

Simon BELL

Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, United Kingdom

LAIBACH AND THE PERFORMANCE OF HISTORICAL EUROPEAN TRAUMA

Summary. This paper reflects a study in how the Slovenian Performance Art collective the NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst), and more specifically its sub-group Laibach, functioned as a 'Memory machine' in re-enacting historical European trauma in an apparent re-staging of the totalitarian ritual. In this way, Laibach demonstrate history as a contemporary active political agency of Eastern and Central Europe.

Shaped by the break-up of Yugoslavia, the NSK was a multi-disciplinary Gesamtkunstwerk primarily comprising three groups: IRWIN (visual arts), Noordung (theatre), and its most influential delivery system, Laibach (music). Championed by Slavoj Žižek, Laibach are Slovenia's most famous cultural export, and are widely considered Europe's most controversial music group. In 2017, Laibach caused further controversy for being the first 'Western' group to play North Korea.

With the strategy of Retrogardism, an aesthetic system unique to Eastern European aesthetic praxis, Laibach and the NSK re-mythologised totalitarian iconography associated with Nazi Kunst and Socialist Realism, which contemporary capitalism can only relate to as offensive kitsch.

Keywords: Laibach, Eastern Europe, Performance, NSK, totalitarian, Retrogardism.

'There's an ungodly chill in the air. Fists punch the air. Eyes come over glazed, extinct. It's bloody enormous. A thunderous cruelty.'¹

These words are from a *Melody Maker* review of a performance by the Slovenian conceptual art collective Laibach at the height of their notoriety in the 1980s. Laibach's controversial aesthetic strategy of 'Retrogardism' interrogates historical European trauma in the re-enactment of the totalitarian ritual. In this paper I will examine the manner in which Laibach (and the associated group the NSK), re-mythologised (or in their words, 're-capitulated'), the taboo energies of the Grand Utopian Narrative, with specific focus on their output between 1980 and 1992. By returning to the rejected faecal matter of European history, Laibach replicate Michael Taussig's notion of the sacred. To paraphrase Laibach collaborator Eda Čufer, only by returning to the unresolved traumas of the past can the present be healed.²

Originally named Laibach Kunst, Laibach were formed in the mining town of Trbovlje, Northern

Slovenia, in 1980. In 1984, they collaborated with other Yugoslav artists to found the NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst). The NSK were a collective consisting of three central groups: IRWIN were the visual artists, Sestre Scipion Nasice were the theatre wing, and Laibach, music.³ Although the NSK is no longer an active entity in its original format, its offspring manifestation, the NSK State in Time, is very much extant, and all three founding groups continue to function, with Laibach being the most famous.⁴ According to Alexei Monroe, cultural theorist and expert on Laibach and the NSK, 'the aim of the association was the constitution of a transnational paradigmatic state, in which Laibach represented the ideological, the theatre the religious, and IRWIN the cultural and historical impulse.'⁵ There were other groups within the NSK, such as the design department the NK (New Collectivism), Graditelji (architects), and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, of which Slavoj Žižek was a member. This multi-disciplinary collective functioned as a Gesamtkunstwerk, and images and symbols were cross-referenced and cross-pollinated by

all groups within the NSK, with central motifs such as totalitarian iconography and Suprematism creating a unified whole.

Since their founding in 1980, Laibach have released 29 studio albums, most recently a re-coding of songs from *The Sound of Music*, and at the time of writing are currently on a world tour.⁶ In August 2017, Laibach became the first 'Western' music group to perform in North Korea. In the 1980s, Slavoj Žižