstein (1995, 282) writes that in certain circumstances “... culture becomes a nation's answer through self-development to the challenge of other civilizations”. Laibach responded to the inherent threat assimilation poses to Slovene identity by taking the fight to the heartland of the pan-German ideology. Historically inimical Germanic imagery is used to facilitate the construction of an unassimilable and unrelegatable assertion of Sloveneness. NSK's Germania is an insurance against their relegation within the Germanic space. Using the same “Trojan horse” tactics (Damjanić 1987) used against the state and the music industry, Laibach were able to ensure that pejorative “Balkan” and “Slav” paradigms could not easily be invoked against them by German audiences or commentators.

This might be read as a simple pragmatic decision to adopt Germanic elements as a concession to the largest cultural market in Europe. However the key motivation seems to have been a radical ambition to transcend the conflicts of Slovene identity via a reversal of the traditionally subordinate Slovene-German relationship. Both those Slovenes wishing to repress the Germanic and those Austrians and Germans wishing to assert the inferiority of the Slovenes are frustrated by NSK's Germania. The underlying claim is that the Slovene is incomplete without the Germanic and even more radically, that the Germanic is incomplete without the Slovene. The pre-concert speeches of the Philosophy Department go further and assert not merely equality (itself a radical claim in the Germanic context) but the superiority of the Slovene as a mode of the Germanic and also imply that the Germanic is a subset of the Slovene.

⁵⁴ To some extent the arrangement and delivery of the song works against the declamatory intent. The harsh high-tempo electronics seem to aestheticise and celebrate Germanic force and speed even as the lyrics condemn them. Ultimately the group (named after the infamous arms-manufacturing dynasty) were unable to escape the paradox that a large part of their appeal derived precisely from their hyper Germanic version of industrial music.

⁵⁵ It also oscillates between a Syberbergian concern to carry out a limited recuperation of certain Germanic qualities

The speeches have a strong subordination theme, particularly in relation to the Austrians and enact a violent symbolic reversal of what could previously have been seen as an iron historical law - that Slovenes always defer to Germans, almost to the point of self-effacement. The speech given in Vienna in 1988 start with the provocative statement, "Austrians you are Germans" and this itself caused a strong reaction,⁵⁶ challenging as it did the post-war Austrian narrative that seeks to distance the country from the "German" phenomenon of Nazism. Having placed Austrians into the category of Germanic subset (the implication of which is that the Austrians bear equal guilt with the Germans "proper") the speech seeks to effect a reversal of the historical Slovene-German subordination complex and to place NSK as Slovenes in the dominant position:

"The Germans gave you well-being; whereas we, the elite, gave you the Spirit... "We have heard rumours that you are afraid. That is the way it should be. Yet, although we have violated your graves, we have no territorial claims. For what is yours is also ours. The Reich, which belonged to you, now belongs to us... We know you have faith. But your attitude towards it is paved in self-interest. That is why the leniency of the Supreme One appoints us to be your chastisers. And if we say you are Germans, then we, Slovenes, are chosen to be the beaters in your forests."⁵⁷ (NSK 1991, 220).

The German-language edition of the Department's speeches (Mlakar 1993) is entitled "Reden an Die Deutsche Nation" (Speeches To The German Nation) and the majority of speeches to Germanophone audiences have taken place in Germany itself where all the NSK groups have enjoyed most success. In Austria NSK address the specific Austrian mode of Germanicism that has shaped Slovenes whereas in Germany they confront the universal form of the Germanic. However the tone of the German speeches is no less condescending and overbearing. The 1989 Dusseldorf concert speech (Mlakar 1992, 77) again gives Slovenes a superior spiritual status to the Germans. As Slavs NSK were able to carry out this unprecedented symbolic reversal through a Germanic medium that was able to smuggle Slav content into the German cultural sphere and evade the prejudice or condescension Slovene artists may otherwise encounter, particularly in Austria.⁵⁸ Such

and a more ironic, dispassionate approach.

⁵⁶ Organizers of the concert almost cancelled the event because of the contents of the speech. See Meglič, 1995.

⁵⁷ A traditional Slovene role performed for the Habsburg nobility. This hunting reference (one of many present in Laibach, Irwin and the theatrical works) has a further connotation. During the war the gamekeepers ("Aufsichtsjäger") in the Carinthian forests were feared as the eyes and ears of the SS and were in the front-line of the anti-Partisan struggle. They were especially reviled as "nemškutarij", militantly pro-German Slovenes (see Barker 1990, 10). Thus references to Slovenes both as hunters and as beaters evoke the Slovene-German (Austrian) dynamic.

⁵⁸ It is equally significant that this reversal is enacted via a format that does not entail compromising accommodations with the local audience. Rather it is its uncompromising nature (the tone of the speeches, the combination of Germanic and Slovene signifiers, the sensory violence) that makes the depth of the incursion into the Germanic sphere possible.

a reversal of the historical dialectic between victor and vanquished lies behind Žižek's recent comments that Laibach and NSK have done far more to defend Slovene culture than the right-wing thinkers who criticise them so bitterly.⁵⁹ The subjection of German audiences to an imposed Slav (ideological-aesthetic) regime represents a major symbolic break in the established flow of German-Slovene interaction.⁶⁰ This break can be seen not just as the symbolic reversal of historical roles but as a cultural analogue of the re-balancing of inter-state relations necessitated by Slovene independence and its potential inclusion in the European Union. Laibach's adoption of a superior stance in relation to German audiences foreshadowed the upgrading of Slovene-German relations to those between two national states and the possibility of an enhanced, less deferential status for Slovenia in relation to Germany.

3.12 NSK in Relation to Historical Revisionism and Nationalist Extremism.

The blend of national and socialist symbolisms seen in NSK works and the relatively straightforward ideological transitions from socialism to nationalism show that there was no fundamental incompatibility between (Yugoslav) republican communism and nationalism. Not only did communism fail to eliminate nationalism within society but the republican structure seems actually to have encouraged nationalism within the party. Recent developments in Yugoslavia and the former socialist states illustrate that in an era of political reordering and economic crisis communists' previous formal internationalism is one of the first values to be discarded. Many such red-black career shifts by politicians are entirely tactical rather than conscience-driven⁶¹ but nevertheless betray the presence of latent nationalist agendas within the elites of multinational states.

From an early stage Laibach exposed the nationalist dynamics inherent to the Yugoslav republican system, diverting them into cultural form through an exorcistic performance of total(itarian) nationalistic mobilisation that incorporated socialist signifiers alongside national ones. In their

⁵⁹ See "Delo", 5.1.98

⁶⁰ It should be remembered that the fact of Germans living under Slav control was the severest provocation to Nazism and directly motivated the attacks on Czechoslovakia, much of Yugoslavia, Poland and beyond. Viewed in this light the successful imposition of Slovene as well as German content on Germanophone audiences seems even more significant in historical terms.

⁶¹ Franjo Tuđman (jailed for nationalism under Tito) is an ideological nationalist but Slobodan Milošević and many other political leaders in Yugoslavia did not adopt a nationalist stance until it became clear that the cultural and political climate had become favourable to nationalism.

aesthetic reconciliation of national and Partisan-Titoist imagery and their monumentalization of state authority NSK demonstrated that there was no unbridgeable ideological gulf between communism and nationalism in the Slovene and Yugoslav contexts. Their seamless fusion of such imageries may be seen to have dramatised and anticipated the fusion of nationalist ideology and communist power structures that Slobodan Milošević initiated in 1987 and which spread across Yugoslavia and many ex-Communist states. In the previous statement Laibach also seem to anticipate and criticise the ancillary process of nationalist historical revisionism that was a precursor to nationalist mobilisation as Yugoslavia moved towards open conflict. Laibach and NSK are historically revisionist to the extent that they reveal the inconsistencies of currently dominant narratives but differ from the actual historical revisionists in that they are not trying to supplant one mono-dimensional narrative with another. The nationalist narrative is purged of Slovenes' negative contributions to their history, whereas Laibach's harsh juxtapositions expose the paradoxes, flaws and guilts of Slovene history. The actual revisionist project sought to externalise social antagonism and attribute it to socialism in the same way that socialism sought to place social or national tensions at the door of the "class-enemy". Both promised the elimination of antagonism through the solution of either the class or the national question and could not (consciously) incorporate the possibility of continued antagonism into their project any more than they could admit the paradoxes of their stance.

In a small state with few minorities such as Slovenia revisionism took a (comparatively) mild, if over pious, form such as the 57 issue of the *Nova Revija* periodical; "Contributions Toward a Slovene National Programme" (see Woodward 1995, 94). The issue was centred upon the articulation of a series of nationalist grievances centred on what was presented as Slovenes' lack of consent to many post war political developments. Slovene history was re-read in this light and the authors devoted particular attention to the disadvantages imposed on Slovenia by the socialist regime.⁶² By the time of its publication in 1987 (in the same period as the "Poster Affair" and the release of Laibach's "Slovenska Akropola" album - see chronology) many of the unresolved political tensions surrounding Slovene identity had already infiltrated the public sphere via NSK references to such issues across a range of media. "Nova Revija" was controversial even prior to the publication of the national programme but its academic mode of discourse and the credentials of its contributors provided a far more regular and, for the wider audience, palatable, format than the

⁶² This revisionist activity may be seen as a contemporary, more conventional, mode of Slovenism than that of NSK and as one with far more concrete political objectives.

way in which NSK addressed national tensions. Yet despite its less overtly confrontational mode it still attracted a degree of condemnation otherwise received only by Laibach and NSK and the two were often jointly condemned elsewhere in Yugoslavia as examples of the same Slovene nationalist threat (see chronology, 19.3.87). However, the similarities between the two re-examinations of Slovene history should not be taken to classify NSK's work as merely another (cultural) form of nationalist historical revisionism. The acknowledgements of the role played by Yugoslavia in Slovene post-war developments that recur in NSK statements clearly place it at odds with the far less ambiguous and dispassionate stance of "Nova Revija".

The more aggressive nationalist mobilisation in Serbia also began with academic revisionism, exemplified by the highly controversial Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences issued in September 1986.⁶³ In both republics the official post-war historiography came under challenge. The motive for revisionism was primarily nationalist rather than out of a concern for an objective re-assessment of recent history - these new narratives were no more holistic than the official socialist historiography, they simply had a different ideological agenda. Whilst there are definite similarities between the revisionism in Slovenia and Serbia⁶⁴ the character of the subsequent mobilisations was different. Mobilisation in Slovenia was a reaction to the actual and threatened actions of the Yugoslav military in particular (see Gow 1992, 84-88) and was discursively articulated around the defence of human and cultural rights (during the "JBTZ" affair in 1988 - see chronology). Questions of sovereignty only came under serious political consideration as relations between Serbia and its allies and the rest of the Federation became more polarised from 1989 onwards. The active engagement of the NSMs and civil society theorists in the "Slovene Spring" as well as the desire to demonstrate Slovenia's democratic European credentials meant that there was no space for open xenophobia or racism in the drive to independence. This is not to say that there is no racism in post-independence Slovenia. "Balkan" and "Southern" have become pejorative terms and more subtle racism is certainly present. However since independence Slovenia has not to date received criticism in any Amnesty International Report and on this basis it may be said that the contemporary stress on cultural and institutional respect for human rights does provide a strong check on the potential for overtly authoritarian or aggressive nationalism. In an assessment of Slovenia's political status, Markotich (1994) dismissed some of the fears expressed in the West

⁶³ See Woodward 1995, 94. The memorandum was the first codification of the contemporary Greater Serb programme and in particular argued that Tito's regime had conspired to keep Serbia down, particularly by granting autonomy to Vojvodina and Kosovo.

about the tone of post-independence politics. In 1992 the (constitutionally) nationalist Slovene National Party (SNS) had achieved a limited degree of electoral success which some saw as portent of something more sinister even though they had no influence upon government. Markotich challenged this view:

“It is certainly not obvious that a well-organised, ideologically charged skinhead movement promoting the interests of a nationalist party was the key to the SNS’s (Slovene National Party) winning twelve seats. Given Slovenia’s history and its traditions, it is unlikely that any such extremist movement will overtake political institutions or play a major role in society. In 1992, during tough economic and social times, Slovenia’s electorate responded by voting for political moderates. There are no clear signs at present indicating that it will not continue to do so in the future.” (pp.101-2).

The high level of constitutional protection afforded the Italian and Hungarian minorities in Slovenia suggests a higher degree of Slovene immunity to nationalist etatisme than elsewhere in former Yugoslavia but awareness of the strategic inadvisability of aggressive nationalism may be crucial here,⁶⁵ combined with a very strong desire not to be labelled “Balkan” by the West. While the strength of Slovene civil society activity in the eighties may suggests a Slovene bias against etatisme, Laibach reveal that impulses toward hegemony are inherent, not just to the Slovene but to any national character as they are fundamental to mass psychology. Rather than externalise or deny these as some nationalist narratives do, Laibach transcends them through the deployment of their spectre. Since such impulses seem endemic (even) in the era of late capitalist globalization it is likely that the lessons of Slovene history are as important as a strong democratic culture in preventing the rise of exclusivist rather than reactive nationalism in Slovenia.

Laibach may also have played a role in the weakness of right-wing extremism in Slovenia. The “paradigm of impossible authority” created by Laibach in the nineteen-eighties was sufficiently severe to make any future political extremism appear weak and lacking conviction or vehemence in comparison - Laibach annexed the sites and modes of potential para-militarist mobilisation that took place elsewhere in Yugoslavia. The small number of skinheads in contemporary Slovenia are emulating Western political fashion rather than Laibach, a group associated (albeit ambiguously) with a cosmopolitan art scene anathema to fascist ideology. The para-militarist absolutism performed by Laibach in Slovenia and carried out in earnest elsewhere has remained almost entirely

⁶⁴ Tudjman lost his position teaching military history in Zagreb in the nineteen-seventies due to his revisionism.

⁶⁵ With no offensive armed forces to speak of and vulnerable minorities in Italy and Austria a more aggressively nationalist Slovenia would have very limited options were it to pursue a course of either territorial revanchism or the persecution of minorities.

spectral and abstracted. If not an actual inoculation against such phenomena the author would contend that Laibach have been successful in diverting and channelling them away from the field of concrete political action. Together with the other NSK groups Laibach prefigured the (cultural) possibility of a Slovene state (subsequently transcended with the creation of their own “State In Time” in 1992) and had a pre-emptive impact on the symbolic political content and mode of political-cultural mobilisation in the new Slovene state.

3.13 The Annexation of The “National Thing”

Žižek (1994b, 201) argues that national identity is structured around a relationship to “the Nation qua Thing” or the “Nation-Thing” which is inherently contradictory. It is based on the belief that “it” is only accessible to members of the nation and yet is simultaneously constantly at risk from “others”. This framework may be used to illustrate the way in which NSK related to the Slovene “national thing”, contextualizing both some domestic reaction to their work and its impact. The demonization of the group by veterans’ groups and elements of the media gave Laibach the status of internal (Slovene) outsiders. Though it could not plausibly be presented as actually foreign (as opposed to in co-operation with foreign interests) its extremism put beyond it “beyond the pale” in relation to state and nation. As outsiders they were perceived by some and could be presented in the media as an (implicit) threat to the Nation-Thing itself, despite embodying some of its most spectacular characteristics.

NSK’s discourse seeks to place itself at the heart of the Slovene national programme and in this way a claim is made to control of the national thing. The implication is that those who wish to be associated with the Slovene programme cannot do otherwise but abandon their opposition to NSK. Prior to 1987 the dominant ideology did not permit explicit engagement with, or reference to, the national thing and to adopt such a stance was to go beyond the pale, even to take on the status of outlaws. Since no other actors on the political and cultural scenes were prepared to take this step, Laibach arrived at, or returned to, the national thing first and in so doing tainted it in advance. This usurpation can be seen at a symbolic level to have taken on the ideological role (the attempted foreclosure of the national thing) that had previously been carried out by the disintegrating “Brotherhood and Unity” ideology. The effect (intentional or otherwise) of NSK’s pre-emptive reintroduction into the cultural sphere of national archetypes was to carry out a limited

rehabilitation of them and simultaneously to put them beyond the pale politically. When the national thing was invoked politically during the Slovene independence process it was (necessarily) in a comparatively kitsch and non-threatening form (for examples see Erjavec and Gržinić 1991, 156) when compared to the manipulation of national imagery by NSK and by para-militarist nationalism elsewhere in Yugoslavia.⁶⁶

Laibach pre-empted the para-militarist deployment of national imageries through the presentation of its spectre and what its domestic critics experience as a type of parasitic attachment to the national thing. After the interventions of Laibach and NSK the national thing was always-already tainted as would be anyone politician promising direct unmediated access to it in the way Laibach suggested. Žižek (1994b, 222) argues that the status of nationalism "... is ultimately that of the transcendental illusion, the illusion of a direct access to the Thing; as such, it epitomizes the principle of fanaticism in politics". The uncanny spectral power of Laibach's total performance derives from such an illusion. The national thing is present in the sounds and images in forms such as the kozolec or references to mythical figures such as Črtomir (section 2.13) and appears directly accessible. However direct enjoyment of these is problematized via the use of tautology, paradox and contradiction, which function as a type of aversion therapy towards, even as they manipulate the desire for access to, the national thing. The antithetical German national thing (and the spectre of aggressive German nationalism) is also present, together with signifiers of the Yugoslav system that Slovene nationalists argued was inimical to Slovene interests.

What Laibach's fanatical mode of presentation makes clear is that there is a price to be paid for such access – the national imageries are so bound up with the other paradoxical elements in the mix that they cannot be enjoyed in isolation. Access to "it" means acceptance of the work as a whole. An actual Slovene nationalist wishing to draw inspiration from Laibach would have to repress awareness of the contradictory, parasitic elements attached to the national thing(s) and this repression would introduce a distortion (if only subconscious) into the enjoyment of the imageries.

⁶⁶ Žižek (1994b, 222) speaks disparagingly of a shift in Slovenia "... from Punk and Hollywood to national poems and quasi-folkloric commercial music". Whilst events in Serbia and Croatia demonstrated the sinister potential of this cultural shift, its Slovene equivalent did not become paramilitarised to the same extent and retained its quaint character. Žižek would certainly not explain the different turn taken in Slovenia through any Slovene exceptionalism (being somehow less inherently reactionary than Serbs or Croats) and if this nationalist argument concerning Slovenes' greater democratic awareness or restraint is discounted then there has to be some other, less tangible factor that (at least partly) explains this situation. The only other significant cultural or political factor in Slovenia that might have had this effect was Laibach /NSK.

Contemporary nationalism promises not just direct access but a hedonistic enjoyment of the national thing and the traumatic conceptual density of Laibach's spectral presentation of it precludes by its nature unmediated hedonistic enjoyment of the excess of the national thing. Within the most overtly "national" NSK works, direct national enjoyment is simultaneously promised and problematized, if not forestalled. At the moment when Laibach appears to offer this access it diverts it to the paradoxically ambivalent core of the group. The national thing in Laibach has a spectral quality and what the observer has direct access to is to the spectre of Laibach itself, the central void around which its identity is structured.⁶⁷ The "Laibach thing" is as harsh as it is transcendent and its contents partly projected in by the observer. Neither is it access to it climactic or final but only transitory (as its content is primarily projective it can only be moved through rather than inhabited). Just as the national thing cannot free itself of antagonism and discontinuity nor can the Laibach thing which reflects the spectral status of the national thing itself.

The title of the tenth anniversary concert: "Ten years of Laibach, Ten Years of Slovene Independence" (video clip 4) is one of the most explicit examples of the group's parasitic attachment to the national thing. The concert took place at the end of 1990, six months before actual Slovene independence and its title thus associated Laibach with a process of national development. In this respect Laibach's constant retroactive claim to shape events was also in operation in the timing of the event. The implication is that Laibach is not only absolutely inseparable from the notion of Slovene independence but that "Slovene independence" dates only from the creation of Laibach, that Laibach precedes all contemporary manifestations of the process. One interview response takes this attachment to its logical conclusions and implies that without Laibach there is no nation as such:

"The end of Laibach?. The end of Slovene nationhood." (NSK 1991, 58).

Laibach's national(ist) performance evokes the controversial terminology of Friedrich Meinecke⁶⁸. Through such statements Laibach and NSK seek to present themselves as being in the vanguard of the final transition of Slovenes from a "kulturnation" (nation based (only) upon culture) to a

⁶⁷ The type of militant Slovene nationalism Laibach appear to deploy is inherently unreal or spectral – there are no substantial precedents for such extreme Slovenism (only for its opposites) and while not impossible that it could have emerged during the collapse of Yugoslavia, it seems unlikely to do so now after Laibach's interventions and the settlement of issues of Slovene sovereignty.

⁶⁸ See Smith 1991, 8.

“staatsnation” (state based nation). Yet, although such a transition seems to have been present as an immanent popular desire amongst the Slovene public, NSK’s association with the process of national self-assertion only provokes nationalist critics further. The shock and unease caused by the extreme mode of NSK’s manipulation of the national thing means that their parent society still retains a degree of antipathy toward Laibach in particular and this is not confined solely to the older generation. Asked upon their return from a leg of the first “Occupied Europe Tour” why they returned to Ljubljana despite their unpopularity Laibach replied:

“Romantic aesthetic nationalism is the mania of the cultural servitude to progressiveness. LAIBACH is organically connected to its home; it jealously nurtures the link with the people and its history, and it is aware of its role within the Slovene cultural-political range... Every opposition to our appearance in the public does not threaten LAIBACH itself *but acts against Slovene culture itself* (my emphasis). History will accept this kind of hesitation as an authentic document of the times and situate it in the broad chapter of Slovene non-consciousness”.⁶⁹

In this passage the claim is that to oppose Laibach is to oppose Slovene culture as such and that the opposition, rather than harming the group, is a manifestation of “... Slovene non-consciousness”, a possible reference to populist philistinism, conservatism or even national self-repression of the type discussed previously. At this point Žižek’s (1994a, 92-3) description of an element which is “... more X than X itself” is again relevant. Laibach assigns itself a status equivalent to that of Slovene culture, nationhood and self-consciousness and in this way implies it is “more Slovene than the Slovene itself”, because of and not despite its inclusion of Germanic and other non-Slovene elements. The logic of this statement is that Laibach (with all its contradictory, alienating and unpleasant associations) is the ultimate paradigm or horizon of Sloveneness. The effect of this is to mark off a place beyond which is not possible to go meaning that any future cultural or political project attempting (even the performance of) such a direct engagement with the national thing will be unable to escape comparison with the intensity of Laibach. As with their recapitulation of the totalitarian state Laibach reveal the traumatic core of the national thing and reveal the paradoxical and potentially catastrophic effect of the full realisation of notions of both state and nation, the irrational, uncanny qualities of which are brought to the fore. The hurt and unease provoked among some Slovene opponents of Laibach derives from the unshielded intensity of the presentation of national archetypes, presented by Laibach alongside symbols of the difficult realities that give them their significance such as colonisation by the Germans and self-assimilation.

⁶⁹ The conclusion of the statement reads: “Only God can subdue LAIBACH. People and things never can.” which is itself a paraphrase of a 1933 Mussolini statement (see Lisič 1985).

It should also be noted that Laibach's annexation of the national thing, the foreclosing of the most undiluted, volatile national archetypes applies equally to foreign audiences. It is recognised even by mainstream sources that for many foreign observers an awareness of Slovenia (as distinct from Yugoslavia) was entirely shaped by their exposure to Laibach and/or NSK. This recognition may be found even in the promotional tourist literature of the new state (see Raposa (Ed.), 1995, 50-1) which features both Laibach and Irwin, and their undeniable status as the Slovene artists to have achieved the greatest international success to date. However this will have further antagonised some Slovenes who not only resent the fact that such a controversial presentation of the Slovene thing has been so successful abroad but the fact that previously obscure, closely held folk secrets constituting Slovene identity have been widely broadcast. The difficulty of the language, (frequently presented as being at the heart of Slovene identity) had, until the advent of NSK, protected much of Slovene identity from non-academic foreign scrutiny. Though it is several years since Laibach last sang in Slovene, the mere fact of its wider exposure was an unprecedented innovation⁷⁰ but not one for which they are thanked except in the work of certain journalists and critics who recognise their impact. Even if Laibach's opponents approved of the transmission of Slovene language and culture (which is itself is open to question) their dissemination by a group some found too disturbing to refer to by its name was unacceptable. Slovene reactions to Laibach project the doubts and insecurities about national identity which survive in NSK's work in the paradoxes with which it qualified its use of Slovene symbols. The Slovene language and folk culture are constantly evoked by many Slovenes as sources of national strength and yet Laibach's militant retransmission of these caused many to fear that irreparable damage would be done to them (see discussion of the 1987 "Laibach and Occupied Europe" controversy in chapter four and the chronology).

Part of the discursive tactics through which Laibach attached itself to the national thing was the rhetorical style employed so as to suggest that the group both embody and allow direct access to the national thing:

"The creative ability of the artist identifies with the national spirit. Every artist carries within him certain (ethnic characteristics, which are the result of a common origin and kindred lifestyle of a group of people over a longer historical period.) These characteristics are reflected in his work. It is impossible to imagine Leonardo or Cervantes as Russians, Voltaire and Verdi as Germans, Dostoyevsky and Wagner as Italians or

⁷⁰ As previously stated in the discussion of NSK's impact in Germany and Austria, the fact of the successful transmission of Slovene in these territories was perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of NSK's cultural impact.

LAIBACH as Yugoslavs⁷¹. Every artist comes from the depths of his nation, from the dark, subterranean *workshop* (my emphasis) of the national psyche, and through its creation illuminates its basic, typical features, the essence of spirit and character" (NSK 1991, 43-44).

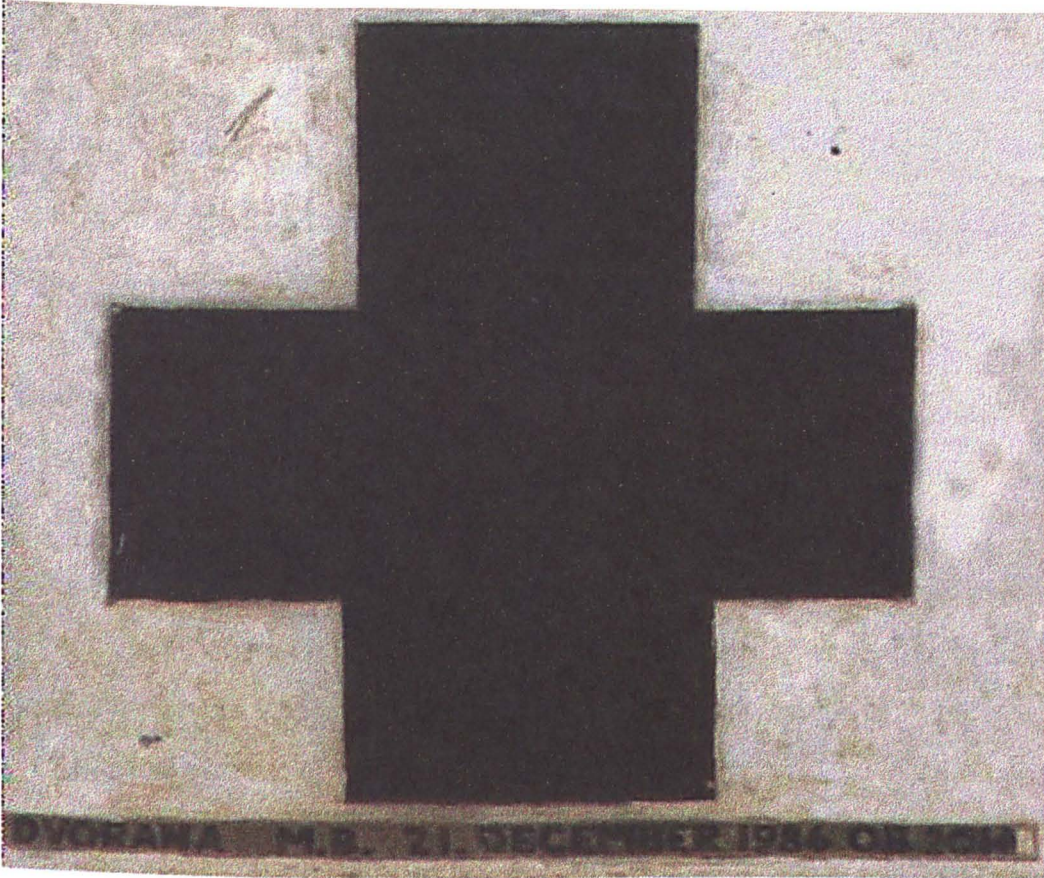
In this statement Laibach claims that every Slovene artist (including both Laibach and artists with no obvious national themes in their work) illuminates the Slovene "essence of spirit and character" and goes further to place Laibach as the contemporary Slovene equivalent of such pantheonic national figures as Wagner. This audacious and to its opponents highly impertinent claim was made at a time when the majority opinion of the group was that it was a politically sinister underground formation with no possible connection with the great figures of either Slovene or world art. The sources and material of this aspect of Laibach's discourse are statements by nationalist and totalitarian artists and theorists in Nazi Germany, the USSR and elsewhere. In his study of the nineteenth century roots of totalitarian culture Golomstock (1990, 159) quotes the comments of the pre-eminent Socialist Realist critic Belinskii on the nineteenth century realists whose work was cited by Socialist Realist theorists in order to lend historical weight to the artistic ideology of Stalinism. Anticipating Laibach, Belinskii (amongst others) wrote that every artist or writer "...expresses the consciousness of the people, which stems from the *weltanschauung* of the people".⁷² At first glance the Laibach passage above, one of several in this vein, may appear closer to Nazi than Stalinist rhetoric. However, as Golomstock (1990, 146-7) points out, statements in praise of the Volk or the progressive socialist masses were very often practically interchangeable. Further, after the Second World War Soviet artistic doctrine became almost as patriotic and anti-internationalist as that of the Reich. This element of Laibach's discourse epitomises the group's fluent recapitulation and retro-quotations of totalitarian discourse as well as the nineteenth century nationalist discourses which influenced totalitarianism. Such Laibach statements are not always based on actual totalitarian statements but are such uncannily accurate simulations that can seem "more totalitarian than the totalitarians themselves".

⁷¹ This contradicts the band's self-denotation as Yugoslavs and their reference to "our country" as Yugoslavia in some statements (see NSK 1991, 54). See also Irwin's more ambiguous statement "The more Slovene our art is, the more Yugoslav it will become" (NSK 1991, 121) which appears to resolve the contradiction between a Slovene and Yugoslav focus. NSK as a whole came to be spoken of in the Yugoslav media as the country's leading cultural export and the groups did nothing to discourage the Western perception that they were *de facto* Yugoslav cultural ambassadors.

⁷² Such essentialist views about national environment and history finding expression both in the collective and individual psyche and culture find an echo in the works of Jung. For a discussion of Jung's apparently fundamental national essentialism see "Jung, Anti-Semitism and the Nazis" in Samuels (1993). Jung's statements on the fundamental effects of nationality are echo the "Blut und Boden" rhetoric recapitulated by Laibach.

This skill at retrospectively appropriating statements and works to prophetically validate present practice is a fundamental totalitarian technique that constantly recurs in the work of NSK. Like the title of their tenth anniversary concert Laibach's recapitulation of such nationalist-essentialist discourse effectively monopolised it in advance, (so far) rendering it beyond the pale within subsequent Slovene cultural and political practice although this does not imply that NSK are still beyond the pale and are not a part of the cultural establishment, but that the national territory they annexed seems still to be inaccessible to subsequent artists). An optimistic reading might suggest that Laibach and NSK have carried out such a thorough "durcharbeiten" (working through) of the most dangerous aspects of the national thing that it is unlikely it will manifest itself in such intense form again. Even when moves towards independence meant that signifiers of national identity such as Mount Triglav and the ducal stone were more widely disseminated they retained a primarily quaint aura. So far they have not manifested in such intense and implicitly threatening forms as in the works of Laibach or as has been seen in Croatia and Serbia. The creation of the NSK State In Time, an attempt to transcend the specificity of the new Slovene national state is a further means of evacuating such material from the national political and cultural space into a more abstracted field too diffuse for concrete political forces to mobilise around. What can be stated with certainty is that NSK's controversial and by some still-resented attachment to the national thing will not easily be dissolved.⁷³

⁷³ Any future political or cultural project that attempts to appropriate the Slovene national thing (of which there is at present no sign) would first have to remove the mark of NSK and Laibach in particular and carry out a disassociation whereby extreme manifestations of the national thing would not automatically recall Laibach (and all its disturbing ambiguities).



Poster Advertising "Anonymous" Laibach Event (Taken from sleeve of Laibach 1997b).

4) Laibach: The Name-Controversy and The Group's Political Status.

(See video clip three)

"A name signifies the reification of the Idea on the level of an enigmatic cognitive symbol. The name LAIBACH first appeared in 1144 as the original name of Ljubljana, the city "by the stream" (Bach) and "the moor" (Laibach). It appears again during the reign of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, this time as an alternative to the already existing Slovene version. "LAIBACH" again appears in 1943, after the capitulation of Italy in the Second World War, when the Germans took control of the city. This was the period when the Nazis and Belogardisti (White Guard) arrested, tortured and murdered those citizens of Ljubljana who did not believe in the victory of the Third Reich. In 1980, with the emergence of a youth culture group, the name LAIBACH appeared for the fourth time, suggesting specific possibilities for the formation of a politicised - systematically ideological - art, as a consequence of the influence of politics and ideology. In this sense, the name summarizes the horror of the communion between totalitarianism and alienation generated by production in the form of slavery." (NSK 1991, 43).

Analysis of the reactions to Laibach's name is the best means through which to monitor and analyse

domestic political reaction to the group and its work. Some of the fiercest polemics over the group in Slovenia were between those arguing for the legalisation of its name and those insisting on its unacceptability. Aside from general issues of nominalization and the specific resonance and effects of the name the focus here is on the public debate over the issue which anticipated the wider struggle between the new social and cultural movements and defenders of the ideological status quo. The name controversy reveals the “demasking and recapitulating” dynamic that structured Laibach’s interaction with the Slovene and Yugoslav public spheres. Its effects are traced through analysis of a series of pro and anti-Laibach views published in the Slovene press and in particular letters sent by partisan veterans (both partisan and non-partisan protest letters are documented sequentially in the chronology). In conclusion it is argued that what its opponents referred to as the “Laibachization” (Cajhen 1982a,b) of Ljubljana and the entire controversy reflect the geopolitical and ideological shifts the city has undergone since Laibach first became an issue of public debate in the early eighties.

The selection and public display of the name “Laibach” on posters in Trbovlje on 26th September 1980 (see chronology) was the founding public act of Laibach’s career. The group subsequently revealed that the cross used in one of the posters revealed was modelled on Kazimir Malevich’s “Black Square” but the cross also recalls the markings on German Second World War military aircraft and vehicles. The name and the cross preceded all other aspects of the group’s presentation into the public arena, the music, the discourse and the “sinister” image of the members. The name can be seen to have symbolised and foreshadowed many aspects of the group’s work. Its impersonal and abstract nature indicated the formal emphasis placed on the group as such as opposed to the specific individuals it consisted of at any particular time. The early text “10 Items of the Covenant” states:

“LAIBACH adopts the organisational system of industrial production and the identification with the ideology as its work method. In accordance with this, each member personally rejects his individuality, thereby expressing the relationship between the particular form of production system and ideology and the individual.... The flexibility and anonymity of the members prevents possible individual deviations and allows a permanent revitalization of the internal juices of life.” (NSK 1991, 18-19).

As a provocative and impersonal signifier the name was a key aspect of the group's alienating power. The name was established as a generic signifier strong enough to be used against media demands for individualisation and for propagating Laibach's collectivist aesthetic. The reactions to it and the processes set in train by its re-appearance are a microcosm of Laibach's interventions as a whole. The name served as an anticipatory "demasking and recapitulation" of the reactions the group would trigger and the way in which it was received set the pattern for subsequent domestic reaction to other NSK activities. Even before Laibach used images of atrocities from the Second World War or performed songs in German the name itself, in its evocation of the recent and violent Austro-Germanic attempts to suppress or to incorporate the Slovenes, traumatised a section of the Slovene public, sparking the co-ordinated series of protest letters sent by Carinthian partisan veterans (see section 4.8).

4.1 Alienation and nominalization.

Discussing the functioning of the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovskij's "making strange" (ostranenie) process Jameson (1972) laid especial emphasis upon the shocking, dislocating effects such artistic techniques can have, commenting that:

"Art is in this context a way of restoring conscious experience, of breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct... and allowing us to be reborn to the world in its existential freshness and horror." (p.51)

From the formalist perspective a name can be viewed as the first crystallization of the raw material provided by ideologized language and social material and the first site at which the aesthetic of "making strange" the world becomes visible. The alienating power of a disturbing name is exemplified by (the name) Laibach. Some names are inherently, tonally, aggressive: they *sound* and are experienced as disturbing, even before any of their specific associations come into play. The name re-appeared at a time when apart from "Kraftwerk", very few groups aiming for an

international audience bore non-English names. German names are especially sensitive because non-speakers often experience German (due to its historical associations as much as its phonetic characteristics) as harsh and alienating.¹ Thus even for those with no historical knowledge of its significance, “Laibach” could sound disturbing. For Yugoslavs, and above all for Slovenes with very recent memories of what the name symbolised (German oppression) it brought into play a much more disturbing set of associations.

Although the name is obviously also to some extent simply a distinguishing mark or even recognisable brand identifier it is also far more than this. As with other NSK formations and the name “Neue Slowenische Kunst” itself, the name both characterises some aspect of the object (in the case of “Laibach”, its disturbing Germanic associations) and functions as a kind of signifying blueprint. That is, the choice of name can be seen as informed not just by its actual associations but also as a type of regulating guarantor shaping the direction of future development. Similarly the name of “Kraftwerk” (Power Station), whose impersonal image Laibach used as a template, can be seen to have anticipatorily expressed and described one of the key aspects of their work, the influence of industrial-technological processes. Similarly the name “New Collectivism” evokes the collective anonymity of the group and presents the spectre and the promise of collectivism. The appropriation of the name of Scipion Nasice, the Roman emperor who suppressed the theatre as a degenerate form, by the first NSK theatrical unit was intended to evoke the historically painful interaction between theatre and state. Just as with Laibach the name (though far less provocative) was an active agent even before the character of the group’s work had become apparent. The censorious implications of the name challenge the ostensibly liberal humanist norms of the theatre, the very medium in which it is based. All the disruptive, alienating effects described by Jameson were triggered by the name, quite independently of the other disturbing aspects of Laibach’s presentation. The name itself activated the denaturalising effects of “ostranenie” or in NSK terms “demasking and recapitulation”.

¹ See the text “Concepts and Relations” (Čufer/Irwin 1994) quoted at the start of section 3.10 which explains NSK’s use of German as being based upon the negative psychological and historical associations of the language.

4.2 The Historic Role of the name “Laibach” as a Signifier of Germanization:

The names of many other places in Yugoslavia were Germanised, Italianised (from 1941-3 Ljubljana was officially known as “Lubiana”) or Magyarized during the Second World War and whilst at a general level the group might conjure up foreign assimilation it was only in Slovenia that condemnation centred on the name. The press in the other republics attacked the fascistic or generally Germanic elements, and to a lesser extent what they saw as Laibach’s manipulation of totalitarian terror and wartime atrocities, none of which were uniquely Slovene traumas (see chronology). However “Laibach” symbolised Germanization in a way that could be understood by other Yugoslavs but was *felt* most acutely in Slovenia.

Whilst letters from ex-Partisan groups and others spoke as representative organs of socialist civil society, the grounds of their complaint were strictly local, ignoring the fact that what other republics saw as an overemphasis on Slovene issues by both the band and its critics could only diminish the sense of a common Yugoslav culture.² Some letters referred to the “national liberation struggle” (and then only with reference to Slovenia rather than Yugoslavia as a whole) but even the official Partisan letters were preoccupied with invoking “Slovene-ness” and “Slovene consciousness” rather than insults to the dignity of the Yugoslav liberation struggle and state. The first “Carinthian Partisans Protest” letter (Artnak 1986) contains an arguably nationalistic subtext discourse that might have been condemned as “bourgeois nationalism” had it come from one of the Yugoslav nationalities³:

² Only one protest letter, (Zidarič, 1983), written primarily in response to the TV incident, even mentions Tito and is also the only one to contain the key terms “Yugoslavia”, “self-managing” and “non-aligned”. The concluding paragraph signed by a female reader on behalf of the veterans and citizens of Domžale, is as bombastically rhetorical, and as remote from spontaneity as the most formalistic Laibach statements:

“We will always remain faithful to our socialist, self-managing, non-aligned homeland, Tito and our Yugoslavia and will invest all our strength for the improvement of our economy and... also for the political stabilization of our society.”

³ As one of the officially recognized “nations” as opposed to “nationalities” of Yugoslavia Slovenes were fully recognized historical-state subjects with the right to ignore the contradictions between invoking national consciousness and membership of the Yugoslav federation and its socio-political institutions (of which the ex Partisan movement was formally one of the most powerful).

“Germanized names within our history have... been symbols of the oppression of Slovene national consciousness and are judged among genocidal events, against which the fighters of the liberation struggle fought in order that Sloveneness would survive on our territory”. (Artnak 1986).

Germanization per se remains a much more painful and ambiguous subject for Slovenes than for other (ex) Yugoslavs as for historical reasons it could not simply be dismissed as the external imposition of an alien occupier. The areas of Slovenia occupied by the Nazis were the only Slav inhabited area to be directly incorporated into the Reich proper and its people the only ones the Nazis systematically attempted to assimilate rather than merely subordinate. The rapid southward march of denationalisation in Slovene-inhabited Carinthia in the nineteenth century, (Arnez 1958) then the war and, as many protest letters about Laibach show, the continued struggles of what had become a Slovene minority in Carinthia made the spectre of Germanization seem an extremely insidious threat to the older generation. The influence of German culture and the fact until very recently self-assimilation had been a “natural” option for many Slovenes meant that the emergence of a Germanised aesthetic struck radically challenged a politically de-Germanized/Yugoslavized Slovene identity.

Similarly contested national controversies surround the use of the German or native names for Gdansk/Danzig, Königsberg/Kaliningrad or Pressburg/Bratislava and help illustrate the violent tensions inherent in the Laibach/Ljubljana dualism. Such names contain an implied threat of territorial claims that could be reactivated if aggressive nationalism were to return to Germany. Ljubljana, Gdansk and several other locations in Central and Eastern Europe are all referred to by their German names by German exile groups and nationalists who refuse to recognise the legitimacy of post-war territorial changes. The names are the phonetic expression of German revanchist claims and as such remain disturbing, even without their appropriation by a group as extreme as Laibach. It is possible to reconstruct the alarm caused by (the use of) the name itself (which works independently of the sensory-ideological violence of actual Laibach works) by imagining the shock and potential distress that would have been caused by a Polish group bearing

the name “Danzig”. An similar series of reactions would have been set in place though it is of course likely that any such Polish phenomenon emerging in the atmosphere of the early eighties would have been suppressed long before it became an issue of public discussion.

The political situation in Slovenia, the most liberal republic of the most liberal European socialist state (the tolerances of which “Laibach” would test to the limit) was far more hospitable toward artistic provocation than was the case in Poland. However if Polish artists had then had the opportunity of being equally provocative, the shock of a group (or anything else) bearing the name “Danzig” would probably have been at least as violent as that caused in Slovenia by Laibach. Conversely, Gdansk would not have experienced the type of voluntary assimilation and Germanophilia typical of the middle classes in late Hapsburg Slovenia since the Poles were not deemed worthy of assimilation as the Slovenes were. The wartime denotation of Ljubljana as “Laibach” was not simply the brutal innovation of a new group of occupiers but a forcible but scarcely unprecedented return to a name used as recently as 1918. Ljubljana had never previously been known as “Lubiana” as the Italians named it during their occupation,⁴ but its (contested) identity as “Laibach” dated back more than eight hundred years⁵. Disregarding the fact that in the late Habsburg era many assimilated or non-nationalist Slovenes would have seen Laibach as the “proper” name for their city it can still be stated that the re-imposition of the name “Laibach” required far less psychological and cultural adjustment than the imposition of the name “Lubiana”, especially amongst those old enough to remember how recently “Laibach” had been the dominant, official name.⁶ This is not to say that it was welcomed or that it did not offend only comparatively recently awakened Slovene national sentiments. However, given eight hundred years of cultural and

⁴ All the principal Slovene coastal towns such as Koper (Capodistria) had tended to be known by their Italian variants reflecting the dominant socioeconomic position of the Italian bourgeoisie in the towns in the same way that political and economic dominance meant “Laibach” was the official name for Habsburg Ljubljana. When Italy absorbed the western area of Slovenia under the terms of the 1915 Treaty of London and took over further territory in 1941 names were Italianized but unlike the towns of the Littoral the new names of inland towns had only been Italian geographic terms rather than traces of the presence of Italian communities.

⁵ The city celebrated the eight hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the first recorded mention of the city (as “Laibach”) in 1994. The first written mention of “Ljubljana” was in 1146.

⁶ For an account of the contested ethnic politics of late Habsburg Ljubljana see Rogel, 1977.

political precedent the name “Laibach” was probably less alien even than the ancient and invented German names (re) imposed elsewhere in Eastern Europe by the Reich, let alone the Italian or Hungarian ones.⁷ Where geographical usage was concerned the weight of precedent was behind “Laibach”. Only after the creation of Yugoslavia and the discarding of official German place names did Slovene place names begin to appear in foreign atlases and the Nazis wrote off the nomenclature of the 1918-41 period as an unnatural aberration, which could literally be wiped off the face of the map⁸ before the “new” name (Ljubljana) had become fully established.

4.3 The Re-Emergence of The Name as Traumatic Temporal Displacement.

“Purpose: to provoke maximum collective emotions and release the automatic response of [the] masses” (NSK 1991, 44)

This extract from an early interview in which Laibach sought to explain their style of live presentation is just as applicable to the group’s name. The free, conscious and public use of the term “Laibach” was for many older Slovenes a literal return to centuries of German attempts to relegate or even liquidate Slovene identity and inevitably provoked “maximum collective emotions” and strong responses. “Laibach” contained within it a disturbing “as if”, or alienating temporal displacement. Renewed use of “Laibach” seems to imply it is as if... Ljubljana is still “Laibach” and under the veneer of normality “they” (the Nazi and collaborationist forces) had won⁹. As if the city remained occupied, (if only by its unresolved history) and the forty years since the war had never taken place. The establishment of an alternate temporal domain in which its creators enjoy full sovereignty is a technique developed throughout the careers of Laibach and NSK, commencing

⁷ The third partner in the 1941 division of Slovenia was Hungary, which annexed the Prekmurje area on the Hungarian border carrying out a Magyarization policy as violent as that carried out by the Italians in the Slovene and Croat inhabited territory it received after the First World War.

⁸ It is only the unequivocal defeat of Germanizing, Italianizing and Magyarizing regimes in 1945 that has finally enabled the place names used by the inhabitants to finally recognized as international geographic terms. Interestingly some contemporary German maps still use “Laibach” but do not for instance continue to use “Agram” for Zagreb or more sensitively, “Posen” for Poznan.

⁹ In the late eighties the Serb media and leadership presented this scenario as fact and claimed that fascistic forces dominated contemporary Ljubljana (see chronology, 22.5.89)

with Laibach's choice of name and culminating in the NSK State. As Shklovskij's work suggests *ostranenie*/"making strange" is also a process of re-familiarisation; dis-habituating accepted forms in order to return them to visibility and Laibach's alienation of Ljubljana from itself could be viewed in this light. Many of the protest letters hint at this effect and were indignant even at being reminded of the occupation period, let alone the Germanization of Slovenes generally (as if the previous forty years had not taken place).

Until the group adopted the name, reintroducing it into (heavy) public circulation, the name-signifier "Laibach" was a de facto taboo word mentioned only in ritualised accounts of German oppression and wartime resistance. Whilst it was never actually a prohibited term this was until 1980 superfluous; even if some might suspect that German nationalists or anti communist émigrés would use it this would have been simple enough to deal with through censorship or as an internal security matter. The actual form in which the expression "Laibach" re-manifested itself was unforeseeable (particularly coming so soon after Tito's death.) Neither could the extent to which "it" would penetrate national and international consciousness have been foreseen. It was not until 1983 that the legal status of the term "Laibach" was defined and the finding was retrospectively based upon an obscure local ordinance passed by Ljubljana city council as recently as 1981. The fact that at the republic level there were no legal provisions concerning the use of the term was almost certainly due to the improbability, if not unthinkability, of anyone using this name outside of historical texts.¹⁰

¹⁰ It is equally unlikely there are any provisions or sanctions against the use of the term "Danzig" in Gdansk or "Königsberg" in Kaliningrad, simply because of the improbability of anyone apart from easily denounceable irredentists using them.

4.4 The Group's Name As An Ideological "Original Sin"

There are numerous articles from the Slovene press that addressed the name issue and thus the previously unspeakable name was in constant circulation. Through its ever-higher profile (and the hostility this produced) the group set in train some of the first serious post war discussions of wartime issues of Germanization and collaboration, predating the first nationalist attempts to reassess these issues.¹¹ Many letters and articles from the 1986-7 period go into to some historical detail about the history of the name and what it evoked. Laibach gave complex, didactic, accounts of the name's history and its full implications were exhaustively, almost compulsively worked over by commentators and opponents in anguished discussions of the issues it raised.¹² The name was re-released into the public domain at the optimum moment and always already contained within itself the whole subsequent process of its reception and its consequences.

4.5 The Shame of The "Hero City"

Aside from the associations with the occupation of Yugoslavia there was another formal sense in which "Laibach" contravened Yugoslav political sensitivities, making it a more than purely Slovene issue. After the war Ljubljana had been named Yugoslavia's first "hero city", a title given in recognition of the resistance efforts centred on the city.¹³ In the light of this the resurrection of the

¹¹ For instance Nova Revija's 1987 "Contributions To A Slovene National Programme.

¹² See the response to a favorable "Mladina" article by Mastnak (1986b). One letter, "On the Slovene Translation of Laibach" (Kmecl 1986) is a detailed etymological discussion of the name. Kmecl states that the city's name must be both pre-Slovene and pre-German, however in the sentence "Order and Freedom are the basic elements of purity" it seems to demand something more rigorous than historical accuracy in the use of the name.

¹³ Unlike elsewhere in ex socialist Europe many of the plaques, inscriptions and sculptures commemorating the communist led resistance front (O.F.) have still not been removed from Ljubljana although it is now a decade since the Communists were in power. The house in which the resistance organization was founded is privately owned but still bears a plaque and the street ("27th April") still takes its name from the date in 1941 upon which it was founded and this date remains an official holiday, "the day of uprising against the occupiers". On the other hand the official historiography of the resistance front is widely discredited and the church and émigré groups in particular constantly strive to draw attention to Partisan atrocities rather than those carried out by collaborators and their German and Italian allies. In fact Ljubljana might as easily have been commemorated as a city of collaboration, the seat of the collaborator General Rupnik's puppet regime from 1943-5. However so far there are no concrete moves to de-emphasize or remove the Partisan imageries associated with Ljubljana.

occupation era name appeared even more disrespectful. However although Yugoslav media were increasingly full of lurid scare stories about the revival of fascism in Ljubljana and Slovenia¹⁴ (by “fascism” they also had in mind the activities of the NSMs as well as more obviously nationalist phenomena such as the historical revisionism of “Nova Revija”). Yet the research has not uncovered any Yugoslav articles referring to Ljubljana’s “hero city” status in connection with Laibach. The issue was mentioned by two of the first Slovene correspondents to write anti-Laibach letters (Čepe 1982, Cajhen 1982a,b) but was not stressed by later correspondents. The only official pronouncement to refer directly to this was in the statement issued by the Ljubljana municipal secretariat on 30th July 1983, which affirmed the executive decision of 29th June to ban public appearances. After stating that it was “greatly saddened” by Laibach’s TV appearance it added:

“This group has taken the name of our city, which also has the title “hero city” and which we call Ljubljana. This is an abuse of the name”¹⁵

Apart from these instances public condemnation of Laibach’s name centred exclusively on the offence caused to Slovenes and Slovene identity. This can perhaps be seen as indicative of a certain embarrassment both at the group’s defilement of the city’s hero status but also at the fact that due to Ljubljana having been the seat of Slovene collaborationism its “hero city” was vulnerable to historical scrutiny. For Laibach’s opponents it would have been a logical ideological step to make it a wider Yugoslav issue, perhaps in the hope that the federal authorities would pronounce upon it in the absence of decisive action at republican level. The fact that this theme was not taken up outside Slovenia suggests a certain shame in relation to the other republics over the increasingly embarrassing provocations of the Slovene alternative and a desire not to draw too much Yugoslav attention to a phenomenon that showed Slovenia in a bad light. One letter from a Partisan group (Artnak 1986) speaks explicitly of the shame veterans felt in relation to those Slovenes struggling

¹⁴ One of the most infamous of these, “Fašizem na Ljubljanski Scene” (Fascism in the Ljubljana Scene) appeared in the Zagreb magazine “Start” in July 1984 (Ilić-Drakulić 1984). It provoked a detailed response from Vidmar (1984b) entitled “Fašizem na Startovi Sceni” (Fascism on the Start Scene).

¹⁵ See Documents of Oppression (1984), discussed subsequently.

for their rights in Austria and Italy yet there was no such admission in relation to the rest of Yugoslavia. This absence speaks of the difficulty in admitting this intimate Slovene weakness before fellow Yugoslavs but also of the fact that the challenge of Laibach's name was far greater for Slovenes than other Yugoslavs (although the idea of a Germanised name for a Yugoslav city was hardly un-provocative). The re-framing of the debate in all-Yugoslav terms could have made the debate more accessible to non Slovenes and even ritual references to the (Yugoslav) political order (which with hindsight appear conspicuous by their absence) would have helped present such an intensely inward Slovene debate more positively rather than confirming Yugoslav perceptions about Slovene self-absorption. Legally the 1974 Yugoslav constitution meant that the matter was a Slovene one (and in fact was dealt with primarily by the Ljubljana municipal authorities). Yet if there had been some constitutional means for the Federal authorities to suppress Laibach and other alternative phenomena in Slovenia it is likely they would already have acted by the time JNA felt compelled to contemplate military intervention against "counter-revolutionary" phenomena in Slovenia in 1988 (see chronology – "JBTZ" affair).

4.6 Attempts To Suppress The Alternative

Mastnak (1990) argues that the authorities in Slovenia attempted a covert "delegation of repression" in the early eighties. However the repression was delegated to the non-intellectually or culturally active "quiet majority", of the same civil society later seen as the principal site of democratic, *and therefore inherently progressive* mobilisation (see page 169). Officially encouraged "civic" outrage and complaints by local communes and residents about noise, dirt and behaviour provided a democratic, non-Stalinist means of suppressing alternative activities and clubs. Mastnak emphasises that the goal of this socialised violence was to eradicate all symbolic and actual alternative presences within Ljubljana. Meeting places and clubs were regularly shut down and activities severely disrupted in the first half of the eighties and late in 1981 a fierce media controversy erupted in Slovenia and Serbia over an article linking Punk to Nazism (see chronology November-December 1981). Although from the mid eighties onwards, the alternative became too big to be made invisible and repression slowly abated, the period is significant as a symbolic

struggle for the ownership of the soul of the capital city. However these tactics actually led to the alternative movements finding a more secure niche in the social spectrum - it was in response to what its leadership saw as crude disinformation campaigns and threats to youth interests that ZSMS moved towards adopting the role of defender of the alternative, including Laibach. The fact that such a delegation of repression was seen as feasible and normal tends to confirm Kovač's thesis about the undemocratic nature of Slovene society (see Magaš, 1994, 149-50). A tendency towards self-repression might be taken as the default state of Slovene society and the democratic mobilisation of the "Slovene Spring" (1988) as an exception, even if events since independence suggest that this mobilisation may have represented a decisive break in the pattern and that the default state is now based on more democratic paradigms, particularly at the institutional level (see Markotich 1994).

Mastnak (1994, 99) characterizes the attempt to repress the alternative as civil society turning on its own potential and describes the phenomenon as "totalitarianism from below". This was the most acute phase of a still tense struggle between NSMs that were slowly combining their commitment to "Western" liberal values with a new alternative Slovenism and the conservative national superego, embodied in Church and Party. When this schism became apparent NSK, for all its authoritarianism, was associated with the alternative stand against conservatism, even if it never took sides explicitly, although given the extent of NSK's co-operation with alternative institutions this would have been superfluous and contrary to the appearance of "radical ambiguity". The reactions to Laibach's repressiveness made explicit the wider social self-repressiveness in Slovenia. For the authorities an open alliance with Slovene conservatism was obviously impossible because of the ideological discontinuity between officially tolerant, culturally progressive socialist ideals and popular, anti-cosmopolitan, sentiment. However kept at a distance such sentiment was useful in a double game played by the Slovene leadership; keeping the alternative within minimal boundaries whilst simultaneously keeping lines of communication to the alternative open by not adopting the repressive role itself.

Laibach both suffered and benefited from the demonisation of the alternative, most notably in the 1983 "TV Tednik" interview with Jure Pengov,¹⁶ who played out a role of willing provocateur similar to that of Bill Grundy in the infamous Sex Pistols interview of 1976¹⁷. Laibach appeared in

¹⁶ See NSK 1991, 50-51 and attached video clip.

¹⁷ Transcript in Savage 1991, 257-261.

full uniform with armbands with a Laibach poster in the background and recited their “Documents of Oppression”, elements of which appear on “Perspektive” (CD track 3). Pengov upbraided the group for their use of German language and imagery at a time when the Slovene minority in Carinthia “... have to fight for each word and sign”¹⁸ a reference to the resistance of Austrian nationalist groups to public bilingualism, even in majority Slovene areas of Carinthia (see Fritzl 1990). Although it later emerged that the interview was a case of mutual exploitation, Pengov nevertheless appeared to act as the mouthpiece or agent of civic repression, denouncing Laibach on air as “enemies of the people” and appealing to citizens to stop and destroy the group. His concluding remarks were an explicit, if slightly theatrical appeal to the forces of civic repression:

“If I got it right, you use television to challenge us. Fine, so do we. Maybe, maybe now somebody will act and repress these horrifying ideas and declarations here in the middle of Ljubljana.”¹⁹ (Benson 1995b, 19)

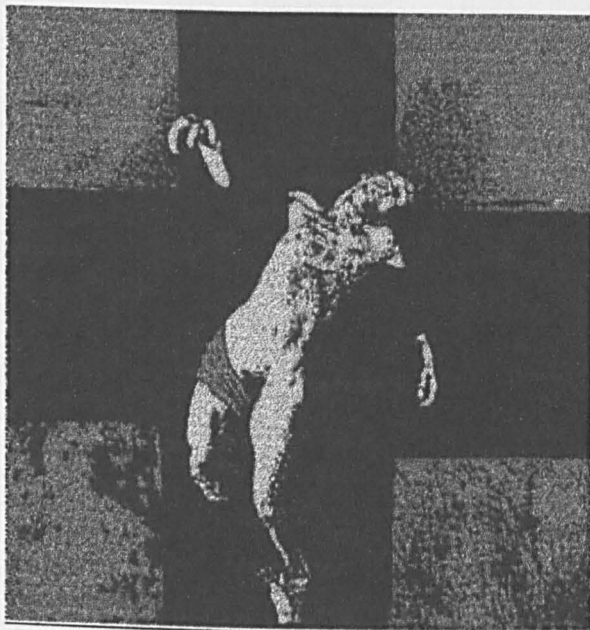
4.7 Documents Of Oppression: The Official Response to Laibach

The period of concerted official action against Laibach came only in response to the TV incident. In the immediate aftermath of the interview Ljubljana council decided that the use of the Germanised name was “without legal basis” and banned any future appearances in Ljubljana by the group under that name.²⁰ During this period the name functioned as an absent signifier through its visual expression in the unnamed, effectively unnameable, black cross which appeared on posters advertising their concerts (see page 212) and on the “anonymous” 1985 album.

¹⁸ Excerpts appear on the films “Predictions of Fire” [Dir.] Benson 1995a and “Bravo” [Dir.] Vezjak (1993). Letters protesting against Laibach’s name also invoked the plight of the Slovene minority (SKPS 1987a).

¹⁹ Benson (1995b), p. 19.

²⁰ Soon after the interview the group “went to ground”, taking refuge at various locations including a monastery. The ban on performances at home led to a renewed effort to penetrate foreign markets and the commencement of “The Occupied Europe Tour” (see chronology).



Cover of Laibach's First Yugoslav Album Release, 1985.

Despite the ban the constant discussion of the issue in this period gave it an ever-stronger presence in public consciousness even while Laibach were abroad. On the 21st of June 1984 Mladina published three key documents²¹ on the issue together with a commentary with the English title "Documents of Oppression" (the title of the first Laibach video project from 1982). It reproduced in full the "Standpoint of the Presidency of MK SZDL²² on Public Manifestations of the Group Laibach" issued on 29/6/83 as the official policy response to the TV provocation and the controversy over the name. In a pre-echo of the tone of anti-Laibach protest letters and in a phrase that would frequently recur thereafter, the first paragraph concludes with a reference to "... the group Laibach, who for some time have alarmed the wider public with their name and destructive activities". It goes on to state that it wishes to indulge in a free dialogue that does not restrict artistic and cultural creativity but is opposed to "all provocations that are reminiscent of the period of Nazi-fascist occupation" (Documents of Oppression 1984)²³. By denouncing Laibach's

²¹ One of the most remarkable features of the Punk period in Slovenia is the extent to which it was chronicled as it occurred. See for instance Skupina Avtorjev (1984), an exhaustive documentation of the period.

²² The Ljubljana municipal assembly of the SAWPY organisation.

²³ Interestingly the text also criticizes Laibach's use of non-Nazi totalitarian and Stalinist symbols, the use of which

interventions as “provocations” the party representatives and Laibach’s other opponents attempted to exclude the group from the space of progressive socialist morality whilst still being able to pay (seemingly obligatory) lip service to formal principles of democratic dialogue and free artistic creation. By avoiding overt “Stalinist” modes of repression they hoped to justify policies that the NSMs argued were inimical to what they claimed was the spirit of self-management. The document also states that in “...our self-managing socialist society” criticism of “...negative social phenomena must be sharp, strong and uncompromising” however such criticism should avoid “anarchoid hopelessness and depersonalisation” (a clear reference to Laibach). Such qualities “...must not be characteristic of our self-managing society” and so by implication have no place within its cultural life (Documents of Oppression 1984). The document also condemns the “insufficient politico-cultural sensitivity” of the programme council of ŠKUC and, presumably with Laibach’s academic and media defenders in mind, warns “against interpretations which attempt to give legitimacy to this phenomenon”. However it goes no further than warning against such interpretations; it does not assume the right to suppress or denigrate them, but merely warns against them. The document then speaks of the “special role” of educational and cultural-educational institutions and groups in the development of creativity and perspectives *consistent with* (my emphasis) the development of socialist, self-managing democracy²⁴ and not in its denial, which strengthens all “anti-humanitarian” and “anti-socialist” tendencies. As further evidence of its desire to appear reasonable and not alienate youth further the document speaks of giving more attention to their needs and demands. The conclusion makes no further reference to Laibach but attributes the affirmation of “anti-cultural and ideological manipulation” to the present organisational structures of cultural institutions (such as ŠKUC) and the “contents” of their cultural programs (Documents of Oppression 1984). The inference to be drawn from this is that whatever influence possible may soon be exerted over the financing and organisation of cultural programs. However the (advance) threat of financial restrictions on marginal cultural activities was hardly totalitarian

was seen as being as reprehensible as the Nazi images.

²⁴ The polarization described above stemmed from such ideological qualifications of democracy. The semantic differences in emphasis between the party discourse of “socialist self-managing” democracy and the NSMs’ demands for an unqualified democracy-as-such illustrate a gap that was far wider than it appears on paper.

and as the contemporary controversies over federal arts funding in the USA and smaller echoes in Britain demonstrate, certainly not exclusive to state-socialist systems.²⁵

The second document reproduced (in full) by "Mladina" ("Subject: Application For A Public Performance")²⁶ exposed the actual mechanics of the ban and the surprising openness with which the affair was dealt with. The full formality of bureaucratic courtesy and formality was employed even (perhaps especially) in interaction with alternative institutions such as ŠKUC. The letter was the Ljubljana secretariat for internal affairs' response to a request by ŠKUC to mount a Laibach performance on the 8th of June 1984. The letter notes the "defectiveness" of the preface to ŠKUC's application and the signatures included on it. Far more significantly it observes that the group's program was not labelled "in the Slovene language", i.e., that it contained German (Documents of Oppression 1984). In its attempts to avoid banning Laibach for straightforward "public order" reasons which would both draw attention to the seriousness of Laibach's challenge and compromise the authorities' progressive self-image the municipal authorities had to resort to ever more absurd logical contortions to justify the ban. As with what turned out to be an unenforceable ban on the use of the geographical expression "Laibach", the objection to the non-use of Slovene had absurd implications. Such a policy had obviously chauvinistic overtones at odds with Yugoslav "brotherhood and unity" and was obviously unenforceable. If applied beyond Laibach it would in theory have affected Slovene bands performing under for instance Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian, English or Russian names. Yet the failure to this implied policy to other groups signified an exceptional (and thus discriminatory) policy employed specifically against Laibach, an inference the readers of "Mladina" would have been aware of. In declining the request for a performance the letter recapitulates the formalist-ritualistic nature of the anti-Laibach stance, ritually invoking the phrases used the previous year to justify the imposition of the ban. It employs the by now routine phrases about the group "alarming the wider public" and their use of "the corrupted German name"

²⁵ The fact that the primary threat issued was financial rather than one of repressive action illustrates that in some respects the situation of alternative culture in Slovenia was already closer to that in the West than to that in the rest of Yugoslavia and the Warsaw Pact states.

²⁶ "Zadeva: Priglašitev za prireditve." (Documents Of Oppression 1984, 17).

[for Ljubljana] which they use without appropriate permission. Here too the standpoint of 29th June 1983 is cited, particularly the section which criticised ŠKUC's lack of "culturo-political sensitivity". It concluded by stating that the socio-political and cultural content of the Laibach Kunst²⁷ programme further illustrated the "unsuitability" of a performance by the group.

The third "Document of Oppression" (Subject: Use of the Name of the City of Ljubljana)²⁸ is a response on the issue received by "Mladina" from the municipal secretary which is intended to acquaint the magazine with the standpoints reached and some of the questions asked at the 14th session of the Ljubljana socio-political assembly on 30th June 1983. The letter quotes an unnamed delegate whose question exemplifies the generic tone of the municipal anti-Laibach discourse and its "spontaneous" presence in the expression of "personal" outrage by individuals. As in previous partisan letters the delegate constructs himself as "a fighter and a Slovene",²⁹ "deeply affected" by [reports of] the TV incident. At the session of 29th June an investigation into the legality of the use of the name had been launched and its conclusions (announced on the 20th July) are reproduced. These were that the use of the city's name requires the permission of the council and that no such permission had been granted. The letter states that the members of Laibach are aware that permission for the use of the name had not been granted and that they use it "without legal basis". The letter ends concludes with the formal Yugoslav salutation "Tovariški pozdrav!" (Comradely greetings).

Both in these official strictures and in the protest letters discussed below, the general level of official condemnation was surprisingly mild and restrained, considering the severity of the Laibach phenomenon and in the light of Western preconceptions about (the lack of) open debate within a state socialist society. In the debates of the 1980's the authorities were never allowed to "rest on

²⁷ The application to perform as "Laibach Kunst" was probably a device to ascertain if the ban applied only to a group calling itself simply "Laibach" but also an attempt to goad the authorities into further self-contradiction or, most unlikely, a lifting of the ban.

²⁸ "Zadeva: uporaba imena mesta Ljubljane" (Documents of Oppression 1984, 17).

²⁹ Similarly in a letter of 20th October (Zidarič 1983) protesters introduce themselves as "The Fighters and Citizens of the Community of Domžale".

their laurels” by the “progressive” forces; under their rule Slovenia may have been the most open part of Yugoslavia and of state-socialist Europe generally but the NSMs were actually pushing for full or “total” pluralism. The Yugoslav “third way” which had previously inspired much idealism in Yugoslavia and beyond was by the eighties no more seen as culturally progressive or tolerant than as economically efficient by the culturally and politically active youth of Slovenia. It was Laibach and the NSMs as much as the authorities that polarised the cultural climate of the early eighties. Under these conditions the comparatively mild administrative restrictions and the outraged protests of partisan groups and others could be presented as oppressive actions as extreme as those of Laibach. This was possible because in this respect Laibach occupied a “progressive” role (artists challenging politics and enforcing debate). The municipal authorities were forced by default to occupy the far less attractive role of politicians meddling in artistic affairs seeking to delimit and restrict debate. Although it is hard to identify a consistent governmental policy in relation to Laibach, there does seem to have been an active preference for the civic-bureaucratic measures discussed above as opposed to more brutal “Stalinist” methods (treating the group’s activities as a public order issue). Yet even had a decision been taken to use repressive methods (which in fact the authorities seem to have been keen to avoid) there would have been a problem over what specific charges might be brought without creating martyrs. As Chris Bohn’s text for the “Bravo” video (Vezjak [Dir.], 1993) asks: “Could they hang a man for shaving his head? For quoting Tito, Heartfield or Malevich?”

4.8 Delayed Reactions to Laibach.

The next major peak of controversy over the name-issue after the TV and Zagreb Biennale incidents in 1983 (see chronology, 23-30.4.83) came in the aftermath of the unanimous decision taken in April 1986 by the 12th ZSMS Congress to demand the immediate recognition and legalisation of the name and activities of Laibach (see Vovk 1986), and, to a lesser extent, the simultaneous award of that year’s “Zlata Ptica” (Golden Bird) cultural prize to NSK. Although

both the ZSMS decision and the prize were provocative to the partisans, their main grievance remained Laibach's name. Given this focus on the name it seems surprising that the peak of correspondence on the issue dates from the period from 1986-7. In the protests of this period Laibach were retrospectively condemned on the basis of their appearance under that particular name six years previously. This means that there is a temporal gap to be accounted for – it might reasonably be expected that the controversy would have reached a peak far sooner, if not at the time of its appearance in 1980, then certainly from 1982 onwards.³⁰

Yet though less widely-known, the name would have been more disturbing in 1980 or 1982 because a larger number of people with memories of the war were still living and the proximity of the band's emergence to Tito's death in May 1980 can only have added to its offensiveness. The gap can be explained in at least two ways. Firstly by 1986 Laibach was a far "louder" presence in the media, receiving a new level of coverage as its international success grew. Given constraints of budget and resources in the period prior to their first international record deal in 1984 (which was hardly lucrative) Laibach nevertheless managed to mount early attempts at "Gesamtkunstwerk" type presentations which foreshadowed the high "production values" of their later productions. However, prior to the definitive academic "arrival" of Laibach and NSK in the NSK issue of the periodical "Problemi" in 1985, their works retained the aura of ultra-marginal manifestations of sub-cultural terrorism. Whilst in the early period the group consistently expressed the desire for a wider cultural role it as yet lacked the resources to fulfil these ambitions. By 1985 the portentous ambitions of Laibach and NSK texts (for instance talk of building a "new Athens on Slovene soil" – see NSK 1991, 120) were supported by experience, professionalism and resources. This meant the projects now carried sufficient aesthetic authority to break out of the underground ghetto and into mainstream culture. The reaction of those sufficiently agitated by Laibach to engage in polemics against it some years after the group's advent betrays recognition of this new status (or new threat).

³⁰ The first report, "Črno Beli šok v Trbovljah" (Black and White Shock in Trbovlje) only appeared in "Mladina" on 20th November 1980 and during 1981 the group members were dispersed across Yugoslavia during their military service.

Rather than concentrating their fire on Laibach's current actions³¹ they returned to the question of the name, the selection of which it could repeatedly be condemned for. The name was seen by its critics to negate and invalidate Laibach's actual and potential incursions into "respectable" fora such as literary journals and, indirectly, state subsidised institutions and venues³². The lapse between Laibach's emergence and the most intense condemnation might also be attributed to the type of shock expressed in the protest letters. The questions the correspondents wanted answered were, for instance, how was it possible that a group of young Slovenes dared to blacken the name of Ljubljana, first "hero city" of Yugoslavia, insulting previous generations of Slovenes and, perhaps more importantly, how was it possible that such activities could be supported by public institutions and not be dealt with "appropriately" by the proper authorities? The shock caused by the violent shattering of the post war taboo not just on the name but on open discussion of Slovene collaboration could explain an initial period of silence but the "failure" of the authorities to prevent the emergence of such a phenomenon at the outset may well have been more shocking to some correspondents. The delay tends to suggest that the outraged only put pen to paper as a last resort, when it became clear that beyond a tenuous administrative ban on the use of the group's name no stronger administrative action would be forthcoming and that governmental attitudes towards the

30 In fact Laibach's increased visibility was merely the pretext for a return to the unhealed wounds Laibach's name represented. What the timing of the protests also suggests is not just that the works themselves were more or less irrelevant to the abstract questions of the name and the group's image but that beyond those favourably disposed to Laibach there was little knowledge of the specific works involved. This was a factor that certainly worked in Laibach's favour as a more detailed familiarity with the works on the part of its critics could have invited far more severe condemnation.

³² Some reviews of the "Baptism" production in January 1986 drew attention to the fact that the ban on Laibach appearances had been indirectly circumvented by the inclusion of Laibach's music and name in the production. Furthermore this took place in Slovenia's leading cultural venue, Cankarjev Dom. A question concerning this indirect recognition of the still-banned name appeared in a report of the press conference the venue organized in connection with Baptism (Šutej 1986). The general director of the venue, Mitja Rotovnik was asked how it was that the forbidden name appeared in the text of adverts for the production to which the Rotovnik replied that the venue took full responsibility for publishing it. A literal interpretation of the municipal statutes under which Laibach were banned would have meant that permission had to be sought from the council for every use of the name "Laibach". Had it had sufficient political will to do so the council might have attempted to apply this ruling to use of the term in the media. The fact that it did not do so, despite implicit calls for this, suggests that beyond preventing public appearances by Laibach the council (and so also its superiors in the republican government) were not prepared to cross the line into a type of heavy handed media censorship which would have compromised attempts to modernise the party's image and rendered it open to ridicule and scorn. The way in which Cankarjev Dom and other institutions helped maintain "Laibach" as a public presence, provides an example of the shield provided to Laibach, NSK and other alternative cultural phenomena by more or less friendly cultural institutions prepared to run the risk that the printed appearance of Laibach in a "respectable" forum would not provoke an unduly damaging response.

alternative generally were becoming far more tolerant. A degree of the outrage seems to have derived from the fact that it was necessary for them to enter a public debate at all and the fact that it should have been allowed to reach the stage of a frank and embarrassing public discussion. The implication of the protests was that such an anti-social phenomenon should never have been permitted to endure long enough to become an issue of discussion but should simply have been able to be dealt with, preferably quietly and efficiently, before ever reaching such a stage. "Laibach" forced these party members and partisan veterans into an open public debate which revealed that their views were now merely subjective and no longer necessarily part of ideological common sense; the fact that they had to articulate their arguments publicly and even pay lip service to the rights to cultural expression as some did showed that the old orthodoxies were already open to question in a fundamental way.

What is perhaps more interesting is not the delayed reaction to Laibach but the fact that the partisans did not publicly react to a series of even greater provocations. Just as the partisan protests reached a peak so did Laibach's use of partisan imageries and motifs. There were several general and specific references to the partisans in Laibach works. As part of their manipulation of Western ignorance concerning Slovenia and Yugoslavia, Laibach began to tell interviewers that their "uniforms", which by now incorporated Tyrolean-style Loden jackets and breeches, were based on those of the Slovene partisans.³³

³³ Actual Slovene partisan uniforms (and those of all Tito's forces) were an ad hoc mixture of British, Soviet and other fatigues and only towards the end of the war did a coherent uniform emerge.



Laibach "Uniforms" in the 1986-7 Period. Taken from the inner sleeve of "Opus Dei" (1987c).

Whether any of Laibach's opponents ever heard of this is unknown but the symbolism of Laibach claiming to wear partisan uniforms would have been almost intolerable to those for whom Laibach (as an embodiment of Germanization, if not Nazism) represented all the partisans had fought against. Among the most blatant of the specific partisan references was Laibach's manipulation of two partisan songs in the tracks "Vojna Poema" (War Poem – CD track 6) and "Jezero" (Lake – Laibach 1987c). "Vojna Poema" features a song describing the hardships of war, which was supposedly taped from a radio broadcast. The sombre piano and baritone voice actually fit well with Laibach's "militant classicist" style to the extent that those with no knowledge of the original source will assume it is simply another variant of the Laibach style. However Laibach deconstruct as well as appropriate the original by adding subtly comic audio effects ("samples" of atonal pianos and car horns). "Jezero" appropriates one of the most sentimental partisan songs "Počiva jezero v tihoti" (A Lake Resting In Calmness). A soprano sings mournfully backed softly by a male chorus typical of the partisan song genre. However in this version the original is constantly in danger of being drowned out by a sinister orchestral motif taken from a work by Liszt (see section 5.7). This piece, together with other key signifiers of Slovene identity was featured in the "Baptism"

production (1986), which meant it appeared in a more “mainstream” (theatrical) context than obscure records and concerts. The appropriation of Titoist and partisan iconography by Laibach was an even more serious political heresy than the group’s name but presumably too embarrassing to mention. In place of such discussion the name issue stood in for the numerous other possible lines of attack against the group more fully developed by non Slovene critics over whom the name did not exert such a bewitching effect. It seems unlikely that none of those opposed to Laibach were aware of these pieces³⁴ and yet none of the protest letters refer to these or to any specific Laibach work or motif, perhaps because of embarrassment at the way national symbols had been tainted and perhaps because of the pain it caused. Not only were such references avoided, such opponents were at pains to stress that their objections were not aesthetic judgements of specific works (see page 237). As late as the 1992 “Kapital” tour Laibach continued to use animated film of black and white woodcuts (borrowed from the Slovene national film archive) depicting German atrocities and Partisan resistance as a backdrop to their performances. Thus while they could not make public reference to it, the partisan veterans were actually dealing with something even more serious than what they saw as the Germanization of their culture. In the “hero city”, a group named “Laibach” was carrying out a wholesale appropriation of some of the most “sacred” symbols of the partisan struggle whilst simultaneously claiming to represent the essence of the Slovene nation. Unable or unwilling to refer to these most provocative actions, the veterans and other Laibach opponents could only concentrate on the issue of the group’s name.

³⁴ Additionally both “Država” and “Panorama” (see Laibach 1986a) feature samples of Tito’s speeches which were excised from the versions released on the Laibach’s 1985 first Yugoslav release (see Laibach 1995b [Reissue]).

4.9 Partisans and Fascists:

"The activity of LAIBACH and NSK maintains productive ties with the history of the past, the present and the future; it is rooted in a *fanatic violation of the mass and energy preservation law* and relies heavily on the Slovene program for spiritual, cultural and political independence. That is why we strongly reject all the accumulated controversy concerning our name and appearance levelled at us from some quarters of the Slovene public, although these arguments may be interpreted as a creative misunderstanding, which will be satisfactorily resolved in the future. Our name may be dirty, but we are clean."³⁵

The Yugoslav veterans of the partisan struggle were a highly organised socio-political body. Officially recognized veterans enjoyed special benefits and privileges, both individually and collectively. They also had a special ideological status as a result of having fought both for socialism and national (Yugoslav) liberation from foreign aggressors. This "credit" gave the veterans' groups the confidence to pronounce on a wide variety of social and political issues. They expected their views to be heard with respect and to be able to influence public and official opinion. As the veterans saw it Laibach's provocation was so severe they had to intervene, even at the risk of alienating elements of youth opinion. The response was initially sporadic but by 1986 it had a far more systematic character. A partisan dimension to the Laibach issue first became apparent in October 1982 in a letter published in "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" (Cajhen 1982b). After citing several examples of Laibach's "unintelligible" language the correspondent notes that the partisan organisations also have a voice and looks forward to such a response to his letter, more or less openly urging the veterans to take a stand on the issue. In fact the first collective letter from a veterans' group came only in July the next year in the aftermath of Laibach's June TV interview. The letter was from the veterans' organisation of Moste (a suburb of Ljubljana). It demanded ("as a veterans' organisation that strives for the preservation of the ideals and historical essence of the liberation struggle") that measures be taken against all those responsible for the broadcast (Babnik 1983). This protest was followed on 20th October by a protest letter from the "veterans and citizens" of the nearby area Domžale (see footnote two above). Despite the stringent tone of the first letter in particular they did not provoke extended debate. It was only in response to ZSMS'

³⁵ From the "Address at The Occasion of Opus Dei Album Release in Yugoslavia", November 1987, NSK 1991, 67-8.

decision at its 1986 congress to demand recognition of Laibach's name and the legalisation of its activities as a cultural group that a wider debate broke out between the veterans and those in support of Laibach (beyond remote statements of the type on page 210 Laibach never involved itself directly in the polemics). The first letter to appear under the heading "Carinthian Partisans Protest" (Protest koroških partizanov, Artnak 1986) appeared in April of that year. This letter was provoked at least as much by the ZSMS decision as by Laibach. The partisans realized that the decision was a significant step towards Laibach becoming an accepted part of the Slovene cultural scene with no restrictions placed on its activities and so long as the group bore what they considered a highly offensive name they were determined to oppose this. The fact that Laibach was being covertly allowed into the mainstream under the patronage of ZSMS, a state institution, was also deeply troubling to them.

One of the most persistent themes in the letters is the presentation of Laibach as a menacing agent of Germanization, something far more serious than a provocative alternative group.³⁶ Referring to the ZSMS decision the letter states: "With this name they allow Germanization of our [Slovene] places elsewhere (who can guarantee they won't establish a new name e.g.: Assling, Trifail, Cilli³⁷ ... and to try to put into effect [the use of] the German language in the Slovene homeland?" (Artnak 1986). The attempt to reactivate fears of Germanization (the letter also contains ritual references to the struggle of the Slovene minority in Austrian Carinthia for cultural autonomy, frequently presented as a struggle for survival) was based on the historically recent de-Slovenization attempts made by the Italian, Hungarian and German regimes during the Second World War. In the eyes of the correspondents the threat of Germanization and the invocation of the plight of Slovene minorities were bound to be influential and so were a plausible site for the mobilisation of

³⁶ The partisans needed to present Laibach as a grave threat in order to justify their intervention. They also hoped to win over as wide a proportion of the public as possible and persuade the authorities to intervene. However in attributing to Laibach the power to re-introduce Germanization they were actually only amplifying Laibach's presence in the public domain. Laibach's praxis is structured so as to absorb and manipulate such criticism, which only made its self-aggrandising claims to a central role in national life seem more plausible. Yet even if they were aware of this the partisans could not see any alternative to their intervention, which added to Laibach's demonstration of social repressiveness.

³⁷ Historical German names for various Slovene towns - "Trefail" is Trbovlje, "Cilli" is Celje.

opposition to Laibach.

The well-organised letter campaigns can best be characterised in the language of Laibach itself as a “systematic ideological offensive” of the type the Slovene authorities themselves no longer showed any inclination to pursue.³⁸ After the publication of the April 1986 Partisan letter, supporting letters from individual partisan veterans were published in “Delo”, yet aside from the odd personal comment or memory they closely corresponded in format and style. Although many of the protests were couched in extremely generic language which had an almost mantric quality, constantly repeating close variations of the same denunciatory phrases and echoing Laibach’s own recapitulation of generic official discourse, they do illustrate the contours of the anguished debate which the name provoked.

It was during the following year when it became apparent that the ban on Laibach appearances was no longer to be enforced³⁹ that the campaign intensified. On February 21st 1987, in the wake of Laibach’s first legal Ljubljana concert on the nineteenth and the de facto tolerance of public performances, SKPS (The Union of Carinthian Partisans of Slovenia) sent a letter published in “Delo” under the title “(The) Germanised name is genocide” (SKPS 1987a). What the partisans had feared (the de facto acceptance of Laibach) had now taken place and their sense of grievance intensified in response. The same letter subsequently appeared in “Ljubljanski Dnevnik” on the 25th entitled “Germanised name at the Heart of Slovenia” (SKPS 1987b) and in the Party journal “Komunist” on the 27th entitled “Protests without Response” (SKPS 1987c). The title of the letter’s final appearance reflected another of the campaign’s major concerns. It states that despite gaining a response to their concerns from other veterans and some cultural workers there had been no response whatsoever from the responsible socio-political groups and associations and that this

³⁸ The most recent such official campaign was the harassment and vilification of the Ljubljana punks in 1981.

³⁹ According to Laibach the ban was no longer enforced partly due to the realization that as “Laibach” was a (Germanophone) geographical expression it could not be banned. A further factor was the realization that continuing to enforce the ban on the group was increasingly absurd given their success elsewhere in Europe and Yugoslavia and the fact that in 1986 they had even managed to play in the Slovene village of Hum. Whilst the ban was having no effect on the group’s wider success it was in increasing danger of bringing the municipal authorities into contempt.

silence was eloquent. The only official response was the Ljubljana authorities' repetition of their viewpoint that the name was unsuitable and its refusal to register Laibach as a cultural group, even though Laibach performances were now tolerated. The letter applauds this but the earlier complaint about the lack of an adequate institutional response conceals an appeal to the authorities to take action and explains the necessity for the letter campaign. In the absence of even a co-ordinated propaganda offensive against Laibach the Partisan groups were forced to into a recapitulation of their ideological role as para-state institutions (i.e. to reveal what their opponents presented as a hegemonic and authoritarian character). They were forced by default to assume the traditional state role of systematic propaganda against dissent. In the process of their ideological campaign uncanny similarities to Laibach's operational methods became apparent. Both shared a belief in the effectiveness of repetition and did nothing to conceal the rigidity and formality of their discourses. The systematic nature of the campaign and strident tone of the language were symptomatic of the fact that the veterans felt compelled to assume the traditional ideological/repressive functions of the state. Yet these functions were precisely those usurped by Laibach. In fact the state played the role of embarrassed but compromised bystander, unable or unwilling to side more strongly with its "natural" allies among the Partisans.⁴⁰

Without further intervention from the state the struggle was uneven. Laibach had the luxury of being able to employ an uncompromising rhetoric based on the absolute dictatorial freedoms of an intense (spectral) totalitarianism formally relinquished by the self-management state. Their opponents were forced to dilute their anger and compromise by paying heed to the ideological norms of self-management pluralism. The previously-mentioned 1987 letter, written in the aftermath of Laibach's first open performance since 1983, strove to avoid a censorious tone so as not to alienate artistic and youth opinion: "We stress we are not attempting to evaluate the musical or theatrical value of Neue Slowensiche Kunst or Laibach. Our remarks concern exclusively the

⁴⁰ The fact that the second Partisan intervention was necessary was a sign that their struggle was already lost. By 1987 the Slovene government was making strong efforts to distance itself from the repressive aspects of socialism and Laibach's foreign success was in any case rendering the effectiveness of a continued Slovene ban questionable.

German name and Nazi symbols.”(SKPS 1987a)

A similar tone had been present in the partisan protest letter of the previous year:

“... we ask the five protagonists of Laibach not to blackmail us with their international influence. We are not meddling in the artistic and aesthetic efforts of the group Laibach. On these experts will pass judgement. However the Carinthian Partisans have decided to resist registration of the group under this name, because of our sacrifices for a free Slovene nation, in order that we can develop our own and the nation’s identity, [and] independent cultural and spiritual life.” (Artnak 1986).

4.10 Call without a response: Failed Interpellation By The Partisans.

The failure of these fears to assume a sufficiently concrete form in the opinions of the post-war generations to sway their opinions on Laibach represents an ideological “transmission failure”. While youth and alternative cultural leaders were aware of the wartime struggle for the preservation of Slovenia and the continuing difficulties of Slovenes in Austria and Italy they refused to allow these factors to dictate cultural preferences or cultural policy in present-day Slovenia. A non-Germanised Slovene cultural process was only as old as the second Yugoslavia, however by 1985 the new generation of cultural activists and their older supporters were able to present the Germanised aesthetic of Laibach/NSK not as an inherently inimical threat to Slovene identity but as a source of creative regeneration. Forty years of sheltered growth within the Yugoslav framework meant that Slovene culture was now able to reabsorb the supposedly alien Germanicism which had remained forbidden since the war.⁴¹ This was the stance taken by Osterman (1987): although Laibach might contain distasteful elements the group had achieved a degree of international success rare for Slovene artists and presented no threat to Slovene culture or identity. Under the influence of the (self)-censorship of actual/official Yugoslav cultural paradigms of the mid-eighties, “the Germanic” was re-coded by the youth of the eighties from an automatic signifier of threat and

⁴¹ Irwin’s comment “The more Slovene our art is, the more Yugoslav it will become” (NSK 1991, 121) can be read as a paradoxical acknowledgment of the progress it was possible for Slovene culture to make after the defeat of fascism within the framework of Yugoslavia. It also stands in contrast to the views of “Nova Revija” and other nationalistically inclined intellectuals who were loath to admit any progress in the post-war period and painted an almost wholly negative picture of Yugoslav cultural and political oppression.

assimilation into simply another historical mode available for post-modern assimilation (and crucially one that was far less alien to the Slovene context than other aspects of global culture). The continued struggle of the Slovene minorities would not have been looked upon unsympathetically but it might have had more influence had they not constantly been invoked in such ritualised formulas⁴². Such appeals were no longer perceived by the younger generation as neutral calls upon natural sympathies but as integral elements of the regime's repressive maintenance of the ideological and cultural status quo. In contrast Laibach was able to respond from the site of absolute magisterial judgement it had appropriated, free to be as arbitrary, incomprehensible and imperious as necessary (see statement on page 210).

The general situation in which the new social movements and alternative media enjoyed not just tolerance but ever increasing influence for the first time compelled the veterans to *qualify* their ideological demands. Just as Laibach had initially committed the destructive act of appropriating the state structure as a site of terror, their counterparts among the NSMs and independent theorists took literally the pluralism inherent within the doctrines of "self-management" and compelled the older generation to pay respect to its libertarian potentials. Viewed in generational terms the conflict can be interpreted as that between pre- and post-self-management generations. The youth of the eighties were now sufficiently distant from the purges of the early seventies and the enforced political (as opposed to economic) orthodoxy prevalent after the purging of that generation's student movements. In the eighties Slovene youth attempted to use self-management discourse to the same system's repressiveness. For the partisan generation the innovations of self-management

⁴² References to the threats facing Slovene identity in protest letters were formulaic almost to the point of parody. The (Artnak) letter of 12/4/86 states: "This [the initiative for the recognition of Laibach] comes at a time when Carinthian Slovenes abroad are fighting for Sloveneness [and] need great personal courage, will and renunciation but also the moral and political support of the mother nation." The second published response to the letter (Kuznik 1986) stated "Our sacred duty is to support Austrian Slovenes in their just struggle against denationalization." The 1987 letter states "We feel we have shamed and betrayed ourselves in front of the Slovenes of Carinthia and Primorska" and congratulates RTV Ljubljana for its reports on the struggle of these Slovene minorities while criticizing Marjan Znidarič and Vladimir Kavčič (writers of recent pro-Laibach articles) for having unintentionally shown support for those who agree with the denationalization of Slovene culture (a reference to Laibach and the Italian and Austrian governments).

marked out the progressiveness of their society in relation to the more Stalinist states to the East but were primarily tools of economic development that would strengthen the state through limited shop-floor democratisation. The alternative, literal reading of “self-management” provided a “ready-made” discursive/legitimizing framework for the development of an emancipating praxis just as Laibach had used the paradigms of state power as “ready-mades”. Statements incorporating concepts such as “democratisation” and “autonomy” were key features of late Yugoslav socialism. The NSMs were no more subversive than to attempt to turn this rhetoric to the advantage of alternative social, cultural and political stances..

Even in the cultural sphere the official discourse of self-management bears a strong resemblance to the language in which Slovene youth staked its claims for the recognition and protection of cultural otherness, of which Laibach was the pre-eminent example. In 1972 UNESCO issued a monograph on “Cultural Policy in Yugoslavia” part of a series in which states presented their cultural policies and objectives. The document presents a highly liberal picture of the possibilities for creative development within Yugoslavia:

“As it may be inferred, development in all spheres, including the cultural one, is directly antithetical to Statism...The socialization of culture, which is the general objective of this [Yugoslav cultural] policy, calls for the change of both the external and internal relations which formerly existed in the administrative budgetary system. It denotes a comprehensive programme of “deStatization” of all spheres of public activity and the gradual democratization of relations between cultural institutions and society as well as the democratization of relations within the institution itself... It further implies the creation and development of a democratic cultural climate which will make a free competition of creative forces possible, ensure the enforcement of the principle of selectivity, the emancipation of evaluation from bureaucratic subjectivism and restrictions, while concurrently heightening the sense of responsibility for cultural and social development of the community as a whole.” (Majstorović 1972, 24-5).

This progressive discourse would have been at odds with the political-cultural instincts of some of the partisan generation but they were forced into verbal contortions in order not to contravene the formally progressive paradigms of the system from which they were demanding action. Their expressions of outrage were compromised by the imperative not to appear to threaten the level of cultural freedom the system formally permitted. Even when confronted by a phenomenon as

disturbing as Laibach it was still necessary for the writers of the partisan protest letters⁴³ to stress that they were not attempting to interfere in Laibach's creative efforts or to pass judgement on them. To do so would have been to exemplify the "subjectivism" and "restrictiveness" criticised by Majstorović and which Yugoslav cultural policy had formally foresworn. For the veterans as an organised body to pass a public aesthetic judgement could be seen as regressive interference that would further alienate the alternative sector and polarise the struggle. Whether they were genuinely committed to the idealistic narratives of self-management or not the Partisans were concerned not to appear repressive if at all possible. By issuing reassurances that they were not attempting to interfere in the cultural field per se (but only in relation to the specific issue of Laibach's name and use of Nazi imagery) the partisans were attempting to preserve a discursive space within which their concerns might come across as reasonable and non-threatening. However from the perspective of the Slovene alternative media even the restrained tone of the letters represented a gross intrusion upon cultural autonomy and pluralism.

4.11 Polarisation and The Social Displacement of The Partisans.

Laibach's responses only made reference to its opponents' stance as evidence of its own rectitude. In its statements Laibach appropriated the role of defenders of Sloveneness the partisans claimed for themselves. One of the paradoxes of Laibach's intervention was that their opponents' references to the struggle of the Slovene nation came to sound like diluted parodies of Laibach's discourse. Unlike Punk, which aimed merely to provoke condemnation, Laibach's linguistic operations went further, appropriating the codes of condemnatory authority so totally as to be able to turn them against their opponents. Laibach's performance at the 1982 Novi Rock festival in Ljubljana was introduced by a sneering female announcer reading the text of a recent anti-Laibach protest letter (Čepe 1982):

⁴³ Anti-Laibach letters contributed by individual correspondents were able to take a stronger, less placatory line.

“Is it possible? Is it possible that someone permitted in Ljubljana, first Hero City of Yugoslavia, [that] a youth group can have a name which unearths memories of ... *Laibach!*”⁴⁴

The use of this outraged discourse at a Laibach concert illustrates how Laibach went beyond provocation and into actual recapitulation of the discourse directed against it, providing an amplified demonstration of the ideological repressiveness their work seemed to some to advocate.

Condemnation of Laibach by the Slovene authorities never went much further than criticising the disturbance of the public, the revival of unpleasant memories and the presence of “anarchoid hopelessness” in its work (Documents Of Oppression 1984). Sparked by what the correspondents viewed as the deviational decision by ZSMS to associate itself with and press for the recognition of Laibach, the letters can also be seen as a critique of the lack of more robust measures to deal with such phenomena by the competent “organs” which were berated by the correspondents for their inaction. What this material reveals is that by 1986 Laibach had reached such a level of visibility (and, via ZSMS, penetration of the political structures) that the prospect of its re-emergence with the lifting of the ban prompted a second wave of reaction which instinctively returned to the most acutely disturbing point of Laibach, its name as the basis for a general critique not just of the group’s aesthetic (about which there was little concrete knowledge displayed) but of the wider context of alternative culture, “the other Slovenia” (Druga Slovenija) after which Tomc named his (1989) account of twentieth century youth cultures in Slovenia. Laibach received support from the alternative and youth institutions primarily for their usefulness in establishing an extreme frontier of tolerance behind which (slightly) less extreme democratic and cultural activities could shelter. From an early stage the policy-makers of the alternative scene realised that the repressive fury centred on Laibach might otherwise very well be centred upon them. The concerted official harassment and intimidation of Ljubljana punks in 1981⁴⁵ served as a warning to the wider alternative scene that “they could be next” and increased their determination to concede nothing in their demands for the

⁴⁴ Featured on the final track of the compilation “Ljubljana-Beograd-Zagreb” (Laibach 1993). The first piece performed after the introduction is “Cari Amici” itself an appropriation of Mussolini’s wartime rhetoric: “Dear friends, soldiers, the time of peace has now passed” (Cari Amici Soldati, Il Tempo Del Pace Sono Passati).

⁴⁵ See Erjavec and Gržinić 1991, 60.

tolerance of political and cultural otherness whether that meant fighting for Laibach's right to its name or homosexuals' right to meet freely.⁴⁶ Erjavec and Gržinić (1991) claim that:

"LAIBACH introduced into Slovene culture a method that could be labelled the de-naturalization of already "natural" cultural values and rituals. In its radical sameness-otherness the Slovene public was polarized into either acceptance or rejection of LAIBACH. Their very response indicated the level of pluralism in Slovene society." (p. 100)

On the 26th June 1986 Pavle Gantar, the president of the council of ŠKUC-Forum responded to the series of Partisan protest letters published in "Delo" in April and May. Far from evading the argument about the continuing struggle for Slovene identity he approached it directly and used it in defence of free cultural expression within Slovenia. He stated that arguments based upon some correspondents' characterisation of Laibach's activity as an insult to the national struggle for identity were invalid unless those who held this position wished to argue that there had been no progress (in resolving) the problem of national consciousness within the last century or more. What this seems to imply is that it was only prior to the national cultural revival of the second half of the nineteenth century that Slovene culture was as endangered as some were now claiming and that Slovene national and cultural identity was now mature enough to be able to deal with phenomena such as Laibach. Gantar acknowledged the problems faced by the Carinthian Slovenes but argued that it would really be tragic if their struggle were used to justify the suppression of the rights to alterity and difference Slovenia itself. He added that ŠKUC-Forum asked only that institutions and the public recognise the right to difference even if they disapproved of such and that they had no wish to politicise the issue into a struggle between young and old (as by implication their critics were). He concluded by saying there was no reason not to recognise Laibach's name in the light of its de facto semi-legal participation in other public projects such as Baptism. Gantar concluded:

"Thus we also call on the democratic consciousness, above all of those who think differently from us, to recognise the group's right to its name, which is part of its identity... As history teaches us, a name may be given, but not taken away."

⁴⁶ In 1984 Yugoslavia's first gay club night opened in Ljubljana at an alternative venue.

The final sentence is particularly striking as it represents a stylistic appropriation of exactly the same type of appeals still used by Slovenes in Austria and Italy against the de-nationalisation of Slovene names and identity.⁴⁷ Gantar and others arguing for the recognition of Laibach were stressing the centrality of its nomenclature as a symbol of its right not just to perform but to its (aesthetic) existence per se and the more general rights of provocative alternative practices to a place within Slovene society. Laibach's opponents attempted to make their demands seem that much less absolute and more pragmatic by framing them in terms of a positive-sum game. They claimed not to be interfering in the group's right to creative self-expression, *provided* it did not go beyond certain limits. However, Laibach's supporters closed this avenue down by polarizing the issue into a zero-sum game, just as nationalists would do later in the decade in relation to their demands.

4.12 Ideological Discontinuity.

The Partisan protests demonstrate the role of Laibach's name as an agency in itself, preceding and distinct from the group's actual aesthetic interventions and provoking a specific set of responses.. The protests provide a concrete example of how Laibach helped effect a de-legitimisation of dominant socio-ideological bodies such as the veteran groups. As one of the component bodies of the LCY structure (along with the youth organisations) the veterans had a constitutionally recognised socio-political role. During Tito's rule their status and power were both unquestioned and un-exercised. However it was only in the face of what seemed to be the irresponsibility, if not subversiveness, of the youth organization and its allies and the silence or passivity of the party and other institutions that they attempted to exercise their influence in a concrete political intervention. Yet by the time their intervention became necessary the post-war legitimacy they had enjoyed had already faded and could no longer be "cashed in" to support their pronouncements, especially on issues of concern to youth. Here Pilkington's (1994) account of the traditional role of youth in

⁴⁷ It also typifies a theoretical argument employed by liberal theorists and sympathetic journalists to argue for the recognition of Laibach, namely the connection between a name and the existence or otherwise of its subject - see Hladnik-Milharčič (1984).

Soviet society is useful in demonstrating the destabilising nature of generational conflicts within state socialist systems. Whereas in market oriented societies such conflicts may be exaggerated or exacerbated in order to create distinct markets and facilitate the sale of new products in the socialist world such a differentiation is highly damaging to the state itself, and not simply to society.

“The “continuity of generations” in a non-antagonistic society replaced the struggle between classes as the motor of history. This meant that the drive for ideological “purity” amongst youth was greater than amongst the adult population, since dissidence could either be tolerated or physically alienated, whereas a generation gap would wreck the very means of the development of socialist into communist society; it would disrupt the laws of history themselves.” (p.84)

The rapid escalation of the Laibach issue into a generational dispute as acute as those seen in older Western generations’ reactions to Punk was a symptom of a wide ideological cleavage in the form of an intergenerational dispute. The historical continuity of ideological transmission presupposed by the system was broken and endangering the continued legitimation of the system, even before the political crises of the following years finally destroyed this. In fact, as an article by Mastnak (1986b) argued, the Partisans’ intervention was likely to destroy any authority they still possessed to pronounce on anything but their own concerns (such as pensions). Mastnak took a confrontational approach to the partisans and foresaw the futility of their struggle. He opened by referring to that year’s veteran’s congress, at which a delegate had complained it was left to the veterans alone to perpetuate the glory of “partisan-ness” (in other words that other institutions were not assisting in the retransmission of partisan values). Mastnak agreed with this analysis but argued that this was the fault of the Partisans themselves. Taking what he condescendingly referred to as “only the most recent episode” – Partisan attacks on the 12th ZSMS Congress and its decisions concerning Laibach, Mastnak characterised their approach as authoritarian, intolerant and demagogic, based on the use of insults and imputations. This was in a climate in which any slight criticism upon any party official was taken as an attack upon the system per se. Officials were aggressively defensive even when confronted by infinitely milder criticism than that the partisans directed at Laibach. He

suggested that perhaps the Partisans might be unaware of how deep a gulf they were creating between themselves and the younger generations and how they were establishing “partisan-ness” as something opposed in a very concrete way to the life interests and needs of youth: “... all they will achieve is this, that youth can experience partisan-ness only as something really hostile to them” (Mastnak 1986b). In conclusion he explicitly characterised the partisans as a repressive agency observing that those who possess authority and strength frequently have only one thought; that others may not have their own opinions. Mastnak’s piece illustrates both the repressive space the veterans were perceived to occupy within the socio-political environment and the way in which through attempting to exert their influence in a concrete form they de-legitimated themselves in the eyes of younger generations. Although they attempted to moderate their reaction, the spur of Laibach’s name compelled the veterans to “demask and recapitulate” their repressive potential. Although the fear and outrage expressed in the partisan letters were understandable, Laibach’s supporters in the media and ZSMS polarised the debate to such an extent that it was there was no space left in which the partisans might present their case as a natural non-intrusive one. By the onset of the “Slovene Spring” in 1988 the political status of the partisans was “normalised” as a result of their unsuccessful intervention and the changing political climate and they were relegated to being simply one of a plurality of interest groups.

The veterans were the last institutional source of resistance to the normalisation of the status and activities of Laibach and NSK within Slovenia. By spring 1987 Laibach had again performed in Ljubljana and New Collectivism were caught in the “Youth Day” scandal. The latter event marked a shift from a cleavage within Slovene society over Laibach and other alternative phenomena to a cleavage between Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia.⁴⁸ It also normalised the conditions in which controversial cultural phenomena such as Laibach would in future be dealt with in the Slovene public sphere. Laibach remained controversial but was condemned in a less ideological manner more reminiscent of the “democratic” type of cultural criticism by individuals and commentators

⁴⁸ The “Youth Day” poster was controversial within Slovenia and some attacks on NSK continued but these were far overshadowed by the onslaught from the rest of Yugoslavia and it was now from this source that serious pressure for the restriction of their activities came.

that controversial Western artists receive.

4.13 Conclusion: Effects.

The Laibach controversy has long faded but Ljubljana's now indelible conflation with "Laibach", in both its historic wartime and artistic forms, is indelible. An increasing number of visitors come to Ljubljana primarily or entirely due to the Laibach connection. Laibach postcards based on their once explosive designs are sold from a stall by the statue of Slovenia's idolised national poet Prešeren which in turn is overlooked by the same castle incorporated by NSK architects Graditelji into their designs for a monumental industrial city called "Laibach" (see NSK 1991, 252-3). For those Slovenes still disturbed by Laibach and what they represent these continued reminders of the city's temporal and aesthetic displacement from itself are hardly welcome. A lasting symbolic consequence of Laibach's notoriety is that although Ljubljana is not better known as Laibach, it is certainly now much better known because of (its shadow) Laibach.

The continued symbolic appropriation (or "Laibachization") of Yugoslavia's first "hero city" and the capital of the new republic attest not only to the continued symbolic-political impact of Laibach but to the shift in ideological and geopolitical alignment the city has undergone during Laibach's period of activity. The transition from Yugoslav republican capital to "Laibachized" centre of the European "retrogarde" to post-Yugoslav national capital (and "home" of the NSK state) can be read as a geopolitical shift foreshadowed by Laibach in the nineteen-eighties. The re (tro)-activation of the city's previous name anticipated the rejection of a paradigm of Balkan-oriented "brotherhood and unity" (with all of its political, cultural and economic aspects) back towards the traditional (though from a Slavophile perspective un-natural) "Central European" (largely Germanic) paradigms Slovenia had been structured by until 1918. Laibach effected an anticipatory recapitulation of attempts by intellectual and political nationalists to discard Ljubljana's previous Yugoslav-ness as abruptly as its Central European/Germanness had been de-emphasised after 1945.

Yet if the cultural conflicts of the eighties prefigured the cultural and geopolitical shifts of the nineties it should not be inferred that the Slovene shift back to Central Europe was a specific political objective of Laibach. No Laibach action is free of paradox and it is significant that together with the other NSK groups it maintains active links with artists and media in the rest of former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe. If in the eighties elements of Slovene society wished to forget or deny the Germanic elements of Slovene culture and identity, in the nineties there is a similar tendency to downplay or dismiss Slovenia's Yugoslav connections. Yet in both decades Laibach's interventions have run counter to these attempts to create a "shadowless" national image.

4. New Slovene Sonority

(See video clip four.)

5.1 The Theoretical Context of Laibach's Musical Activity:

"Make people believe. The entire history of tonal music, like that of classical political economy, amounts to an attempt to make people believe in a consensual representation of the world... In order to stamp upon the spectators the image of the ultimate social cohesion, achieved through commercial exchange and the progress of rational knowledge." (Attali 1996, 46)

Given the wealth of historical, visual and ideological references and effects associated with Laibach, it might be tempting to relegate the group's work in the musical field to a secondary role. This would be mistaken, as it would overlook the fact that all Laibach's techniques and effects can be found in their most intense forms in the group's music and the processes visible elsewhere in its work (the attempt to transcend a series of regimes via their "demasking and recapitulation") can be found in the arrangements, lyrics and instrumentation Laibach employ. Laibach produce ideological tone-pictures of a series of regimes, rendering audible the presence of the state in the sphere of music and vice-versa, denying in advance the possibility of politically neutral music (of any genre). Laibach's approach is heavily informed by Attali's work, which presents music as a form prophetic of changes in political orders and a reflection of political power systems. Attali's work is an analogue Laibach's musical interventions. Attali and Laibach share the same basic thesis, that music (as a reflection of political power), can function as a regime in itself. Laibach "sample" Attali's "Noise" in the same way that they appropriated speeches by Tito or remarks by Hitler and Stalin. Therefore besides being a major influence on Laibach's theoretical stance in relation to music, the sono-ideological paradigms developed by Attali are also the most relevant to assessing Laibach's work as sonic form. Laibach's music conjures up and renders audible a series of regimes that (as Attali argues) find expression in music. Music, as an abstract force, is particularly well suited to the materialization or unmasking of pervasive but non-localizable ideologies. Laibach attempts to transcend various regimes by confronting them with their own systemic "noise" (contradictions and discontinuities) and materialising them in sonic form (rendering them audible).

Although Attali's "Noise" was an influential work it is not immediately clear why a group so influenced by his work should have emerged from Yugoslavia, even if French and other Western theoretical works were widely available in Yugoslavia, both in the original and (surprisingly quickly) in translation. If there is no mystery surrounding the availability of Attali's work, to understand its local relevance the nature of the pre-Punk Yugoslav music scene must be considered.

5.2 Rock in Yugoslavia

"Music, the quintessential mass activity, like the crowd is simultaneously a threat and a necessary source of legitimacy; trying to channel it is a risk that every system of power must run." (Attali 1996, 14)

In discussing the history of Yugo-rock and the relative tolerance extended towards it by the authorities Ramet (1994, 111) draws attention to a sycophantic pro-state trend within the scene. At an early stage Tito and Kardelj had decided not to treat rock per se as a dissident form and there was far less overt censorship¹ of popular music in Yugoslavia than in the Eastern bloc. One result of this was a "rash of panegyric rock ballads" praising Tito and self-management, particularly in the late nineteen sixties. Ramet explains this phenomenon as a grateful reaction to Tito and Kardelj's relaxed attitude. In this light Laibach's conflation of a rock format and state ideology appears neither as surprising nor as transgressive as it might otherwise have done. The fact that the majority of the performers in Yugoslav popular music were either silent about political or social issues or, in other cases, actively supportive of the system, meant that Punk's critique of popular music as a generator of conformity had a particular impact in Slovenia (and to a lesser extent elsewhere in Yugoslavia) because of the recent experience of the musicians there.

Unlike the increasingly apocalyptic political and economic situation in Britain², the surface stability of late seventies Slovenia was a less obvious breeding ground for Punk. Yet stability and prosperity was experienced as oppressively safe and conformist by the younger generation. In 1972-3 a general purge of liberal elements in the media and academia, cultural life and the party took place in Yugoslavia. The economic prosperity of the period (which by 1979 was replaced by crisis) was coupled with pervasive caution and self-censorship in cultural life and the continued threat of

¹ According to Ramet the scene was not controlled directly by the state but indirectly through record companies and producers who would "advise" bands to change their image or lyrics in order for their work to be released. This was the fate that befell Laibach's first, cancelled album, "Nebo žari" (The Sky Glows) in 1984.

² See Savage's (1992) analysis of the polarized cultural politics of the period.

repression (see Dolenc 1992, 87). As in Britain the pre-Punk calm harboured ominous political tensions (see Savage 1992).

According to Tomc the status of popular music in seventies Slovenia was ambiguous. On the one hand domestic labels such as Jugoton could see the profit potential in licensing popular Western albums for domestic release and the number of new discos was increasing. However the neo-conservative period after the 1972-3 purges also saw the imposition of draconian restrictions on the domestic rock scene, at least on all but the most mainstream groups. While actual censorship of lyrics was rare, its implicit threat produced an appreciable degree of self-censorship among artists. Police dogs, alcohol bans, plain-clothes officers and strict curfews became regular features of concerts by local bands (see Tomc 1989, 121-22).³ Laibach would later appropriate the oppressive atmosphere of the period into key aspects of their live performances. The severity of Laibach's treatment of the audience could seem as oppressive as a police action. Glaring spotlights trained on the crowd and the taped sounds of barking dogs evoked the semi-criminalisation of Slovene rock in the seventies, preempting and recapitulating repressive action against Laibach performances. Another clue to the thinking behind Laibach's adoption of a totalitarian role is provided by the comments of their manager, Igor Vidmar, who in June 1987 observed:

"In every situation where there are new ideas coming forward, the regime tries to associate them with fascism-which is a totally psychotic reaction. It is the response of dinosaurs". (Ramet 1988, 407).

Since any new domestic rock product that attempted anything beyond the bounds of socio-musical convention ran the risk of being labeled "fascist", a group such as Laibach had nothing to lose. Through a "... voluntary acceptance of the role of ideology" (NSK 1991, 21) Laibach manipulated and provoked the mentality that equated innovation with fascism by including fascist elements that seemed to "prove" the group *really was* fascist but also combining these with Slovene national and socialist symbols.

One of the defining features of the period immediately prior to Laibach's inception was the increasing penetration of the Slovene public sphere by mainstream Western rock culture. However this was coupled with the demonisation and semi-criminalisation of all non-mainstream domestic groups. Whilst some traditional socialist-style polemics against rock persisted⁴ they were being

³ By contrast the music scene in Belgrade operated under less severe conditions. The particular repressiveness in Slovenia supports Mastnak's (1990) arguments about the anti-democratic nature of Slovene society.

⁴ A rare example of a Soviet-style polemic against rock as such is quoted by Hladnik-Milharčič (1984). In the late nineteen-seventies S. Verbič linked rock to the "imperialist expansionism" of the Carter administration.

discarded by ZSMS and the only serious attempts to restrict the form were directed against non-mainstream local artists using the vernacular who were treated as posing a greater threat than anything but the most extreme forms of Western rock subculture. Yet the only Slovene bands likely to make a serious impact (even within the home market) against the dominance of Western music would be those either innovative or forceful enough to stand out as being more than just imitators of local trends.

5.3 Punk pod Slovenci (Punk Under The Slovenes).

By the time news of Punk began to spread across Europe from Britain, Yugoslav borders had already been open twelve years. Travel and trade across the Italian and Austrian borders was straightforward and direct access to western European media and products was no novelty. Given Slovenia's location and the oppressive atmosphere experienced by some of its musicians it is unsurprising that it was in Slovenia that punk first penetrated non-capitalist Europe. With the well-established (1969) alternative music infrastructure of Ljubljana's Radio Študent in place and little difficulty in importing music, there was a ready-made means of transmitting these new musical viruses and a youth/student audience predisposed towards and familiar with radical musical and cultural innovation.⁵ Thompson's (1992) view of the period makes clear young Slovenes' immersion in Western popular culture but also the lack of indigenous alternatives to this prior to Punk:

"The punk generation of teenagers and students knew the styles of European and Anglo-American mass culture from inside and out. Because of Slovenia's location, and because it was the most prosperous of the republics, young Slovenes could afford habits of consumption beyond the reach of other Yugoslavs. On the other hand, they were not subjects of this culture - how many foreign films or rock bands or genre novels mentioned Yugoslavia, let alone Slovenia?

Yet unlike their Western counterparts, especially in Britain, young Slovenes bore no burden of anxiety about cultural Americanization. They were cosmopolitan enough to have the confidence to be parochial. Free to accept Western mass-culture as a repertory of styles, they pounced on the do-it-yourself forms of punk and applied them to their own context as Slovenes in a decaying authoritarian state." (p. 40)

The oppressive quiescence of everyday life in the pre-Punk period interacted with a relative freedom of cultural information to produce a radical break in the established norms of cultural politics and youth culture that arguably would have more concrete political effects than the movement in Britain. According to Erjavec & Gržinić:

⁵ Imported rock n' roll records were present in Yugoslavia even in the fifties, meaning that Slovene audiences in particular (because of their higher purchasing power) had been able to follow (if not participate in) all the

“Punk, modified according to Slovenia’s socialist context, played an exceptionally important role. It can be understood as a reaction to the culture of relative prosperity of the preceding decade, to alienated politics, to the catchwords of self-management, to political manipulation.” (1991, 60).

Punk’s impact in Slovenia was as much ideological as musical. Those to whom Punk appealed saw the mode of consumerism encouraged in Yugoslavia in the seventies and the accompanying dominance of frivolous, conformist musics, as decadent and complicit in the status quo. Similarly the spontaneity and immediacy of Punk’s “do it yourself” aesthetic, which valued immediate expression over musical proficiency also proved highly relevant as a means of escaping the ideologically-compromised stasis of the Yugoslav music scene.

The first *wave* of Slovene punk bands began as early as 1977, less than a year after Punk became a mass-media issue in Britain. Following the first band Pankrti (Bastards) came others such as Ljubljanski Psi (Ljubljana Dogs) and Berlinski Žid (Berlin Wall). By 1979 Slovenia’s first Punk festival had taken place in the Ljubljana suburb of Moste. Vidmar (1983) places Laibach at the start of a third wave of Punk groups also including O!Kult, and Otroci Socializma (Children of Socialism). To create an authentic, perceptibly real version of punk required a degree of politicization and so almost inevitably the new bands incorporated explicitly local political issues in their lyrics. From its opening in 1978 ŠKUC became an axis of the new subculture, issuing recordings and other Punk material and organizing concerts by Slovene and foreign groups. The decision by ŠKUC to issue recordings itself was a crucial facilitator of the growth of the scene, giving a voice to dozens of artists, including Laibach, whose work would not otherwise have found an outlet at that time (see Erjavec and Gržinić 1991, 48-49.) ŠKUC activities echoed those of the hundreds of new British independent labels which emerged from the aftermath of Punk. Tomc also stresses the role played by activists in local youth organisations in the growth of the scene.⁶ All the officially subsidized organs of youth culture and agitation swung enthusiastically behind the scene, perhaps making the difference in turning what might otherwise have been a passing fad into the most high profile and socially influential youth subculture yet seen in either Slovenia or Yugoslavia. The covert or open support of various philosophers, sociologists and even progressive elements in the media, university and government structures was also crucial though far from enough to guarantee punk an easy ride.

The new form was subject not only to renewed media disinformation campaigns of a type last seen

post-war musical trends and thus had a full historical understanding of them.

in the early sixties⁷, but to all the restrictions already placed even on pre-Punk domestic groups such as Buldožer. Elements in the media attempted to link the scene to Nazism and other anti-social phenomena. Various forms of civic repression were employed against the scene and its participants but with the institutional support of Radio Študent, ŠKUC and the theorists associated with them the scene gained enough “weight” to make overt suppression of it problematic and so a *de facto* policy of repressive tolerance was adopted whereby Punk was either ignored or, when it became too visible, ghettoised and harassed (albeit to a lesser extent than elsewhere in Yugoslavia). Shuker (1995, 281) argues that “In terms of cultural politics, rock is a site of struggle, with constant attempts to establish dominance, exploit contradictions, and negotiate hegemony” and the development of Punk in Slovenia can certainly be read in this light. What evolved from 1977 was a constant guerilla struggle between the advocates and opponents of Punk carried out in both the mainstream and alternative media. However unlike in Britain where the class-conscious anti-intellectualism of most Punk tended to militate against complex theoretical stances the Slovene debate over Punk is marked by the extreme articulacy of Punk’s protagonists, the curiously formal terms in which the scene was sometimes defended and the meticulous documentation of the scene (see Skupina Avtorjev 1984).

5.4 Laibach In Relation to Punk

In terms of its refinement and (ab) use of the punk inheritance it built on, and the political context it operated within, Laibach was simultaneously post-punk and post-socialist. Thus for instance Laibach’s controversial poster actions of the early eighties in Trbovlje and Ljubljana appear as a development of the first rash (or in subcultural terms, flowering) of graffiti experienced in previously unblemished Ljubljana from the late seventies onwards.⁸

In its early phase (1980-2) Laibach was generally perceived by those outside the scene as a component part of the Punk movement. Laibach’s shock tactics certainly facilitated such a classification yet it was a paradoxical one. Whilst it was to an extent anarchic, it was in a strictly controlled manner, which would have far more corrosive effects than the more conventional musical anarchism of other Punk groups. Laibach’s emergence from under the Punk umbrella

⁶ See Tomc (1989, 130-2). Tomc’s is the definitive account of this Punk period in Slovenia and its antecedents.

⁷ See Tomc 1989, 92. Tomc compares a disinformation campaign against a sixties dance club with the 1981 “Nazi-Punk” affair (see chronology November-December 1981).

⁸ The appearance of graffiti was one of the most visible symptoms of the spread of Punk into Slovenia and both Tomc (1989) and Erjavec and Gržinić (1991) stress its importance. The appearance of foreign slogans and band names on the walls of Ljubljana was also a precursor to Laibach’s “making strange” of the city.

mirrors the separation of late seventies industrial bands such as Throbbing Gristle from the factors they shared with Punk (confrontation, nihilism, anti-professionalism). From the time Laibach's music first gained a Western release (1984) it was classified as "industrial", as those unaware of the Slovene context would see no obvious link between Laibach and Punk. In terms of tempo and instrumentation even early Laibach cannot really be described as Punk. Operating at much slower tempos than the Punk norm and employing samples from records and film as well as homemade electronics, Laibach produced a genuine industrial music, informed by the surroundings in Trbovlje (see "Red Silence", CD track 1).

However the group's recapitulation of state discourse was part of a wider trend in the Slovene Punk scene, which its chief ideologist Igor Vidmar referred to as ironically named "state rock" (1983). Besides Laibach Vidmar cited other "third wave" Slovene punk bands who were confronting bureaucracy, etatism and alienation in their works. All these groups concerned themselves with political questions and some ironically paraphrased official rhetoric. Prior to Laibach the original Slovene Punk band Pankrti (Bastards) had been the most extreme group. The planned title of their 1982 album was "The Bastards In Collaboration With The State". The sleeve image was to have featured a band member kissing a partisan memorial. Under record company pressure the plan was abandoned. However as Ramet (1994, 114) explains the finished product was just as provocative. The title was changed to "Državnih ljubimcih" (Lovers of The State) and the sleeve image now featured a World War One memorial. In between the tracks of the album were "sampled" excerpts from a speech by Stalin.⁹

In this respect Pankrti and some of the other bands were covering similar territory to Laibach and in their different ways confronting the state. It was because of these and other similarities that Laibach were grouped with Punk (in the context of the period any non-mainstream band could only be seen as Punk as there were no other classifications within the Yugo-rock field.) However from the start Laibach were already post-punk, and, in terms of their (archaic) industrialism, post-industrial.¹⁰ One of the key factors distinguishing Laibach was its radical ambiguity. Rather than simply reflect oppression or incorporate it so as to critique it Laibach deliberately appeared to advocate it. The group refused to assume a straightforward oppositional role and carried Punk's critique of commercial rock into an apparent rejection of the form per se. Laibach created the spectre of a

⁹ Stalin's image appears in the Irwin painting "The Basics of Morphology" which was used as a "Mladina" front cover in 1988 (see NSK 1991, 93). Laibach have never used Stalin's voice although they did appropriate his term "engineers of human souls".

¹⁰ The recordings discussed in section 4.6 presented a "post-industrial" sound picture of industry as decrepit,

totalitarian form in which there was no distance between ideology and music and whose creators were fanatical automatons. In order to construct a “paradigm of impossible authority” Laibach also performed a sustained theoretical assault on popular music (including by implication Punk).

In terms of technique Laibach’s work represented a refinement of Punk. Rather than causing outrage for its own sake, they reproduced or represented it. The rigour with which they condemned Western failings (section 5.13) was an appropriation of the discourse of the most reactionary ideologues. Furthermore the provocative statements that would attract such condemnation were often collages of the pronouncements of leading political figures such as Kardelj. The point was to interrogate specific regimes and discourses, rather than simply to repulse as an end in itself as the classic Punk strategy often attempts.

Under socialism the state (embodying the people’s will) was a “natural”, structural presence in music and art and vice-versa. In the Western order the state is an “alien” intrusive presence in music and vice-versa. In fact both situations are “fictional” ideal-states. Young Slovenes experienced the state as an alien intrusive presence in the music sphere and sought to exorcise it by bringing it into audibility. The absence of a such an overt state presence in most Western music scenes only masks the pervasive presence of market ideologies that are far more diffuse and less easily dislodged than the “Eastern” totalitarian ideologies. Ideology was both the background and the foreground music (regulating score or systemic din/noise) of the old socialist states whereas in both the successor states and the West music (as a symbol of commodity hedonism) is the soundtrack to the ideology of the market and liberalism. Both conspire against autonomous thought and taste formation, albeit to varying extents and in different ways. Laibach reflected a situation (throughout Europe) in which there was no consensus about the correct roles of the state and of musicians in each other’s spheres.

Laibach’s aestheticized recapitulation of the mechanisms of state power was a much bleaker and more sober depiction of Yugoslav reality than the Titoist panegyrics that strangely anticipated it. Given the extent to which ideology pervaded all spheres of Yugoslav society under self-management neither the pro-Tito or the Laibach variants of Yugo-rock are surprising. However for Laibach “Tito” (as iconic signifier) was simply another raw material for incorporation into their praxis. Laibach’s best-known use of Tito is the inclusion of an extract from a 1958 speech on the

1985 track "Panorama" (CD track 8).¹¹ The text was a militant defence of Yugoslav non-alignment but could equally well be applied to Laibach itself:

"It should be clear to *everyone* that we cannot be noone's appendages of nobody's politics (sic), that we have our own point of view and that we know the worth of what is right and what is not right."

The coda after the text even attributes it jointly to "Josip Broz TITO-LAIBACH 1958-1985" (NSK 1991, 63). At its infamous Zagreb performance in April 1983 Laibach used extracts from four different Tito speeches and the recording of the event groups them together as a single track simply entitled "Tito"¹². Yet in the very early track "Tito, Tito" (see Laibach 1993) a far more ironic approach is taken. Tito posthumously lends his name to a snatch of high kitsch dance music played at variable speeds on primitive equipment, perhaps parodying the official image of Tito as a man of leisure, friend of film stars and royalty. Tito, the one remaining all-Yugoslav signifier still commanding popular affection was a key element in Laibach's manipulation of its politico-symbolic surroundings. The fact that the process began soon after his death implied both a parody of his cult and recognition of his continued vitality as political signifier.¹³

From Laibach's perspective, force, or at least militancy, appeared necessary to deal both with the culturo-ideological pervasion of Slovene society by self-management rhetoric and the culturo-ideological dominance of market-driven popular culture in the West (and potentially the East). In an early interview Laibach explained the necessity for militancy primarily in terms of an attempt to adopt the manipulative techniques of mass media in order to transmit a differing message about the very systems of (informational) power it was structured by:

"In every society, the spirit of the entire culture is determined by the spirit of the strongest. The technological revolution offers more and more new systems in the development of mass communication, and the masses are increasingly susceptible to influence. The level of mastery of the information system depends on the determination and possibilities of those in power to master the entire social structure. Moreover, the fundamental role of information in the functioning of the social system and culture is thus determined by the ideology of the ruling class... By studying information and the propaganda system of its forceful and planned operation in the formation of social values (public opinion - uniform thought), LAIBACH is constantly discovering new ways and means of psychological influence on the masses, new ways and means of forcing new humanistic ideas upon the alienated consciousness" (NSK 1991, 44).

¹¹ Together with "Decree", "Panorama" formed Laibach's first British single release in 1984. Both feature on the albums "Nova Akropola" (1986a) and "Occupied Europe Tour 1983-5".

¹² See (Laibach 1997b). The accompanying booklet includes full translations of the Tito speech extracts featured on the track.

¹³ The uncanny power still exerted by Tito symbolism was noted by Meštrović, Letica and Goreta (1993, 63). Discussing the continued presence of Tito portraits in official buildings in independent Croatia they observe

The final sentence makes explicit the use of force, seen as necessary in order to achieve exposure within and dominate the mass media. Here again Laibach techniques can be seen as a post-punk refinement of their contemporaries' media strategies. Laibach went beyond the praxis of outrage for the sake of outrage, which in Britain at least was frequently designed not to promote any standpoint but simply to gain coverage (and ultimately sales) for the group concerned (see Savage 1992). Laibach stripped shock tactics of any spontaneity and replaced this with the militancy and precision necessary to achieve the dissemination of their work. The contrast between the unplanned chaos of the infamous 1976 Sex Pistols' interview with Bill Grundy (see Savage 1992, 258-9), and the precisely calculated militancy of Laibach's 1983 TV Slovenia interview (video clip 3) exemplifies the refinement of such techniques.

5.5 Laibach's Incorporation of Ideological Material

In their integration of fascist symbolism Laibach trapped the ideological authorities, seeming to fulfill official warnings about the continued need to be vigilant against fascism by apparently embodying the fascistic tendencies the ideological watchdogs constantly warned against. However, for every fascistic/Germanic signifier in Laibach's early work there was a social-realist or Slovene national icon and this created severe difficulties for the authorities. Laibach could not but be condemned as fascist since even leftist punk groups had been so denoted and yet this trapped Laibach's accusers in a paradox of their own making which it was fatal to acknowledge. For this was a band simultaneously appropriating the heroic socialist-realist iconography of the "Red Districts" (Trbovlje, Zagorje and Hrastrnik) and the image and words of Tito. In Žižek's terms Laibach presented a "totally inconsistent mixture" and to fix upon and condemn (or alternatively celebrate) any one (shifting) ideological point within it was fatal since the real "... mistake is to suppose that the fascists are fascists, that they behave like fascists." (video clip nine).

Whilst the authorities and much of the media were hyper-vigilant in response to the supposedly fascist threat posed by Slovene variants of punk and other alternative trends this was rarely accompanied by Soviet-style denouncement of "degenerate" or "imperialist" Western originals. Since all domestic innovation was, per se, likely to be denounced as fascist, nothing was to be gained by abstaining from the use of fascistic symbolisms, or in the terms of point three of "Laibach: Ten Items Of The Covenant":

that when questioned people are unable to explain why they have not removed the portraits.

“All art is subject to political manipulation, except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation”. (NSK 1991, 18)

Mainstream Western rock remained within the (repressive) tolerance zone giving it even greater dominance in relation to domestic product and most critiques were focused on domestic artists and scarcely at all on the form as such. This apparently tolerant policy created a radical imbalance that worked against the production of autonomous local forms of popular culture. Since the initial, relatively short-lived, post-war efforts by the youth leadership at mounting an ideological critique of jazz (then the dominant Western popular form) there had been no serious theoretical challenge to the dominance and increasingly uncritical reception of *mainstream* Western popular music. In fact in the immediate years after the break with Stalin there was an active official suspicion of Russian or other Eastern bloc cultural imports (see Ramet 1993, 87) combined with an increasing openness to Western popular culture. Laibach occupied an apparent void within which it might have been expected that the state would be engaged in an ideological “kulturkampf” against Western culture. Once again Laibach assumed and recapitulated a traditional state role and reconfigured this apparent tolerance as an instrument of state control. The tolerance in relation to Western groups was meant to create the impression that the state was rarely and only reluctantly involved in the limitation of youth culture and that cultural Stalinism was alien to it. However the treatment already received by domestic pre-Punk groups, and the way in which Laibach forced the authorities into new levels of public repression revealed a far less tolerant reality. The use of local hygiene and noise regulations to hinder alternative activities in the eighties also show that those elements of the authorities that did wish to suppress the new culture were keen to do so as unobtrusively as possible, employing bureaucratic rather than openly repressive methods. Laibach’s advent polarized the situation and made impossible the pretence that authoritarian elements wished to treat domestic musicians as anything other than “the enemy within”, and helped flush out the neo-totalitarianism latent within the system.

5.6 Industry

Attali identifies three ways in which music is used strategically by power. In the first music is a means to make people forget generalized systemic and social violence, in the second music is necessary to make people believe that the world is harmonious and ordered (and therefore legitimate). In the third (contemporary) zone music serves to silence people “...by mass-producing a deafening, syncretic kind of music, and censoring all other human noises”. (Attali 1996, 19)

This silencing music, which Attali relates to the maintenance of political regimes, is intended to obscure or drown out the background “regime noise”, or power-codes, which all systems wish to keep silenced. The threateningly totalitarian language with which Laibach presented itself was an example of the totalitarian “noise” which the state needed to present as an external phenomenon to which it bore no relation. Laibach statements made audible a type of discourse, which the authorities claimed had no place in a self-managing society.

“LAIBACH adopts the organizational system of industrial production and the identification with the ideology as its work method. In accordance with this, each member personally rejects his individuality, thereby expressing the relationship between the particular form of production system and ideology and the individual” (NSK 1991, 18)

The depersonalized, automatic language of the early statements heightens the sense of coldness and alienation attached to Laibach’s work and like the industrial sounds audible on Laibach’s early works is intended to unmask (render audible) the repression upon which industrial production and social order are based. Just as it was important to silence the totalitarianism latent within the system it was important that the sounds of industrial alienation not be heard by anyone not employed in (and therefore acclimatized to) heavy industry. For those un-acclimatized to industrial noise its brutality could be experienced as an oppressive “noise-regime” that would further de-humanise the image of industry. Laibach’s manipulation of the sensory violence and alienation surrounding industry occurred in the aftermath of the emergence in Britain of what came to be known as “industrial music”.

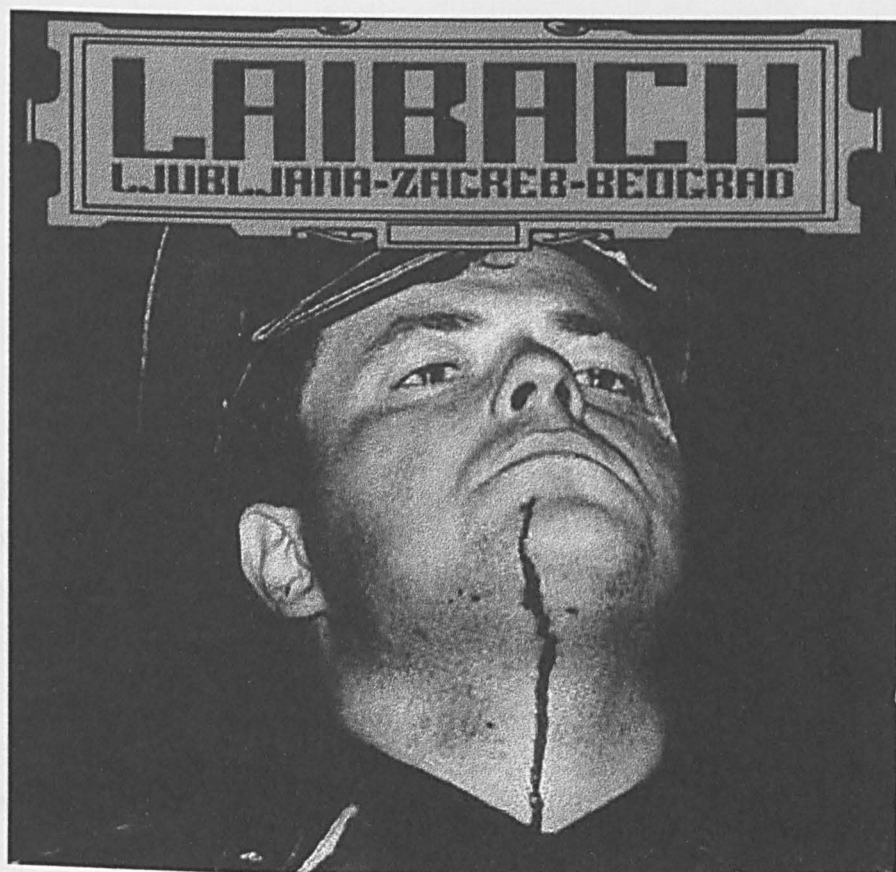
Although post-war electro-acoustic experiments sometimes incorporated industrial and mechanical noise, these generally remained static compositional elements. They were not fashioned into rhythms and beats, nor were there any sustained attempts to represent industrial process in music. Kraftwerk, from Dusseldorf at the heart of the Ruhr industrial region were the first successful artists to incorporate industrial sounds (or representations of such) into non-academic electronic music. On their early works (particularly 1975’s “Radio-Activity”) Kraftwerk created a type of “industrial sublime”, aestheticizing and romanticizing the sounds of transmitters, Geiger counters, oscillators short-wave radio, railways, autobahn and other technological sound-sources. However whilst these sounds were certainly too alien for some (see Bussy 1993, 74) they were still offset by bittersweet and even kitschy melodies and a sense of romantic melancholy.

As the seventies progressed a far bleaker and more violent industrial/electronic aesthetic emerged,

primarily in Britain. Like Laibach, Cabaret Voltaire (named after a Dadaist group from 1916) were influenced by the cut-up techniques of Burroughs and Duchampian “ready-mades”. Their early concerts were based on cut-ups and tape loops of “found sound” accompanied by provocative video images of power, domination, fascism and terrorism and the events sometimes provoked violence (see Fish and Hallbery, 1989). Like Cabaret Voltaire and Laibach, Throbbing Gristle was a multi-media operation covering a similar range of alienating audio and visual material but with additional (and even more controversial) sexual and quasi-pagan elements (condemned in Laibach pronouncements on the group)¹⁴. Throbbing Gristle gained notoriety in the British tabloids and through their label, “Industrial Records” named the new genre. The major respect in which Laibach performances differed from those of the British groups was that they took place within an even more developed theoretical framework and included an (even) more overtly militaristic aura. Although far less ideological in their approach the American duo Suicide also made clear the links between electronic instrumentation and violence. The group’s song structures were rock n’ roll based and far more conventional than those of the British groups but the songs’ raw electronic instrumentation was highly provocative to some audiences and caused a near riot in Brussels in 1978.¹⁵ Laibach performances have also provoked violence and one of the most iconic Laibach images (featured as one of New Collectivism’s NSK stamps) is of Tomaž Hostnik with a bloody chin caused by a missile thrown from the crowd at a 1982 Ljubljana concert.

¹⁴ Laibach are much closer in tone and in their militant ideological approach to the slightly later British industrial group Test Dept. However like Laibach’s examination of art and ideology, TG’s work is presented as “an investigation” of “...to what extent you could mutate and collage sound, present complex non-entertaining noises to a popular culture situation and convince and convert.” (Throbbing Gristle 1986).

¹⁵ The performance ended when the audience seized the singer’s microphone. See the re-issued recording “23 Minutes Over Brussels” (Suicide 1998).



Laibach: Ljubljana-Zagreb-Beograd Cover, 1993.

This “new” compositional mode (which was partly anticipated and inspired by the noise experiments of the futurists) was identified by these groups as the ideal means of transmitting extreme imageries and themes normally suppressed or silenced by mass culture. Thus by the time of Laibach’s first experiments at the start of the eighties electronic or industrial music was clearly established as a site of incitement and provocation. The use of noise and electronic instrumentation was still sufficiently novel to be experienced as a violent challenge to established musical and at least by implication, socio-political orders. The use of extreme, physically threatening noise and transgressive images of sexuality and politics could have been taken as proof of socialist claims about the degeneracy and cultural collapse of the West (and Laibach themselves recapitulated this attitude in their comments on Throbbing Gristle). Provocation and alienation in a socialist system were, at least in theory, far more dangerous than in the West yet by the mid-eighties sonic elements of the industrial culture were spreading and were present not just in the work of Laibach but in the work of Budapest’s B.P. Service or Belgrade’s Autopsia (who like Laibach have gone onto explore Teutonic imagery albeit in a far more esoteric, quasi-mythological fashion).

The earliest (1980-4) Laibach recordings and live performances (documented on the albums "Ljubljana Zagreb Beograd", "Rekapitulacija" and "M.B December 12 1984") represented not just the forging of a Slovene, but of a local, industrial sound particular to the "Red Districts" around Trbovlje. In the formal sense of the term recordings such as "Red Silence" (see CD track 1), "Delo in Disciplina" (Work and Discipline) (CD track 2) or "S.T.T (Machine Factory Trbovlje)" were "ambient", alluding to the cacophonous rhythms of the area's decrepit industries, which were also manifest in the titles. Laibach attempted to represent the noise of the area's power stations, mines, conveyors, lathes and forges using tape-loops, percussion and primitive electronics. Unlike Kraftwerk's aestheticized tonal representations of industry the early Laibach works present a picture of a brutally dysfunctional industry, which nonetheless may be experienced as a dystopic version of the industrial sublime. The harsh screeches and "funk-less" rhythms are sonic archetypes of industrial violence that function as ideological tone-pictures of their context. The brittle tempo of "Delo in Disciplina" approximates the sound of regular but faltering machinery and is not particularly threatening. The vocal is the principal alienating device. The same phrase, which resembles an exhortatory Stalinist slogan, is lifelessly repeated in a manner that suggests a senselessly productive worker, stripped of individuality and initiative. Within the context of self-management this had a particular resonance. The ideological system was intended, as far as possible, to prevent alienation (for instance via the designation of workers as "associated socialist producers") and to value and consult the workforce. However the track raises the spectre of a forcible return to Stalinist industrial discipline threatening the ideological fiction of non-alienating industrial labour that the regime sought to promote. The apparently fanatical insistence on discipline might also be taken as a critique of the waste and inefficiency of the economic system. It relocates industry as a site of linear, hierarchical regimentation and command rather than an illusory shop-floor democracy. "Red Silence" works by contrast and has various connotations. It commences with a sustained, formless "scream" of machine noise but from out of this emerges a fierce sequence of primitive electronic sound that anticipates the sound of techno and suggests a machine accelerating out of control. This is a tone-picture of the "Red Silence" endured by the workers of the region and as such it ran contrary to the interests of the ruling ideology. By rendering audible the "noise" of the system Laibach suspended the official musical representations of "reality" in Yugoslavia. From the perspective of Laibach and the Punks the ideologically compromised noise of Titoist Yugo-rock, the majority of Western music and the so-called "zimzelenci" ("evergreens")¹⁶

¹⁶ The Slovene term for nostalgic, kitschy songs from the fifties and sixties. An equivalent to the German term "Schlager".

all conspired to silence individuals by obscuring the actual systemic noise of the system. In reintroducing the regime's own "noise" into the Yugoslav "sonosphere", Laibach suggested that the actual "Red Silence" was that of officially-supervised popular music, just as Attali claims that popular music has a silencing effect in the West, attempting to forestall the articulation of oppositional stances.

The first album released outside of Yugoslavia by Laibach was "Rekapitulacija" (1985). It was at this point in Laibach's development that their approach began to go beyond the industrial template and establish real points of difference with the approach of other industrial groups. Rather than simply recapitulate and simulate the sounds and slogans associated with industry, "Rekapitulacija" mysticizes it.

The track "Perspektive" (Perspectives – see CD track 3) is a dramatized programmatic statement of Laibach's methodology. Set against a sinister instrumental backdrop, the statement is read coldly and without animation and cites some of Laibach's principal influences:

"Our basic inspiration, ideals which are not ideal in their form, but [which are] the material of Laibach's manipulation remain industrial production, art of the Third Reich, totalitarianism, Taylorism, brutism, disco. Disco rhythm, as a regular repetition, is the purest, the most radical form of the militantly organised rhythmicity of technicist production, and as such the most appropriate means of media manipulation." ("Perspektive", Laibach 1985)

The track is certainly the product and expression of alienation but the mode of its delivery is far colder and more focused than a group like Throbbing Gristle as Laibach appears actively to identify itself with totalitarian power. The formalism and precision of the statement is certainly distinctive and confronts the understanding of popular music as a hedonistic form, whilst its relation of disco to alienating industrial production again echoes Attali's critiques of popular music.¹⁷ However, whilst appearing to embody coldly scientific totalitarian terror, "Perspektive" also incorporates the more irrational, uncanny aspects of totalitarianism and speaks of a "mystic, erotic-mythological sound" within which is present the "constitution of an ambivalence between fear and fascination".

"Mi Kujemo Bodočnost" (We Forge The Future – see CD track 5) has quasi-mystical lyrics based on poems by the pre First World War Yugoslavist "Preporod" (renaissance) youth group and has an overtly mystical aura, using archetypal imagery that suggests the presence of alchemical

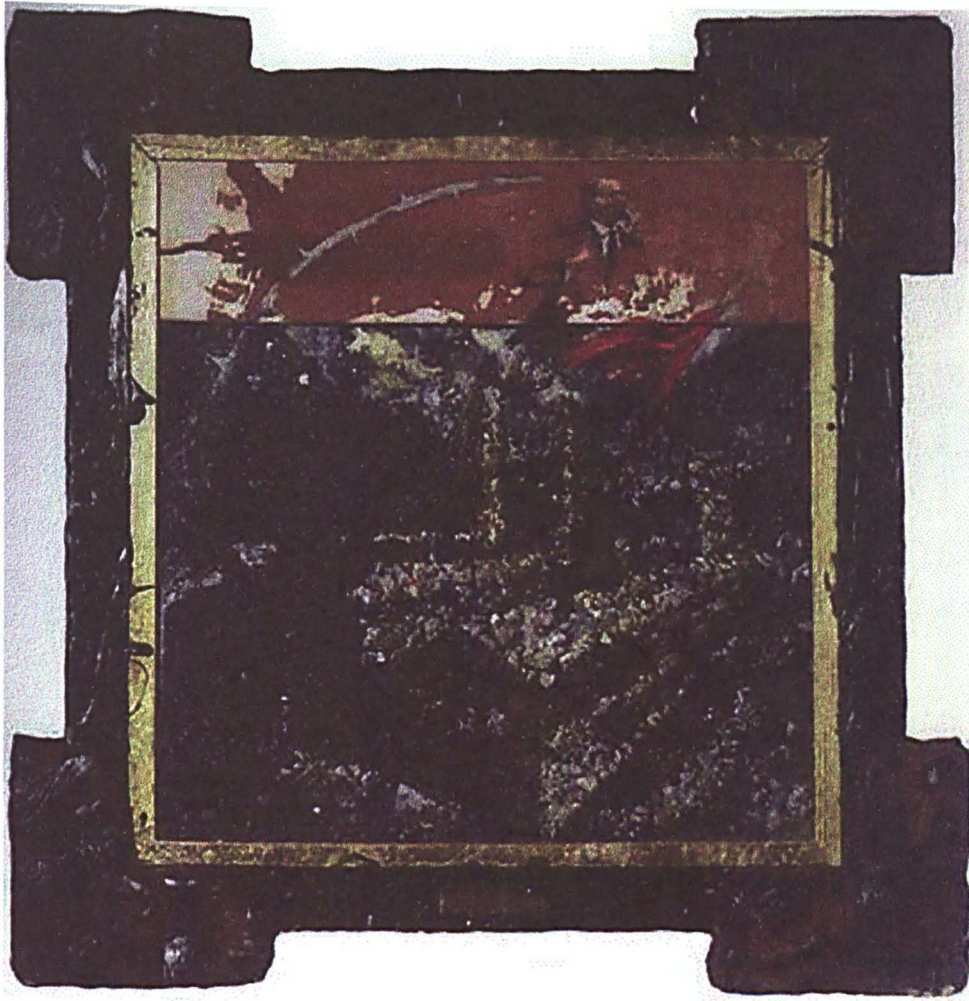
¹⁷ The stances adopted towards popular music by Laibach and Attali also refer back to the critique of jazz and popular music and the culture industry made by Adorno and Horkheimer (1993) in "The Dialectic of

concepts and recessed, esoteric layers of meaning:

"We are the fire, the steel and the smiths;
We forge the truth and freedom into this whole
We are rising, rising into freedom
And growing youthfully into infinity!

We Are Forging The Future!"

Like "Brat Moj" (Brother Of Mine) and other tracks from the album it moves at a funereal tempo, interrupted every so often by a massive percussive impact that, like the "Red Districts" sleeve drawings, alludes to the presence of heavy industry and suggests an unending Promethean struggle. However also present is a ghostly keyboard motif that runs throughout the album and which provides a contrast to the oppressive tone. The album renders audible a spectral, hallucinatory aura attached to heavy industry, presenting it as a site of primeval and unworldly struggle. This uncanny quality is what Laibach's "Ten Items of The Covenant" identifies as "... the mystical dimension of alienation, which reveals the magical component of the industrial process." (NSK 1991, 19). The Irwin works that use industrial motifs captured this quality in visual form. Like many other Irwin works "Electrification I" is overlaid with coal fragments that almost obscure the factory image, seemingly burying it.



Irwin: Electrification I (1988)

This “making strange” of industry is far more charged within the socialist context than that within which the British industrial groups operated. Even under Yugoslav socialism heavy industry was a key site of ideological mobilization and was valorized as the embodiment of progressive, rational scientific socialism. However the reality in Trbovlje and the “Red Districts” was quite different from this vision. Situated in a dark narrow valley frequently filled by dust from the 19th century cement works and surrounded by mines, goods yards and the highest industrial chimney in Europe (designed to disperse pollution as far as possible), Trbovlje had a nightmarish aura even before Laibach’s interventions. The forging of a dystopian mysticism from socialist heavy industry represents a return of the industrial realities repressed by socialism’s rationalist ideology. The bringing into audibility industrial repression, trauma, noise and regimentation frustrated official attempts to muffle industry’s less attractive qualities. As well as introducing the spectre of

mysticism and irrationalism into the engines of socialism, Laibach's work on "Rekapitulacija" also fatally archaichises its image. Through association with mysticism and the use eerie, haunting instrumentation Laibach present industry as a spectre from a nightmarish archetypal past rather than a gleaming technocratic future. Many of the works of this period have a pervasive aura of terror attached to them. The mystical, uncanny excess present in totalitarian terror is replicated in the terrifying, sublime scale of heavy industry, itself experienced by many as a form of terror and present in Laibach's music as confrontational (tonal) device as well as ideological signifier.¹⁸ Rationalised heavy industry was actually the site of socialism's least rational semi-mystical faith - in industrially dominated "socialist construction" leading toward a utopian future (communism). Like Orwell's "Telescreen", ideology can rarely be turned off and despite its formally utopian elements was experienced by many in the younger generation in particular as another mode of psychic oppression, if not actual terror but this too produced a spectral excess. Laibach dramatised the fact that "industry" possessed a radical ambiguity, located in the dual connotations of the sublime; as elevated experience or colossal scale that almost obliterates the individual.

"Ti, ki, izzivaš" (You Who Challenge – CD track 4) is one of the most threatening Laibach tracks, combining Bernard Herrman's "Psycho" score with massive industrial percussion that at times resembles the sound of marching troops. As on "Boji" (Struggles) the vocal is distorted as if spoken through a megaphone and is harshly commanding. The track also features on the live album "The Occupied Europe Tour 1983-5" (Laibach 1986b) along with other material that would appear on Laibach's first release on a British label, "Nova Akropola" (New Acropolis – Laibach 1986a).

¹⁸ A more concrete fascination with terror is present in the work of Laibach's Belgian contemporaries Front 242 who during the eighties were condemned almost as severely as Laibach for their use of paramilitary imagery and slogans such as "Moment of Terror is The Beginning of Life." (Front 242 1988)



Laibach: Nova Akropola Cover, 1986.

Due to the (apparent) contrast between its subject matter and its tone “Die Liebe” ([The] Love – CD track 7) is equally nightmarish and transforms “love”, perhaps the key signifier of the pop ideology, into a demonic all-conquering totalitarian force. The fanatical delivery of the lyrics, (which translate as “Love, love the greatest strength, love, love the all-powerful”) evokes the totalitarian potential of love. The punitive military percussion, sinister orchestral samples, and even hunting horns recast love (as applied for instance to notions of nation or state) as a blind, merciless source of sublime terror. “Država” (The State) is one of the most emblematic Laibach tracks. The opening orchestral fanfare (video clip seven) seems to be based on the bombastic tones of the Ron Goodwin’s soundtrack to the Alpine war film “Where Eagles Dare” (Goodwin 1969). Its “lyrics” recapitulate state propaganda, casting the state as a benevolent provider under which freedom and progress are advancing (see section 6.1) Taken literally the state is idealised and takes the place of the traditional love-object in the pop song. However, whilst the heroic tone of the music and the ambitious tone of the “lyrics” may seem to function as a model of identification with a totalitarian state, these same elements also set a utopian/dystopian standard no actual state could hope to equal. The effect of this is to draw a contrast between the pragmatism of “actually existing” states and the utopian-dystopian ideal of an absolute state, a space Laibach reserves for itself through its “paradigm of impossible authority”. “Vade Retro” is slower paced but even more sinister. The title

(meaning “Get Back” in Latin) refers to exorcism (“Vade Retro Satanas”). The rasped vocal is scarcely intelligible and is supplemented by cold percussion effects and discordant string samples. Towards the close of the track the percussion intensifies brutally and the sound of a braying stag is audible, lending a sinisterly archaic natural ambience to the track. The exorcistic motif recurs frequently throughout Laibach’s early work¹⁹ and the group explicitly described its concerts in these terms “Our appearance has a *purifying* (EXORCISM!) and *regenerative* (HONEY + GOLD) function.” (NSK 1991, 44). The pre-1987 concerts could sometimes be particularly ritualistic and critics spoke of a demonic aura at the events (see Lisić 1985). The concerts constituted an audiovisual pandemonium within which the same demonic, terrorising regimes present in spectral form on the recordings (industry, totalitarianism, paganism, noise and de-personalization) were called up. Overt mysticism of any sort challenged the socialist faith in scientific progress and atheist humanism. To mount a transcendent or exorcistic performance is also threatening as it carries the clear implication that there is something in (socialist) reality that needs to be driven out or surpassed. Laibach symbolized one definition of the term transcendental in its militant assertion of the fundamentally irrational or supernatural (demonic) elements of contemporary reality. To suggest that irrationalism is present in any regime is actually as much a critique of human nature as of the particular system it infects, yet the suggestion that self-management too was pervaded by the antagonistic, irrational and even demonic elements that Laibach claim are endemic to all regimes was as ideologically provocative as any of Laibach’s other “outrages”. Therefore it is important not to dismiss the supernatural and demonic ambience of the “Nova Akropola” period as simply terror for terror’s sake. The use of terror and its association with industrial production and ideology was an integral and spectacular element of Laibach’s presentation that lent additional force to the “demasking and recapitulation” of the regime under which Laibach operated and was central the group’s musical aesthetic. “Nova Akropola” demonstrates the association between sublimity and terror and is to this extent the most extreme of Laibach’s works, both psychically and musically. Together with the “Baptism” score (composed in the same period), “Nova Akropola” marks the highpoint of the group’s avant-garde militancy and the start of Laibach’s transition from avant-garde industrialism to a direct confrontation with (and infiltration of) the global pop regime.

¹⁹ References to exorcism also occur in works by Irwin and Scipion Nasice (see NSK 1991, 170).

5.7 Baptism: The Musical Representation of National Trauma

“Music is a credible metaphor of reality. Mozart and Bach both reflect the bourgeois dream of harmony more precisely than all the political theories of the nineteenth century together. Harmony is the true supreme form used by authority to demonstrate its power, satisfaction and its political scenic arrangement. Primitive polyphony, dodecaphony, electro-acoustic music, etc., etc., - any kind of music is an attribute of authority, its tool and its bond with its people, whatever it may be” (NSK 1991, 55).

By the time Laibach produced its score for Scipion Nasice’s “Krst Pod Triglavom” in 1986 the group had largely discarded the industrialisms of the early releases and were now encoding a national/historical rather than ideological ambience. The four sides of Laibach’s “Baptism” soundtrack album were numbered 1983-87, 819-22, 1095-1270 and 1961-82. These respectively coincide with; the lifespan of the Theatre of The Sisters Of Scipion Nasice, the period in which German forces defeated the Slovenes, the period leading up to the Habsburg assumption of sovereignty in the area and the lifespan of Tomaž Hostnik, first Laibach singer. The shadowy myths at the root of Slovene identity were monumentalized both on stage and in the music but the result is not an autarchic, insular cultural product. Just as the play incorporated many references to the international avant-garde, the music drew upon a wide variety of European composers. Laibach created a sonic representation of Sloveneness and the paradoxes of Slovene culture that revealed rather than concealed the plurality inherent to Slovene identity and in this respect the work cannot un-problematically be read as nationalistic.²⁰ The wide variety of sources used in the music were summarized by Barber-Keršovan:

“Laibach interprets, Laibach quotes, Laibach appropriates pieces of existing compositions in the sense of the Duchampian ready-made and puts them into new relations. This group unscrupulously plunders a treasury of the most diverse musical styles, and assembles whatever comes into their hands in their songs, as for instance in “Baptism Under Triglav”. In this “sampling” opera we can hear folk tunes for zither and “Ohm, Sweet Ohm” by the group Kraftwerk,²¹ (on the track “Hostnik”) pieces of Wagner, Bruckner, Orff, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, a well-known waltz from the operetta “The Blood of Vienna”, and the introductory motif of “Dante’s Symphony” by Franc Liszt through which the partisan song “Počiva jezero v tihoti (“A Lake Resting In Calmness”) is projected.²² (Barber-Keršovan 1993, 91)

The eclectic, composite, nature of Slovene identity, which “Baptism” suggests is a fusion of stronger European traditions with some archetypal pre-Christian remnants is represented through a series of audio citations and references to pantheonic figures of Slovene and European culture

²⁰ A nineteenth century romantic nationalist depiction of a nation such as Smetana’s “Ma Vlast” (*My Country*) necessarily repressed the ambiguous and problematic aspects of national identity that NSK manipulate.

²¹ Featured on Baptism’s introductory track “Hostnik”. “Ohm Sweet Ohm” from 1975’s “Radio Activity” album, features a vocoded voice and primitive electronics playing a mournful refrain. Laibach use it as the instrumental backdrop to a spoken lament for former singer Tomaž Hostnik.

“Baptism” was the most unrestrainedly Slovene presentation yet seen (free of Austrian or Yugoslav political supervision) yet was also an ambiguously paradoxical depiction of national identity. “Sloveneness” was celebrated through the recapitulation of the extent to which Slovenes have been assimilated and forced to carry out cultural counter-assimilations to ensure their cultural survival. Hostnik, victim of the Slovene propensity to suicide, is eulogized by his comrades alongside Kraftwerk, Černigoj, Prešeren, Malevich and other figures rendered pantheonic by the mode of their invocation. Myth, legend and archetype are given full expression as a constructive reworking of the original Slovene trauma of subjection and victory is located in the celebration of survival and persistence rather than in heroic nationalistic conquest. The music is as mournful as heroic and Laibach’s use of sinister orchestral motifs and noise effects on tracks such as “Waldung” and “Jagerspiel” (Hunting Game) and renders audible the national and cultural regimes by which Slovene identity has been both menaced and shaped while “Laibach Apologija” (CD track 9) returns to the portentous mysticism of “Rekapitulacija”. “Krst” (Baptism) itself is both the most utopian and sinister piece (CD track 10). Malevolent electronic tones and a solemn spoken incantation gradually give way to euphoric brass fanfares, perhaps suggesting the possibility of a passage from defeat to victory. Thematically “Baptism” is the most Slovene of all Laibach’s works yet is based upon the works of European composers assimilated to form a new Slovene sound. By placing the works in such archetypically Slovene contexts Laibach made irrelevant questions of originality. Without the benefit of sleeve credits or knowledge of the classical repertoire the sounds will be taken as Laibach’s own and Laibach’s sounds as something wholly Slovene. When Laibach initiated their campaign of covering rock classics in 1987 the group make explicit a process that had already begun, the creative reexportation of Western ideas in the Slovene form of an ambiguously pluralistic assertion of national particularity and the right to Slovene cultural self-confidence.

²² This refers to the track “Jezero/Der See” (The Lake).

5.8 "Laibach v trebuhu Trojanskega konja" (Laibach In The Belly Of The Trojan Horse)

Laibach's interventions in the domestic ideological context were matched by an equivalent intervention against Western pop culture. Laibach argued that just as ideology saturated "the East" a consumerist rock ideology permeates "the West". Both were regulative totalizing discourses that could be disrupted by confrontation with their own codes. One of the sharpest differentiating features between Laibach and their Punk contemporaries was Laibach's quasi-academic, reproachful, attitude to popular music as such. Laibach's discourse would problematize the reception and bases of Western popular music, initially in its domestic context and subsequently worldwide. Laibach took advantage of the stylistic possibilities opened up by Punk but this did not prevent the group mounting a sustained assault not just on Western rock per se but even other industrial/experimental bands that they are naturally grouped together with in terms of instrumentation. Asked in 1984 how they would define the difference between the work of Frankie Goes To Hollywood and experimental groups such as Einsturzende Neubauten (also signed to Mute Records), Laibach stated:

"There is no difference. One type of music deforms the truth by hypertechical degeneration of the sound image, the other type alienates itself from truth by losing faith in the power of positively establishing their own destiny, and by violently and pretentiously linking their "mission" with extreme forms of popular apocalypticism, spiritualism, neosatanism... If the entire West European society is prepared to unconcernedly accept such empty/loud dialogue through this type of music, it is because it has nothing to say to itself anymore; because it has no meaningful discourse to develop for a good reason, and because the spectacle itself is only another (already surpassed) form of repetition. In this sense, this is music without sense, annihilating music, a prelude to the cold silence of the Western civilization, in which mankind will be exterminated through repetition." (NSK 1991, 45)²³

Besides their technical industrialism in terms of instrumentation and technique Laibach had extensive infrastructure and personal links with the industrial networks of Britain and Germany as witnessed by their participation in the Berlin Atonal Festival of 1985 and their friendship with British counterparts Test Dept. Yet asked for an opinion of first-generation British industrial groups Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV Laibach were equally censorious, even at the risk of alienating potential audiences:

²³ This text is the clearest example of Laibach's use of the work of Attali as a theoretical template. Attali wrote (in 1977): "Make no mistake: if all of society agrees to address itself so loudly through this music, it is because it has nothing more to say, because it no longer has a meaningful discourse to hold, because even repetition is now only one form of repetition among others, and perhaps an obsolete one. In this sense, music is meaningless, liquidating, the prelude to a cold social silence in which man will reach his culmination in repetition." (1996, 122). However unlike Laibach, Attali concedes that these popular music might perhaps be

"The influence of mysticism, degenerate avant-garde and structural materialism (which inspired groups such as TG and PTV) have incubated confusion. The engagement of these groups in terms of their programs has remained at the level of romantic existentialism. LAIBACH, on the other hand, stands in the midst of life and is pragmatic. Our motto is based in reality, truth and life. From this standpoint, every comparison of LAIBACH with the specified groups is meaningless." (NSK 1991, 45)

Condemnations such as this should be understood as an essential aspect of their critique of rock as a form (itself a recapitulation of totalitarianism) to which the neo-pagan excesses of Psychic TV leant themselves naturally. In order to sufficiently problematize their place within popular culture as to be able to mount an apparently objective critique of it, Laibach had to carry out an ideological differentiation and in order to define a "party line" of quasi-totalitarian discourse, had to relegate even some of those with whom they shared approaches into a position of otherness. In this respect as in many others Laibach's position was structurally and consciously paradoxical. Despite the techno-pop departure of the NATO album Laibach continue to be primarily marketed through industrial distribution networks and media and are now pragmatic enough to permit remixes of their work reworked by artists their original rhetoric would seem to have condemned a priori.²⁴ The critiques of industrial groups might be compared to Laibach's wariness about being categorized under or assimilated by traditional anti-state paradigms of dissidence. In both cases Laibach drew attention to the fact that overtly oppositional dissenting discourses are in themselves insufficient to deal with contemporary power structures and may well bolster them by providing safe, commodifiable or assimilable outlets for negative attitudes.

The uncompromising invective used by Laibach echoed not so much (previous) domestic ideological stances as the Soviet tradition of total theoretical opposition to Western rock, which by the late eighties was being abandoned even in the USSR:

"Glasnost did not revoice the invective against rock music of the immediately preceding period, in which it was declared that Soviet young people must be trained in "ideological immunity" in order to withstand the psychological warfare being conducted by the West. On the principle that "forbidden fruit is always sweeter", arguments working on the purely ideological level were replaced with an acceptance of the popularity of rock music, alongside attempts to control its worst excesses. The prime task was thus to "educate" young people in what was and what was not worth listening to and what the "subliminal messages" of Western rock might be." (Pilkington 1994, 106-7)

Such an ideological mission in relation to rock is almost identical in tone to Laibach's "mission" of

²⁴ "... the herald of the birth of a relation never yet seen."

The single "War/In The Army Now" contained remixes by Johnny Violent (also known as Ultraviolence), a producer of a lurid version of Gabber techno whose work has frequently been condemned as tasteless by critics.

demasking and recapitulating the subliminal and encrypted themes of the Western rock regime. Even as the Soviets began to abandon (or at least refine) the ideological “kulturkampf” against rock Laibach returned to the archetypal level of such criticism. In both Slovenia and the USSR state authorities had abdicated their traditional role of culturo-ideological defence, leaving a vacuum filled by Laibach and individual researchers and journals in the USSR. Laibach’s stance in this respect also functioned as an implicit critique of uncritical pro-Western sentiment in Slovenia. Whilst the slightest suggestion of closer educational or cultural links coming from Belgrade elicited concrete anti-assimilation sentiment and action in Slovenia, there were no equivalent concerns about the far less tangible but more pervasive prospect of Westernization. Only during the period of the first Yugoslav “Petletka” (five-year plan from 1947-51) had anti-Western rhetoric as severe as Laibach’s been strongly present in Slovenia. Despite later reactionary phases this had been the only period of true cultural Stalinism on a Soviet scale when socialist realism was the only acceptable form and systematic propaganda against “decadent” Western art was undertaken.²⁵

With the exception of Kraftwerk, Laibach did not attempt to differentiate between good and bad examples of rock but attacked entire genres and if anything were even more critical of alternative musics than of global rock phenomena such as Queen (see section 5.10), whose power over audiences they professed to admire. Laibach’s principal counterparts in this respect were a few researchers who even under Glasnost carried out the struggle against rock, often informed by critical sociological research from America. Pilkington (1994, 109) quotes the Adorno-influenced²⁶ 1987 research of N. Sarkitov, which blames rock for inducing social (ideological) passivity via gradual stupefaction. As late as 1988, when restrictions on the availability and production of rock in the USSR were vanishing, an article in “Nash Sovremnik” (ibid.) likened the effects of the “inherently bourgeois” rock form to cocaine and described it as an agent of the Western psychological warfare being waged against Soviet youth.

²⁵ See Dolenc 1992, 84. This was the only period of absolute (rather than qualified and sporadic) cultural totalitarianism experienced in Slovenia and Laibach’s totalitarianism refers more to totalitarianism in general than to this brief period.

²⁶ Laibach’s discourse on rock has many similarities with Adorno’s critiques of Jazz and other popular forms.

5.9 Rock: Mobilization and Self-Defence:

“During the last three quarters of a century Slovenes have successfully rejected more-or-less concealed attempts to assimilate them into a wider national community. Slovene cultural creators, as the main bearers and maintainers of national consciousness, still remained in the front lines against such attempts.” (Dolenc 1992, 88)

“Everywhere in Europe - East and West - people have capitulated to coca cola culture. Only inside fortress LAIBACH can art and popular culture look the other way.” (Laibach 1992a)

That Laibach’s discourse should so closely mirror the Soviet one is neither surprising nor accidental. The (re) presentation of ideological struggle was integral to the recapitulation of the paradigms of absolute totalitarianism – Laibach had to conjure the spectre of cultural Stalinism to reveal its presence in the domestic context of their operations. However the fact that it was necessary to adopt such an extreme form, again points to the need for force in order to raise any critique of the pervasiveness of rock culture, the user-friendly face of which only conceals its oppressive ubiquity. Laibach sought to problematize and rebalance the simplistic equation of the East as “totalitarian” and the West as “democratic”. Paradoxically Laibach re-presented Soviet style fear of Western cultural domination via music, the most aggressive form of Western dominance. Laibach located in the mechanics of the “culture industry” (of which it was now part) a largely undiagnosed Western totalitarianism. Asked in a “Mladina” interview at the time of the release of “Kapital” whether they were saying the West was more totalitarian than the East they replied:

“The Eastern ideological (communist) totalitarianism occurred exclusively as a reaction to the economic colonialism and totalitarianism of the West; as a political system totalitarianism is a typical phenomenon of West European nihilism, which operates with the power of financial capital.” (Laibach 1997a)

Laibach’s bleak analyses of the music industry recall not just Attali and Adorno but the work of Althusser. Just as the work of Laibach and NSK in relation to the totalitarianism of state power was informed by the concept of “ideological state apparatuses” their late work can be seen as informed by a neo-Althusserian descriptivism that diagnoses the hidden power of the (cultural) market’s ideological and repressive apparatuses. This analysis informs some key Laibach statements on the media:

“The Western press is the extended hand and dictate of the market economy, which tailors its truth according to the current needs of market logic, and which does not see, does not need or acknowledge competition outside its economic limits. In this perspective, our performances in Western Europe represent a pain-inducing foreign body in the decaying bowels of a voracious animal.” (NSK 1991, 49)

This anti-Western rhetoric²⁷ was not simply a recapitulation of totalitarian cultural isolationism but a reference to the fears of cultural assimilation felt in small European nations such as Slovenia and in much of the Slavic cultural sphere generally. In drawing attention to the inroads Western culture was making and devising an active strategy of cultural resistance Laibach referred back to the Slovene tendency for cultural rather than political figures to play a key role in the defence of cultural specificity. Such reactions, which inform many of Eastern and Central Europe's new nationalisms, were felt across Yugoslavia. However in Slovenia and Croatia and to a lesser extent in Macedonia and other non-Serb areas, the only assimilation genuinely feared was that coming from Belgrade (just as in practice Yugoslavia's defence doctrines were primarily oriented towards a threat from the Warsaw Pact rather than NATO). Ramet (1992, 24) states that "... assimilation of any kind, whether to a Serbian or Yugoslav model, was abhorrent both to culture-conscious elements and to regional politicians who had a stake in federalism". Such attitudes help explain the de facto tolerance accorded to Laibach and NSK, which were seen by elements of ZSMS and even the party as well as the intelligentsia, as a dynamic assertion of Slovene culture of obvious use in the fight against what they saw as a very real threat of Yugoslavization. The fact that only some members of the wartime generation accused Laibach of Germanization implies that even if Germanization was perceived as Laibach's goal, this process was seen as more "natural" (or less alien) than Yugoslavization. Laibach did not seek allies but some of those associated with Nova Revija and other intellectuals saw value in the emphasis placed by Laibach and NSK on Slovene culture. However Laibach and NSK stood more or less alone in Slovenia in the stance they took against the uncritical, otherwise unremarked cultural Westernization process.²⁸ Laibach's performance of a cultural defence role represented a lone attempt to redress the imbalance in Slovenia's emergent cultural policy which demonized the "Balkan" and the "Eastern" as surely as the West continued to place Slovenia within such categories, often ignoring the country's over-identification with the West. Even the ferocity of Laibach's assault on the Western pop market (into which they are inevitably becoming assimilated) cannot hope to rebalance the massive pressures and diverse strategies employed by its adversary.

Whilst in a Slovenia hurriedly constructing an increasingly pro-Western alignment that largely ignored or even welcomed the possibility of cultural assimilation by the West, in Serbia this

²⁷ This theme was most sustained in interviews and texts from the "Kapital" period (1992-3) but it had been presently intermittently throughout the eighties. The most fully-developed example was from a particularly strident 1987 interview:

"The Western market is a synonym for the cultural hegemony of the West... Every cultural exchange with the East or the South is only political courtesy" (Damjanić 1987).

²⁸ The emphasis on the value of "Eastern" culture and experience seen in the "Moscow Declaration" (see

possibility was and remains a key point of mobilisation for nationalist politics. Fears of Western cultural dominance are a persistent feature of Serbian nationalist rhetoric and official cultural policy has actively sought to discriminate against modern art and some other Western forms in favour of more vernacular and populist styles. Such policies ran contrary to the direction of nearly all Slovene political strands of the late eighties but in any case Laibach had already foreclosed such terrain and no Slovene politician could have constructed such a platform without appearing ludicrous in comparison. Laibach enacted at the cultural level sentiments enacted in deadly earnest elsewhere on former Yugoslav territory. The responses of both Laibach and of Serbian nationalist strands (and as well as Slavophile currents in Russia), can be read as pre-emptive responses to the spread of cultural globalization by nations struggling to construct a post-Communist sense of self that are now even more exposed to Western cultural influence than previously.

Beyond the rhetorical similarities between Laibach's attacks on Western dominance (which have the character of corrective pragmatism rather than fascistic mobilisation) and post-socialist nationalisms of the Serbian type there is also a formal similarity between the Serbian cultural response to the threat of globalization and Laibach's tactics. Despite the war and the imposition of sanctions a rave scene developed in Belgrade, which until Serbia's renewed isolation in 1999 was actually larger than its counterparts in Zagreb and Ljubljana and attracted many international performers. However there has also been a specifically local response to pop culture, which can be seen as an attempt to devise a resistance strategy via the construction of an indigenous but contemporary popular form that can compete with the Western imports in its home market. Such pressures have produced the hybrid Serb form known as "Turbofolk": a high tempo collision of traditional folk (including more or less nationalist songs) and contemporary dance rhythms. It is a contemporary but explicitly populist form that naturally finds favour with nationalists who are able both to display their contemporaneity and their ethnic sentiment through appreciation of it. It can be read as an attempt at finding an authentic but contemporary form cultural form produced under the autarchic siege conditions of sanctions with an explicit mobilizational appeal to national morale. However, even Turbofolk is not based on outright negation of the West but on an assimilation of those Western elements that might invigorate the traditional national forms. Laibach's assimilation of the Western material is far more thorough but designed primarily to sell such material back to the Western markets with the addition of some Slovene "x-factor" rather than to sell back a revamped form of traditional music to domestic audiences as in Serbia. Both Laibach and Turbofolk represent a defiant appropriation of Western pleasure for local purposes but whilst Turbo surrenders to pop

Laibach attempts to retain a distance, even while using it as a bearer of its signals.²⁹

5.10 Laibach's Recapitulation of The Pop Canon.

"Exceptional historical circumstances shaped us into a generation well aware of the fact that the youth of a small-sized nation like ours must develop much greater creative powers than are required of the youth of larger nations, and that we must muster up all available forces into a collective, frontal, and if necessary, militant act". ("Address at the Occasion of Opus Dei Album Release in Yugoslavia, November 1987", see NSK 1991, 67-8)

Laibach's is not simply an emergency response to the siege conditions of post-modern cultural overload, but an ongoing praxis designed to construct a pragmatic Slovene response to and interrogation of Western popular culture. Laibach and turbofolk are both expressions of an awareness that within the globalized market of popular culture, straight copies of Western trends are ultimately inadequate as they will rarely be able to progress beyond local markets and will be seen as inferior copies of more glamorous Western originals with their "classic" (The Beatles, Queen) or "radical" (techno, Punk) selling points. Even to compete in the domestic market requires a degree of hybridization (local elements boosted by Western forms) rather than straight copies and to compete internationally requires a real degree of proficiency in the form plus some (local) selling point that will ensure attention in already crowded markets. Rather than the corrosive overidentification tactics they applied to the paradigms of state power Laibach used tactics of recapitulatory oversimulation in relation to the Western rock canon. Laibach described its reworkings of such material as the creation of "new originals" (as opposed to hybrid forms or local imitations) and asked whether they considered cover versions or sampling a superior technique they replied:

"The essence of music is a miracle of technology, which is based on mechanical principles of the universe. The essence of mechanics is *Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (Endless Repetition of The Same). On this basis we find no superiority in the cover-versions over sampling techniques. Our work, however, which is original, or rather a copy without the original, is superior to the historical material." (NSK 1991, 58)

Laibach's "new originals" were not intended as Slovenized product for local consumption but as the expression of a systematic campaign to establish Laibach and its concepts in the Western market, offering an authentically "Eastern" form in familiar Western packaging. In terms of Western preconceptions the fact of a successful Slav group is almost de facto transgressive. To achieve even limited success and exposure in the West using as obscure a language as Slovene runs

²⁹ For a more detailed comparison see Monroe 1998.

contrary to received cultural logic but for such a group to go on to rework some of the classics of Western pop culture is doubly transgressive. Like the “Third World”, “Eastern Europe” is still largely seen not as a source of cultural product but as a passive market for it. These apparently “non-productive” zones had never been taken seriously until the eighties (the decade of world music) and were seen as no more than passive markets in need of further development. The same prejudices that still apply against East European goods generally (seen as either shoddy or hopelessly poor copies of superior Western products) were, and pace Laibach, still are major obstacles for non-western artists to overcome. Laibach’s entire oeuvre presents a militant challenge to the representation of Central and East Europeans as passive consumers lacking the discrimination to judge good from bad in the tide of popular culture and certainly incapable of producing pop forms that can compete globally.³⁰ In common with the Macedonians, Slovaks, Ukrainians and other “unhistorical” Slav nations Slovenes have had to develop a full range of cultural activities in the vernacular at a far later historical stage than Western nations. Whilst earlier groups from the seventies were able to establish the notion of distinct, non-imitative Slovene versions of pop and rock they were unable to transcend the limitations of the Slovene market and could achieve little success even in the rest of Yugoslavia whilst using Slovene (see Ramet 1994, 109). Therefore Laibach’s manipulation of the forms of popular music represents a contribution not just to the ongoing post-war development of a full cultural range within the Slovene sphere, but a limited but successful reversal whereby a form of Slovene popular culture penetrated the Western market.

Whereas in its programmatic statements the group made use of phrases or paragraphs from ideological texts, in the pop context Laibach (re) discovered and employed the lyrics of entire songs as discursive “ready-mades” to recapitulate the structure of the pop regime. Power structures within the entertainment industry are obviously far less readily apparent than those of totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian states but Laibach was able to successfully apply similar techniques to unmask the ideological regimes of the east and the culturally legitimated market regimes of the West. Moving on from their alienating poeticization of ideological discourse Laibach exposed even more pervasive power structures via an alienating *politicization* of the rock discourse. The impact of the cover version can be read from the perspective of ideological manipulation. In her analysis of the discursive tactics employed by Soviet “Newspeak”, Thom identifies imitation as one of the surest means of undermining an inconvenient fact or contradictory argument:

³⁰ For an account of the “cultural imperialism thesis” debate over popular music that has taken place in France, New Zealand and Canada as well as the “Third World” see Shuker 1994, 60.

“Communist power has understood that in order to get rid of an undesirable object, it is better to counterfeit it rather than simply to suppress it. For the copy destroys the real object more surely than physical demolition could.” (Thom 1989, 91)

Through their cover versions Laibach demonstrated the extent of the Western audience’s largely unconscious subjecthood in relation to rock and (particularly on the “NATO” album) to suggest the danger of a pop-capitalist regime replacing the former Eastern regimes. In the case of Queen, subjects of Laibach’s first cover version, “Geburt Einer Nation”, (originally “One Vision” - see video clip four) much of Laibach’s work was already done and almost no alteration of the lyrics beyond their translation into German was necessary to render audible the authoritarian undertone of Queen’s work. Laibach made clear their attitude to Queen and its significance in a 1987 interview:

“Queen are very honest. They are bringing out the main principles of pop culture. They are one of the most significant bands in Western culture. Queen show how the concert is really a political event. The band controls a large number of people and has them behaving according to their vision.” (Wilkinson 1987)

In 1984 Queen had released a single entitled “Radio GaGa”, the video of which depicted the group in a dystopic setting based on the sets of Fritz Lang’s early science fiction epic “Metropolis”. As the four members of Queen stand on stage they stretch and retract their arms in time to the beat and a drone-like audience responds with the same movement. The gesture crossed over into real life performances of the song and was subsequently repeated en masse by audiences as large as a hundred thousand (at Rio De Janeiro). In 1985 Queen released the “One Vision” single, which had been inspired by the mammoth Live-Aid concerts that had taken place that year. Despite the ambiguous sexual persona of Freddie Mercury, Queen were the most successful of all stadium rock groups and the mass devotion of their fans was constitutive of the rock star as “ubermensch” paradigm Laibach manipulated. One Vision’s lyrics were perfect material for Laibach to retroactively transform into (or reveal as) a fascistic hymn to power, an effect amplified by the bombastic militaristic arrangement and harsh German vocal. Even the opening phrases set a militant, uncompromising tone that as in many subsequent Laibach cover versions gave the uncanny impression of being the natural expression of Laibach’s “weltanschauung”. The lyrics have obviously sinister connotations when sung in German by a group such as Laibach - “One man, one goal, one solution”. After exposure to Laibach’s intervention Queen’s song can no longer be read as unrelated to power. Laibach are not ascribing any specific hidden agenda to Queen (beyond the conquest of new audiences and territories) but amplifying or “making strange” the structures of unquestioning adulation (and obedience) common to both totalitarian mass mobilisation and

capitalist mass consumption.

5.10a “Opus Dei”

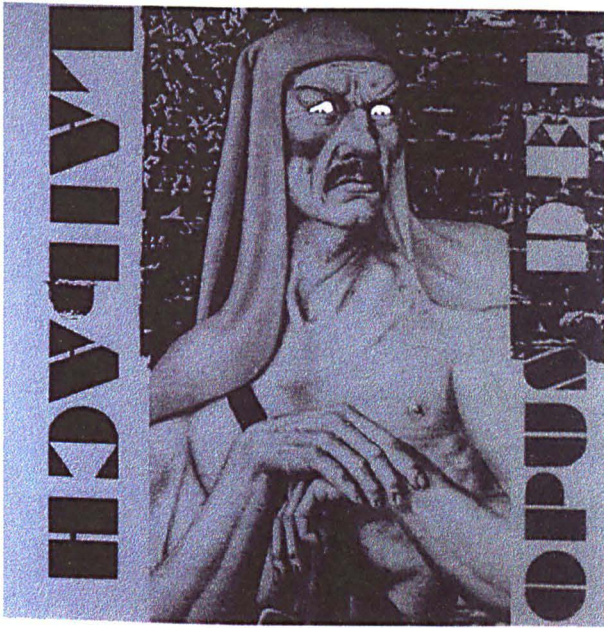
One reason for Laibach’s emphasis on lyrical estrangement and manipulation is suggested by Ramet (1994, 115) who notes that rock audiences in Yugoslavia paid far closer attention to the lyrics of rock than is the case among Western audiences. This tendency to read more of a song’s meaning on the basis even of nonsensical or disposable lyrics is the primary device through which Laibach assimilated the songs they approached. For instance, simply through the fact of Laibach’s militant performance, the 1986 song “Live is Life” by the Austrian groups Opus becomes a paean to Volkisch belonging and the lyrics are re-perceived as less innocent and more nationalistic: “We all give the power, we all give the best Every minute of the hour, we don’t think about the past” or “The feeling of the people is the feeling of the land” (see Laibach 1987a). In fact two members of Opus are from Carinthia and of Slovene descent, yet it was Laibach rather than Opus that enjoyed success with a German version of the song (“Leben Heist Leben”)³¹. “Geburt Einer Nation” and “Life is Life/Leben Heist Leben featured on “Opus Dei” (The Work of God, Laibach 1987a), which inaugurated Laibach’s period of greatest success and the practice of reworking Anglo-Saxon rock “classics” that has continued up until the “Jesus Christ Superstars” album (Laibach 1996b). The title of the album contained at least three levels of allusion. First there was the (ab)use of the Austrian group’s name. Then there was an apparent self-aggrandising claim that Laibach’s work is “The Work of God” (the literal Latin translation). Finally there is a more sinister reference to the quasi-Masonic Spanish Catholic organization Opus Dei, which has been associated with extreme right-wing activities. Masonic allusions are present in the lyrics of another of the album’s tracks, “How The West Was Won” (CD track 11) which dispassionately manipulates the “mystery” surrounding the group and taunts the Western audience into further speculation about the group and its context:

“The world is in pain
Our secrets to gain
But still let them guess and gaze on;
They’ll never divine
The word or the sign
Of free and strong men of the nation...
It’s this and it’s that
They cannot tell why

³¹ Laibach released both a German and an English version. The German version is performed at a slower tempo and has a more severe arrangement than the relatively melodic English version.

So many great men of the nation
Should aprons put on
To make themselves one
With the men who have found their salvation" (Laibach 1987a)

The track is introduced by a trumpet fanfare and proceeds at a grinding pace with heavy guitar sounds and industrial percussion and is partly based on Slovenia's most famous poem "Zdravljica" (A Toast) by Prešeren. The overall effect is to suggest a secret militant ritual organization active within the music industry, distinct even from the satanic ritualism of black metal and with a far greater intent to penetrate the mass market. The album concludes with an ideological "new original". "The Great Seal" is a "cover" of Churchill's famous wartime speech "We Shall Fight Them On The Beaches". The text is read solemnly by Laibach's singer over an anthemic composition that evokes the soundtrack to a wartime propaganda film. It recalls a heroic, mobilisational mode of music rarely heard in post-war Europe, and the militant "lyrics" ("We shall go on to the end") enhance the image of resolute action Laibach seeks to perpetuate. The album was seen by some Slovene critics (Laibach – Howg! 1987) as a musical regression into more kitsch musical styles yet whilst in compositional terms it may not have matched the severity of "Nova Akropola" the "Opus Dei" artwork contains some of the most disturbing Laibach images. The graphics are starkly coloured in black, white and silver and resemble the partisan woodcuts used as a backdrop to Laibach performances. Imprinted on the disc and on the rear sleeve are versions of John Heartfield's controversial montage of a swastika composed of axe-heads. The other dominant motif is a monstrously stylised image of Laibach's singer Milan Fras wearing the distinctive headdress that has been the subject of as much speculation as many other "mysterious" elements in Laibach's work. The eyes are highlighted in white and together with the stern expression seem particularly malevolent and watchful. In a second version (see "Life is Life" sleeve in chronology) the figure is surrounded by a woman and three children, heightening the aura of paternal surveillance surrounding the figure, which almost challenges the potential buyer not to be deterred.



Laibach: Opus Dei Front Cover, 1987.

The videos from the album, for the singles “Life is Life” (video clip eight) and “Geburt Einer Nation” singles were also equally transgressive of the norms of pop imagery. “Life is Life” reinvents the promotional video as Heimatfilm, set around the Alpine scenery of Lake Bohinj, the Savica falls (a focal point of Slovene myth) and ending in the wooden chapel erected in honour of Russian First World War prisoners who died in the area. Similarly “Geburt Einer Nation” makes extensive use of the archaic-pagan scenography of the “Baptism” production (see page 118). Despite or even because of their transgressiveness both these and other Laibach videos have received extensive airplay on MTV, an institution Laibach were subsequently to attack (see page 288).

5.11 “Let It Be” – Laibach Versus The Beatles.

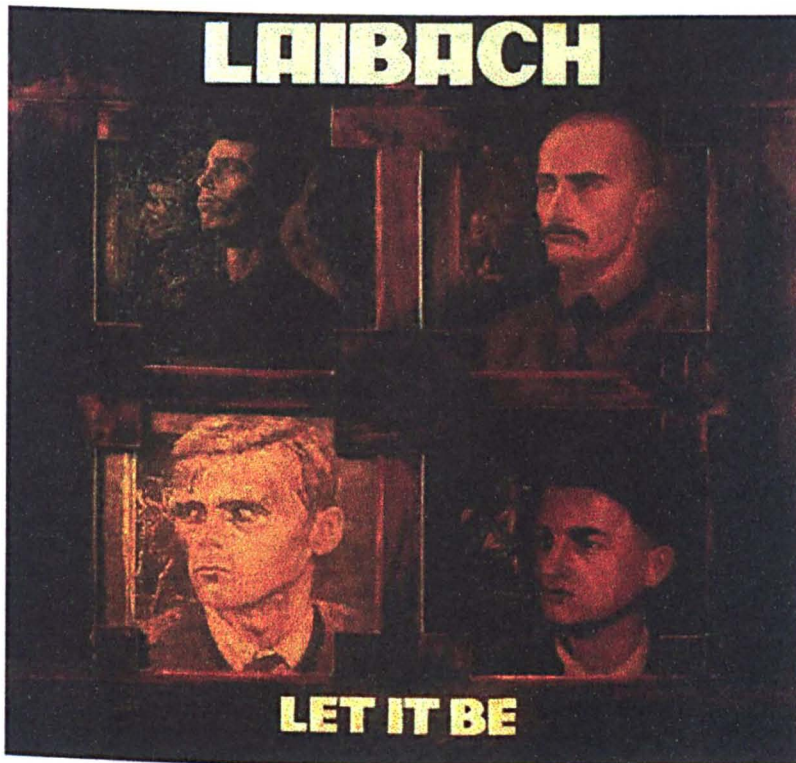
By trading on the oppressive familiarity of songs such as “Get Back”, “In The Army Now”, “Final Countdown” Laibach are sometimes able to bring out an inherent lyrical trait and so transform it via militant presentation as to retroactively alienate it from its composers. The result of this retro-engineering is to make the originals come to seem like poor imitations of the Laibach originals, particularly to those who may not be aware of the originals. Thus a group from an obscure Slav nation and who did not even sing exclusively in English were able to sell back to the West the pop culture represented as a naturally global product able to transcend (or efface) all cultural specificity.

The impact these reworkings have derives not from their similarity but their distance from the accepted norms of the genre. The harsh voice, martial rhythms and quasi-classical arrangements violate from the outside most previously accepted conventions of rock composition and make such transgression into a virtue that attracts attention. The “making strange” of the lyrics in the context of Laibach’s performance served to extract the immanent political implications of what is supposedly a semi-oppositional musical culture biased toward rebellion rather than conformity and institutionalization. Yet while Laibach’s reworkings serve as demonstrations of the inherent and largely unacknowledged mass psychological force of much popular music these pieces should not be perceived as celebrations, save in the most ironic sense. Asked why they chose to rework The Beatles’ “Let It Be” album in 1988, Laibach replied:

“Let It Be (FIAT) is a prophetic title which covers the ill-starred nature of an operation that gave us pop music and its industry. The Beatles record itself stands as a cheapskate epitaph, a cardboard tombstone, a sad and tatty end of an era when it all started. We have enough imagination not to do a cover version; what we are doing is rewriting history, which every now and then has to be corrected and reinterpreted to be useful for the future.” (NSK 1991, 58)

The choice of “Let It Be” and Laibach’s attitude towards it indicated that the legacy of the Beatles was experienced in the Yugoslav context as being as oppressively canonical as the British Punks had found it. Whilst elsewhere in the Eastern bloc The Beatles retained an exotic, forbidden aura, in Yugoslavia their work was so much historical debris needing to be cleared and returned to a productive role. By monumentalizing the most abject and unregarded Beatles album (Paul McCartney disowned the finished project) Laibach were able to question the Beatles’ supposedly given status as a signifier of quality. Some of the lyrical material such as “Get Back (to where you once belonged)” (CD track 12) again seems highly appropriate to Laibach and the arrangement of “I’ve Got A Feeling” has a semi-comical, histrionic rabble-rousing quality typical of seventies glam-rockers such as Gary Glitter. As a whole though it was the mediocrity and “scrappiness” of the original lyrics and music that best facilitated their assimilation. No rearrangement of phrases as trivial as “Dig a Pony” could be as ridiculous or as nonsensical as the original. Given the paucity of the lyrical material on “Let It Be” Laibach made the instrumentation rather than the lyrics the primary agent of recapitulation. Rather than produce an openly contemptuous punk-style cover Laibach monumentalized the paucity of the original through massively excessive orchestration in line with the assimilatory totalitarian techniques alluded to by Thom (p. 280), destroying the original through duplication. Classical string arrangements, semi-operatic vocals, hunting horns and martial drums conspire both to bury and to salvage something from the original. In Laibach’s terms their “new originals” transcend the mediocrity of the original work. In the process the group

implicitly claims the Beatles' canonical status for itself and that its interpretation of the form is superior to that of the Beatles.³² Through their reworking Laibach display an awareness of the nuances of the history of pop culture at least as acute as that of any Western artist or critic. In addition Laibach further challenge condescending assumptions about artists from "the Other Europe" being unable to produce material as sophisticated as their Western counterparts. In fact Laibach's ideological problematization of the consumption of received pop cultural history has no obvious Western counterpart.



Laibach: Let It Be Album Cover, 1988.

5.12 The Gaze of The Other: Laibach's Use of Video.

Just as Laibach began to question the icons of the Western rock pantheon Slovene (and Yugoslav) exposure to this culture increased exponentially as the provision of cable TV in large parts of the country brought MTV and German (plus the existing Austrian and Italian) channels into availability. It is typical of Laibach's strictly non-aligned stance in relation to the industry that despite MTV having given the group much airplay they are nonetheless scathing on its effects:

³² This effect is amplified by the sleeve art of Laibach's album, which is an archaic pastiche of the cover portraits featured on the cover of the Beatles album.

“Through the channels of cable and satellite television, rivers of the uninterrupted programs of world television stations flow (like MTV), radically brainwashing millions of young people, altering-in substance and essence-their psychosomatic structures in the direction of monstrous mutations, thus implementing the totality of rock ‘n’ roll music and the TOTALITARIANISM of its determinants. In this way the psychosomatic structure becomes the outermost extension of the network of rock ‘n’ roll communication, a kind of bottomless box in which its contents are poured, creating and satisfying needs, exhausting and seemingly regenerating its energies. The system of rock ‘n’ roll moronisation by means of TV programs like MTV lowers the intelligence level of its devotees below the indispensable level of sound judgement. To those with more distance MTV is of course nothing but chewing gum for the eyes, and Maiken Wexo³³ stretches it for us with great dexterity.” (Laibach 1996a)

Despite the need to distance itself from video as an integral element of the capitalist entertainment complex, Laibach realized the centrality of video to the penetration of the Western market and had been experimenting with the form from an early stage³⁴ Video’s alleged totalitarian, “brain-washing” nature made it an ideal bearer of the totalitarian motifs in Laibach’s work. The videos produced for Laibach by the NSK video section “Retrovision” dramatise the totalitarian potential of the fusion of music and image.”³⁵ In the process of recapitulating Western rock Laibach simultaneously played on Western stereotypes, presenting an apparently primitive Balkan ritual whilst applying a highly sophisticated retrogardist methodology. This strategy is most apparent in the video for Laibach’s version of the Rolling Stones’ “Sympathy For The Devil”³⁶ (video clip nine) The video (here intercut with comments by Žižek) presents a dual spectacle. In a clichéd mist-wreathed castle (Predjamski Grad near Postojna) Laibach are seen feasting in a hall decked with hunting trophies. Their traditional costume and the almost feudal decadence of the scene appear as an incarnation of the imaginary “obscene enjoyment of the Other” that Žižek (1994b) claims animates nationalism:

“We always impute to the “other” an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) he and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the “other” is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the “excess” that pertains to this way: the smell of “their” food, “their” noisy songs and dances, “their” strange manners, “their” attitude to work”. (p.203)

In Žižek’s account the cause of hatred is hatred of enjoyment in the Other. In this video as in much of their symbolism Laibach present the illusory spectre of a particular ritualized form of Eastern

³³ An MTV presenter who expressed praise for an MTV video.

³⁴ As early as May 1984 the thematic Laibach video “The Debate Over Man” was presented at a video festival at the Pompidou Centre, Paris.

³⁵ Retrovision’s work is presented in NSK 1991, 227-239.

³⁶ The combination of the Nazikunst sleeve artwork and the reformed lyrics (“I rode a tank, held a general’s, when the Blitzkrieg raged and the bodies stank”) were also key factors in establishing a demonic image for the group amongst Western audiences in particular.

enjoyment, which others may envy but never fully participate in or comprehend. Simultaneously the luxuriousness of the video's scenes confront the Western stereotype of impoverished, oppressed East Europeans who can only access pre-modern forms of enjoyment (feasting, hunting), which in relation to Western consumer-leisure activities are both highly archaic and strangely fascinating. In the video's final scenes Laibach enact one of the key Western beliefs about the east; that it is a zone still harbouring archaic rural primitivism of a type long extinct in the West. Semi-naked children play in a straw-strewn stone courtyard surrounded by ruined buildings while Laibach's singer plays the role of pater familias. Intercut between the feast and family scenes are shots of Laibach marching in hunting gear through the spectacular Škocjanske caves bearing blazing torches. The fact that such specific/alien images are presented as the natural accompaniment to what had once been a Rolling Stones song serves to underline the extent of its assimilation. The images play upon the extent of Western ignorance about the East (for all the casual Western viewer might know such scenes might still be typical of Slovene social life and not just its landscape and architecture). The ultimate impression given by the images is of a pre-modern lifestyle which in some respects may be primitive but in which unmediated access to forms of enjoyment superseded elsewhere remains possible.

In manipulating the spectral Eastern primitivism active in the Western imagination Laibach were staging and making use of they type of popular prejudices about Eastern Europe described by the Bulgarian writer Tschernokoshewa who in 1993 warned of:

“... one of the greatest dangers that lead to misunderstandings between Eastern and Western Europe today: the tendency to conclude that daily reality for the people living in a system corresponds to one's own images, ideas and knowledge of this system. That means that the characteristics of the political system are intertwined with the people living there - if the system is brutal, barbaric and totalitarian, then the people living there must also be totalitarian, barbaric and brutal.” (p. 63)

5.13 Kapital: The Chaos of Form.

“Everywhere we look, the monopolization of the broadcast of messages, the control of noise, and the institutionalization of the silence of others assure the durability of power. Here, this channelization takes on a new, less violent, and more subtle form: laws of the political economy take the place of censorship laws. Music and the musician essentially become either objects of consumption like everything else, recuperators of subversion, or meaningless noise.” (Attali 1996, 8)

Attali was writing in 1977 and his concepts are based on the Western experience of popular music, however his account of political or moral censorship largely being displaced by the laws of the market is highly applicable to the situation faced by musicians in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism. At one level far more may be expressed than was possible under the old regimes but conversely the pressure to be commercial has intensified and with it the pressure not to test the tolerance of audiences to an extent where the product becomes “uncommercial”, a term now as pejorative as for instance “anti-social” or “reactionary” had been under the old system. At the start of the nineties the “reactionary realism” (NSK 1991, 48) of the pop market and pop culture was already the norm for Slovenia and the old power structures were evaporating. Laibach was clear about the difficulties of the post-socialist situation and the role which pop culture played in the generation of pro-system sentiment:

“In socialism the abyss between subject and superstructure was large enough to produce skepticism; in capitalism there is no abyss between the subject and the superstructure, because superstructure and subject are brutally melted together. The superstructure carefully creates sentiments to disguise this brutality. Sentimentality in the victory of Kapital therefore acts as a superstructure covering brutality and eliminates the abyss between subject and itself.” (Laibach 1996a)

1992's fifteen-track album “Kapital” was released in the aftermath of the political upheavals that had taken place in Eastern Europe since the release of Laibach's last “new” material since 1988³⁷ It wrong footed many by the lack of explicit political references to the recent changes (Irwin's “Kapital” exhibition and catalogue of the previous year had been much more obviously political in the works' valedictory use of socialist iconographies). Kapital's themes are diverse, multiple and oblique, taking in economics, astrophysics and even hip-hop. The obscurity of the work was accentuated by the fact that the sleeve contained only fragments of the lyrics as well as destabilizing phrases apparently unconnected with the tracks.³⁸ Each album format (CD, tape, vinyl) contains a different sequence and alternate mixes of the tracks, heightening the sense of a multilayered, non-

³⁷ The “Macbeth” album was available at the start of 1990 but contained material dating from 1987.

³⁸ The track “Illumination” is accompanied by the following passage in the booklet: “Pour blood into the pot Boil it dry Follow it with rabbit's testicles and pigeon liver to produce aphrodisiac.”

linear “text” in which the paradoxical aspects of Laibach are allowed to predominate over the militant and absolute. The sounds were still monumental but structured by far greater sonic complexity and ambiguity than previously and there seemed to be a need to conceal and sublimate impressions and moods that had previously been predominant. The most “topical” of its tracks was the single “Wirtschaft Ist Tot” (The Economy Is Dead) which suggested that Western economic concepts might already be failing in the East and anticipated the European recession of the nineties. The track recapitulates and archaicizes the Germanic model of economic progress, combining a sample of a German financial report and mentions of Nomura Securities with forties-style string samples and rigid, inflexible beat patterns. The “retro-kitsch” aspect of the work is exemplified by the accompanying video, which presents Laibach as silver-faced, android-like pilots of a “Flash Gordon” type vessel (video clip ten). The economic subtexts of the album were only fully developed in the interviews of the period:

“The East collapsed because it blindly believed Western utopian ideas of the freedom of the individual. The West, on the other hand, survived because through its corporate logic it discreetly introduces a system of unconscious, collective non-freedom. The collapse of communism no longer means a permanent triumph of classical capitalism. In its core, capitalism has a tendency towards self-destruction. The fundamental self-destructive substance of capitalism, and its driving force, is greed. It is a characteristic of greed that it only appeases its hunger when it destroys itself.” (Benson 1995b)

This statement was later performed in Ljubljana Stadium (site of wartime collaborationist rallies) for the film “Predictions of Fire” (video clip 11). The way in which “Kapital” was promoted left no doubt that it represented a redoubling of the assault on Western cultural hegemony but this was more apparent in the album’s general sound than explicit lyrical stances. The track “Illumination” was based around a sample of an American commentator discussing the Great Depression, which brought:

“... inflation, famine and chaos to every corner of the globe, some label it the great depression, others are naming it nemesis” (Laibach 1992c)

This is set against throbbing electronic basslines and menacing strings, which like the rest of the album seem to evoke the chaos and disorientation of both the early nineties and the depression-wracked thirties. The album’s opener, “Decade Null” (CD track 15) combines another sound of the thirties, the distorted drone of a propeller aircraft, followed by clipped electronic pulses, militant string samples and incongruous percussive interludes. Kapital’s instrumental tracks suggest a kind of informational overload within which contemporary elements battle fragments of far older musical forms. The arrangements recapitulate the de-centred chaos of post-modern culture and attempt to

transcend it by rematerializing fixed forms from the stylistic chaos of late-capitalism (to which Laibach itself has contributed). In contrast to the linear techno of the period even the technoid elements on the album are qualified by strange time signatures and disconcerting samples. “Young Europa” sounds simultaneously archaic and futuristic because of a grinding mechanoid rhythm audibly different to contemporary (Western) sounds and the strange insertion of classical piano samples. Each track transgresses the norms of contemporary music and as a result, listeners’ expectations. In this respect Laibach’s work acknowledges Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the predictability of “light” (popular) music (Adorno & Horkheimer 1993, 3) privileging complexity and unpredictability, even in relation to its own stylistic norms. Tempos halt and even reverse upon themselves and moods are jarringly dispelled by incongruous, un-Laibach like, elements that problematize the reception of the songs even for an audience familiar with the group’s work. However rather than simple obscurantism or irony such transgressions also constituted a new and specifically Slovene sound whose very inconsistencies simultaneously identify it and problematise its simulation.

Three of the vocal tracks (“Entartete Welt”, “Hunter’s Funeral Procession” and “Sponsored by Mars”) are particularly anthemic, recalling the spirit of earlier work but disrupted by genre collisions that constitute a distinct (Eastern) sonic form. The German songs in particular are almost incomprehensible even for native speakers, and are a type of linguistic bricolage that serve to recapitulate and toy with the fan (and the researcher’s) need to decipher lyrics. “The Hunter’s Funeral Procession” includes Latin phrases and asyntactical segments of an unknown archaic form of German that tantalize an audience into speculation about the “secret” meaning, or agalma they must contain (CD track 16). The listener’s belief that there must be some inherent meaning in the lyrics and that at least some purpose will become apparent is manipulated and enflamed. However the examples discussed here suggest that if there is some defining logic to “Kapital” it is uneven and fragmented and the “inconsistent mixture” of the sounds represents the first time that Laibach’s music becomes totally structured by the paradoxes and contradictions constitutive of its discourse, which themselves form a type of private pseudo-logic. “Entartete Welt” (The Discovery of The North Pole)’s (video clip twelve) lyrics echo the dissolution or complexification of previously fixed meta-narratives (including Laibach’s) accompanying the end of the Cold War while the melody creates a mood of implicit nostalgia for less complex times:

“World, without dreams, without lust, without words, all is money. Death, lust is dead, death is dead, sorrow, dead, God is dead... God is dead; lust-lust is dead, and sorrow is dead; everything is dead... Where is a space, a sacred space, where my vows will not be disturbed? Where is a home, a national place, Where our sighs

will not be heard?³⁹ Where is my space? my holiness? Where my prayers disturb none? Where is my place? my holy place? Where noone hears our German?... That faith of yours in mighty God, Golden age you've gone away, Now we face the judgement day, Golden age for you we mourn, Age of gold, the golden door... Now we face the judgement day."⁴⁰

"The Hunter's Funeral Procession" suggests proto-Germanic pagan rituals through lyrics referring to "11000 dancing maidens" and Latin incantations offset by seventies-style funk percussion combined with hunting horns and filmic strings. Laibach here transgressed their own sonic archetypes as well as continuing their deconstruction of Western rock norms and anticipated the chaotic genre fusions and schisms affecting electronic music in the nineties. In 1992 such experiments were stylistically transgressive in themselves but all the more so for being the work of Slavic artists concerned to produce an autonomous sound that directly challenged Western preconceptions about the East's inevitable and wholly passive embrace of pop culture. "Kapital" encodes the accelerated post-cold war collisions of Western pop culture and archaic folk survivals. The "ethnic" elements act as signifiers of local authenticity and flavour so that "Volkischness" becomes the music's "unique selling point" in the globalized cultural market. Rather than making explicit the East/West cultural dialectic of their work, on "Kapital" these issues are worked out in a series of unique musical hybrids. Hip-hop, jazz and rock elements are assimilated into an esoteric contemporary neoarchaicist form that encodes the boundariless consumer-driven chaos of post-cold war globalization. The closing "Regime of Coincidence State of Gravity" is based on extensive samples from "THX 1138", George Lucas' dystopian science-fiction film from 1973 in which a character played by Donald Pleasance speaks of the need for a new unity in the face of the oppressive state machinery. These coexist with hip-hop sounds, operatic vocals and the omnipresent string samples, creating a highly ambiguous close to the album that constantly provokes further questions rather than providing an easy, satisfying closure.⁴¹

³⁹ Translation from sleeve of "Kapital" (1992c)

⁴⁰ Translation of German lyrics by Winifred Griffin.

⁴¹ The vinyl version concludes with a Euro-pop style song by the occasional Laibach sub-group Germania .

5.14 NATO: Pop-Militarism

One of the key themes running through all of Laibach's best-known work is an East-West dialectic in musical form. The press release for the NATO album in 1994 alluded to this when it described it as "... the seventh in a sequence of official Laibach LP releases that have artistically redefined the political map of Europe." (Laibach 1994a)"

In contrast to "Kapital", "NATO" was an infinitely more straightforward product, directly expressive of the East-West theme in Laibach's work. The weightiness of the political theme was offset by the melodic, accessible style of the most of the tracks. NATO's music was straightforwardly generic and the disorientation was once again centred on the lyrics and the contexts of their redeployment. All its songs have a loosely military theme and deal (sometimes contrary to the original artists' intentions, with issues of war, cultural colonization and fears of the future. The most audacious aspect of the album was not musical but the appropriation of the imagery and symbolism of the world's most powerful military alliance. The NATO insignia became an element of Laibach iconography appearing on stage sets, merchandise and videos seen across Eastern and Western Europe. This effect was anticipated in the "NATO" press release (Laibach 1994a), which stated: "Now Laibach take NATO where NATO itself has refused to go", a reference to the way in which Laibach would bring NATO symbolism both to areas where NATO was considering wider intervention (the Balkans) and where it was already regarded with suspicion as a potentially hegemonic force (Russia and Serbia). Laibach recapitulate NATO as an ideological regime and link the structure of capitalist power relations the Western alliance symbolizes to pop culture as the soundtrack to this reality. The para-militarism of Laibach's performance is the "noise" that NATO in its guise as a defensive institution seeking to "embrace" the states of Central and Eastern Europe sought to keep silent in order to assuage the fears felt it arouses, particularly in Russia. In 1994 Laibach presented a more militaristic image than NATO itself but suggested by means of this "parasitic attachment" that NATO actually harboured hegemonic ambitions to impose the Western system across the Balkans and beyond, a prediction that some will see as having been vindicated by NATO's recent military campaign which was triggered by Yugoslavia's refusal to accede to the terms of an agreement that amounted to a de facto NATO occupation of Yugoslavia itself.⁴²

The first single, a reworking of Swedish group Europe's hit "Final Countdown" gained heavy

⁴² For an account that reads Laibach's recent works ("NATO" and "Jesus Christ Superstars") in the light of NATO's recent campaign see the webpage "The Art of East and West Laibach, NATO and Yugoslavia" (1999). NATO insignia first arrived in Sarajevo not with the IFOR troops but with Laibach, just as the Dayton

Slovene airplay and the computer-animated video was both MTV-friendly and a dynamic expression of NSK state symbolism (video clip thirteen). The best-known pieces on the album were Edwin Starr's "War" (video clip fourteen) and Bollard & Bollard's "In The Army Now", previously covered by Status Quo. "War" had been reworked as an eighties protest song by Frankie Goes To Hollywood but Laibach's arrangement is based around strict tempos and a choral arrangement. In response to the opening question "War - what is it good for?" Laibach substitute their own answer with the recitation of the names of major corporations such as IBM that are associated with the military-industrial complex. Sony and CNN are also referred to, including multinational and media corporations in what Laibach imply is now a military-industrial-*entertainment* complex. The song presents the spectre of a contemporary reality in which there is no distance between pop culture, capitalism and militarism (video clip 14). Despite the jocularly of the arrangement Laibach's version of JD Loudermilk's "National Reservation" (CD track 17) is the most poignant of the pieces here. Originally about the dispossession and forcible civilizing of the native Americans, Laibach's version also refers to the patronized, economically subordinated populations of post-socialist Europe; "the whole Eastern nation", that as Laibach warned on "Kapital" is now subject to intensive globalization:

"They took the whole Eastern nation, put us in their reservation, took away our ways of life... Took away our native tongue, taught their English to our young... all the things we made by hand, are nowadays made in Japan" (Laibach 1994c)

The original song "In The Year 2525" prophesied an increasingly technological future and speculated on whether humanity would survive until that date. Laibach's version is still more dystopic and prophesies a future of continual devastating war. The tempo is slow and mournful and as elsewhere on the album a prominent role is played by the choral elements, which together with the quiet fade of the track have the air of a lament. The album closes with "Mars On The Drina" a punning rework of the Serbian nationalist tune, "Marš na Drini" (March On The River Drina) (CD track 18). The martial drums of the main section offset the melancholy introduction but the principal significance of the song (apart from its role as a Balkan signifier on "NATO") lies in the fact of its performance. The piece has now been performed in five of the ex-Yugoslav capitals. (Skopje May 1995 Zagreb June 1995, Ljubljana October 1995, Sarajevo November 1995 and Belgrade November 1997). Despite the traumatic associations the song had for non-Serbs even before the war none of these audiences seem to have questioned Laibach's performance of it, perhaps because the key phrase "Mars" (War) on The Drina effectively unmasks the still active para-militarism attached to such "national" songs in Serbia and elsewhere, just as the album as a

whole addresses the casual manner with which pop culture addresses themes of war through songs such as “In The Army Now” which enjoyed renewed popularity in 1991 with the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia.

5.15 Recapitulation

“Laibach is not the consequence of some kind of intellectual process. It is a fact of that same mechanism (*immanent, consistent spirit*), which forces it to create and to live as it lives; it is a state-action where intuition, as a magical act in the rhythm of people and things, decides the direction, without offering or looking for explanations.” (NSK 1991, 50)

Although the NATO project’s significance lies far more in its theoretical-political symbolism than in its music it still refers to the state-music interface that has run throughout their work. Ever since the earliest versions of “Država” in 1982, statist motifs have been a latent presence throughout their work either latently or explicitly. This connects Država’s concern to “... raise standards of national health, national working and defence capacity” with Laibach’s condemnation-recapitulation of rock and the assimilation of NATO into their Gesamtkunstwerk. The state has made an appearance in Laibach’s work as motif or institution (NATO) at points where the state is either apparently absent (as guiding monolith in eighties Yugoslavia) or unexpectedly present (in the rock industry’s role as “ideological state apparatus” of Western market-states). Laibach’s strict, martial rhythms and hierarchical, rally-like performances are also encodings of state processes of mobilisation and control. This is the same link between musical and political forms of power alluded to in the Laibach statement “Music is the law of the Institution.” (1996c). Similarly, in his introduction to Attali’s “Noise” (1996) Jameson reads Adorno’s characterization of Schoenberg as having:

“... replicated the dynamic of a repressive, bureaucratic and technocratic social order so completely as to offer something like an aesthetic portrait or mirror image of it.” (p. xi)

Through the recapitulation and aestheticisation of a state paradigm Laibach and NSK drew attention to the repressiveness of political regimes in both parts of “Occupied Europe”. At home Laibach suggested that its apocalyptic, totalitarian sound was a far more accurate depiction of Yugoslav reality than most imagined. Whilst formally the state as totalitarian archetype was less apparent in the self-management system than in the Warsaw Pact states Laibach drew out (the sound of) its latent repressiveness and its persistent ideological relatedness to Stalinist terror. Yet as the populist reaction to their name and to the alternative in general showed Laibach also threw light on examples of repressive, even totalitarian mentalities operative in the wider population. Laibach also

assumed the traditional state function of cultural defence in relation to the force of Western popular culture and its para-state role of ideological conditioning. Laibach's totalitarian discourse and visual signifiers were exploited as guarantors of a certain "Eastern", totalitarian authenticity and actually helped serve as a "unique selling point" in the Western market.

The success or otherwise of Laibach's *musical* confrontations with the ruling ideology in eighties Slovenia is hard to separate from the group's overall impact. Nevertheless it can be said that music (as a violently disruptive intervention in mass culture) is the basis of the scale of Laibach's political and cultural impact. At the least Laibach's early works stand as powerful examples of the role of popular music as a documentation of the systems under which it is created. Paradoxically the use of Slovene and German national symbolism in Laibach's music was one of the key aspects of Laibach's appeal in the West, offering the novelty of a distinctive national form within popular music. Writing of the difficulties surrounding the construction and identification of a specific New Zealand approach to popular music, Shuker (1994, 68) argues that the perception of a music as "local" (i.e. more than simply a simulation of the Anglo-American rock and pop norms) is dependent on three factors. These are an immediate local association through the band's name and the content of the lyrics, the presence of a local accent audible in the vocal delivery of a song or the presence of local elements in the "general style or idiom" of the song. All these factors mark out Laibach's "Sloveneness" and along with Kraftwerk Laibach (and subsequently their German imitators Rammstein) have been one of the most successful non Anglo-Saxon groups. Much to the resentment of some younger musicians the foreign perception of a "Slovene sound" in popular music is indelibly associated with Laibach and its work. The fact that Laibach was already achieving success in 1985-6 at a time when many of the lyrics were still in Slovene suggests that rather than being an impediment, a strong "local" or "national" can create a sense of fascination in the global market. Laibach may prove to have been "the exception that proves the rule"⁴³ but have certainly established the international credibility of the notion of Slovene popular music and to this extent have undermined what smaller cultures and nations experience as the hegemony of Anglo-American music.

Laibach's paradoxical place within the popular music industry (once characterized as "in the belly of a Trojan horse" – see Damjanić 1987) makes its assumption of a judgmental approach to the form problematic. On the other hand Laibach has successfully infiltrated a sustained critique into

⁴³ The only Slovene artists currently achieving much Western success are instrumental techno performers such as Random Logic and DJ Umek and there are no signs of any act attempting to export music based on the Slovene language.

otherwise unreflective institutions such as MTV and the pop media. Laibach's work has "rendered audible" a series of regimes by means of and within music and, following in the wake of Attali's theoretical work, exposed the continuities between music and power relations, at least temporarily re-politicizing music and identifying it a site of hegemonic social and ideological power. Laibach's paradoxical status within the industry informs the group's work yet the group also faces the constant danger of becoming a part of the "regime" it originally sought to infiltrate, economically bound to the traditional rock mode of touring and promotion.

If the group has succeeded in creating and transmitting an identifiably national sound and has transcended the obstacles facing it, has it similarly managed to create work of lasting aesthetic value? Laibach improvised sampling techniques before the creation of digital sampling technology and whilst their work was preceded by the cut-up techniques of Cabaret Voltaire, Laibach's use of soundtracks, classical music, political speeches and other elements took the technique to a new level of complexity on recordings such as "Baptism" (see Barber-Keršovan 1993). Whilst Laibach's transgressive approach to stylistic and genre conventions may not have had any lasting influence, the type of incursions audible on "Kapital" anticipated the increasingly marked collapse of rigid borders between genres seen in the late nineties. The extent of Laibach's success (in the independent music sector) has also re-configured the notion of the popular, proving through sales that there is a market even for extreme and complex musics that challenge and manipulate mainstream tastes. I have argued that the work of Laibach represents an attempt to transcend a series of regimes and one measure of the success of this transcendence is the aesthetic. The fear and antagonism provoked by the group suggests that it has at least successfully presented the spectres of a series of regimes (Laibach have *sounded* as well as looked totalitarian). The question is whether Laibach has gone beyond the mere documentation of these regimes, or whether its music has reached an "escape velocity" that enables it to transcend the limitations of its problematic source material. Whether an aesthetic value can be discerned in the music depends on whether the aesthetics of force and noise in music first conceptualized by the Italian futurists are accepted. The concepts of the futurists are seen as compromised due to their glorification of war and the collaboration of some of its leading figures with fascism. However as Hewitt (1992, 39) argues it is now possible to differentiate between artistic practices considered reactionary and the political attitudes of the artists involved. Therefore the use of reactionary material cannot form the basis of a dismissal of all artistic worth in the project. It is worth noting that the vast majority of ideologically fascist bands do not play industrial or electronic musics but variants of the guitar based "Oi!" style or Germanic/Nordic acoustic folk. Actual (rather than spectral) musical fascism is in practice

suspicious of, if not hostile to, avant-garde approaches to music or culture generally.⁴⁴ Fascists do attend Laibach concerts but have to tolerate Laibach's paradoxical recapitulation of fascist imagery and its juxtaposition with communist and other formally antithetical symbols and Ramet (1991, 230) has argued that Laibach's music is best seen as "... a sublimated form of "pop fascism" enabling aggressive instincts to be channeled innocently". Laibach's music makes available the illusion of a mode of heroic transcendent experience that remains generally absent or forbidden. Whilst this carries the dangers of any exorcistic/therapeutic intervention it does not manifest forces that would not otherwise be present in music or society. The sounds bring into audibility the hegemonic potentials latent within all systems if they are not openly dealt with. What begins as alienating noise can be re-contextualised through novelty or repetition as of positive value and the fact that the sounds of alienation can be "enjoyed" is itself disturbing to some and certainly questions existing evaluative categories within music as Punk did previously. Shock tactics necessarily carry with them the "danger" of an audience fetishizing the brutality but this is outweighed by the counter-systemic value of rendering audible "regime-noise". Whilst it may be objected that Laibach itself functions as a regime that brutally subordinates its audience, the group's work is only an amplified recapitulation of the more insidious (but not less brutal) way in which listeners are interpellated into the dominant pop-capitalist ideology. A positive aesthetic recuperation of this process by the listener is transcendent in as much as it represents a recovery of value in contemporary or historical conflict and distress. The "beauty" of Laibach's early (1980-6) music might be read as a dystopian sublime produced by attempts to transcend industrial, ideological, national and historical trauma. Ultimately Laibach's success in transcending or at least temporarily evading the regimes it confronts in its music can be measured by the extent to which Laibach remain musically and politically ambiguous. Ambiguity is often codified by the media as "danger" and when the group no longer appears ambiguous it will have lost the transcendent menacing otherness that accounts for a large proportion of its impact on the regimes it interrogates.

⁴⁴ Laibach's 1994 Dresden concert was protected by riot police against possible attacks by local fascists (see Birringer 1996). Laibach has been threatened by both right and left wing German groups.

6) Država: Culture As A State.

(See video clip five)



Laibach: Become A Citizen Poster, 1994.

6.1: The State is Taking Care.

“The State is taking care of the protection, cultivation and exploitation of the forests. The State is taking care of the physical education of the nation, especially the youth, with the aim of improving the nation’s health and national, working and defensive capability. It’s treatment is becoming more and more indulgent, all freedom is tolerated. Our authority is that of the people.” Laibach: “Država.” (see video clip 7).”

Whether in the form of rhetoric, statements, samples of Tito, references to heavy industry and propaganda or in the form of the NSK state and Laibach’s spectral double of the NATO state-machine the state is one of the dominant paradigms of NSK works. Whether used literally or as a more abstract signifier of centralized power the state provided the conceptual-aesthetic means and material for Laibach’s interaction with the cultural and political and cultural regimes of East and West. This paradigm made it natural for Laibach to be retro-designated as the “state generator” (see Irwin 1996 and illustration below) of the NSK State In Time, a utopian form of identification with the potential to unite individuals from diverse nationalities including into a new conceptual structure. Much of NSK’s material is based on a reprocessing of the traumatic and transcendent (utopian) qualities attached to the notion of 20th Century industrial state. The “State In Time” is an attempt to deal with the surplus produced by NSK’s repeated reprocessing of the signifiers and ideals of the state and to maintain its ambiguity in relation to

actual states and systems.

Writing in 1992 Eda Čufer and Irwin describe the foundation of NSK retroactively claiming that:

“The aim of the association was the constitution of a transnational paradigmatic state, in which Laibach represented the ideological, the theater (sic) the religious and Irwin the cultural and historical impulse. The element shared by all three groups is the scientific factor, a tendency towards a formative, not only verbal, but also physical analysis of concepts on the basis of which states had been constituted or dismantled throughout history. The 1980s were a period when the NSK body was formed, through a selection of concepts and symbols, relationships and structures. The body of the NSK State was built when an equilibrium was established between the syntax of images, musical and theatrical texts in relation to their media with the syntax of the NSK body in relation to the social, historical and state context.” (Irwin/Čufer 1994)

In this reading the formal establishment of the NSK “State In Time” is the necessary outcome of NSK activity, planned from the outset. Whether this was the case or not the state was formalized in the aftermath of the break up of Yugoslavia (1992) and has primarily been read as a response to such. However as this passage suggests the state was the outcome of a body of work that was in turn the result of the conditions of its production. Examining these provides a means of recapitulating some of the key themes and results of NSK work and some of the possibilities that they have opened up.

One of the key productive forces generating NSK projects has been the collective confidence or “esprit de corps” that has enabled them to take on projects as large as the creation of a virtual state. Discussing the totalitarian will to ignore or distort scientific fact in favour of ideology Gottlieb (1992, 55) speaks of “... the outrageous confidence that the iron logic of ideology transcends the laws of physical reality.” The concept of a retroactively constructed, a-territorial, non-hegemonic state formation appears at one level to exemplify such arrogance. Since NSK’s totalitarian performance gives the organisation the confidence to act in such a way there is no reason not to develop NSK statism to its (il)logical conclusion. The project might seem wilfully to ignore the laws of politics in positing a state without permanent territory. However it is also an expression of certain political realities felt particularly acutely in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. It is a development of the statist aesthetics extant in NSK work since Laibach’s “Država” (1985). NSK members and associates now travel on self-produced diplomatic passports yet long before the first embassy and consulate events they had appropriated the demeanour of international statesmanship. This was present above all in the use of formal speeches as at Irwin and the Philosophy Department’s 1988 action in Graz, Austria⁴⁵ and Laibach’s self-identification as “politicians”⁴⁶. The mode in which

⁴⁵ This took place on the fiftieth anniversary of the Anschluss. See chronology and NSK 1991, 50.

NSK carried out its propaganda activities and the structure of the “organigram” all invoke the totalitarian state. Whilst the appropriation and construction of state apparatuses might appear hubristic or arrogant it represents a transgressive, violatory disruption of political norms. At one level to locate embassies in private apartments (as in the NSK Embassy Moscow Project in 1992) is such a transgression. However, it should also be remembered that many new states are forced to conduct their diplomacy from just such premises due to lack of funds. Irwin took this process to its extreme with the NSK Consulate at Umag, Croatia in 1994. This was located in the kitchen of a gallery owner’s home, a location that Gržinić argues is by its nature “scandalous”:

“When the NSK Consulate Umag project was realized, I wrote that IRWIN in their photographs reach into the very core of historic memory, not only the most significant but also the most legitimate means of discussing history and its phantasms, particularly when placed on the East-East axis. On the other hand, those photographs are definitely scandalous, since a private apartment (and of course, the kitchen) should not be part of the hierarchy of cultural space, let alone located in its centre.” (Gržinić 1994)

Besides the “scandal” of an artistic event in a kitchen there is also the disorderly representation of a high state office on domestic premises. Such an informal relocation helps to balance what might otherwise seem an uncritical veneration of the notion of the state. Using such a location introduces a degree of levity into the project, problematizing any attempt to recapitulate the state project into a programme for political action and balancing its more grandiose manifestations. The location also exemplifies the fact that NSK state is not fixed to any particular location or conventional notions of what a “state” implies. The state rematerializes and de-materializes at will and its transitory manifestations are expressive of the fact that:

“NSK confers the status of a state not upon territory but upon the mind, whose borders are in a state of flux, in accordance with the movements and changes of its symbolic and physical collective body.” (Irwin/Čufer 1994)

6.2: Local Contexts.

Through observing in the course of the research the reactions still produced by NSK in Slovenia it has become clear that many see NSK as somehow almost physically removed or remote from its host society, particularly in the light of the creation of the NSK state (despite it being based in Ljubljana). Writing in 1932, Josip Vidmar, a subsequent founder of the wartime Slovene resistance, observed that whereas other nations had built themselves upon military prowess

⁴⁶ See the Laibach statement printed on the cover of the NSK monograph (1991): “Politics is the highest form of popular culture and we who create the contemporary European pop culture consider ourselves politicians.”

and dominance over others, Slovenes had been forced to apply these energies in the field of culture and that rather than a great state Slovenes had their culture (see Rupel 1992). According to this view of history, the establishment of Slovene political statehood in 1991 is the outcome of the processes of cultural construction Vidmar identifies. If Vidmar's view is correct, then Slovene statehood derives from the sum of past cultural activity far more than political action and traditions. Similarly the NSK State has been constructed from "... the syntax of images, musical and theatrical texts" (Irwin/Čufer 1994) that formed the NSK "Gesamtkunstwerk" which in turn formed the "body" of the new state. The establishment of the NSK state uses and comments on this process. NSK works carry the spectral presences of both the forces that have attempted to assimilate Slovene identity (Germanism) and the canonical works of Slovene cultural construction (Plečnik, Prešeren and others). NSK's "State In Time" is formed from the totality of its engagement with these and other forms and is the ultimate example of a state based on cultural construction. The Slovene base of the NSK state is simultaneously highly specific and highly universal, composed as it is of both local Slovene signifiers and transnational signifiers (totalitarianism, avant-garde art etc.).

The NSK state also refers to the historically alienated relationship of Slovenes to the various states within which they have lived. In Jančar's (1992) analysis of the causes of Slovene exile the state factor is central:

"The State never completely corresponded to a homeland or nation. It was always the state which deprived them of an open, intensive and free economic, political and intellectual life... the state they left behind had never been called Slovenia." (p. 99)

It was the alienation Slovenes seem to have experienced as a result of the discontinuity between state and nation that spurred the need to create imaginary spaces (of which the NSK state is the most dramatic example) and to bolster identity through cultural construction. The creation of an independent state in 1991 was to a significant facilitated by the self-confidence and momentum created by cultural construction, particularly after the Second World War when there were no longer open restrictions on Slovene culture as such. The new state is a pragmatic entity, based not primarily upon hegemonic romanticism but on what most Slovenes saw as the greater efficiency of an independent state and the perceived need to protect Slovene identity from Belgrade's centralism (the threatened imposition of an all-Yugoslav educational curriculum for instance). Yet at the cultural level it also closed off a certain utopian category, the dream of a state based on idealism and spirit rather than late capitalist pragmatism. At this point NSK faced the threat of a moment of nationalist closure in which NSK's difference and ambiguity would disappear in the context of

Slovene independence. In fact New Collectivism's ambiguous wartime posters (section 2.15) as well as more recent actions such as Laibach's 1997 concert with the Slovene philharmonic (see chronology) have all helped maintain a distance between NSK and mainstream Slovene opinion but the key differentiation device has been the NSK state. The appearance not just of the Slovene but all the new post-socialist states and the chaotic circumstances of their inception form the context of the NSK state. The entire mode of state power NSK interacted with vanished, or at the least mutated. Therefore NSK had to redefine its relations not just with the new state in Slovenia but also with the state as such. Not to have taken such a step might retroactively have implied (given NSK's assertion of Sloveneness) that the creation of the Slovene state was somehow the natural culmination of NSK's activities. The text "Concepts and Relations" (Irwin/Čufer 1994) warns that:

"The territorial borders of the NSK state can by no means be equated with the territorial borders of the actual state in which NSK originated."

Yet the Slovene factor continues to affect the development of the new state. The two new states set a new paradigm of inter-state relations in 1994 when Slovenia formally recognized the NSK State. Even to harbour and tolerate such an entity would be beyond the tolerance of many states. In recognising the NSK state the Slovene government (which includes many ZSMS veterans) sought to recast itself as a state prepared to write new rules and explore new possibilities while NSK receives symbolic recognition of its ambitions through the same device with which it seeks to maintain distance from the day to day political process in Slovenia.⁴⁷

NSK's decision to move from a simulation to a re-formation of the notion of the state recapitulates the totalitarian/nationalist audacity that drives the creation of almost unviable microstates. In conditions where the smallest groups enact their own states and counter-states (Republika Srpska and the secessionist micro-state in the Russian areas of Moldova) the peaceful creation of one more new state does not appear especially remarkable. NSK's response to the period of intense fragmentation and national differentiation that commenced in Yugoslavia in the late nineteen eighties was to re-establish the state as universal post-national category, a utopian framework that can transcend the conflicts caused by the desire for ethnically driven border demarcations. A review of Laibach's 1997 "homecoming" concert in Belgrade suggests the relevance of the post-territoriality of the NSK State to these local conflicts:

⁴⁷ The difficulty in placing NSK within the Slovene socio-political spectrum and their constantly evolving praxis all tend to support the reading of NSK as a category in itself, pursuing a course that brings it into conflict and co-operation with a variety of bodies but never "arriving," at any fixed social position.

"Borders must stay the same...borders must stay the same...borders must stay the same..." A hypnotic, looped mantra played in total blackout marked the closing of Laibach's last concert in Belgrade in the fall of 1989 - just before Yugoslavia fell apart. This prophetic finale contorted itself into a prologue, for two years later it was lights out in the Balkans. War inevitably followed the "Serbian struggle for new borders" and the feverish resistance to their change. Meanwhile, operating out of newly independent Slovenia, Laibach and NSK (the New Slovenian Kunst/arts organisation to which they are affiliated) proclaimed themselves the virtual state of NSK. As an extraterritorial entity, NSK still seems like the perfect solution to the Yugoslav problem." (Paunović 1998)

6.3 Culture As A State:

"The only truthful aesthetic vision of the State is the vision of an impossible state" (Baptism Sleeve notes – Laibach 1987c)



Irwin: A Model of The NSK State, 1996. (Author's Photograph.) The speaker cone visible at the base of the structure is labelled the "Laibach State Generator".

NSK has reactivated a series of hidden or repressed aesthetic and political codes in its work. The ambiguity and irony with which the reactivated images are surrounded make the use of the term “rehabilitation” problematic but it can be said that in the case of totalitarian art and Germanic imagery NSK have forced a re-assessment of certain signifiers that are generally viewed as having been compromised by the political forces with which they are associated. The notion of the state also makes a return in NSK work in the form of a “statist” aesthetic. The retroactive construction of the state is based upon the statist aesthetics initiated by Laibach who are ascribed the role of “State Generator” (Irwin 1996) within the contemporary NSK structure. NSK’s fusion of culture and state has found concrete expression in the insignia and paraphernalia of the State In Time. The passports, stamps and insignia of the state are the artefacts of this new aesthetic. Yet these items are in turn a repetition of various iconic NSK images, retroactively assimilated into the narrative of the new state so as to convey the impression that their development was the only logical outcome of a direct causal process rather than a more complex interaction of cause and effect. The presence of state symbolisms and artefacts in a cultural context also implicitly challenges official narratives about the tolerance of state authorities in relation to culture. Within Yugoslavia one of the key legitimating discourses used by the system was the fiction that state was absent from culture and was actively working for “de-statization” (Majstorović 1972). Artistic “provocations” such as the “Poster Scandal”, staged by NSK and other Yugoslav groups in the eighties repeatedly forced the state to risk violating its own rhetoric by revealing that it retained an active legislative presence in the cultural sphere. Since the transition to a market system in Slovenia the need to reveal the continued presence of the state in the cultural sphere has actually grown more acute. No capitalist state wishes to adopt a censorious public stance if it can avoid it yet the fiction of a free cultural market provides cover for the state (and now the market’s) continued repressive potential in this sphere. In the post-socialist context state cultural power is far less easily localisable but the authorities and the media are just as concerned to present an image of cultural tolerance as the ideologues of self-management were. During the “Kapital” period (1992-3) Laibach were particularly concerned to point out the dangers of market censorship and the continuance and even proliferation of repressive mechanisms in the post-socialist context (see section 5.13). NSK’s decision to carry out an explicit fusion of culture and state is a symbolic challenge to narratives seeking to deny the possibility of repression under capitalism and arguing that censorship is a purely Stalinist trait.

6.4 NSK Passports: State-Cultural Documents.

Responsibility for the use of NSK passports is placed upon the bearer, s/he may use them as actual travel documents or merely as an artefact, but the extent to which they resemble “real” passports serves as an incitement to use, especially for those who find their given statehoods problematic or inconvenient. The passports are manufactured according to international specifications and are described as documents “... of a subversive nature and unique value.” (NSK Information Bulletin 1 1994). At the symbolic level the passports can be read in several ways. They are the final codification of NSK’s state aesthetic and its appropriation of processes normally reserved to state authorities. They also represent a materialisation of the essence of all the NSK works that reprocess state motifs. They are both aesthetic artefacts and political documents and since the Slovene authorities tolerate and recognise the NSK state and its documents their “subversiveness” lies in the practical uses to which they might be put elsewhere. The most direct demonstration of their practical utility came during the “NSK Država Sarajevo” event in November 1995. The National Theatre in Sarajevo was declared NSK state territory for a two-day event combining two Laibach performances, an exhibition and speeches. Besides regular passports, a number of diplomatic passports were issued by NSK. These documents were subsequently used by several individuals to leave Sarajevo. The documents play on the proliferation of new states in Europe since 1989, a context that provides cover for the appearance of one more new state. The authentic appearance of the documents combined with their self-bestowed the “diplomatic” status proved a successful deterrent to questioning of the bearers by any officials unfamiliar with the new state.



NSK Diplomatic Passport.

“The NSK State denies in its fundamental acts the categories of (limited) territory, the principle of national borders, and advocates the law of transnationality” (p. 23, NSK Information Bulletin 1 1994)

The NSK mode of statehood is so appropriate to the Yugoslav context precisely because of its transcendence of ethnicities. Citizenship is elective and open to all who feel able to align with themselves with NSK and will not bring it into disrepute by their activities. The project might also be seen as representing an appropriation or abstraction of the utopian energies and aspirations surrounding communism and self-management. In extracting these energies from their problematic association with real regimes NSK preserve a utopian political space beyond politics and implicitly warn against the dangers of political utopianism whilst pointing to the absence of trans-national idealism within actual politics. Within the post-Yugoslav political context an emphasis on transnationality appears by its nature to be utopian and yet as Paunović suggests it also appears as a pragmatic response to the conflicts created by an emphasis on physical rather than spiritual territory. NSK’s holistic representation strategy suggests that both utopic and dystopic energies

persist and that if repressed they can return in catastrophic forms. The recuperative use of totalitarian art and imageries of state power also draws attention to the utopic energy of dystopian imageries in the abstract and the dystopic potential of utopianism in practice. The re-circulation of totalitarian aesthetics and utopian discourse carries obvious dangers but their suppression (a refusal to recognise their aesthetic value or place in national narratives) carries equal dangers. Therefore the NSK state strategy attempts to manage these energies by dramatising and breaking the link between political territorial regimes and conceptual utopias.

Totalization remains a mode inherent to most human process, even within post-modernity (the characteristic anti-totalism of which can itself become totalising). There is nothing inherently democratic in the concept of “The First Global State of The Universe” and a universal tyranny could be described in this way. Yet by claiming this role for itself NSK has symbolically pre-empted and coloured in advance the notion of a global state, pointing to the dystopian and utopian potentialities attached to such a notion. By monopolising the utopic potential of the state NSK attempt to insure against global utopianism taking the form of global hegemony. This effect is achieved through the retroactive manipulation of the imageries of would be global hegemonies (Nazism, Stalinism, Monetarist Capitalism). In this way NSK create an open paradigm of global statehood and attempt to occupy the paradoxical space of a “nontotalitarian totality” envisioned by Epstein (1995):

“Our entire postcommunist culture can become a laboratory in which all previous cultural forms and styles are rediscovered and intermingled into a new *nontotalitarian totality*.” (p. 292)

6.5 Re-formation Of The State.

“As far as art, according to definition, is subversive in relation to the existing establishment, any art which today wants to be up to the level of its assignment must be a state art in the service of a non-existent country.” (Žižek 1993a).

NSK overcome the fissure between culture and state, not via the totalitarian subordination of individual artists to the ideological demands of the state but via an “ideology” deriving from their voluntary assimilation into a new collective structure. Their response to the constant threat of hegemonic totalization (economic, ideological, ethnic or religious) is to design their own totality as a loose, nomadic structure clad in the guise of defeated and present totalities. The fact that the NSK project happens to have had such a positive outcome, is at one level irrelevant: the consistent application of “demasking and recapitulation”, “emphatic eclecticism” and the other methodologies

has its own momentum, independent of result. Yet in fact NSK's work reveals an inherently positive and not purely aesthetic value that can be salvaged from the disturbing spectres of totalitarian states. NSK return to visibility not just the most threatening but also the most utopian qualities attached to the notion of the state. NSK's "statehood" is based not on the repression but on the acceptance and productive integration of historical trauma. Such integration is generally beyond the individual but NSK offer the individual a facilitating symbolic framework based on totality re-manifested as a zone of possibility rather than closure. Within the state project the colossal power attached to the notion of the state is used by NSK not to atomise but to provide a conceptual weapon with which the individual might interrogate or frustrate external regimes and ideologies that structure their subjecthood.

"To recognize this contradiction between the individual voice and statehood, and to find an artistic vehicle to navigate within it, is a contemporary imperative especially while the apparatus of totalitarian states seems to be melting, yet the conditions on which these apparatuses are built still seethe around us. This contradiction is of primary concern in the work of all of *Neue Slowenische Kunst* and is central in the paintings of IRWIN. By finding an expression of what is most deeply personal and specific to their condition, IRWIN has created a work, which expresses the spirit of our time. Rather than evading or denying the safety and security that a political or artistic statehood can provide, IRWIN gives statehood a voice through its own collective activity, through which it defines and determines an individual invective which challenges that very totalitarianism." (Finley/Watten 1991)

In an era characterized by the Western, Fukuyaman "end of history" thesis on the one hand and the actual Eastern experience of "the rebirth of history" (Glenny 1990) on the other, new forms of totality have returned as a challenge to discourses based on the death of meta-narratives. On the one hand are the totalising fundamentalisms used to legitimise the aggressive demarcation of microstates. On the other is NSK's counter-totalitarian totality, which has emerged from the same Yugoslav/"Eastern" contexts in which the collapse of socialism was hailed as the final victory of liberalism. The cultural, spiritual and ideological totality of the NSK State recuperates certain utopianisms and illustrates the need for an alternative narrative paradigm that acknowledges the necessary role of the state and the value of approaches other than Western liberalism. In his essay "Es Gibt Keinen Staat in Europa" (There is no state in Europe) Žižek (1993a), argues that the state has traditionally been the *bete noire* of the left, seen as an "the original source of evil" and that both left and right-wing utopias were based on the abolition or subordination of the state. However, in Žižek's view the bloodshed in Bosnia can be linked to the absence of a "unified State authority elevated above ethnic disputes" and the absence of a state framework of some type leads to the dominance of violence. Žižek contrasts this situation with the post-territoriality of the NSK state, which is representative of a new development in the concepts of state and utopia:

“... today the concept of utopia has made an about-face turn - utopian energy is no longer directed towards a stateless community, but towards a state which would no longer be founded on an ethnic community and its territory, therefore simultaneously towards a state without territory, towards a purely artificial structure of principles and authority which will have severed the umbilical cords of ethnic origin, indigenesness and rootedness.”⁴⁸

In the same catalogue point six of Laibach’s “Ten Theses For The NSK Pavilion” (1993b) states:

“As long as nations and states will be disintegrating and reorganizing, as long as supra-national corporations will tailor the world’s art economy, as long as in ethnically high-strung regions instability and the threat of war will be erupting, we will be confronted with the need to find completely new (political and aesthetic) organizational forms in order to create a dynamic system of matrixes, that is to say “packaging”, in order to establish an ostensible “new world order” - a world in which the nation-state will have become a dangerous anachronism, and in which the idea of a dominant globalism is useless to regions with suppressed national identities due to its ideology of forcible universalism. The eruption of a new communication paradigm cannot come into being without the breaking up of old relationships, the breaking up of ossified systems and oscillations in the financial world. That which resembles chaos is actually the great transpositioning of centers of power in accordance with the demands of the new civilization. That is why in this transition NSK is founding its own corpus, its own modus vivendi, its own pavilion and its own state.”⁴⁹

That which resembles order, the NSK State, is actually a form constituted by harnessing political and creative chaos, a constructive cultural container for the volatilities of the present era. It is also a productive holding area for the oppressive associations of twentieth century utopianisms in which the pragmatic acknowledgement of state as structural necessity can be reconfigured as an emancipatory enabling act. From time to time the NSK state assumes concrete form, temporarily occupying space into which it is invited and then moving on. It needs no “repressive state apparatus” (Althusser 1971) to maintain order as the only territory it has to defend is conceptual. The “NSK State In Time” provides the aestheticized spectacle of a total institution providing a safeguard for constantly threatened modes of freedom, particularly the rights to ambiguity and non-alignment and the rights of individuals and cultures to exercise fully autonomous historical consciousness in the face of totalising narratives. The paradoxical nature of the freedom the state appears to offer in the form of non-territorial conceptual citizenship was pre-figured in one of the earliest and most dramatic Laibach statements which has the status of both threat and promise:

“Our freedom is the freedom of those who think alike” (NSK 1991, 46)

⁴⁸ Žižek, 1993, “Es Gibt Keinen Staat in Europa” (There is no state in Europe).

⁴⁹ The full title of this text, “Cari Amici Soldati, I Tempi Della Pace Sono Passati (Dear friends, soldiers, the time of peace is over) (Theses For The NSK Pavilion) refers to the early Laibach track “Cari Amici”.

6.6 The State of Things To Come:

The NSK State is structured both in order to enhance the security and resources of all the NSK groups and to provide an outlet that due to its abstract character is a relatively healthy recipient of latent impulses and attitudes that are not created by NSK but made manifest and then channelled by them. The notion of a state contains its own uncanny excess and Laibach in particular dramatises this super-rational quality:

“The state was created by *passion*. We celebrate its creation with a feast where the tables are weak-legged under the weight of *Fleisch* (meat). The *Fleisch* is the armour of reason. (NSK 1991, 60)

In linking passion and the state Laibach refers both to the violent emotions produced by identification with or mobilisation by the state and to the falseness of contemporary states' claims to be based primarily on pragmatic reason. Insisting on the irrational roots of state power in the context of either scientific socialism or monetarist market states challenges the “given-ness” of such formations' claims to be based on reason, pragmatism and law. The NSK state makes visible the emotions associated with the state and attempts to transcend their hegemonic potentials. The fact of a post-territorial state based on cultural activity appears less unprecedented in the light of Mure's discussion of Hegel's ideal of the “organic state”. Mure (1965, 59) argues that the notion was not based on any actual state but instead represented “... a sort of ideal work of art presenting the perfect pattern.” The legacy of this mode of imagining an ideal state, which heavily informed totalitarian movements is a situation in which notions of the state retain an aesthetic as well as political charge.

The logical culmination of NSK's manipulation of the emotions and energies associated with the state was the establishment of the State and the offering of NSK citizenship. Apparently many NSK passport holders have remarked that they feel happier with their voluntary status as citizen of a “state in time” than with their “given” national status which often entails recognition of the dominance of a particular ethnic group or ideology the citizen may feel excluded by. The reading of the state project as a healthy outlet for statist impulses toward identification and belonging that might otherwise be directed into nationalist or imperialist projects is not disputed by NSK members.⁵⁰ The preference for an abstract rather than a local citizenship evokes what Redhead

⁵⁰ Based on examination of letters received by NSK Information Centre and previously cited conversation with Peter Mlakar.

(1990, 87-88) has characterised as “the refusal of citizenship”. In discussing political apathy and disaffection in contemporary youth culture, Redhead observes that growing numbers of people are refusing to be “conscripted” into adult society or identification with the existing state authorities. A significant minority of youth find identification with (the worldviews of) their musical heroes easier and more natural than with their “own” national state, particularly if they come from minorities or other marginalized social groupings. It might be argued that a post war shift from overtly nationalistic to more passive civic patriotisms is not unconnected with the unprecedented extent of popular identification with the stars of the music industry, which has spawned the type of personality cults which retranslated into the political sphere could only be described as totalitarian. In the light of Laibach’s explicit politicization of the genre the distance between for instance, young North Koreans visiting Kim Il Sung’s tomb and swearing loyalty to his ideals and their Western counterparts (still) visiting the tomb of The Doors’ Jim Morrison and endlessly poring over his works is perhaps not as vast as might be imagined.

The ostensibly non (party) political identification provided by the star system has to be constantly bolstered by new generations of listeners since with time fans generally become audiences who find that unquestioning belief in musical idols becomes inadequate to their evolving needs or is grounded by such “betrayals” as sell outs and artistic compromises. The fact that many of the stars of classical music have middle aged fans no less besotted than their teenage counterparts suggests that such identification does not simply or automatically fade with age but that it tends to seek more “appropriate” or “mature” outlets. The “seriousness” of Laibach bridges this gap, apparently making available a “mature” mode of identification, which can appeal to a far broader audience spectrum, insuring itself against a limited “shelf life” by facilitating a type of appreciation characterized by depth and durability rather than disposability. Redhead’s analysis of the refusal of citizenship is echoed by Gržinić’s (1994a, 43) comments on the refusal of the Slovene alternative scene to accept the limitations of a dissident status and its determination to create self-sufficient structures for itself. To this extent the alternative institutions which supported Laibach and NSK in the eighties already anticipated the NSK state project. In both cases it is possible to observe a refusal to accept the physical or conceptual limitations of a particular state (socialist Yugoslavia and independent Slovenia) and its citizenship. The type of trans or a-national identification enabled by the NSK state reflects both an increased contemporary awareness of (though also a greater questioning of) (established) national identities and is a symptom of what could be termed a contemporary “interpellation crisis” whereby (young) people’s need for identification is actually frustrated by the established ideological and other (market) apparatuses designed to facilitate such.

Within the current context therefore, the State and not NSK can be seen as the real or actual appropriator or usurper of values such as “freedom”, “culture”, and “nation”. Specific national states are seen by those alienated from them as inherently threatening and although the NSK state is partly constructed from the imageries of such threats it manifests itself as a promise for those such as the citizens of wartime Sarajevo who are in some way trapped by their “given” citizenship. The state (a category currently under far more rigorous interrogation than the nation) has been appropriated by NSK and made into a non hegemonic, a-territorial, “universal” structure which implicitly undermines established structures and serves as a benign receptacle for identificatory drives which might otherwise go no further than teen euphoria succeeded by apathetic disillusion or be transferred onto regressive socio-political forces presenting themselves as panaceas for the problems caused by disillusionment with the social, racial or territorial status quo.⁵¹

6.7 Gravitation Zero: Can Art Escape Regime?

The state project therefore, like NSK’s work as a whole represents a utopian attempt to transcend alienation using the codes of the same alienation. The clearest parallel to this is the suppressed utopianism of the Russian avant-garde and to a lesser extent its largely unknown Slovene and Yugoslav counterparts. The approach of the Suprematists and especially the Constructivists was to attempt a spatial representation of abstract forces and (subsequently) to relate these to political utopianism. The designs of Tatlin for instance attempted to model an avant-garde political utopia within which art and politics fought for the same goals. The NSK Gesamtkunstwerk explicitly relates itself to avant-garde idealism, not just in its choice of motifs but in its textual self-representation:

“The NSK state in time is an abstract organism, a suprematist body, installed in a real social and political space as a sculpture comprising the concrete body warmth, spirit and work of its members.” (Irwin/Čufer 1994).

The emphasis on the suprematist heritage of the NSK state stresses the extent to which it attempts to transcend existing notions of statehood and cultural practice. Despite the eventual suppression of avant-garde transcendence by Stalinism, NSK argue that suprematism’s idealisation of the abstract

⁵¹ The NSK State has no territory either to defend or to claim, makes no demands upon its citizens beyond sympathy with its outlook and is fully self sufficient with no literal political objectives or requirements). Compared to other available outlets such as football teams, political parties or even rock bands (Laibach are uninterested in the type of personal exploitation the star system facilitates) the abstraction or displacement of the consequences of emotional identification the NSK structure provides appears in a favorable light.

can still play a role in contemporary culture. Suprematism (source of the Black Square motif so central to NSK imagery) forms an integral element of the holistic re-modelling of the state as an aesthetic, spiritual, and conceptual category. The dissonant creative energy that fuels NSK allows the state to be formed from the symbolisms of the forces that suppressed avant-gardism. This is the key point of difference between the NSK state and the classical nation-state which in order to constitute itself has either to suppress or ignore difference and is threatened by contradiction and dissonance. The co-existence of the dissonant artistic styles comprising the NSK state is a symbol of its universal aspiration: to retain difference and transcend the conflicts difference generates.

The state project, which is the outcome of all previous NSK work is a useful measure by which to measure the success or otherwise of NSK attempts to go beyond the limits of the ideological, political and symbolic systems with which they work. One major objection that suggests itself when assessing the success or otherwise of NSK attempts to transcend regimes is that the visual works in particular do no more than intensify or even fetishize the post-modern practice of repetition. It is true that repetition in itself carries the danger of reification or even glorification of the symbols it manipulates. However, NSK's work "goes beyond" (transcends) "mere" repetition because it combines the technique with juxtaposition and dissonance. This mode of repetition "makes strange" the subjects of repetition and often alienates them from their original creator's intentions or ideological stances. The tensions and contradictions generated by this approach make it problematic to attempt to characterise the political or aesthetic intentions of an NSK work on the basis of any one of its elements (state imagery, Nazi-Kunst, Pop Art, Yugoslav symbols etc.). The presence of irony and contradiction in the works and the difficulty in quantifying these qualities also serve as insurance against political recuperation or any "definitive" external interpretation. NSK's holistic representational strategy is by its nature incompatible with one-dimensionally partisan political art as it uses the contradictions of the original sources against the hegemonic potential of the regimes it engages with (the music industry, late capitalism, nationalism, and political pragmatism amongst others). So if NSK does to this extent transcend the limitations of its sources (particularly in the state project) how consistently does it manage to go beyond the limitations of its status as a cultural organisation?

It might be objected that NSK actions have primarily been successful at the symbolic level and that the interventions provide no more prospect of "escape" from the conditioning of contemporary economic and ideological structures than any other technique. However, such an objection is based

on a false distinction between symbolic and practical action. In a series of interventions dating back to Laibach's 1980 Trbovlje "Poster Action" through the 1983 TV interview to the 1987 Poster Scandal and the "NSK Država Sarajevo" project, NSK have demonstrated a praxis in which concrete political and social consequences flow from symbolic acts. It is the NSK state itself that has provided the most effective examples of this approach. In the first place, the institution of the state has managed as far as is possible to remove NSK from the limitations of too close an identification with the Slovene nation-state and the nation-state in general. The post-territoriality of the State in Time enables a mode of symbolic-practical escape from specific territorial jurisdiction.

The most effective example of this was the previously mentioned use of NSK diplomatic passports by besieged citizens of Sarajevo to escape the physical confinement and danger that their "given" political identity (Bosnian citizens unwilling to side with or submit to Serb or Croatian paramilitarism) kept them in. The device of art carried out in the guise of the state therefore managed (if only briefly) to open up a symbolic space in which it was possible for individuals to physically transcend the increasingly sophisticated control systems that regulate physical movement within Europe and the world generally. It is true that these are only utopian "moments" affecting a few individuals and that the regimes in question soon re-deploy themselves yet they are utopian precisely to the extent that they are momentary and routine as in the present conditions at least, practices that are institutionalised cannot by definition remain utopian. The arguments presented here are intended to show that these actions do have tangible effects beyond the sphere of culture but also that their symbolic and philosophical implications continue to proliferate after the event. NSK makes no attempt to marshal or to mobilise its citizens into a concrete force and the state does not represent a "movement" in any conventional sense. However when the implications of the self-bestowal of "diplomatic" status and the evasion of state control systems are considered they do show that NSK has made breaches in otherwise monolithic regimes and that its artistic praxis retains an active counter-systemic potential of type rarely found in contemporary culture. Discourses that seek to confine art to "its" sphere and argue against the possibility of an ideological art of the type NSK represents in effect argue for the suppression of such a potential.

The transcendent drive of the NSK project has found its most utopic resonance in the groups' use of space as an arena for the dissemination of the NSK meme. Laibach's 1994 "Final Countdown" (see video clip) is effectively an advert for the new state as well as for the NATO album. The slogan "Become A Citizen of The First Global State of The Universe" appears in several languages and a steady stream of passports passes through the interior of the vessel in which the Laibach

cyborg figures function. The desire to colonise new space is most apparent when the video arrives at its final destination, the “NSK Embassy Mars” (which is another repetition of Plečnik’s unbuilt Slovene Parliament). Like the other symbolic annexations carried out by NSK this gesture pre-empted the colonisation of a territory or sphere of activity by specific political forces. NSK as a culture-based state claim Mars for art rather than for the specific political and economic forces that might actually reach Mars and to this extent transcend the ideological compromises associated with specific national and corporate forces.

The work of The Cosmo-Kinetic Cabinet Noordung is marked by a repeated emphasis on the escape from gravity. The 1999 event “Gravitacija nič Noordung” (Gravitation Zero Noordung) was the most successful attempt to escape planetary gravity, being performed in simulated zero gravity above Russia aboard a training plane for cosmonauts. The same mechanism that informed Laibach’s symbolic appropriation of Mars in the “Final Countdown” video drives Dragan Živadinov’s “cosmo-kineticism”, namely, the desire to challenge the monopolisation of space by ideologically compromised political and economic formations.⁵² Noordung actions embody the concern of all NSK groups to escape the “gravitational” pull of the historical, political, artistic and economic regimes that structure their environment. Whilst in one respect highly technical, the designs of Herman Potočnik Noordung also have a mythical aura because of their historical obscurity. In attempting to rescue the historical figure from obscurity, the Noordung projects introduce an uncanny element to the sphere of space exploration (as NSK does to the notion of the state) and propose a ritualistic techno-sacral mode of inner as well as spatial exploration. The ritual elements of the performances attempt to preserve a sense of utopian idealism in relation to space of the type displayed in Noordung’s original work (“Das Problem Des Befahrung Des Weltraums”, 1929) and in the abstraction of the Russian avant-garde.

At the literal level, such works are of course wholly “escapist” and seem to suggest a literal flight from engagement with political realities. However, it can be argued that it is in its very abstraction that the work reveals the possibilities of a new mode of engagement. NSK share the belief of the Russian avant-garde in abstraction as a symbol of the possibility of re-coding

⁵² This concern also animates the work of the London-based Association of Autonomous Astronauts (AAA), which espouses a revolutionary desire for popular involvement in the exploration of space and refuses to recognise practical or ideological limitations upon their desires. Another parallel is apparent in the work of maverick British inventors intent on designing autonomous space-going rockets. All these initiatives attempt to bypass the domination of the space programme by the military-industrial complex and private corporations and to this extent are more pluralist than Noordung actions, which as Birringer (1996) argues are heavily centred

existing reality and frustrating its established methods of dominance. By asserting the rights of spirituality and idealism to a place in space exploration Noordung works respond to feelings of techno-alienation experienced by artists and non-scientists alike and imply that a purely scientific ideology that cannot acknowledge the importance of abstract values and ideals is distorted.⁵³ The Noordung works attempt to manage the persistent desire for transcendence while preserving a space in which this potential is not accessible to recuperation by political forces. To the extent that in the post-socialist context utopianism per se is seen as at best escapist, if not perverse, the works can also be read as a defence of the right to an “escapist” imagination. Within the work of NSK such escapism has been a key element in the construction of an interrogation machine that critiques and recapitulates reality and refuses to recognise the limitations imposed by all “actually existing” cultural, political and economic regimes.⁵⁴

6.8 Evaluation:

Due to the nature of the subject and the lack of precedent, the thesis is by its nature “experimental”. There is no model for an extended theoretical analysis of this subject or even for some of the genres it interacts with (industrial music). By its nature the project has spurred some cross-disciplinary interactions and the assembly of a body of literature that might not otherwise have been brought together and as a result has shown recent events in a new light. The project was motivated in large part by an awareness of the under-developed state of the field and the relatively small number of approaches to the subject in existence. Whilst this research is not necessarily a model for future approaches it is hoped that its findings as well as the gaps and contradictions that arise from its experimental status will help spur the development of new approaches both to NSK and the debates broached here. The forms these might take will probably be based as much on the options this research has had to exclude as on those it has included. Obviously, the representational strategy outlined cannot be comprehensive. It would be impossible within this format to cover all aspects of NSK equally and the possibilities of research oriented towards NSK activities not covered here are discussed in section 6.6a.

on one individual, Živadinov.

⁵³ It can also be argued that some producers of electronic music are making a similar attempt to demonstrate that values such as “soul” can play a positive role in the use of technology (see Eshun 1998).

⁵⁴ It is arguable that pragmatic acceptance of realities is more “escapist” because it implies repression of the knowledge of the economic and political contradictions that challenge the “given” nature of present systems.

The first problem addressed was the definition of NSK and its characteristics. A large amount of basic explanatory material about the nature of the phenomenon was essential and the phenomenon could not adequately be explained without detailed consideration of its works. Secondly, there is the issue of verification. Whilst extensive use of documentary material is made (particularly in chapter four) this in itself is insufficient. Many of the effects of the works derive directly from the highly specific references they contain and the best way to illustrate this and to explain the mechanisms involved is through detailed engagement with specific works. The representational strategy chosen has sought to manage the dissonances of the works and to reveal key mechanisms and effects across a range of media. This strategy has been based on the identification of many of the original works and artists “retroquoted” by NSK.⁵⁵ With this information it has been possible to re-view the works in a new light and to relate them to theoretical analyses of the originals and their genres (particularly totalitarian art). It has been possible to show the ideological and aesthetic mechanisms associated with the material and to contextualise the deployment of effects as specific *as tempo* and individual motifs within a specific NSK work. This approach has demonstrated the insufficiency of both purely aesthetic and purely political or historical analyses of the subject.

Only on the basis of a detailed knowledge of the works has it been possible to identify key motifs and paradigms that structure NSK’s work as a whole. Having identified and selected the most illustrative and persistent of these themes (the state, regime and transcendence) these paradigms were used to organise the material and the narrative. Based on this work it has been possible to account for the way in which NSK has responded to (and attempted to transcend) its environment. The synthesis of aesthetic analysis and historical-political contextualization attempted here illustrates NSK as a product of a specific historical, ideological, national and cultural context and the relation of this to other contexts. The examples discussed are not a comprehensive documentation of NSK work but are intended to illustrate the core processes that have created forms such as the NSK state. An attempt has been made to discuss not just the most obvious or frequently discussed works and topics and to avoid an agenda dictated purely by an account of the most sensational episodes (this is the reason for the emphasis on Laibach’s earlier works - whilst little discussed now they represent the Laibach “archetype” in a particularly clear form).

The thesis tries to resist hagiographic tendencies or the presentation of NSK’s development as a natural progression with no contradictory elements, and has highlighted the way in which NSK

⁵⁵ This information may well form the basis for subsequent readings that may reach different conclusions to the present research.

manipulate the inconsistencies of their work and the critiques it attracts. Similarly by exposing the gaps and ambivalences in the national identity as part of the discussion of NSK's effects, the research avoids an over flattering picture of Slovenia (see chapter three). NSK necessarily use heroic, militant forms to assert Slovene identity but paradoxically, what they present is the very fragmentation constitutive of Sloveneness and in this respect their work is as much mimetic as mythic. For a project of this scale that embraces previously un-addressed issues a certain motivational enthusiasm for the subject is necessary but an effort has been made to compensate for this and it is balanced by extensive theoretical and factual contextualization that does not brush over inconsistency or ambiguity. Rather than a heroic struggle for a pre-defined objective, NSK's actions are read through their effects as the result of pragmatic conceptual aesthetic responses to the conditions of their creation. Similarly the use of the term "transcendence" should not be over-read. Transcendence does not necessarily imply a mystical dimension that is unquestionably positive. Rather it refers to a surpassing or "going beyond" of the restrictions of a given regime or set of regimes.

The integrated strategy has facilitated a first in-depth analysis of some of the terminology and procedures used by NSK and of its discourse generally. Terms such as "demasking and recapitulation", "retrogradism" have been analysed and illustrated in practice. It has identified common factors, motifs and approaches shared by NSK groups and shown how a contemporary art collective functions. By addressing these issues and discussing the way in which NSK uses mystification it penetrates many of the self-created myths surrounding NSK but has still allowed for random, intuitive factors in the creative process and has not sought to remove all mystery or to sought to argue that the interpretations of the works are the only ones possible.

Based on the examples discussed NSK's work can be interpreted as a testing to destruction of the repressive contradictions of various regimes and their own creative praxis. We have seen concrete examples of the normal functioning of regimes being disrupted by confrontation with spectral distorted forms of their own codes and that is possible in this way to open up spaces that resist dominant ideologies by reprocessing the energy generated by their systemic contradictions. Finally by linking an extreme cultural phenomenon to concrete national, ideological and historical forces the thesis has demonstrated the role of "irrational" forces in an extreme political situation of the type seen in Yugoslavia since the death of Tito. It establishes the way in which aesthetic practice may (both predictively and retrospectively) map political events and is the most systematic model to date of NSK's relation to specific events and tendencies and positions NSK in the wider history of

its time. In this respect it strengthens the case for “holistic” readings that integrate cultural and other extra-political forces into historical narratives.

6.9) Scope For Future Research:

As a survey of the literature on NSK makes clear, studies of the field are still at a comparatively early stage and the complexity and scope of the works means that there is no shortage of potential avenues for research. The most useful new research on the subject is likely to take the form of further in-depth analyses of specific works and their effects. There is equal scope for research that treats NSK an example of wider phenomena but at this stage the priority would appear to be research centred on NSK in its own right. Some suggestions for what forms this might take are discussed below, along with suggestions for how to relate the subject to wider debates in a series of disciplines (musicology, media studies, aesthetics and discourse analysis amongst others).

6.9a) Individual NSK Groups

The thesis has attempted to maintain the integrity of NSK as a subject of research, and, whilst particularly focussed on Laibach as the originators of the phenomenon, has been structured in order to give at least an overview of the works of the other groups involved. However, one obvious scope for further research would be studies centred on the individual NSK groups. The works of Scipion Nasice/Red Pilot/Noordung for instance might be approached within the framework of theatrical history and performance theory. Study of Irwin’s works and methodology would open up debates on contemporary artistic practice and the status of art from Central and Eastern Europe. The texts produced by the Philosophy Department or by the other NSK groups individually or collectively would benefit from systematic discourse analysis and semiotic approaches might be applied to the question of how meaning is signified and obscured within NSK works. In particular, a comprehensive documentation and identification of the theoretical and ideological sources of the texts could be productive, as would an examination of the discursive and psychological mechanisms active within the texts.

Aesthetic research might focus heavily on the reception of NSK images, sounds and texts by the individual and relate the works and the reactions they produce to current theories on the concept of beauty in art. Whilst detailed discussion of the references within NSK works will reveal the extent of the references made, a more comprehensive cataloguing of the artists, musicians and theorists

whose work NSK use might also be of use in quantifying the extent to which NSK employ a Duchampian technique based on the use of “found” objects. The use of qualities such as irony and paradox and the relation of these to similar artistic practices could also form the basis of useful research. Further work based on the functioning of NSK as a whole could be important in developing a framework for the discussion and analysis of complex multi-media phenomena and the nature of the “Gesamtkunstwerk” in contemporary culture. More detailed aesthetic comparisons might also be made between the work of NSK group and regional artists who have explored similar territory or used similar methodologies (Raša Todosijević or Mladen Stilinović for instance). One issue deserving of further consideration is the question of whether it is possible to experience a primarily aesthetic enjoyment of such ideologically contentious and extreme works. In this respect a more explicit attempt to reassess the wider significance of the industrial genre and its shock tactics is certainly overdue (see section 6.9c).

6.9h) Media Content and Audience Analysis:

The present research represents the most comprehensive documentation to date of press material on NSK. However, it is heavily focussed on the Slovene material and it would be useful to assemble a comprehensive catalogue of for instance British or German material and to subject this material to formal media content analysis by territory. This would enable the development of media attitudes to the phenomenon in each territory to be traced and the impact of NSK in these different contexts to be compared. In this way the common (“transnational”) factors affecting the reception of NSK in “Eastern” and “Western” contexts could be identified. Research based purely on the media reception of NSK might reveal differences in the modes of reporting of controversial artistic phenomena in [post]-socialist and capitalist contexts. Such comparative approaches might also attempt to track the development and mutation of misinformation and rumours concerning NSK, both those initiated by NSK and those that developed as part of an attempt to make sense of the contradictions structuring the works and to relate these to existing (media) narratives.

Besides the media audience, studies of the general Laibach/NSK audience might also be of interest. At present the only material with which to work would be the letters and queries received by the NSK information service. Analysis of these would be instructive and comparison could be made by national origin of the correspondents or other factors. However more structured audience surveys (interviews or questionnaires) would help assess the ways in which Laibach and NSK are understood by those with no direct knowledge of the context of the works. Political and aesthetic

interpretations of the work could be assessed and might be linked to the political persuasions of the audience.

6.9c) Potential Approaches to Laibach:

In the case of Laibach established methods of “fan” research might be applied so as to draw comparisons between the Laibach audience and those of more conventional groups. Comparisons might also be made between the coverage of Laibach in the music media and that of other groups. Laibach’s work could certainly be integrated into a study of the development of the industrial genre and the stylistic conventions through which it represents social and political violence and power. Studies based on a direct comparison between Laibach and similar groups might illuminate common factors in the expression of what might be termed an “industrial sensibility” in music and art. Musicologically the creative strategies of Laibach (the early use of sampling, the use of “inappropriate” instrumentation) would certainly be productive areas of research even if in practice it is difficult to split off Laibach’s music from the rest of its work without damaging the integrity of the whole. Of more relevance to the still undeveloped field of Eastern and Central European Cultural Studies would be research that attempted to create an integrated account of alternative music and culture in the region and the ways in which such practices differ from their Western counterparts. Using theories such as Adorno’s (1993) work on fascistic mobilisation within music and popular culture a narrative might be constructed that could compare the type of mobilisation performed by Laibach with that of actual fascist movements. In this light a study might be made of the political associations of particular instrumentation and styles within popular music.

6.9d) Relating NSK to Other Themes and Disciplines:

As the first major work on the subject the thesis has inevitably had to take a multi-disciplinary approach in order to present an overview of the range of processes, techniques and references concerned. Now the subject has been provisionally “mapped” on an interdisciplinary basis there is scope for much more closely focussed studies. These will not necessarily focus on just one of the NSK groups but would examine the subject solely or primarily from the perspective of a particular discipline. The construction of a narrative integrating the work of Laibach and NSK into the wider history of Slovene and Yugoslav culture would be invaluable although such an approach would be likely to generate some opposition in Slovenia, as it would represent a final “normalisation” of the

groups' work. Finally, NSK's work should also be linked more extensively to analyses of contemporary Slovene identity and culture and to contemporary forms of the performance and assumption of ethnic identity in Central Europe and beyond.

Video Clips

Excerpts taken from Russian TV and “Laibach Bravo” are based on average quality original recordings and thus are not of the best quality but are still useful documentation.

1 Laibach live in Moscow, December 1994. Track “NATO”. Recording of Russian TV broadcast.

2 Collaborationist rally, Ljubljana 1944. Archive material taken from “Predictions of Fire”,

Dir. Benson, M. (1995a).

3 Laibach “TV Tednik” interview, June 1983. Taken from “Laibach Bravo”, Dir. Vezjak 1993.

4 Laibach “Geburt Einer Nation” live, Termoelektrarna I, Trbovlje, December 1990. Taken from

“Laibach Bravo”.

5 Irwin in Moscow, 1992. Taken from “Predictions of Fire” as above.

6 Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy Laibach concert speech, Belgrade 1989. Taken from

“Predictions of Fire”.

7 Laibach/Michael Clark, “Država”, September 1987. Taken from “Laibach Bravo”.

8 Laibach “Life is Life”, 1987. Daniel Landin/Mute Records.

9 Laibach “Sympathy For The Devil”/Slavoj Žižek interview. Taken from “Laibach Bravo” as

above.

10 Laibach “Wirtschaft Ist Tot” (The Economy Is Dead). Mute Records 1992.

11 Laibach, Ljubljana Stadium 1993. Taken from “Predictions of Fire”.

12 Laibach “Entartete Welt” (Degenerate World), Festivalna Dvorana, Ljubljana, 1992.

Taken from “Laibach Bravo”.

13 Laibach “Final Countdown”. Mute Records 1994.

14 Laibach “War”. Mute Records 1995.

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² As above.

Appendix: NSK/Yugoslav Media Chronology

Laibach concerts are listed by venue, eg: "7.2 Toronto" or, where known, with performance name.

1980

May:

4.5: Josip Broz Tito dies in Ljubljana clinical centre.

June:

1.6: Laibach founded in Trbovlje.



Laibach Exhibition Poster, 1980.

September:

26.9 Overnight poster action by Laibach in Trbovlje.

27.9 First Laibach exhibition and concert banned due to "illegal and irresponsible use of symbols"¹.

November:

20.11 "Black and White Shock in Trbovlje" (Xaver² 1980), an account of the recent controversy over Laibach appears in "Mladina".

December:

18.12 ZSMS Trbovlje responds to Xaver's article providing reasons for its opposition to the event and the poster action. (Predsedstvo OK ZSMS Trbovlje 1980).

¹ See Meglič (1995).

² Franc Xaver joined Laibach soon after the publication of the article.

1981:

February:

5.2 A summary of the Trbovlje controversy appears in "Mladina" (Strajn 1981).

March:

11.3 Unrest breaks out in Kosovo.

April:

Unrest escalates, martial law declared.

June:

14.6 "Austellung Laibach Kunst", first public exhibition of paintings, graphics and recorded music at Belgrade student cultural centre (ŠKC).

18.6 ŠKUC cancels its planned publication of a Punk fanzine in protest at the cuts demanded by the Ljubljana section of ZSMS.

November:

19.11 Radio Belgrade's Ljubljana correspondent reports on the discovery of a group of eighteen teenagers openly using Nazi symbols. Their leader is alleged to have travelled to a National Front gathering in London and to have returned with Nazi badges.

22.11 "Nedeljski Dnevnik" publishes "Kdo riše kljuskašte križe?" (Who draws swastikas?) (Šetinc 1981a) a key element in a media and police campaign against alleged Nazi and other anti-social tendencies amongst Slovene Punks. The article linked the case of three members of an alleged Nazi-punk group "Fourth Reich" charged under the "verbal offence" article of the penal code with that of some high school students who had mutilated a female colleague. It was illustrated by a picture of a youth in neo-nazi uniform taken from a British paper. The article initiated what became as the "Nazipunk affair" which featured prominently in the Slovene and Serbian media for the next month. It was characterised by sometimes-bitter polemic between the opponents and defenders of Punk. Although more complex than its opponents acknowledged Šetinc's article persistently asked "who is guilty?" for the alleged excesses of the group and the Punk scene generally. It implied links between [Punk] anarchy and both ultra-leftism and Nazism. The case of the two alleged members of Fourth Reich was dismissed for lack of evidence in 1984.³

26.11 "Mladina" publishes the first letter (Flegar 1981) to attack Šetinc's article. It questions how the author could have been sure that swastikas were actually drawn and if he had actually seen any? Šetinc is criticised for presenting police reports to readers as objective information and denies any

³ See Erjavec & Gržinić 1991, 60 and Tomc 1989, 131.

connection between Punk and Nazism, highlighting the anti-racist activities of the movement in Britain.

27.11 The Editorial Board and Party Section of RŠ issue an open letter “On Anti-Youth Chauvinism” (ZKS RS, Uredništva RS 1981). The article cites not just Šetinc’s article but other recent media commentaries as evidence of the trend. It states that the equation of Punk with Nazism is a means of gaining the public’s consent for the intervention of the security forces against Punk. It identifies a tendency amongst the older Slovene generation to denounce whatever is new in society, from Prešeren and Cankar through to Communism. The establishment of Punk as ideological bogeyman is presented as a tactic to divert attention from the actual problems facing youth and society. It also states support for the cultural plenum of ZSMS and its support for youth initiatives in all cultural forms.

29.11 “Nedeljski Dnevnik” publishes a reply to Šetinc’s article from Laibach manager, Punk promoter and RŠ presenter, Igor Vidmar (1981). Vidmar also attacks Šetinc for “sensationalism” and stresses the anti-fascist statements and activities of leading British Punk figures such as Johnny Rotten. Vidmar argues that anarchists continue to be amongst the principal victims of Fascism and Nazism and that there are no grounds for equating the two ideologies, particularly since there is no basis for the identification of those involved in the Fourth Reich case as Punks. It asks rhetorically where the borders between objective writing with integrity and superficial, sensational, prejudiced and agitational journalism lay.

December:

1.12 “Ilustrovana Politika” (Belgrade) publishes an account of the Fourth Reich controversy (Zeć 1981). Zeć summarises the Radio Belgrade report and Setinc’s article as well as a statement by Tomaž Ertl, Slovene Secretary of Internal Affairs. Ertl stresses that only two individuals are in investigative custody and that similar phenomena could occur in Belgrade or Zagreb and pose no threat to constitutional order. The remarks of Milan Meden, director of Nedeljski Dnevnik are also reported. Meden is reported as stating that three registered neo-Nazis amongst two million Slovenes pose no threat and that similar phenomena are present elsewhere in the country and both the Slovene and other forms of it are purely criminal.

6.12 “Nedeljski Dnevnik” publishes further letters responding to Šetinc. Andrej Štembal (1981) takes an anti-Punk stance arguing that if the music is a response to crises in the Western system it is irrelevant to the context of self-management. It asks why radio stations should play this foreign “music” that has no connection with “our” cultural development and problems. A defence of Punk

is made by Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid (1981), both leading protagonists of the alternative scene. The letter, which includes extracts from several Slovene punk songs is published but with cuts. It speaks of the recent media tendency to present the Punk issue in a one-dimensional way and differentiates between the role of mainstream media such as *Nedeljski Dnevnik*, *Delo* and RTV Slovenija and on the other hand the alternative or youth media represented by RŠ, *Mladina* and *Tribuna*. RŠ for instance seeks to differentiate positive and negative tendencies within mass culture rather than present it as either wholly positive or negative. This is contrasted to the absence of such critical discussion in the mainstream media outlets, which for many are the sole source of information. According to the authors the sensationalist presentation of youth delinquency and Šetinc's attempt to link diverse phenomena such as ultra-leftism, fascism, anarchism and Punk can not function other than as an attack on an entire generation. It is further characterised as a "Stalinist discourse". The place of such in a self-managing society that has not yet healed the wounds of the last war is questioned. Punk lyrics are presented as warnings about social problems, illustrating the constructive role of Punk.

7.12 "Politika Ekspres" (Belgrade) publishes a further account of the article and its aftermath (Plavevski 1981).

8.12 RŠ holds a live round table discussion on the Punk issue including a phone-in.⁴

12.12 "Borba" (Belgrade) analyses the ideological background to the affair (Dorgović 1981). It concludes that the erosion of ideological consciousness is not unique to Punk.

14.12 "Tribuna" responds to the affair (Županc, Stanovnik 1981) raising questions about the legal treatment of the teenagers in investigative custody.

15.12 ZSMS holds a discussion on Punk to which critics, academics and others are invited. The meeting also condemns sensationalist reporting and calls for research on "nationalism and Stalinism".⁵

19.12 "Duga" (Belgrade) publishes a further commentary on the affair (Durđević 1981).

20.12 Šetinc, responds to his critics (1981b). He points out that many of the letters received in response were anonymous and that one (Vovk 1981) reappeared in "Mladina" under a different name (Flegar 1981). He blames some of the Serbian coverage for the criticism "Nedeljski Dnevnik" has received. RŠ is accused of simplifying his argument for its own ends. Šetinc then reports a conversation with three young Punks who visited the editorial office. They had stressed the

⁴ Document 65, Skupina Avtorjev (1984), 252-60.

⁵ Conclusions reproduced as Document 69, Skupina Avtorjev (1984), 266-67.

importance of Punk lyrics, that those drawing swastikas and writing Nazi programmes were not Punks and that youth should not be condemned on the basis of what music they listen to. The discussion is presented as amicable and Šetinc alludes to the difficulty of being young and concedes "Music is one thing, Mein Kampf another".

26.12 "Delo" publishes a summary of the recent polemics.⁶

31.12 RŠ editorial board and party section issue a final statement on the controversy.⁷

1982:

January:

12.1 "Victims of a Plane Crash" exhibition and concert at Disko FV 112/15, Ljubljana. Laibach perform an experimental set using electronics, radios and turntables.⁸

27.1 Further concert at Disco FV.

April:

2.4 First Zagreb concert.

28.4 "Austellung Laibach Kunst" exhibition plus first performance by Laibach sub-group 300 000 V.K. at ŠKUC.

29.4 "Delo" reports (M.S. 1982) on the reaction caused by the Laibach posters used to advertise the ŠKUC event. These were posted widely in Ljubljana and bore the group's controversial name and cog-wheel motif (the article included a photograph of the offending poster). A brief description of the concert follows, highlighting the use of taped noise and suggesting that (due to its experimental elements) it was not actually a rock event.

May:

First issue of independent review "Nova Revija" published.

5.5.82 First anti-Laibach protest letter (Čepe 1982) appears in "Delo" following the controversy over the ŠKUC concert posters.

18.5 "Austellung Laibach Kunst". Exhibition/performance at ŠKC Belgrade. Laibach use military issue smoke bombs for effects.

June:

3.6 Laibach performance at "Rock In Opposition" festival, Krizanke, Ljubljana.

26-29.6 12th LCY Congress. Congress states its adherence to the 1974 constitution and the self-

⁶ Document 74, Skupina Avtorjev (1984), 284-5.

⁷ Document 77, Skupina Avtorjev (1984), 289-90.

⁸ See Meglič 1995.

management system.

28.6 "Smrt za Smrt" (Death for Death), 300 000 V.K. concert at Disco FV.

July:

12.7 Laibach make first four studio recordings in Ljubljana.

September:

10.9 Laibach performance at Križanke as part of Novi Rock festival 82, live broadcast by Radio Ljubljana. (Later released on "Ljubljana Beograd Zagreb" CD (Mute/Grey Area 1993)). Tomaž Hostnik wears totalitarian type uniform on stage and is slightly wounded by a missile flung from the crowd.

14.9. Protest letter (Cajhen 1982) appears in "Dnevnik" under the title "Laibachization".

29.9 MK SZDL (Ljubljana SAWPY) condemns 7/82 "Punk" issue of "Problemi" at its session.

October:

12.10 "Problemi" editorial board publishes its reply to criticism of the "Punk" issue.

14.10 "Laibach Pieta or The Sound of Revolutionary Midnight" (Lenard 1982), detailed Laibach interview published in "Mladina".

19.10 Second "Laibachization" protest letter (Čajhen 1982b) appears in "Dnevnik". The letter quotes from and condemns some of the more extreme Laibach statements.

22-24.10 11th ZSMS Congress, Novo Mesto. Conclusions link Punk to progressive youth concerns and innovation both culturally and in relation to environmental, peace and gender issues.

November:

23.11 "Night of the Long Knives". Conceptual presentation of Laibach and the sub-group GERMANIA. Disco FV, Ljubljana.

December:

10-12.12 "Touch of Evil" performances at Moša Pijade Hall, Zagreb. Smoke bombs used again.

13.12 Concert by five punk groups to mark first anniversary of martial law in Poland held in Freedom Hall, Šentvid near Ljubljana.

22.12 "Polet", SSOH weekly magazine publishes feature (Scena "Moše Pijade" 1982) on Zagreb shows.

24.12 Death notice published for Tomaž Hostnik in "Delo".

1983:

Irwin founded.

March:

6.3. "Ausstellung Laibach Kunst-Regime Transavantgarde". Exhibition in Mass Media Gallery, Zagreb.

10.3 Exhibition banned and closed by the management after Laibach refuse to remove "problematic" pictures. Croatian police escort the group onto a train for Slovenia.⁹

April:

21.4 "Ausstellung Laibach Kunst-Monumental Retroavantgarde", ŠKUC, Ljubljana. Exhibition and presentation of first video "Documents of Oppression" and first joint cassette with British group Last Few Days.

22.4 "Instrumentality of the State Machine" joint concert with Last Few Days and 23 Skidoo, Freedom Hall, Šentvid.

23.4 "We Forge the Future" all-night show by Laibach, Last Few Days and 23 Skidoo at 12th Musical Biennale, Moša Pijade Hall, Zagreb. Police and organizers halt show at 5AM. Laibach refuse to leave and are ejected.

26.4 Zagreb Biennale Executive Committee, ŠKUC and the republican conference of ZSMS issue a proclamation distancing themselves from Laibach's performance and demanding an explanation from those involved in the preparation of the show.

27.4 "Večernji List" (Zagreb evening paper) publishes article entitled about the Biennale show (Rock pod krivim notama 1983).

30.4. "Večer" (Maribor evening paper) publishes an account of the Zagreb show (Pretep in pornofilma na prireditvi 1983).

May:

1.5 Laibach issue a detailed letter (1983a) refuting some of the allegations made concerning the show and providing a detailed conceptual account of the presentation and the films shown.

4.5 "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" publishes an account of SSOH's response to the Biennale incident entitled "Abuse of Trust". (Zloraba upanja 1983)

12.5 Laibach's letter (1983a) published in "Mladina".

31.5 Laibach sign contract with RTV Ljubljana label for first LP, "Nebo Žari" (The Sky Glows).

June:

23.6 "XY-Nerešeno" (XY-Unsolved). Laibach interview with Jure Pengov on Slovene TV's "Tednik" (weekly) programme.

29.6 SAWPY Ljubljana discusses Laibach, condemning "provocations reminiscent of the time of

⁹ Meglič, 1995.

Nazi occupation” and the “insufficient culturo-political sensitivity” of the ŠKUC programme council. In the light of increasing controversy Laibach members are rumoured to have taken refuge in monasteries at Pleterje and Kum.

30.6 Laibach statement of 26.6 entitled “Laibach, or [The] Escalation of Fascism on Ljubljana TV” (1983b) issued and published in “Mladina”. Statement also sent to “Delo” which rejected it, engendering a string of correspondence between Laibach and Delo editor Jože Volfand (Skupina Avtorjev, 1984). “Stop” publishes a hostile review of the TV interview (Kavčič 1983).¹⁰ June issue of “Ekran” (Slovene screen review) publishes a favourable review (Lešnik 1983).

July:

3.7 “Nedeljski Dnevnik” publishes a hostile article “Kdo je “Laibachu” Naredil Srajčke?” (Who Made Shirts For Laibach?) (Tomazič 1983).

10.7 “Nedeljski Dnevnik” publishes a young reader’s letter arguing that a ban on Laibach is counterproductive (D.M. 1983).

13.7 “Jana” (Slovene women’s magazine) publishes protest letter about the TV incident (K.D. 1983). It complains about Laibach’s use of “foreign” vocabulary, and the fact that they read prepared statements. It also expresses concern about the potential effect on young viewers, comparing Laibach’s image to that of Hitler Youth.

20.7 Ljubljana socio-political assembly (SAWPY) determines that use of the name of the city of Ljubljana requires permission from the municipal authorities and that Laibach have not received such. Denied permission to use or display their name in public Laibach are de facto banned from named appearances in Ljubljana.

28.7 “TV-15” publishes a letter from the Moste veterans’ group (Babnik 1982). It calls for strong measures to be taken against all those associated in any way with the broadcast.

August:

7.8 “Nazism and Anti-Nazism” article in Serbian magazine “NIN” discuss the TV incident.

September:

Laibach in studio recording “Nebo Žari”, 300 000 V.K. also record two tracks.

October:

Two Laibach videos “Documents of Oppression” and “Morte ai s’ ciavi” feature in Cankarjev Dom video festival.¹¹

¹⁰ Skupina Avtorjev (1984), 395-7.

¹¹ See NSK (1991), 78.

13.10 Founding of Theatre of Scipion Nasice Sisters (TSSN).

20.10 "TV15" prints protest letter on behalf of "veterans and residents of the Domžale area" (Zidarič 1983). The letter states that all working people, but particularly veterans, are outraged by Laibach, which is presented as eroding the basis of self-management.

November:

1.11 - 23.12 Laibach's "Occupied Europe Tour" commences. Running until 1985, concerts take place in 17 cities in Yugoslavia, Austria, Poland, West Germany, the Netherlands, Britain. The Dutch concerts are later released by the Staalplaat label on cassette as "Through the Occupied Netherlands".



Laibach: "Occupied Europe" Tour Poster, 1983.

4-5.11 Symposium entitled "[The] Role and Field of Difference in Materialist theory" takes place in Upper Šiška youth centre Ljubljana organised by ŠKUC-Forum and RŠ, supported by ZSMS. The event's other theme is "What is the Alternative?" and discussions cover questions of socialization, socialist ideology and critiques of mass culture. Also featured were various video presentations including Laibach and (Disco) FV and concerts by various groups including Borghesia. As well as Laibach the exhibition included work by photographer Jane Štravs and Dušan Mandič, one of the organizers and an Irwin member.

December:

5.12 "Punk as Social Phenomenon". Lecture by Žižek at Cankarjev Dom Ljubljana.

8.12 "Mladina" publishes various theoretical contributions to the symposium in a special supplement (Štrajn (Ed.) 1983). Documentation concerning the eviction of Disco FV from the student residences is also published.

9.12 9th Slovene central committee session dedicated to questions of socio-political organization

and youth activity. The “punk question” and Laibach are discussed.¹²

22.12 “Mladina” publishes an interview with Dušan Mandič addressing the controversy over his poster for the symposium, which incorporated two badges, which Igor Vidmar (Laibach manager) was imprisoned for wearing (Reproduced, Erjavec & Gržinič, 1991, 60).

1984

NSK foundation year. Novi Kolektivizem begin work.

January:

First performance of “Retrogarde Event Hinkemann” by Theatre of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice (TSSN) takes place in a private apartment in Ljubljana.

26.1 “Mladina” publishes a feature on the Occupied Europe Tour (Lorenčič 1984).

February:

“Sila/Boji/Brat Moj”, first western release on Belgian L.A.Y.L.A.H. label.

March:

Laibach sign contract with Cherry Red Records, London. Recording of “Panorama” 12” single.

April:

Laibach feature in April issue of “Zig-Zag” (London). (Vague 1985).

2-8.4 “Back to the USA” exhibition at ŠKUC by RROSE IRWIN SELAVY. The name combines a Duchamp alias with that of the new Irwin group, three of whose members took part in this complete reconstruction of that year’s “Back to the USA” exhibition by young American artists. Also included were graffiti works from Disco FV and the “What is the Alternative?” designs.

19.4 “Mladina” publishes a feature discussing the Irwin exhibition, graffiti art and the group Borghesia as “...subversion of the Slovene cultural space” (Gržinič 1984).

28.4 “Studies in Tyranny”, Laibach feature in “NME”. Reproduced, “Mladina” 7.6.84 (Kopf 1984)

May:

2.5 Laibach video “The Debate Over Man” shown at video festival, Pompidou Centre, Paris.

5.5 One day exhibition at ŠKUC; “Occupied Europe Tour Documents”. Presentation of tour posters and photography and ŠKUC issued live cassette “Vstajenje v Berlinu” (Resurrection in Berlin).

9.5 “Laibach Im Hause Der Funkindustrie” (Laibach In The House of The Sound Industry) concert at Disco FV.

¹² See Document 140, Skupina Avtorjev 1984, 411-414.

23.5 Commission for Ideological Work and Information of the ZKH Central Committee meeting on ideological struggle in art and culture. Conclusions of the meeting, known as “The White Book” condemned throughout Yugoslavia as neo-Stalinist.¹³

June:

6.6 “Was Ist Kunst?” concert at ŠKC Belgrade. Feature, “Provocation” in June issue of “Rock”, Belgrade. (Trifunović 1984).

7.6 “Laibach in the Domestic and Foreign Press” review of media coverage by Igor Vidmar (1984a) appears in “Mladina”.

21.6 “Mladina” prints “Documents of Oppression” (1984), three official documents relating to the administrative ban on Laibach performances.

July:

28.7 “Fašizem na alternativnoj sceni” (Fascism on the Alternative Scene) feature by Slavenka Drakulić Ilić (1984) published in Zagreb magazine “Start”.

September:

6.9 “Fasizem na Startovi Sceni”, response to the Start article’s allegations of fascism on the Ljubljana scene by Igor Vidmar published in “Mladina”. (Vidmar 1984b)

October:

ZKP RTV label issues “84”, a compilation of Slovene alternative bands including Borghesia, O! Kult, Otroci Socializma (Children of Socialism), Abbildungen Variete (Various Portraits) and 300 000 V.K.

23-24.10 TSSN event “Resurrection” (see chapter 2) initiates second, “Exorcism” phase of TSSN activity.

November:

5.11 Trial of the “Belgrade Six” group of liberal intellectuals begins.¹⁴

December:

18.12 Laibach works feature in ŠKUC New Year exhibition.

21.12 “V spomin Tomaž Hostnika”, clandestine Laibach concert in memory of Hostnik (see poster on page 210).

1985

First Irwin exhibitions in Belgrade and Sarajevo. Group exhibitions in Zagreb and Rijeka. NK

¹³ See Nečak 1991, 193.

¹⁴ See Magaš 1994, 102-4.

Studio produce "Youth Work Brigades" poster, first ZSMS commission of an NSK project. NK receive several other semi-official commissions.

February:

7.2 "Laibach You, Who Challenge (On the Slovene cultural holiday)" feature in "Mladina" (Suhadolnik 1985).

18.2 Laibach performance at Berlin Atonal festival¹⁵. Einsturzende Neubaten and Test Dept. also feature in the 2 day festival reported in "Dnevnik", 26.2. (Nova Godba v Zahodnem Berlinu 1985).

19.2 "New Tendencies in Art – 80s" ŠKUC group exhibition featuring Laibach.

20.2 "Berlinale 85" Laibach feature in "Infermental" video festival, Berlin.

March:

22.3 Analytical article on Laibach and Irwin (Lešnik 1985) published in "Naši Razgledi" periodical (Ljubljana).

April:

Irwin programme written (later published in "Problemi" together with contemporaneous text; "Retro Principle The Principle of Manipulation with The Memory of The Visible Emphasized Eclecticism - The Platform For National Authenticity")¹⁶

26.4 "Continuity of Pure Form", concert at Zagreb Biennale of New Music, Kulusič Hall, Zagreb.

27.4 "Laibach" first album released by Š.K.U.C - R.o.p.o.t. label after contract with ZKP/RTV cancelled. Album sleeve omits the group's name.¹⁷ The track "Panorama" has a missing censored passage from which Tito's voice had been excised (left intact on European releases).

May:

Second TSSN performance, "Retrogarde Event Marija Nablocka" takes place in a Ljubljana apartment.

4.5 "Militant Minimalism" review article published in "Vjesnik", Zagreb.

7.5 Irwin exhibition "Was Ist Kunst" opens at ŠKUC with a critical discussion taking place the next day.

9.5 "Was Ist Kunst" article by Gržinić in "Mladina" (Grzinic 1985). "Rekapitulacija 1980-4" first Western album release on Walter Ulbricht Schallfolien, Hamburg. The album is a retrospective compilation.

¹⁵ Two tracks featured on Laibach (1997b).

¹⁶ Reproduced NSK 1991, 114.

¹⁷ Cover artwork reproduced NSK 1991, 23.

15.5 "Neue Konservativ Festival" Laibach concert at two-day festival in Israel Halle, Hamburg. Special issue (no.6) of "Problemi" periodical, "Neue Slowenische Kunst 1985" published in Ljubljana (NSK, 1985). Lyrics, artwork and programmatic statements from Laibach, Irwin, TSSN and New Collectivism included without editorial commentary.

22.5 Start of "Occupied Europe Tour 85" at N.L. Centre, Amsterdam.

27.5 Further "Occupied Europe Tour 85" performance: "Vade Retro Satanas", Posthorn kerk, Amsterdam.

28.5 Tour continues with "Life in Hell" performance, Hell Hall, Hertogenbosch, NL.

June:

10.6 "Boundless Avantgarde" (Jenšterle 1985), an analytical piece on Laibach appears in "Delo".

July:

8-9.7 Two Laibach concerts at Bloomsbury Festival, London.

August:

22.8 "Laibach", first eponymous album named "Disc of the Week" by Marjan Ogrinc in "Stop" magazine (Ogrinc 1985).

September:

5.9 Brief article on NSK issue of "Problemi" appears in "Delo". (S.J. 1985)

10.9 "Laibach in Ljubljana", a round-table discussion of the performance ban takes place at Peklensko Dvorišče (Infernal Court), Križanke, Ljubljana. Contributions from theoreticians, representatives of socio-political organizations and, (via video) Tine Tomlje, mayor of Ljubljana. Various contributions summarised in article of the same name in "Teleks", 12.9. (Jensterle 1985). "Mladina" of 19.9 publishes detailed transcripts of the discussions (Neue Slowenische Kunst 1985).

October:

1.10-27.10 Irwin "Red Districts" exhibition, Mala Galerija Ljubljana.¹⁸

November:

1.11 "Neue Konservativ" semi-official numbered live LP from July's Hamburg performances.

17.11 "Laibach Uber Dem Deutschland - Die Erste Bombaridierung" (Laibach over Germany - The first bombing)¹⁹ First independent German tour begins at Arena Hall, Munich. The use of hunting costumes/iconography begins on this tour. Antlers feature as a stage motif for the first time and before the show logs are cut on stage by Laibach's chauffeur/bodyguard Franci. Later a rabbit is

¹⁸ See pp. 128-9 "NSK".

¹⁹ For tour poster see illustration 8, "NSK", p. 47.

held by the ears, soiling itself through fright during “Ti, Ki, izzivas” (You Who Challenge).

18.11 “Nieschling Aktion” performance in Aachen.

26.11 “Der Holzung” performance, Markethalle, Hamburg.

29.11 “Die Liebe” 12” single released in Britain.

December:

Irwin text “Epistle” written.²⁰

2.12 “Ich Bin Ein Berliner!”, performance at Caffe Grand, Berlin.

3.12 “Metastaza – Laibach”. Dance performance by Damir Zlatar Frey inspired by and featuring Laibach’s music.

4.12 “Kreuzhacke” performance in Wiesbaden.

5.12 “Der Holzung” performance in Oberhausen.

6.12 “Laibach uber Dem Deutschland”, tour concludes in Cologne.

8.12 “Das Ist Kunst” Zagreb concert cancelled by group due to “unacceptable censorship of the program by the management”, films and flags used in the previous year’s Zagreb show are forbidden (Vidmar 1985).

9.12 “Das Ist Kunst” performance at ŠKC Belgrade, Laibach posters banned.

27.12 “Naši razgledi” publishes an analytical article on Laibach (Wruss 1985).

1986

First private Irwin exhibition in Venice. Group exhibitions in Sarajevo and Zagreb.

First designs by NSK Architecture Section Graditelji (Builders) appear.

Milan Kučan becomes president of LCS.

January:

8.1 “Delo” publishes review of the joint Irwin-OHO project “Birds of A Feather” selected as featured artwork of the month at Cankarjev Dom (Images reproduced NSK 1991, 139).

17.1 “Nasi Razgledi” periodical publishes analytical article “Laibach and Art” (Rotar 1986).

28.1 “Delo” article on Irwin’s “Suitcase For Spiritual Use”²¹ and the imminent “Krst” (Baptism) performance.

29.1 “Delo” publishes an opinion piece (Lešnik 1986) on the cooperation between Irwin and TSSN (“currently the most disturbing of active Slovene arts groups”) and Cankarjev Dom. Further piece in Maribor’s “Večer” (Smasek 1986a).

²⁰ See NSK 1991, 128-9.

²¹ Illustrations 27a,b, Erjavec & Gržinić, 1991, 116-7.

February:

- 3.2 "Krst" press conference held at Cankarjev Dom, reported in "Delo" 4.2 (Šutej, 1986).
- 6.2 Premiere of "Krst Pod Triglavom", Cankarjev Dom. Further performances 9th-11th, 15th-17th and 22nd-24th.
- 7.2 "Mladina" publishes an opinion piece by Mastnak (1986a) arguing that "Laibach is an example of the activity of civil society". The cover of the issue features a Laibach Kunst portrait of Tomaž Hostnik and contains an NSK feature (Nova Slovenska Umetnost 1986).
- 8.2 "Nova Akropola" LP released by Cherry Red Records London. Review of "Krst" appears in "Delo" (Inkret 1986).
- 10.2 "Krst" review in "Večer" (Smašek 1986b).
- 12.2 "Krst" review in "Kmečki Glas" (Farmer's Voice) (Krst pod Triglavom 1986).
- 14.2 "Laibach over Belgrade" feature in "Intervju" (Cirič 1986). "Krst" review in "Naši Razgledi" (Taufel 1986).
- 15.2 "Divergences/Diversions 2" Laibach performance at D.M.A. 2 festival, Bordeaux.
- 16.2 "Occupied Europe Tour 1983-1985" Live LP released by Side Effects Records, London.
- 18.2 "Krst" feature in "Danas", Belgrade. (Zatočenci oblika 1986).
- 21.2.86 Letter from ŠKUC Forum calling for the normalization of Laibach's status (ŠKUC Forum 1986) published in "Mladina". Subsequently appears in "Tribuna" of 8.3.
- 23.2 "Vhuktemas Archetipi", Side Effects Records compilation released in London. LP features two Laibach tracks and sleeve design by Novi Kolektivizem²²
- 26.2 "Occupied Europe Tour 86" performance in Brussels.
- 28.2 Performance at Kortrijk, Belgium.

March:

- 29.3 "Nova Akropola" feature in "Delo" (Jenšterle 1986).

April:

- 5.4 "Krvava Gruda, Plodna Zemlja" (Bloody Ground - Fertile Soil) performance at Hum, Slovenia. The concert was possible as the ban on Laibach performing was based on Ljubljana municipal ordinances inapplicable elsewhere in Slovenia. Report in "Tribuna" (Vovk 1986) appears 6.4. 12th ZSMS Congress demands the legalization of Laibach's name and activities.
- 12.4 First "Carinthian Partisans Protest" letter appears in "Delo" (Uranič-Drago 1986).
- 19.4 "Delo" publishes letter in support of Carinthian Partisans (Kuznik 1986).

²² See NSK 1991, 41.

26.4 ZSMS response to protest letters published in "Delo" (Artnak 1986).

May:

9.5 "Last Futurist Exhibition" anonymous reconstruction of Malevich's work in ŠKUC (previously shown in Belgrade from 12.85-1.86). Further "Krst" feature in "Naši razgledi" (Vogelnik 1986).

10.5 Two further veterans' protest letters published in "Delo" (Wilfan 1986), (Precej 1986).

15.5 Cultural Council of the party discusses ŠKUC initiative for legalization of Laibach's name, reported "Delo" 16.5. (Puhar 1986).

17.5 Further protest letter from a veteran in Australia appears in "Delo" (Kovač, 1986).

24.5 "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" publishes "Siscia", an opinion piece opposed to Laibach's name (N.N. 1986).

25.5 ZSMS and "Mladina" awards the 1986 "Zlata Ptica" (Golden Bird) cultural prize for multimedia activity to NSK, citing its "... unique aesthetic intervention in the field of ideology in recent Slovene history" and "the start of a new spiritual emancipation within Slovenia" (Zlate ptice mladim ustvarjalcem 1986).

31.5 Further partisan protest letter in "Delo" (Štifter 1986).

June:

5.6 "Laibach Tour Over America" British Tour begins at Bay 63, London.

6.6 "Dialogue Not Possible", "Mladina" article by Mastnak on ŠKUC legalization initiative.

9.6 Manchester

10.6 Liverpool. "Delo" publishes analytical piece by Marjan Ogrinc (1986) on the issues raised by Laibach's name.

11.6 Brighton

12.6 Laibach record three tracks for their first John Peel session in London.

21.6 "Delo" publishes letter from Pavle Gantar (1986), president of ŠKUC-Forum programme council in response to protest about ŠKUC initiative for the legalization of Laibach's name.

July:

19.7 "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" publishes brief opinion piece (N.N. 1986b) on the NSK presence at Venice Biennale.

September:

4-9.9 "No Fire Escape in Hell" dance performance with Michael Clark Dance Company.

16.9 "Delo" feature on 20th Belgrade International Theatre Festival where "Krst" was the first performance and a report on TSSN. Third, "Retro-Classics" stage phase of TSSN activity ends,

final “self-abolition” phase begins.

17-28 Further “No Fire Escape” performances at Sadler’s Wells Theatre London.

24-25.9 Extracts from the nationalist Memorandum of Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences published in “Večerjne Novosti”, Belgrade.²³

October:

10.10 “Keine Gnade” performance at Steirischer Herbst festival, Graz. Review in “Večer” (Smurk 1986) appears 14.10.

24 + 31.10 “Mladina” publishes two letters (Kmecl, Srakar 1986) on the historical status of Laibach’s name.

December:

23.12 ZSMS agree to stage the annual “Day of Youth” relay event but state that it must represent “all innovative, creative people” and include social critiques to assist the resolution of social problems (Hostnik-Šetinc 1987).

26.12 “Ljubljana-Moskva-Leningrad”. Laibach private visit to USSR.

1987

Irwin solo exhibitions in Amsterdam. Group exhibitions in Kassel, Ljubljana, Graz.

January:

20.1 Mute Records release “Geburt Einer Nation”.

February:

Nova Revija 57 “Contributions To a Slovene National Programme” published. The 246-page journal includes contributions from 16 Slovene authors on the problems of Slovene identity and statehood within the present Yugoslav framework. The Slovene Central Committee condemns parts of it as “extremely undemocratic, non self-managerial and anti-Yugoslav oriented”.²⁴

6.2 Review of second Borghesia album “Their Laws Our Lives” in “Mladina”.

10.2 “Bloody Ground - Fertile Soil”. Opening concert of Yugoslav tour, Kulusič Hall Zagreb, repeated next night. Small student protest on Plečnikov Trg Ljubljana demanding the abolition of the baton relay ritual, reported in “Tribuna” 14.1.87

12.2 ŠKC Belgrade.

13.2 National Theatre, Subotica.

²³ See Grafenauer (1991).

²⁴ See Slovenia Between 1987-1991, (1991, 25.) and Lajovič (1989).

17.2 "Birds of a Feather". First legal Laibach concert in Ljubljana since 1983, Festival Hall, Youth Theatre. The ban on public appearances by Laibach is un-enforced and effectively lapses. The venue is so overcrowded some audience members faint.

18.2 Student Centre, Maribor.

20.2 "Mladina" front cover is Laibach graphic "Trst Ljubljana Celovec".²⁵

21.2 Protest letter from Association of Carinthian Partisans appears in "Delo" under caption "The Germanized name is Genocide" (SKPS (Skupnost Koroških Partizanov Slovenije) 1987).

23.2 "Opus Dei" released by Mute. Due its use of John Hearfield's axe-swastika lawyers have to fight off a threatened ban in (West) Germany where display of the swastika is prohibited.

24.2 "Radical Difference", analytical article to mark Laibach show by Gržinić (1987b) appears in "Delo".

25.2 ZSMS confirm that NK Studio's "Youth Day" design has been accepted as the official poster for the 25th May event. Prior to the acceptance of the design NK representative and Irwin member Roman Uranjek spends several hours with the federal organizing committee explaining the designs. The design for the staff itself (a four legged fixed object completely unsuited for a relay) was rejected as members feared it would cause derision. Laibach feature ("We Build The Future") by rock critic Marjan Ogrinc (1987) in "Delo". Carinthian Partisan letter reprinted in "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" as "Germanized name at the heart of Slovenia" (SKPS 1987).

26.2 Concert review appears in "Ljubljanski Dnevnik"(Emonski 1987). NK's Youth Day Poster designs published in Yugoslav press. A session of the LCS Central Committee Presidium rejects the "political points of departure" of Nova Revija 57 and states that its [nationalist] programme will not be permitted implementation. (SWB 5.3.87)

27.2 Brief Laibach feature appears in "Polet" (Radaković 1987). "Komunist" publishes the partisan letter as "Protests Without Response" (SKPS 1987), along with an extract from the Jože Osterman article criticized in the letter. "Mladina" review of Ljubljana and Maribor concerts (Postrak 1987). The Presidium of the Republican Conference of the Slovene SAWP under Jože Smole expresses astonishment at the "anti-self-managing and anti-Yugoslav theses" present in Nova Revija 57. (SWB 5.3.87 – "Further Criticism of Nova Revija Article")

²⁵ See page 188.

POSTER AFFAIR:

28.2 Yugoslav evening papers publish the news that Nikola Grujić, a Belgrade engineer has discovered²⁶ the true source of New Collectivism's "Youth Day" poster (Klein's "An Allegory of the Third Reich"). Milan Lazović, secretary of the federal committee responsible for the Youth Day celebrations stated that such an "error" could not have been accidental and announces that the competition will have to be reopened in order to find a replacement design. Both NK Studio and the Presidency of ZSMS have to issue explanatory statements (Novi Kolektivizem 1987a and RK ZSMS 1987). The NK statement compares the substitution of Nazi for Yugoslav imagery with illegal night actions by partisans to deface Nazi posters. It draws attention to the Yugoslav imagery in the new design and the democratizing effects of dealing with past traumas. It concludes with the slogan, "Long Live the Day of Youth - Free Artistic Creativity". ZSMS states that it was not aware of the design's provenance. It too stresses that the substitution of symbols has consciously antifascist connotations yet accepts that this may have effects independent of the wishes and expectations of its creators. Since it may be seen as insulting the national liberation struggle it does not correspond to "the spirit of the freedom-loving ideas of the nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia" and has therefore been withdrawn. In a letter to "Delo" Jože Osterman, secretary of SAWPY Ljubljana, responds to the partisan letter's charge that in his piece about Laibach for the journal "Komunist" he acted as a supporter of Germanization. Osterman states that while he does not approve of the name there is no reason to overlook their cultural achievements in Europe which are rare for Slovene artists (Osterman 1987). "Večer" publishes reviews of the Laibach and Maribor concerts (Laibach v Ljubljani in Maribor 1987).

29.2 In Zagreb "Vjesnik" reports that among the main problems the federal commission originally had with the poster were its black and white colour and that it carried only European and Slovene symbols. The commentary states that the poster was simultaneously a more subtle and a more offensive means of Slovene youth opposing the idea of the ritual than the previous log sawing protest in the centre of Ljubljana that had taken place the previous year. ZSMS Presidency meets in extraordinary session. A commentary in "Oslobodenje", the leading Sarajevo daily, states that the baton used in the relay race has always been seen as a symbol of brotherhood and that this attempt

²⁶ The summary of the first week of the affair published in "Teleks", 12.3, (Leskovar 1987) printed the word "discovered" in inverted commas as if to suggest that the discovery was not as casual an affair as was reported.

to destroy it is a result of the destructive mood of Slovene youth. It brands the design “schizophrenic” and “shameful” and invokes the memory of Yugoslavia's 1.7m war dead. NK are accused of playing on what they imagined to be the “artistic ignorance” and “bad memory” of the Yugoslav public (Leškovar 1987a).

March:

1.3 Presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina youth organisation denounces the poster as an attempt to test the tolerance and patience of the Yugoslav public and demands that all those associated with the poster's appearance in public assume political responsibility. In Belgrade “Politika” reports further comments by Milan Lazović who speaks of his and the committee's shock at the discovery and that this sentiment was shared by the Yugoslav public and that NK Studio could not be associated in any way with the design of the event. He also states that they should be held legally accountable for their actions. An official commentary by Yugoslav news agency “Tanjug” again speaks of the 1.7m war dead and says that with their “exploits” Slovene youth make it more difficult for their contemporaries in Yugoslavia to understand them.²⁷

2.3 The statements of NK and ZSMS are reported throughout Yugoslavia. In Belgrade “Borba” reports comments by some members of the ZSMS competition jury about the naivety of the NK artists. The condemnatory line taken by ZSM BiH (Bosnia-Herzegovina) is also reported. “Delo” and “Večer” publish the first NK statement. NK are forced to issue a second, more detailed statement (Novi Kolektivizam 1987b)²⁸ in which they reject superficial judgements according to which they have insulted the Yugoslav peoples' struggle against fascism. Invoking both the discourse of civil society and of anti-fascist “brotherhood and unity” they attempt to defend the political, moral and creative rectitude of their stance. They claim that their “contra-punctural” technique is similar to that used in wartime anti-fascist propaganda that incorporated fascist symbols. NK claim the poster's contents place youth in a dynamic relationship with symbols, which are transformed so as to achieve liberation from and purify all the dark forces of fascism, Stalinism and dogmatism. They conclude:

“The reactions which the “controversial” poster has sparked, show that Yugoslav civil society is not mature enough to assume the moral demands of the past, therefore we demand, that the poster

²⁷ Summarised in Sutej 1987.

²⁸ Published in “Mladina” 6.3. and the March issue of the Maribor student magazine “Katedra”.

“Day of Youth” be realized, as it would show that the one million seven hundred thousand victims of fascism were not in vain.”²⁹

A report in “Večerjni List” states that the most members of the federal organising committee had been concerned not to aggravate relations with ZSMS.

3.3 “Dnevnik” publishes a commentary by Majda Hostnik-Šetinc (1987a) discussing the background to the affair and stressing that the federal organising committee had accepted the design without reservations, a version contradicted by other reports. “Delo” publishes a report detailing the negative reaction in other Yugoslav media (Ostri odmevi po vsej Jugoslaviji 1987). It also summarises an article in “Politika” (Belgrade) that discusses the ZSMS statement and stating that NK must have been conscious of the allegoric and metaphysical meanings of the poster. “Delo” also reported the stance of Belgrade’s “Večerjne Novosti” which stated that the poster represented an attempt to revive the “criminal” thesis that attempts to equate fascism and communism. “Delo” highlights “Borba’s” front-page report on ZSMS’ withdrawal of the poster design and its use of phrases including “diversion” and “hostile activity”. A second “Delo” report “Deception with Poster Hurts The People’s Feelings” (Prevara s plakatom žali čustva ljudi 1987) focussed on the statement by H. Rexhepi the president of ZSM Yugoslavia and those of the ZSM presidencies in Vojvodina and Montenegro. While stating that the events must not be allowed to develop into a general condemnation of Slovene youth or an anti-Slovene mood, he spoke of the deep revulsion he felt regarding the deception practiced by the authors of the poster and the jury which selected it. He added that as well as hurting people’s feelings the poster besmirched the struggle of the Yugoslav peoples against fascism and the achievements of the socialist revolution. The statement issued by the Vojvodina youth organisation spoke of “irresponsibility” and “anti-socialist and anti-Yugoslav provocation” while ZSM Montenegro demanded that the authors, the jury and members of the ZSMS presidency all be held responsible for the poster being allowed to emerge in public.

4.3 “[A] Call To Reason” (Skupina Avtorjev 1987) an appeal to the “democratic Yugoslav public” signed by 100 Slovene academics and intellectuals is issued in response to the anti-Slovene rhetoric the poster affair has sparked in the Yugoslav press. It complains that the debate is frequently

²⁹ Ibid.

characterized by emotional, irrational, demagogic and authoritarian elements. It states that the controversy is serving as the pretext for a purge structured on fascistic political mobilization and that those responsible discredit all the Youth Day event stands for. "Tribuna" publishes an article stating the case for the abolition of the Youth Day ritual and quoting an NSK text on "retrogardism" (Konec Štafete vse dobro 1987). "Vjesnik" reports on the extraordinary session of the organising committee at which individual members asked why the "appropriate organs" had not taken action. It also reports on a meeting in Zagreb of the SSOH (Croatian youth organisation) planning commission that demanded that the Slovene youth leadership and the federal organizers also be held responsible. It also condemned Slovene demands for a civil alternative to military service and for an end to the relay ritual as being aimed against "the brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav nations and nationalities" (Leškovar 1987a).

5.3 The public prosecutor's office at the Ljubljana Office of Internal Affairs asks the district investigating judge to organise a hearing which members of NK will attend. Following this a decision will be taken on whether or not to press charges under the contentious article 157 (verbal offence) of the Yugoslav penal code. Conviction under the article provided for sentences of between three months and three years' imprisonment. The prosecutor's report alleges that the group has violated article 157 and are guilty of profaning the Yugoslav flag and coat of arms (SWB 11.3.87 - Developments in Youth Day Poster Case). "Mladina" publishes the second NK statement along with commentary and a report by Franci Zavrl (1987). Zavrl argues that there is no need to rerun the design competition and that repetition is a correct form of artistic expression. "Vjesnik" reports the conclusions of the Slovene republican organising committee which said that NK had undoubtedly manipulated the committee and jury who had been unaware of the design's origins. The ZSMS was guilty of no more than insufficient attention to the question of whether or not the proposal was really in line with the wishes of the young generation in Slovenia (Leškovar 1987a). A roundtable discussion of the affair takes place on RS.³⁰

6.3 The republican committee of SAWP Macedonia discusses the affair. It speaks of the recent appearance of a number of anti-socialist attacks in Slovenia, which evoke memories of suffering under the cover of democratisation. It concludes that the working class and working people of Yugoslavia would understand these events as manipulation and premeditated provocations and

³⁰ Summarised in Suhadolnik, Zavrl (Eds.) 1987.

again calls for those responsible to be held accountable (Leškovar 1987a).

7.3 "Dnevnik" publishes "Retroaffair" by Ivan Sedej (1987) a favourable analytical piece dealing with retrogarde techniques of NK and Irwin. "NIN" publishes an article including the views of Jesa Denegri, a modern art theorist who draws attention to the complexity of the Ljubljana art scene and how it relates to trends such as postmodernism, and transavantgardism. Denegri states that in this context is mistaken to speak of plagiarism.³¹

10.3 "Danas" in Belgrade publishes a detailed feature on the affair, characterising NK's techniques in terms of "citation mania" and including an article entitled "Terror of the Slovene Acropolis" (Fras 1987, 24). "Večer" reprints an article from NIN ("Neue Slowenische Witz"), which describes calls for criminal charges against NK as distasteful (Vasič 1987).

11.3 The Federal Committee organising the Youth Day event adopts new designs for the event to replace those of New Collectivism. The council of "Nova Revija" meets and expresses support for the title's current editorial policy (SWB 18.3.87 - Continuing Dispute Over Nova Revija). The provincial committee of LC Vojvodina meets. Presidency member Janko Drca speaks of "the increasingly aggressive penetration of foreign ideas and ideologies" in Yugoslavia, linking this to anti self-management ideas citing examples such as in Nova Revija, a pro-Solidarity fund and the poster controversy (SWB 18.3.87 - Meeting of Vojvodina LC Provincial Committee). The Slovene SAWP Presidium discussed proposals for new editors at "Nova Revija" submitted by the Coordinating Committee for Cadre Questions. The committee expressed a negative opinion of the existing editor and calls for an assessment of the responsibility of the editorial board, the editor and chief executive for the controversial issue 57 (SWB 18.3.87 - Continuing Dispute over "Nova Revija").

12.3 "Dnevnik" reports (Mandič 1987) that Federal organizers have accepted alternative designs by Studio Marketing Delo for the event. The author of the article observes that the foisting of the shameful NK poster shows the need for urgent changes in the structuring of ZSMJ to make it both more representative of its members and less politicised and bureaucratic. "Teleks" cover story is entitled "Inflation Allowed Posters Forbidden". As well as commentary on the scandal a

³¹ See Leskovar 1987a, 10.

chronology is presented. "7D" of Ljubljana publishes "Who Allowed the entry of "the poster?". The article names the Slovene jury that accepted the design and discusses the polemics over the event since Tito's death. It concludes that "dialogue must not be allowed to demolish the basis of our democratic society!" (Mersnik 1987). Laibach interview published in "Daily News" (Sandall 1987).

13.3 "Mladina" publishes a five-page transcript of a RŠ round table discussion on the affair, (broadcast 5.3) along with a summary of Yugoslav press reaction, an article by Peter Mlakar and an interview with NK and resume of its work to date (Suhadolnik, Zavrl (Eds) 1987). In the round-table discussion Tomaž Mastnak comments that a civilized "resolution" of the crisis would only be possible with an independent judiciary and in addition the comments of politicians and the media have prejudiced the outcome making a fair trial impossible (Mastnak 1987, 13). Also featured is a theoretical article by Mladen Dolar (1987) "Introduction to Self-Management Iconolatry Psychoanalysis of Power On Fascism, Marxism and the Poster Affair". "Delo" publishes an article by Marina Gržinić (1987a) on the current NK exhibition at SKUC. "Intervju" (Belgrade) publishes an in-depth report entitled "Deception Not Successful" (Stojanović 1987). It reveals details of the discussions of the organizing committee and speaks to Nikola Grujić the Belgrade engineer who discovered the poster's source. Its analysis of the NK designs is that they were a deliberate attempt to make the event seem so absurd as to completely discredit it and links this with the opposition of Ljubljana students to the event. It remarks that the NK action has struck a blow against all Slovene youth initiatives (abolition of article 133, a civilian alternative to military service etc.) and characterises some of their demands as an attempt by a minority to tyrannise the majority in the name of democracy. The Federal youth organisation's warning against anti-Slovene sentiment is reported and overall the episode is seen as a positive example of "public self defence" and as proof that attempts to divide Slovene and Yugoslav youth had failed. The Montenegrin district prosecutor in Titograd charges four Slovene youths with "hostile propaganda" under Article 133 of the penal code. It is alleged that during military service in Bar the previous year the four agitated for Slovene secession among fellow Slovene conscripts. It is further alleged that they denigrated other Yugoslav peoples and the national leadership and openly gave Nazi salutes (SWB 16.3.87 - Slovene Youths Charged With Hostile Propaganda).

14.3 "The Economist" publishes a report on the affair entitled "Clash Go The Symbols".³² "Delo" publishes "Kranjci, di vam je pjevaljka?" (Slovenes Where Is Your Singer?) by Peter Potočnik (1987). The article discusses the affair in the light of the opinions of Dr. Vera Horvat-Pintarič, a Zagreb art historian. In particular it cites her 1972 discussion of "the re-semanticization of previously existing verbal and visual inventories" in reference to the use of contentious symbols such as those from the Third Reich period. Slovene LCY Presidency member Franc Setinc criticises those elements of the press that presented the Poster Affair "as if there were only forces in Slovenia who defend this provocation" (SWB 16.3.87 - Franc Setinc on Press Freedom). The Republican Conference Presidium of the Macedonian SAWP condemns contributions to Nova Revija 57 that attack the historical basis of Yugoslav unity and the national identity of Macedonia and other Yugoslav nations. Despite such nationalist statements should not be identified with Slovenia's overall socialist self-managing orientation. (SWB 19.3.87 - Macedonian SAWP on "Nova Revija" Writings.) A commentary broadcast on the Belgrade Home Service discusses malicious attempts to isolate "certain events in that republic" and to attribute guilt for them to the entire youth, leadership and nation. It adds "To impose such a burden of guilt on Slovenia may be socially more dangerous and politically more harmful than the very cases the public reacts against with justification." Separatism is best combated through more popular contacts in economy, science and education.

16.3 "United States of Europe Tour" begins at Arena, Vienna.



Laibach: United States Of Europe Tour Poster, 1987.

³² "Economist", 14.3.87. Reproduced p. 275 "NSK" 1991.

19.3 Ungdomshuset, Copenhagen. Commentary in "Teleks" (Leškovar 1987b) analyses the reaction of Yugoslav media to the recent controversies and says that in the present climate anything emerging from Slovenia is treated with suspicion. A report in "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" (O financiranju Nove Revije, Gledališče Sester Scipion Nasice idr. 1987) details questions raised in the Slovene socio-political assembly on the cultural financing of various cultural groups. The official response was that Laibach received no funding either at home or abroad and that NK operated on a commercial basis. None of the NSK groups were members of the Slovene Federation of Cultural Organisations (ZKOS). Nova Revija and TSSN were not directly financed but had received support as part of general cultural programs. The LCY Central Committee Commissions for Intra-National Relations and Ideological and Theoretical Work meets in Belgrade. Member Dušan Dragosavač poses a series of questions concerning the current political situation. Do "national programmes" (such as that in Nova Revija's issue 57) are excesses or "another line" and to what extent the problems over the Youth Day poster are a provocation and to what extent they are a desire "to become more modern etc." He concludes "...we need more ideo-political work and less repression". (SWB 25.3.87 - LCY Bodies Discuss Nationalism and National Awareness). Jože Smole, President of the Slovene SAWP Republican Conference (which has condemned both the Youth Day poster and Nova Revija 57) is interviewed by "Glas" (Banja Luka). He stresses that there is nothing exceptional about the recent controversies and that Slovenes do not require any "comradely help" from other republics. He states that the creation of a "Slovene syndrome" in the media is irresponsible and only aids Slovene nationalists. On the poster affair he states that "... all available measures should be taken against the authors as it is clear that the poster was meant as a provocation." Although it was now a judicial matter the judges "know what has to be done". He asked that the Yugoslav public not exaggerate the controversy and allow the Youth Day event to proceed. He added that to ban "Nova Revija" as some have demanded would mean being "taken in by the provocation. I think we are strong enough to win this battle in a democratic way". (SWB 27.3.87 - Slovene SAWP President on "Negative Developments" in the Republic).

20.3 Magasinet, Orebro, Sweden. Tomaž Mastnak (1987b) argues in his weekly "Mladina" column that by pre-judging guilt the ZSMJ presidency has negated the legal system. He calls for their removal and argues that it is difficult to live in a country where such people rule state and party. The Slovene SAWP calls for the cancellation of an international homosexual meeting scheduled to take place on Youth Day in Ljubljana on the grounds that it would jeopardise anti-AIDS initiatives.

21.3 Stadt Hamburg, Malmo, Sweden. NK Studio in cooperation with ZSMS and ŠKUC issues an unapologetic proclamation setting out the retrogardist approach to political posters and their effects.³³ The Youth Relay event commences as planned at the summit of Mt. Triglav, Yugoslavia's highest peak. A series of debates and other events also take place. Some youths wear badges with the slogan "Relay? No Thanks" and petitions against the event are in circulation in Ljubljana. The message included in the baton states "We are proud to have our own, critical ideas about the world, socialism and about the realities of our self-management. The future will not criticise us for that, and nor should those among you who have not yet decided whether to heed our voice or not". (SWB 28.3.87 - Youth Relay Baton Starts Journey).

22.3 Markthalle, Hamburg.

23.3 Quartier Latin, West Berlin.

24.3 Rose Klub, Cologne.

31.3 "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" publishes a commentary on the affair by Jože Vogrinc (1987) who believes that a democratic discussion of (the use of) Nazi symbols is currently impossible.

April:

35-day miner's strike begins at Labin, Croatia.

1.4 Queen Elizabeth Hall, London.

2.4 The State, Liverpool.

3.4 "Mladina" publishes further commentaries on the affair by Tomaž Mastnak (1987c) and Slavoj Žižek (1987).

5.4 Manchester.

7.4 Laibach record second John Peel session in London.

9.4 Zap Club, Brighton. "Stop" (Ljubljana) reports the release of "Opus Dei" in Britain and that it will be released on licence by RTV Ljubljana.

10.4 Paard von Troje, The Hague.

11.4 Horst, NL.

12.4 Den Zwarte Zaag, Dtrecht, NL.

13.4 Bielefeld

14.4 Zeche, Bochum.

15.4 Derdemonde, Belgium.

16.4 Manege, Munich.

³³ See NSK 1991, 286.

17.4 "Mladina" publishes a report on Laibach's European tour (Laibach Uber England 1987) including extracts from the British concert reviews in "Melody Maker" and "Sounds".

18.4 Frisson, Fribourg, Switzerland.

20.4 Linz.

May Cosmokinetic Drama "FIAT" premiered by Red Pilot in Ljubljana.

23.4 Press conference at SKUC concerning forthcoming Laibach release "Slovenska Akropola" together with a public presentation of the album plus videos the same evening.

24.4 Slobodan Milošević visits Kosovo Polje site of the battle of Kosovo in 1389. Milošević addresses an angry Serb crowd and tells them "Noone should dare to beat you", a reference to the Albanian-dominated police force. Several speakers engage in anti-Albanian rhetoric. Milošević receives the adulation of the crowd.

27.4 State holiday to commemorate the founding of the wartime liberation front. "Slovenska Akropola" (Slovene Acropolis) Yugoslav only release by S.K.U.C. ropot, Ljubljana, effectively ending Laibach's "illegal" period.³⁴

28.4 Album sold outside Maximarket department store on Ljubljana (adjacent to the republican parliament) as a promotional event. "Delo" reports on a forthcoming seminar on the alternative scene organised by the (liberal) Marxist Centre and the Ljubljana section of SAWPY (Strehovec 1987).

May:

6.5 "Delo" publishes a report concerning Irwin's visit to Edinburgh along with a ŠKUC advert publicizing the sale of "Slovenska Akropola".

9.5 Demonstration attended by more than a thousand protesters in Ljubljana to mark the first anniversary of Chernobyl.³⁵

9-30.5 "Was Ist Kunst – Irwin" (An Exhibition of New Slovenian Art) opens at De Marco Gallery Edinburgh along with an exhibition of photographs on NSK by Marko Modič³⁶. Poster is based on the "Day of Youth" design with the addition of a Scottish flag. For the London exhibitions in July a British flag is used.

6-9.5 "No Fire Escape in Hell" performances at Brighton Festival.

³⁴ This was the first domestic release that bore the group's name and came in the aftermath of the first Ljubljana concerts since 1983. See ROPOT-INFO 1987.

³⁵ See Botteri 1987a.

³⁶ Irwin and Modič were accompanied by Modič's manager Zmago Jelinčič, later leader of the Slovene National Party (SNS).

13.5 "Tribuna" feature entitled "Retrogardizem" (Botteri 1987a) linking the poster controversy to the contentious article 157 of the penal code ("verbal offence") and other current controversies such as the strike at Labin. A second piece by Botteri (1987b), "Partisans and Fascists" summarises the characteristics of fascism and states that Slovene youth activities cannot be characterized as such and that the former partisans are having to invent "new" fascists in order to justify their influence. In a article entitled "The Emperor is Naked" Ervin Hladnik-Milharčič (1987) mocks the ZSMJ presidency for invoking the military terminology of general people's defence and preparedness in relation to the poster, asking what would have happened had the poster's source not been discovered till after May 25th and whether it can really have caused a state of emergency.

15.5 "The List" feature on Irwin exhibition at De Marco Gallery Edinburgh (Bain 1987).

24.5. Conference on alternative culture in Slovenia takes place in Ljubljana. Discussions are later published in a special issue of the Mladina supplement "Prizma" (Štefančič, M. (Ed) 1987).

27-30 "No Fire Escape" performances in Leicester.

31.5 Laibach TV feature for LWT's "Network 7".

June:

1.6 "Delo" reports on a meeting of the federal parliamentary juridical committee (Grgić 1987). The committee discussed the work of the federal and republican public prosecutors in the last year. A large part of the discussion was taken up in discussion of the legality of or otherwise of alternative initiatives in Slovenia and the poster affair. The Slovene prosecutor stressed that all the contentious "civil society" initiatives took place within the institutions of socialist democracy and that writing on taboo themes or the need for cultural pluralism could not form the basis for prosecutions. The issues should be discussed "in a democratic manner" without [derogatory] labelling. This was challenged by various delegates, particularly in relation to the poster and Nova Revija 57. A Slovene delegate responded that it would not be just if in the name of equality measures were taken which apply in other republics and that difference should be respected. A Croatian delegate referred to charges submitted in Ljubljana by the Croatian veterans' association and said he expected that they would be considered by the Ljubljana prosecutor. Miloš Bakić, federal prosecutor stated that no republican assembly had the right to nullify federal laws.³⁷

2.6.87 "Delo" report (Klein 1987) on Scottish reactions to the Irwin exhibition in Glasgow, the

³⁷ The Slovene position remained firm and the federal prosecutor did not overturn the decisions not to pursue prosecutions against NK and others in Ljubljana. It was only at the time of the "JBTZ" trial in 1988 that federal legal action was taken against members of the Slovene alternative groups (journalists) and this was done via the military and not the civil legal system.

group's first British exhibition.

13.6 - 20.9 Irwin exhibition "Was Ist Kunst" at Halle K18 Kassel. Report in "Delo" on 16.6.

July:

July: Red Pilot's "Fiat Ballet Observatory" first performed, Kotor, Croatia.

2 - 10 + 13 - 17.7 "Was Ist Kunst" Exhibition, N.L. Centrum, Amsterdam.

17.7 "Delo" reports on the imprisonment of Dragan Živadinov, head of Scipion Nasice and Red Pilot (Marinčič 1987). He had been conscripted in mid-June and sent to Vršac in Vojvodina. He was then confined to a military prison for refusing to wear uniform. The piece reports the intercessions on his behalf of Mitja Rotovnik, director of Cankarjev Dom and professors from AGRFT, the Slovene performing arts faculty.

18.7 Laibach play Paradiso Hall, Amsterdam as part of Amsterdam 87, European city of culture events.

21.7 "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" reports on the new Red Pilot production "FIAT" which was performed as part of the Eurokaz theatre festival in Zagreb despite the absence of Živadinov (Zupancic 1987).

"Life is Life" single released by Mute.



Laibach: Life is Life Single Cover, 1987.

26.7 "Partisan Performances" NSK feature by Hugo Davenport (1987) for "The Observer". "A Talent to Abuse" by Adrian Dannatt (1987) in "Sunday Telegraph".

27.7 Irwin feature in published in "Times Educational Supplement" (Rathbone 1987).

28.7 Laibach perform at Riverside Studios Hammersmith. Irwin exhibitions take place at Riverside

Gallery and Red Pilot perform "FIAT" (28.7-8.8) there as part of London International Theatre Festival.

29.7-16.8 Irwin/NK exhibition at Riverside.

30.7 "Delo" reports the Laibach, Irwin and Red Pilot activity in London as well as the showing of work by Graditelji at the Royal Academy of Art (Šutej 1987).

31.7-30.8 Irwin exhibition at Air Gallery London.

August:

Laibach feature in "Sounds" (Wilkinson 1987)

8.8 NSK Symposium, Air Gallery. Presentation and discussion of the works of Irwin, NK and NSK. Review of London concert in "Melody Maker" (Mathur 1987). Laibach feature in "Sounds" (Wilkinson 1987)

12.8 "Time Out" publish Irwin feature by Sara Kent (1987).

20.8 "Delo" publishes a review of "Slovenska Akropola" by Marjan Ogrinc, (1987a) the title of which is a quote from Laibach's "Nova Akropola."

24.8. Slovene TV report on NSK and the events in London and Amsterdam. Report in "Gorenjski Glas", 1.9.

27.8 "Teleks" publishes a feature on British reactions to NSK and the coverage the groups received there and in Amsterdam (Vidmar 1987a)

29.8 "Delo" report on "Laibach and Occupied Europe" again focusing on British media reaction (Šutej 1987c).

September:

4-6.9 "No Fire Escape" performances at Los Angeles Festival.

5.9 Premiere of Deutsche Schauspielhaus production of Macbeth in Hamburg. Laibach provide music and take part in sixteen performances. "Večer" publishes an article on NSK and its current activities by Lev Kreft (1987a).

10.9 "Teleks" reprints an article ("Laibach in Germany") from "Der Spiegel" (1987), which reports that in "counter-cultural" terms Ljubljana is currently of greater interest than London, Berlin or New York due largely to the NSK factor.

12.9 Third wave of partisan protest begins in reaction to August's piece on "Laibach and Occupied Europe" (Šutej 1987c). A letter from partisan veteran Ivan Šepetevac (1987a) of Kranj compares the entry of Germanized names into Slovene to "some new AIDS", particularly in light of the damage they inflict on the national language and identity. In line with the themes of previous

partisan letters it speaks of the plight of Slovene minorities abroad, the “shameful” silence of the responsible authorities on the issue of the Germanised nomenclature of Laibach and NSK and complains of the press and TV coverage given to them.³⁸

17-18.9 “No Fire Escape in Hell”, Michael Clark performs at BITEF at Sava Centre, Belgrade. Laibach live performance “rejected and censored”.

18.9 “Mladina” publishes a photo of Laibach in “Macbeth” and a brief summary of the “Der Spiegel” article.

19.9 “Delo” reports on the Clark/Laibach event in Belgrade (Peždir 1987) and publishes further correspondence on “Laibach and Occupied Europe”. A letter from Branko Pungartnik (1987) of Maribor supports the stance of Šepetevac (1987a). It identifies some principal supporters of NSK including the ZSMS leadership. Pungartnik casts doubt on whether the leadership’s pro-NSK stance is really representative of Slovene youth. A letter from Majda Hrast (1987) of Ljubljana takes an opposite stance, stressing the rights of freedom and creativity and highlights the undertone of generational conflict behind the controversy, concluding “Leave youth in peace”. “Ljubljanski Dnevnik” publishes a Laibach interview (Hostnik-Šetinc 1987b). Laibach state that “Opus Dei” has fifty thousand copies in ten European countries in the six months of its release.

23.9 Symposium and exhibition at Moderna Galerija Ljubljana on the theme of NSK and Gesamtkunstwerk.

25.9 “Bloody Ground - Fertile Soil” Laibach perform as to an audience of more than three thousand as part of ZSMS Congress, Golovec Hall, Celje.

28.9 “Delo” report on Celje festival and Laibach performance (Lesković, Verbič 1987).

October edition of “Katedra” (Maribor Student Paper) also reports on the festival (Peč 1987).

October:

3.10 “Delo” publishes a further protest letter from Ivan Šepetevac (1987b). Responding directly to the points raised by Majda Hrast (1987) he states that youth have been left to much in peace, that freedom is not limitless and what youth require is “direction” and education. Having once again raised the plight of Austrian and Italian Slovenes he asks if those who wish to adopt German names are not also traitors similar to those Slovenes who wore the swastika during the war. Such Germanised names insult freedom and are a grave provocation. A letter from Iztok Ahačič (1987) of Tržič wonders why the linguistic debate centres so heavily on Germanization and when there are so many other examples of foreign words entering the language and why Slovenia is scrupulous in

³⁸ Letter of Ivan Sepetevac, “Delo”, 12.9.87

respecting minority laws and agreements when Austria and in particular Italy ignore them. Janez Poljanšek (1987) supports the stance of Šepetevac, speaking of the degrading cultural and linguistic effects of “renegades” and pointing to the official support for this. However he stresses that Anglicization is now an even greater problem. Bojan Mohar (1987) of Ljubljana draws attention to the experience of Slovene *gastarbeiters* in Germany and the provision of linguistic facilities for German tourists. He concludes that it is clear the older generation are making no attempt to understand the arguments of the opposing side.³⁹

10.10 “Delo” prints a third Šepetevac letter (1987c) in which he dismisses concerns about Anglicisation as irrelevant asking when the English have invaded the country and tried to suppress the language. He asks how Slovenia could demand rights for its minorities if they did not respect those of the minorities within Slovenia. He says that just as Hitler said “Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuhrer”, Laibach are saying something similar, “Ein Geist, Ein Volk, Ein Laibach!”. He asks who actually needs “rockers” and states that the real need is for “healthy” youth who might help find a solution for the [politico-economic] crisis. A further letter in support of his stance comes from Alojz Sivec (1987) of Ljubljana. Art historian Dr. Jure Mikuž (1987) questions the uncritical coverage given by “Delo” and others to the work of Irwin and NSK. He speaks of the Nazis’ suppression and destruction of avant-garde art. He states that it seems that “New Slovene politicians” seem to believe that in enabling the “fascistoid manifestations” of NSK they are showing their tolerance, democraticness, liberality and permissiveness. As in the original Šepetevac letter (1987a) Mikuž states that their surprise in Western Europe is no surprise at a time of unemployment, terrorism, economic crisis and a general rightward shift in politics. His final artistic judgement is that “Kitsch has always been kitsch, in 1987 as also in 1937”.

11.10 “Ein Schauspieler” - Laibach perform at German National Theatre, Hamburg.

12.10 “Bremenmarsch”, Schlachthof, Bremen.

NSK Feature in “Art News”.

17.10 “Delo” publishes four further letters in the “Occupied Europe” polemic. Iztok Ahačič (1987b) continues the linguistic debate, refuting Šepetevac’s attack on him and even inviting him to phone him to discuss the issue. Tomaz Grujić (1987) of Ljubljana supports the views of Dr. Mikuž (10.3) and links the avantgarde scene to homosexuality and cultural collapse. He calls for other academics to state that every democracy has its limits. Marko Grad (1987) of Ljubljana points out that whilst Western Europe may be undergoing a rightward shift it has also been a cradle for the

³⁹ “Laibach in osvajanje Evrope”, “Delo”, 3.10.87

most progressive human ideas. Ruža Barič and Aleš Dvoržak (1987) of Kranj respond directly to Šepetevac's points, even addressing him as "Mein Liebe Herr Šepetevac!". Whilst his concern for Slovene language and identity is understandable, his desire for the physical removal of those of differing opinions is not. They ask where Šepetevac was when the monopolistic party was being built and remind him that in fact it is youth that are fighting for his privileges of expression.

23.10 "Mladina" feature "Laibach in Hamburg" (Zajc 1987).

24.10 Final round of "Occupied Europe" correspondence. Tomaž Hostnik's mother Mara warns of a heroic past ruling the present and that witch hunts can kill (1987). Franc Pičej (1987), an Austrian Slovene wonders how it is possible that such a neo-Nazi phenomenon as Laibach can exist in Yugoslavia. Finally Simon Bizjak (1987) of Ajdovščina states that in no way does the use of German degrade Slovene and that all the attacks on Laibach have had either an ideological or a linguistic focus.

November:

November issue of "Art News" publishes article on NSK (Feaver 1987).

2.11 "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" feature (Radež 1987) "NSK in Germany", summarizing German reactions to Laibach and "Macbeth".

6.11 "Mladina" reports (in German) the Yugoslav release of "Opus Dei" describing it as "good news for all friends of the socialist heavy-metal group Laibach" (Ungemutlichs Laibach 1987).

9.11 Official album launch held at Blue Salon, Union Hotel, Ljubljana.

10.11 "Dnevnik" publishes an analysis by Lev Kreft (1987b) of the decision to allow Laibach to perform under its name after the ban from 1983-7.

11.11 "Delo" report on album launch event (Šutej 1987d).

12.11 ZKP RTV LJ release Yugoslav licensed version of "Opus Dei". A letter in "Delo" (Svetina 1987) questions why the existence of a German language radio service in Maribor called "Radio Marburg" has passed unnoticed when the use of "Laibach" remains so controversial and ironically suggests referring to Slovenia as "Altosterreichishnessudslowenischland" (Old Austrian South Slovene Land).

13.11 Laibach feature on "Mladina" front cover. "Polet" reports on "Opus Dei" release event and includes a short interview with NSK members (Ostrić 1987).

14.11 "Večer" reports on "Opus Dei" release (Tom 1987).

16.11 "Klangniederschrift Einer Taufe". Walter Ulbricht Schalfolien, Hamburg and Sub Rosa Records Brussels release "Baptism" soundtrack.

17.11 Feature on “Opus Dei” by Igor Vidmar (1987b) published in “Ljubljanski Dnevnik”. Vidmar states that the use of German and English on the album⁴⁰ will present a new challenge for the Slovene exorcists of all that is foreign.

20.11 Critical “Opus Dei” review in “Mladina” (Laibach - HOWG 1987). “Opus Dei” is characterised as a step backwards from “Nova Akropola” and its sound is likened to that of German beer adverts. It concludes that Laibach have used their musical credit and that the [NSK] Gesamtkunstwerk has fallen.

25.11 Slavoj Žižek lectures at Cankarjev Dom on “Totalitarianism and Woman's Desire” illustrating his points with the use of Laibach and other video excerpts.

26.11 “Živo je Življenje” (Life is Life) Laibach feature including a group chronology in “Stop” (ROPOT - INFO 1987).

27.11 “Mladina” interview (Ogrinc 1987b) with Gregor Tomc and Peter Lovšin on the tenth anniversary of the founding of Pankrti (Bastards) the first Slovene punk group in which they stress the way in which the success of Laibach/NSK is a consequence of the first punk actions. Adverts for the imminent Ljubljana concert appear in “Delo” and “Mladina”.

December:

3.12 “Live is Life” performance at Tivoli Sports Hall, Ljubljana's largest venue.

4.12 Brief concert report in “Dnevnik” (Živo je življenje 1987).

5.12 “Delo” reports that the concert sold out, attracting an audience of more than four thousand (the venue's capacity is three thousand eight hundred). Some audience reactions are reported. (Šutej 1987e).

8.12 “Ljubljanski Dnevnik” publishes a concert review (Urh-Koš 1987) which argues that the show proves that the obvious way to suppress a phenomenon now seems to be to legalise it and that the show concluded an important chapter in the Slovene musical avant-garde.

9.12 Laibach interview in “Delo” (Šutej 1987f). Laibach state that without music no state can exist, a thesis highlighted in the work of Jacques Attali (1996, 49).

10.12 Concert review in “7D” (BB 1987). The December issue of “Katedra” includes a critical review of the Tivoli concert (Peč 1987b). It says that Laibach's songs have become similar and that Tomaž Hostnik would not have approved. According to the reviewer only the last two songs, the cover versions of “Life is Life” and “One Vision” roused the audience. Laibach are presented as

⁴⁰ In fact German was used on the previous Yugoslav release “Slovenska Akropola” (1987a) and had appeared alongside English on the previous (non-Yugoslav) releases “Occupied Europe Tour” and “Nova Akropola” (1986a,b)

having lost the power to disturb. While the reviewer regrets the passing of the myth Laibach are still held to be one of the best pop groups both on the global and Slovene scale.

11.12 "Mladina" reprints the foreword from October's issue of "Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung" which discusses Laibach as musical phenomenon (Faspunder1987). "La Vie C'est Moi" performance, Trans Musicales des Rennes Festival, France.

14.12 Ivan Stambolić dismissed as Serbian president after party coup engineered by Milošević.

15.12 Concert review in "Kaj" (Ljubljana) (Tomažič, 1987).

20.12 "Leben Heist Leben" German tour begins at Longhorn Hall, Stuttgart. "Laibach in the Belly of the Trojan Horse" interview in "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" (Damjanić 1987). The interview responses combine essentialist statements about Slovenia with quasi-Marxist invective against the West and the role of television. Laibach describe themselves as the embodiment of the Slovene spirit and that will act as "apostles" when allowed to play in Poland and that Laibach can carry the ideals of the fourth international. Special NSK feature in "Teleks" including a Laibach interview and features on Irwin, retrogardism and Red Pilot. (Jensterle, Kreft, Drapal, Marinčič et. al 1987).

21.12 Cookys, Frankfurt.

22.12 Live Station, Dortmund.

23.12 Rock Fabrik, Aachen.

24.12 "Teleks" special issue "New Slovene Art".

25.12 Fabrik, Coesfeld.

27.12 PC 69, Bielefeld.

30.12 "Broj" (Zagreb) publishes a review of the year in alternative music in Yugoslavia focussing especially on activity in Ljubljana. (Čikara 1987).

1988.

Irwin solo exhibitions in New York and Paris. Group exhibitions in London, Sydney, Melbourne.

January:

The January issue of "Glasbene Mladine" publishes review of "Opus Dei" (Krokar 1987). It characterises Laibach's current sound as a blend of folk songs and Bavarian disco rhythms.

5.1 In an article in "Ljubljanski Dnevnik", Marjan Ogrinc (1988) argues that perhaps the time has come for a rock equivalent of the wartime liberation front in order to liberate alternative politics and culture. "Slovenska Akropola" is included at number four of five Slovene albums of 1987.

8.1 Ljubljana military district issues document 5044-3 on preparations for the imposition of martial

law. Later passed to "Mladina" by NCO Ivan Borštner.

28.1 "Stop" feature on current Laibach activity (Laibach v Frančiji 1988).

February:

23.2 Review of "Krst Pod Triglavom" album (Novak 1988) and feature by Marjan Ogrinc (1988b) in "Ljubljanski Dnevnik".

March:

12.3 "La Vie C'est Moi" concert at Divergences/Divisiones Festival, Bordeaux.

23.3 "Delo" reports on the "Black Rose Sect" in Zagreb, a group supposedly composed of suicidally disposed alternative youth. It reports that a favoured meeting point is Kulusič Hall a venue at which Laibach have played and that their music is influential among the "sect" who have supposedly carried out quasi-Satanic rituals at Laibach's concerts (Potočnik 1988).

25.3 Special meeting of the Yugoslav Central Committee requested by Milan Kučan to discuss the Federal Military Council's assessment of the situation in Slovenia. Kučan states that anti-Yugoslav sentiment is increasing in response to the anti-Slovene sentiment in the rest of Yugoslavia. Defence Minister Veljko Kadijević warns "Yugoslavia is on the brink of disintegration" (Silber, Little 1995, 52). "Ljubljana Trst Celovec" concert at the Slovene Grammar School, Klagenfurt/Celovec.⁴¹

31.3 "Delo" reports on the cancellation of the planned opera collaboration between Red Pilot and composer Vinko Globokar due to financial difficulties (Sošič 1988).

April:

5.4 "Ljubljanski Dnevnik" feature on Irwin (Gržinić 1988b). "Delo" report on the cancellation of Red Pilot's "Propaganda Observatory Migrants" and a Red Pilot "press conference" at a Ljubljana restaurant, which revealed details of the production (Crnković 1988).

7.4 Further "Black Rose" report in "7D" (Kaj je s Črno Rožo 1988).

May:

7.5 Premiere of Red Pilot's "Zenit" in Zagreb.

13.5. "Mladina" publishes "Night of The Long Knives" a story based on a transcript of the March central committee meeting claiming that the army had compiled a mass arrest list and was preparing an intervention in Slovenia.⁴² The issue also includes a review of the "Zenit" performance in Zagreb (Zupančič 1988).

19.5 Milošević appointed president of Serbian Central Committee.

⁴¹ Opening address by NSK Philosophy Department reproduced NSK (1991), 219.

⁴² See Gow 1992, 175.

20.5 Meeting of Slovene Central Committee. A public denial that a military intervention is being prepared against Slovenia is issued.

27.5 NK graphic "25th of May" depicting Tito slicing through a Swastika flag used as "Mladina" front cover.

31.5 Arrest of Janez Jansa, "Mladina" journalist and defence specialist.

June:

2.6 Arrest of "Mladina" editor Franci Zavrl. Slovene Cultural Workers Committee issues a statement calling for the release of the accused and an investigation into the procedures used against them. Formation of ODBOR, Slovene Committee For The Defence of Human Rights.

4.6 Arrest of "Mladina" journalist David Tasič in Ljubljana. "Big Heat 88" concert at Wiener Festwoche festival, Kaiser Franz Josef Reitschule Hall, Vienna. Organisers almost cancel the show after Peter Mlakar opens his speech with the statement "Austrians, you are Germans".⁴³

5.6 "Mladina" editorial offices searched.

10.6 "Delo" report on Irwin's participation in the Sydney Biennale (Trenevski 1988).

11.6 Laibach feature in "Start" (Kos 1988) relates the work of the group to current musical trends.

21.6 Mass protest meeting in support of democratisation and the four accused, Congress Square, Ljubljana. Belgrade TV's commentary on the protests speaks of "escalating nationalism and counter-revolution" in Slovenia.⁴⁴ "Delo" report on the participation of Laibach and Red Pilot at the Vienna "Big Beat" Festival (Apovnik 1988).

24.6 First US concert at "The Kitchen" NYC as part of New York Festival of Art, repeated the next night.⁴⁵

"Delo" report on an American counterpart to the poster affair in which an agricultural poster was based on a Third Reich design (Plakatni aferi tudi v ZDA 1988). "Mladina" report (Borghesia-Ogolelo Mesto 1988) on the new Borghesia album.

July:

7.7 Last of 28 daily protest meetings organised by Slovene Writers Association in Ljubljana.

17-27.7 "JBTZ" trial, known after the defendants' initials begins at a military court in Ljubljana. Crowds gather daily outside the courthouse.

28.7 All-night prayer vigil for the accused conducted. Milan Kučan states publicly:

⁴³ Meglič 1995, 37.

⁴⁴ Gow 1992, 80.

⁴⁵ Performance clips and audience reaction included on the video "Bravo" (Dir. Vezjak 1992).

“Slovenes cannot accept as their own any state that does not secure the use of their mother tongue and its equality, and in which the freedom, sovereignty and equality of the Slovene people is not guaranteed.” (see Ramet 1992, 211).

September:

1.9 Launch event for Laibach’s “Sympathy For The Devil” release at Disco Turist, Ljubljana.

9.9 New Irwin work “Basics of Morphology”⁴⁶ featuring the face of Stalin used as “Mladina” front cover.

14-16.9 Slovene Society of Aesthetics colloquium on “Gesamtkunstwerk” and NSK, Cankarjev Dom, Ljubljana.⁴⁷ Performance of “Zenit” at Cankarjev Dom.

15.9 Red Pilot performance of “FIAT”, Dom Malci Belič, Ljubljana.

16.9 Red Pilot performance of “Marija Nablocka”, Križanke, Ljubljana. Start of one month Red Pilot “Observatory” season in Ljubljana. Performances of “Ballet Observatory Zenit” and Drama Observatories “Fiat” and “Zenit”. “Delo” report on discussions of NSK at the colloquium and particularly the presentation by Marina Gržinić in which she stated that art in the eighties could function only as a total phenomenon but that this should not be confused with actual totalitarianism (Šutej-Adamič 1988a). NSK “visual presentation”, Equrna Gallery, Ljubljana. “Delo” also reports on Dragan Živadinov’s recent assault on the critic Marko Crnkovič (Šutej-Adamič 1988b).

23.9 “Delo” report and photo of Irwin exhibition at Galerija Equrna, Ljubljana (Šutej-Adamič 1988c).

24.9 Mute Records release “Sympathy For The Devil I/II” two 12” singles and a CD single.

26.9 Federal Supreme Court in Belgrade rejects the appeals of the JBTZ defendants.

28-30.9 First performances of Drama Observatory “Zenit”, Ljubljana Railway Station.

October:

3-7.10 Further “Zenit” performances.

5.10 Milošević’s “Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution” reaches Vojvodina. Autonomist Novi Sad leadership forced to resign by mob intimidation.

10-12.10 Further “Zenit” performances.

11.10 “The Slovene (Post) Modern” a review by Kim Levin (1988) of Irwin’s New York exhibition appears in “Village Voice”.

12+14.10 Final “Zenit” performances.

⁴⁶ Reproduced in NSK 1991, 93.

⁴⁷ Program published in “Mladina”, 9.9.88

24.10 Mute Records release “Let It Be” album.

November:

Irwin feature in “Art in America” (Cotter 1988).

17.11 Kosovo party leadership dismissed by Belgrade.

19.11 Milošević addresses “meeting of all meetings” in Belgrade, calling for the reintegration of Kosovo into Serbia. “Melody Maker” feature on Laibach (Gittins 1988).

22.11 Ten thousand people take part in a rally arguing for sovereignty and human rights outside the republican parliament in Ljubljana.

December:

9.12 NK graphic “Red Pilot” on “Mladina” front cover.⁴⁸

10.12 Release of the single “Across The Universe” from “Let it Be” featuring Laibach sub-group Germania.



Laibach: Across The Universe Single Cover, 1988.

12.12 “Sympathy For The Devil” tour begins at Town and Country Club, London.

13.12 Theaterfabrik, Munich.

14.12 Longhorn, Stuttgart.

15.12 Batschkapp, Frankfurt.

16.12 Jovel, Munster.

⁴⁸ Reproduced NSK 1991, 280.

17.12 Live Station, Dortmund. In an article for "Komunist", Kučan stresses that Slovenia retains the right to secession (Ramet 1992, 211).

18.12 PC69, Bielefeld.

19.12 Quartier Latin, Berlin.

20.12 Markthalle, Hamburg.

21.12 Rockfabrik, Aachen.

24.12 "Delo" publishes an interview with Irwin (Ković 1988).

"Melody Maker" review of London concert (Unsworth 1988).

1989:

Irwin solo exhibitions in Dusseldorf, New York, Chicago. Group exhibitions in New York, Sarajevo, Carcassone, Sainte-Croix, Toulon, Split, Banja Luka.

January:

11.1 A mass rally in Titograd, capital of Montenegro effectively overthrows the local party leadership in favour of pro-Milošević factions.

26.1 "Delo" article by Brane Ković (1988), "Slovene Art in 1988", features the work of Irwin.

February:

Feature on Irwin in "Art Issues" (Pagel 1988).

Sympathy For The Devil US Tour.

2.2 Boston. Irwin/NK exhibition opens at Stadtische Kunsthalle, Dusseldorf. Runs to 12.3.

4.2 The Palladium, NYC.

5.2 Washington

7.2 Toronto

8.2 Cleveland

10.2 Detroit

11-12.2 Chicago

13.2 Minneapolis

16.2 Dallas

18.2 Phoenix

20.2 San Francisco

21.2 San Jose. Strikes begin in Kosovo including a hunger strike at the Stari Trg mine against the ending of Kosovan autonomy.

23.2 Berkeley

24.2 San Diego

25.2 Los Angeles.

27.2 Odbor, the Slovene Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, organises a rally in Cankarjev Dom in support of the Kosovo strikers. Slovene political leaders are fully represented.

Belgrade TV broadcasts the rally live.

28.2 By morning hundreds of thousands have assembled outside the Federal Assembly provoked by the Slovene rally and demanding immediate action in Kosovo.

March:

Irwin feature in *Lapiz International Art Magazine* (Lebrero-Stals 1989).

1.3 Milošević addresses the crowds calling for arms and the arrest of Vlasi, Kosovan party leader. Milošević promises arrests and “unity and freedom” in Kosovo. He states “Nothing can stop the Serb leadership and people doing what they want”.⁴⁹ Only after Milošević’s address does the crowd disperse. Red Pilot opening performance of Drama Observatory Zenit at ZAKK, Dusseldorf.

2.3 Vlasi is arrested. Further Red Pilot performance in Dusseldorf.

3.3 Laibach at “Zakk Club” Dusseldorf as part of NSK manifestation in Dusseldorf. “Delo” article on Irwin's latest activities (Sedmak 1989).

4-5.3 Final Red Pilot performances in Dusseldorf.

14.3 Report on Irwin in “Danas” (Belgrade) (Koščević 1989a).

27.3 Concert at “Lords of Independence” festival in Bonn. Azem Vlasi, Kosovan party leader arrested after attempting to negotiate with the Stari Trg miners and refusing to take orders from Belgrade.

28.3 New centralist Serbian constitution adopted, rioting in Pristina and elsewhere in Kosovo.

30.3 Yugoslav Sympathy for The Devil Tour opens at Tivoli Hall, Ljubljana.

April:

7-8.4 First Sarajevo Concerts.

9.4 Zagreb. The show is introduced by a performance on the guzla, an instrument strongly associated with Serbian folklore and national epics.

11.4 Rijeka.

12.4 Split.

27-28.4 Concerts at ŠKC (Student Cultural Centre), Belgrade. Both concerts are preceded by a

⁴⁹ Silber, Little 1995, 68.

Peter Mlakar speech addressed to the Serb nation⁵⁰ and the showing of a Third Reich propaganda film, "The Bombing of Belgrade".⁵¹

May:

May issue of "New Art Examiner" features Irwin (Heartney 1989).

May/June issue of "Flash Art" includes Irwin interview by French critic Nicolas Bourriaud (1989).

10.5 Concert in Maribor.

11.5 Austrian Tour opens with "Dem Teufel Zugeneigt" concert, Graz, Haus Der Jugend Hall.

12.5 Salzburg, Stadtkino.

13.5 Feldkirche, Stadthalle.

14.5 Linz, "Posthof Hall".

15.5 Vienna.

20.5 European leg of Sympathy For The Devil Tour continues at Bordeaux.

22.5 Milošević describes political developments in Slovenia as fascist.⁵²

23.5 Lyon.

24.5 Fribourg, CH.

25.5 Zurich.

27.5 Strasbourg.

June:

28.12 One million Serbs rally at Kosovo Polje to commemorate the six hundredth anniversary of the Serbian defeat by the Turks.

July:

25.7 Serbian Assembly passes unitarist amendments to the constitution ending the autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina and assuming control of their representation at federal level.

August:

30.8 "Knack" magazine, Belgium publishes a detailed article on NSK relating to the art-historical context in Yugoslavia (Vanderbeeken, Bierinckx 1989). A translation of the article is included in press materials for Irwin's New York exhibition in September.

September:

1.9 Lawyer Vladimir Rabzelj argues in a "Mladina" article that Slovenia and Croatia should secede

⁵⁰ See the film "Predictions of Fire", (Dir.Benson 1995).

⁵¹ See Ramet 1994, 121. Speech reproduced in Slovene and German respectively in Mlakar 1992, 88 and 1993, 20.

⁵² See Nečak 1991, 197.

and form a separate confederation (see Ramet 1992, 211).

27.9 Slovenia adopts a series of constitutional amendments designed to protect its autonomy within Yugoslavia and declares itself a sovereign state. Federal president Janez Drnovšek (current Slovene prime minister) cuts short a visit to the UN in New York in order to be present in Ljubljana. Slovenia simultaneously adopts a de facto national anthem, the traditional toast “Zdravljica”.

9.9-30.9 Irwin exhibition “Second Bombing” at Bess Cutler Gallery, New York.

December:

1.12 Proposed “Meeting of Truth” by 40000 Serbs in Ljubljana is cancelled after Slovenia mobilises for possible military action in order to thwart the prohibited meeting on the grounds that it could cause serious rioting. Trains entering Slovenia are searched in the first assertion of Slovene territorial sovereignty. SAWPY Serbia responds by urging a boycott of Slovene firms and goods. During December 130 Serbian firms cut links with Slovenia. Slovenia then refuses to pay its share of federal funding for underdeveloped regions and sends money allocated for Kosovo direct to the provincial administration in Priština, ignoring the new centralised Serbian constitutional arrangements.

5.12 Milošević states that economic relations with Slovenia will remain interrupted until “the powers of violence and conservatism are removed from this republic”.⁵³

15.12 Irwin feature in “Boston Globe”.

22-23.12 11th Slovene Party Congress predicts the arrival of party pluralism and the first democratic elections. Dr. Ciril Ribičič becomes party president.

27.12 Slovene Electoral Law passed.

31.12 NSK New Year Celebration at Equina Gallery. Unveiling of “Kapital” label wine.⁵⁴

1990

Irwin solo exhibitions in Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland, Ljubljana. Group exhibitions in Paris, Vienna, Prague, Pecs, Zagreb, Ljubljana, New York, Siroki Brijeg, Cleveland, Miami, Winnipeg, St. Louis, Salina, Wichita.

January:

ZSMS organise a petition calling for the word “socialist” to be dropped from the name of the Slovene Republic. Mute Records release Laibach’s “Macbeth” soundtrack from 1987.

⁵³ Nečak 1991, 197.

⁵⁴ Designs reproduced in Erjavec & Gržinić 1991, 115 and NSK 1991, 221.



Laibach: Macbeth Album Cover, 1989.

23.1 14th Extraordinary Yugoslav Party Congress, Belgrade. An acrimonious debate over whether to democratise or centralise the party takes place. Milošević warns that if the Yugoslav party structure disintegrates, republican parties will become nationalist or national socialist. All Slovene reformist amendments are rejected and the Slovene delegation walks out, followed shortly after by their Croat allies thus ending the last party congress to include representatives of all the former Yugoslav republics.⁵⁵

February:

At its congress the Slovene party renames itself “League of Communists Slovenia - Party of Democratic Renewal”. Slovene militia units are withdrawn from policing operations in Kosovo. Society of Slovene Writers withdraws from Yugoslav Association after conflicts with Serbian members.

3.2 “Melody Maker” feature on “Macbeth” (Gittins 1990).

17.2 Serbian Democratic Party founded in Knin, Krajina.

March:

Publication of special issue of “Nova Revija” entitled “Independent Slovenia”.

New Collectivism exhibition opens at Klagenfurt University.

7.3 Supplements to the Slovene constitution passed, including the removal of the word “socialist” from state nomenclature.

April:

7.4 General Kadjević, federal defence minister, visits Ljubljana and declares “Those who today negate all values and achievements of development in the elections, who offer a fratricidal war,

⁵⁵ See Silber, Little 1995, 79-81.

redrawing the borders and tearing apart the country, must realise that this will be stopped.”⁵⁶

8.4 First round of Slovene multi-party elections.

22.4 Second round of elections. Slovene party leader Milan Kučan becomes president after receiving 58% support in second round. The government is formed by the five party DEMOS coalition with 55% support as compared to the 17% vote for the former communists. Lojze Peterle becomes first prime minister. First two-day round of Croatian elections.

May:

6-7.5 Franjo Tudjman elected president and HDZ party wins 58% of seats under majoritarian election system imposed by the Croatian Communists who receive almost as large a share of the vote.

7.5 First meeting of new Slovene assembly.

17.5 Slovene Territorial Defence units are ordered to hand in their weapons to the army. Before president Kučan countermands the orders and puts police guards on the arsenals approximately 70% of the Slovene arsenal is removed. A covert procurement programme begins under the direction of DEMOS defence minister Janez Janša. Confiscation of weapons from Croatian Territorial Defence is even more thorough.

18.5 SFRY Presidency ends state of emergency in Kosovo, turning over policing to the Serbian authorities following the non co-operation of Slovene and other federal units posted there.

30.5 Inauguration of Franjo Tudjman as Croatian president.

July:

1-2.7 Referendum held in Serbia to decide whether multi-party elections should precede adoption of the new constitution or take place later as the government argued. 96.8 % vote to delay elections.

2.7 Slovene parliament declares complete sovereignty. Albanian delegates in Kosovo assembly declare political sovereignty for Kosovo.

5.7 Kosovo Assembly dissolved by Serbian government. Purge of Albanians within government and media begins. Dimitrij Rupel, first Slovene foreign minister declares in an interview for “La Repubblica” that “Yugoslavia no longer exists”.⁵⁷

8.7 20000 Slovenes attend a government supported ecclesiastical “ceremony of reconciliation” at Kočevjski Rog forest, the site of mass executions by Tito's forces of defeated collaborators and

⁵⁶ Ibid, 88.

⁵⁷ Woodward, 1995, 120.

political opponents in summer 1945. Prayers are also said for Slovene partisans and for the future of Yugoslavia.

12.7 Retrovision live broadcast of Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy address; “NSK Appeal To The United Europe” to Alby, France as part of “Interferants” festival.

August:

17.8 Croatian interior ministry helicopters bound for Knin to help assert Croatian authority in Krajina ordered to return to base by JNA interceptors. Local Serb leaders in Knin declare a “state of war” and Croatian forces withdraw.

19.8 Self-organized referendum on cultural autonomy is held by Krajina Serbs.

Autumn: Low-key Laibach tour of Yugoslav industrial towns and Bosnian mini-tour.

September:

Ljubljana University removes the name “Edvard Kardelj” from its institutional title.

October:

1.10 Krajina Serbs declare autonomy and block all road and rail access to the area.

3.10 German reunification. Commemorative “Kraftbach” remix of “Geburt Einer Nation” released.



Laibach: 3 Oktober Single Cover, 1990.

23.10 Serbian Assembly votes to impose customs dues on Slovene and Croatian goods entering Serbia.

November:

10.11 The governing DEMOS coalition announces plans for a plebiscite on Slovene independence.

11.11 First multi-party elections in Macedonia.

18.11 First multi-party elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

December:

3.12 Federal defence minister Kadjević threatens the use of force against paramilitary units refusing to disarm. He states his support for a unitary socialist Yugoslavia.

9.12 First round of multi-party elections in Serbia and Montenegro.

22.12 Croatian parliament passes new constitution defining Croatia as a sovereign state.

23.12 Plebiscite on Slovene independence is held. 88.5% vote for independence and sovereignty on a 93.3% turnout.

25.12 First official post-war Christmas holiday in Slovenia.

26.12 Laibach tenth anniversary concert, Termolektrarna II Power Station, Trbovlje.⁵⁸ The power station is derelict and unheated and the temperature minus fifteen degrees. A party follows at Kum mountain near Trbovlje, a favoured NSK meeting place. Announcement of the results of the Slovene independence referendum. In the second round of Serbian and Montenegrin elections the ruling socialist parties are successful.

1991

Irwin solo exhibitions in San Francisco, Graz, New York. Group exhibitions in Chicago, Ljubljana, Cleveland, Bellingham, Guelph, Amsterdam. NSK State In Time founded. Recording of "Kapital". Irwin issue edition of 500 "Kapital" catalogues from Pittsburgh exhibition of same title. Publication of "NSK" monograph.

January:

25.1 Federal Presidency issues an order for the disarming of all groups other than the Yugoslav armed forces and police. Parliament in Skopje declares Macedonian sovereignty. Dragan Živadinov presents three demands on cultural funding to the Slovene Secretariat for Culture in opposition to "conservative clerical trends of the government policy which is destroying the positive artistic streams and progressive movements achieved during the liberal cultural strategy in the last decade."⁵⁹ Živadinov begins a hunger strike on ministry premises and is removed by the police. Hunger strike continues under medical supervision at ST Gallery, Ljubljana.

February:

1.2 Laibach concert at Kranj, Primorska Hall.

19.2 Having received reassurances from a parliamentary delegation that they will "strive for the

⁵⁹ From "NSK Information For International Public", reproduced in Swezey (Ed.) 1995, 275-77.

realization of the demands put forward by Mr. Živadinov and NSK.” Dragan Živadinov concludes his hunger strike and NSK announces that the strike has achieved its aim.⁶⁰

March:

6.3 Nationalist opposition parties in the Macedonian parliament demand that the YPA leave Macedonia.

9.3 40000 opposition supporters rally in central Belgrade. Rioting follows police attempts to break up the rally. JNA tanks are deployed and the independent Studio B TV station and B92 radio station temporarily shut down.

10-17.3 “Terazije Forum” becomes centre of opposition activity in Belgrade. Students and demonstrators maintain a constant vigil.

11.3 Milošević meets student leaders.

12.3 Federal Presidency meets in emergency session to discuss whether to impose a state of emergency throughout Yugoslavia and the failure of Slovene and Croatian paramilitary units to disarm. Slovenia is un-represented because of delegates’ about the security risks of attending the meeting.

13.3 Opposition leader Vuk Drašković is released in Belgrade, the Serb interior minister resigns and Milošević agrees to organise a parliamentary investigation into the violence of the ninth.

15.3 First collapse of the Yugoslav presidency after the Serbian representative and his allies resign in protest at the other members’ refusal to approve a military intervention to restore order. (The resignation was withdrawn 20.3).

16.3 Milošević declares that in view of the deadlock of the federal presidency “Yugoslavia is finished” and orders the urgent creation of additional Serbian paramilitary units. Serb leaders in Knin declare independence from Croatia.

23.3 Laibach Italian mini-tour begins in Bologna.

25.3 Genoa.

26.3 Torino.

28.3 Udine. First of six “Yu-Summits” among the republic presidents is held at Split.

April:

4.4 Second “Yu-Summit”, Belgrade.

11.4 Third meeting at Tito’s former residence, Brdo pri Kranj, Slovenia.

18.4 Fourth meeting at Ohrid, Macedonia.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 278.

May:

2.5 Twelve Croat policemen killed by local Serbs at Borovo Selo near Vukovar as police enter the town to remove a Serbian flag.

15.5 Janez Drnovšek's term as chair of the federal presidency ends. Serbia vetoes the scheduled succession of the Croat Stipe Mesič on the grounds that he favours Croatian independence.

19.5 Croatian independence referendum. Proposition approved by 93% of 83.6% turnout. Most Serbs boycott the referendum.

24.5 Laibach concert, Budapest.

29.5 Fifth "Yu-Summit", Cetinje, Montenegro.

June:

6.6 Final summit meeting, Stojčevac near Sarajevo.

26.6 Slovenia and Croatia declare independence.

27.6 Slovenia comes under attack from the JNA. NK carry out poster action in Ljubljana with two designs, the Laibach poster "Buy Victory" and "I Want to Fight For the New Europe" featuring the Croatian inventor Nikola Tesla and a chequerboard design reminiscent of the Croatian flag. JNA barracks in Slovenia are blockaded by Slovene territorial defence units.

28.7 EC "Troika" arrives in Belgrade, fighting continues.

30.7 Serbia vetoes JNA plan for full-scale invasion proposed in order to preserve Yugoslav territorial integrity.

July:

1.7 Stipe Mesič allowed to accede to Yugoslav presidency as a concession to EC mediators.

2.7 Blagoje Adžić, JNA Chief of Staff, declares on Belgrade TV that the army will wage war until it regains control of the country. Convoy of 180 tanks heads north from Belgrade.

4.7 Serbian Socialist Party recognises Slovenia's right to peaceful secession.

5.7 An article in "The Guardian" (Dannatt 1991) highlights Slovenia's status as "... a vital part of the European avant-garde" which is closer in spirit to Western than Eastern capitals and that it should be supported in the West. A lengthy summary of NSK activity includes the statement that Freddie Mercury of Queen so appreciated *Laibach's* song "Life is Life" "... that he turned into a hit single".⁶¹

8.7 Brioni talks begin.

⁶¹ "Life is Life" was originally by the Austrian group Opus. Laibach covered Queen's "One Vision" and it is presumably the latter that the article refers to.

10.7 Slovene Parliament ratifies Brioni Agreement between Slovenia, Yugoslavia and the EC. Slovene-Federal negotiations to begin 1.8. Slovene police to control borders, customs dues to be sent to the federation. JNA to withdraw to barracks and territorial defence units to be de-activated (ignored in practice).

12.7 50000 peace demonstrators and civic groups demonstrate in Sarajevo in favour of a united Yugoslavia.

13.7 Laibach concert, Berlin.

18.7 SFRY Presidency session orders JNA withdrawal from Slovenia within three months.

August:

1.8 Tudjman forms government of national unity excluding nationalist hardliners wanting an open declaration of war.

26.8 After JNA attacks Croatia declares general mobilisation and “war of liberation”. Systematic bombardment of Vukovar begins.

September:

14.9 Croatian forces blockade JNA barracks throughout Croatia. Open warfare begins between JNA and Croatian forces.

October:

1.10 JNA Dubrovnik offensive begins.

November:

18.11 Fall of Vukovar to Serbian forces.

December:

23.12 Germany recognises Slovene and Croatian independence.

1992

Irwin solo exhibition in Koper. Group exhibitions in Milan, Rome, Moscow, Graz.

January:

Croatian and Yugoslav military officials sign cease-fire agreement in Sarajevo.

March:

8.3 UN peace-keepers begin to arrive in Croatia.

April:

4.4 President Izetbegović orders general mobilisation of Bosnian Territorial Defence units.

5.4 Serb snipers fire on peace demonstrators in Sarajevo. JNA takes control of Sarajevo airport.

6.4 EU recognises Bosnia-Herzegovina. Mute Records release Laibach single "Wirtschaft Ist Tot".



Laibach: Wirtschaft Ist Tot Single Cover, 1992.

7.4 US recognizes Bosnia-Herzegovina.

13.4 Mute Records release "Kapital".

25.4 "Melody Maker" review of "Kapital" (Simpson 1992)

May:

Laibach feature/interview in "Mladina", "Capitalism Is Dead".⁶²

2.5 Heavy shelling of Sarajevo begins. Serb forces shell eastern suburbs. Bosnian President Izetbegović detained by JNA.

3.5 Izetbegović released. Fighting escalates.

8.5 JNA units ordered to withdraw from Bosnia.

10.5 "NSK Embassy Moscow"; month long exhibition and series of discussions begins.

13.5 "Kapital Tour" opens in Norwich.

14.5 London, Astoria.

15.5 Manchester.

16.5 Sheffield.

19.5 Malmö, "Stadt Hamburg".

21.5 Helsinki.

23.5 Stockholm, Modern Museum.

24.5 Gothenburg.

25.5 Copenhagen.

⁶² Reproduced *ibid.*, 279-293.

26.5 Irwin, Eda Čufer and Marina Gržinić along with Russian artists and critics sign the “Moscow Declaration” on Eastern art and identity.⁶³

27.5 Berlin, “Quartier Latin”.

28.5 Hamburg, “Grossfreiheit”.

29.5 Dusseldorf.

31.5 Frankfurt “Batschapp”.

June:

1.6 Munich, “Theater Fabrik”.

2.6 Prague, “Lucerna”.

3.6 Graz.

5.6 Geneva, “Salle de Faubourg”.

6.6 Berne, “Stufenbau”. “Black Square on Red Square”, NSK action by Irwin/Michael Benson. A 22m X 22m Black Square is unveiled on Red Square, Moscow.⁶⁴

8.6 Paris.

9.6 Brussels.

10.6 Utrecht, “Tivoli”.

12.6 Rostock.

13.6 Magdeburg, “Amo Kulturhaus”.

14.6 Dresden, “Scheune”.

26.6 “Guardian” report on the recent Red Square action (Rogoyska 1992).

July:

5.7 Washington.

7.7 NYC, “Limelight”.

10.7 Boston, “Man Ray”.

16.7 “The European” publishes an article on Laibach (Hooper 1991).

14.5 Toronto, “Opera House”.

15.7 Cleveland.

17.7 Pontiac, “Industry”.

18.7 Chicago, “Cabaret Metro”.

20.7 Dallas.

⁶³ Reproduced in Čufer (Ed.) 1994, 46.

⁶⁴ See 106-7 *ibid.* plus Benson (Dir.) 1995.

21.7 Houston, "Vatican".

24.7 San Francisco.

25.7 San Jose.

26.7 Los Angeles.

August:

6.8 Guardian/TTN reports on alleged concentration camp at Omarska in Bosnia appear.

September:

3.9 Athens, "Ampitheatre".⁶⁵ In a Greek TV interview Laibach state their support for the Macedonian president Kiro Gligorov and the former Yugoslav republic.⁶⁶

14.9 UN Security Council Resolution 776 sends peacekeeping forces to Bosnia.

October:

14.10 Trbovlje, "Termelektrarna II".

16.10 Hum pri Gorici (Slo.)

17.10 Rogaska Slatina (Slo.)

23.10 Bratislava (SK.)

November:

6.11 Maribor, "STUK".

December:

6.12 Slovene presidential and parliamentary elections. Milan Kučan re-elected. Slovene National Party under Zmago Jelinčič wins 10% support. Janez Dronvšek becomes Prime Minister.

16.12 Ljubljana "Festivalna Dvorana"

18.12 Murska Sobota, "Kino Center".

1993:

Irwin solo exhibitions at Seattle, Ghent, Paris, Ljubljana, Milan. Group exhibitions in Milan, Ljubljana, Bonn, Moscow, Pittsburgh, and Kiel.

February:

12.2 Seattle.

March:

20.3 Linz, "Johannes Kepler University".

⁶⁵ For concert footage see Benson (Dir.) 1995.

⁶⁶ Meglič, 1995, op. cit.

April:

Outbreak of Croat-Muslim war in Bosnia.

16.4 Srebrenica declared first UN "Safe Area".

May:

4.5 Laibach concert, Vienna, "Arena".

June:

3.6 "NSK Territory Suhl". Speech delivered by Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy on NSK territory created on an East German army training ground.⁶⁷

11.6 - 21.7 NSK Pavilion at Venice Biennale.

September:

29.9 Skopje, Macedonia. Laibach are received by the Macedonian culture minister and receive a positive press.

October:

9-10.10 "NSK Staat Volksbuhne", Berlin. The Volksbuhne (a former East German cultural venue) is declared NSK territory for the duration of the event with admission only by NSK passport or temporary visa. Two Laibach concerts and manifestations by all NSK groups. Laibach reject proposals from Vladimir Zhironovsky to organise a Russian tour for them and from Serb film director Dragoslav Bokan to compose an anthem for the pro-fascist White Eagle movement.

11.10 Chemnitz, "Kraftwerk".

13.10 Noordung's "Prayer Machine" performed as part of Antwerp's cultural capital of Europe festival.

17.10 NSK Consulate opened at Hotel Ambasciatori, Florence.⁶⁸

December:

3-5.12 "NSK Passport Office Amsterdam", action by Irwin.⁶⁹

1994

Irwin solo exhibitions in Cologne. Group exhibitions at Graz, Berlin, Trevi, Lille.

February:

5.2 Market-square bomb in Sarajevo.

⁶⁷ See Irwin 1994.

⁶⁸ See "Irwin Geography of Time", *op. cit.*

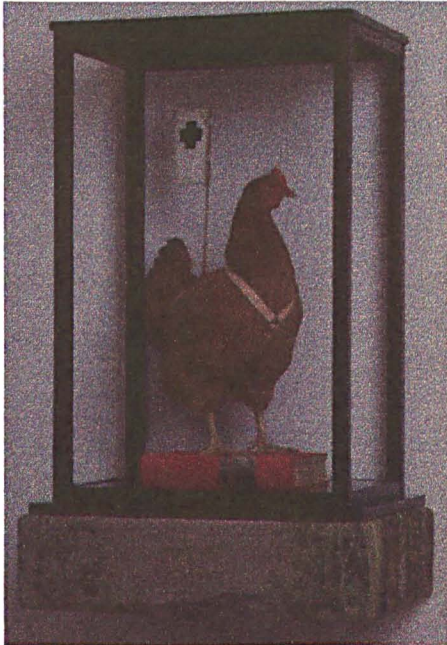
⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

March:

2.3 Bosnian-Croat federation deal signed in Washington.

July:

Irwin exhibition "Project Proposal for the NSK Embassy in Beijing" opens in Ljubljana.



Irwin: Project Proposal, NSK Embassy Beijing, 1995.

September:

Mute Records release new Laibach single "Final Countdown".

10.9 Opening of "NSK Kitchen Consulate" by Irwin, Umag, Croatia.⁷⁰ Exhibition continues till 7.10.94

October:

1-16.10 "NSK Passport Office Graz", Neue Gallerie.⁷¹

10.10 Mute Records release "NATO" by Laibach.

⁷⁰ See "Irwin The Geography of Time", op. cit.

⁷¹ See the catalogue "Irwin Interior of The Planet" Ljubljana Moderna Galerija/Budapest Ludwig Museum, 1996.



Laibach: NATO Sleeve 1994.

31.10 Launch party for Peter Paracelsus/300 000 V.K. "Satanic Techno" CD, Turjak Castle Slovenia.⁷²

November:

9.11 - 15.1.95 "NSK Pošta". NSK installation in main post office, Ljubljana. Exhibition of framed NK designs plus video installation and issue and sale of NSK stamps. The opening is attended by a crowd of six hundred.

12.11 NATO Tour begins, Fribourg, CH.

15.11 Munich, "Strom"

16.11 Cologne.

19.11 Brussels.

21.11 Copenhagen.

23.11 Stockholm.

24.11 Oslo.

25.11 Malmö.

28.11 Amsterdam.

1.12 Glasgow.

3.12 Union Chapel, London. Concert is attended by Slovene ambassador.

5.12 "Markthalle", Hamburg.

6.12 "E-Werk", Berlin.

8.12 Prague.

10 - 11.12 Two Moscow concerts live broadcast on Russian TV.

⁷² Turjak was the scene of one of the largest engagements of the war in Slovenia in 1944. A mixed force of partisans and Italian deserters attacked Slovene collaborationist forces holding the castle. The party was centred in the basement of the old turret and featured a Paracelsus performance followed by a rave.

1995

Irwin Solo exhibitions at Munich. Irwin group exhibitions at Zurich, Nicosia, Budapest, Pescara, Linz, Cleveland.

April:

20.4 Premiere of Noordung's "One Against Ten Million", Mladinsko Gledališče, Ljubljana. Reviewed "Delo", 26.4.

May:

Croatian forces retake Western Slavonia.

Concert in Skopje, Macedonia.

2-3.5 Two rocket attacks on Zagreb by Krajina Serbs.

23.5 - 23.6 Irwin exhibition "Proposal For The NSK Embassy Beijing" at Bleich-Rossi Gallery, Graz.

June:

14.6 Zagreb, Moša Pijade Hall. Muted press and public reaction to Laibach's performance of the track "Mars On The Drina", which is based on the Serb nationalist song "March On The Drina".

July:

11.7 Dutch peacekeepers and local civilians retreat to compound in Srebrenica after Serb offensive. Small-scale NATO airstrikes.

12.7 Bosnian Serb forces separate male prisoners from women and children at Srebrenica during "ethnic cleansing" of the area.

August:

4.8 Croats launch "Operation Storm" in Krajina.

5.8 Knin, capital of "Republika Srpska Krajina" falls to Croatian forces. Serb population flees.

9.8 Izetbegović visits Bihač for the first time in the war after Bosnian army breaks siege.

28.8 Shelling of market square in Sarajevo.

31.8 NATO air-strikes on Bosnian Serb targets begin.

September:

Irwin "Interiors of The Planit" opens at Anonimus Gallery, Ljubljana.⁷³

13.9 NATO air strikes halt after Serbs agree to withdraw heavy weaponry around Sarajevo.

15.9 Croatian-Bosnian military roll-back continues in Bosnia. Jajce and Donji Vakuf retaken.

October:

⁷³ See Irwin 1996 and 1994.

Assassination attempt on President Gligorov in Skopje.

Early version of NSK Internet Site goes on line.

26.10 Ljubljana, Diskoteka Dakota. Laibach/300 000 V.K. concert. Two thousand capacity sell-out. Concert broadcast on Slovene TV and attended by foreign minister Zoran Thaler. "Mladina" review and Laibach chronological feature (Meglič 1995).

November:

1.11 Bosnian peace talks begin, Dayton, Ohio.

20-21.11 "NSK State Sarajevo". Two sell-out Laibach concerts. Video presentations by all NSK groups and issuing of 350 NSK passports at National Theatre Sarajevo.

22.11 Dayton Agreement signed one hour before start of second Laibach show. Speech by Peter Mlakar, "The Apocalypse of Europe and Possible Deliverance". Over 5000 people visit the event in the course of two days.⁷⁴

1996:

Irwin solo exhibition at Madrid. Group exhibitions at Bochum, Stockholm, Rotterdam and Atlanta.

April:

"Interior of The Planet" by Irwin opens at Ludwig Museum Budapest.

July:

"Transnacionala". Four week tour of America by Irwin plus Michael Benson and US and Russian artists and curators. Exhibition takes place in Atlanta, other events in Richmond, Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle transmitted to "Manifesta" art event in Rotterdam.

August:

Mute Records release "Occupied Europe NATO Tour 1994-5" CD/Video box set documenting the previous autumn's shows in Ljubljana and Sarajevo.

12.8 "Occupied Europe NATO Tour" reviewed in "Delo".

September:

Mute Records release new single, "Jesus Christ Superstar/God is God".

October:

Mute Records release new album "Jesus Christ Superstars".

November:

"Jesus Christ Superstars" European tour begins in London.

⁷⁴ See NSK (1996).

1997

April:

Irwin exhibition "Interior of the Planet" opens at Tramway, Glasgow. Peter Mlakar delivers a speech and Irwin members carry out a "passport action" at the "Virtual World Orchestra" event at the Old Fruitmarket.

May:

15.5 Opening performance of the European month of culture festival at Cankarjev Dom. Laibach collaborate in a performance with the Slovene Philharmonic Orchestra and leading composers in an event attended by Milan Kučan and the Estonian ambassador.

31.5 Laibach concert at Krizanke, Ljubljana.

June:

Release of second 300 000 V.K. CD "Also Sprach Johann Paul II" using voice samples from the Pope as a response to the Papal visit to Slovenia in May 1996.

1998

Release of "Hard Drive" CD by "Bill Gates & 300 000 V.K." featuring a sample of Bill Gates.

July:

10.7 Laibach perform at Queen Elizabeth Hall as part of the Festival of Central European Culture.

1999

May:

New Collectivism retrospective exhibition at Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana.

2000

March:

16.3-16.4 "Irwin Live" exhibition at Moderna Galerija.

June:

1.6 Twentieth anniversary of Laibach. Trbovlje announces award of municipal prize to Laibach in recognition of its achievements. Laibach announce plans to transform Trbovlje into a city called "Retropolis".

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Za: Eva – a 21st century muse and a constant presence, responsible for more than can be written here.

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M – absolute belief. Family.

MDNoise for mastering, soundsupply and minimal o/d.

Winifred G for taking the same path.

Sanyo NB17.

Albert Hall.

“The Girl From St.Hubert”, Fairfax, & the other St.H'ers.

Gordana M.

Those who connect and those who will.

From the soundtrack: Tresor, Force Inc./MP/Position Chrome, Renegade Hardware, Ae, Starfish Pool, Black Lung, Autopsia, Alec Empire, DISX3, Ron Goodwin, Olga & Josef – *forward*.

Minimal maximalism and Maximal minimalism – »*rausch*«.

"The DJ is not tolerant, but utterly devoted to everything that he likes, and he throws together his own work from the totality of his personal preferences. The same should happen in writing: everything that the writer likes and likes to think is mixed, remixed and sampled." *Ulf Poschardt*.

Fade: radiance ii edit... .. "infinite emergence"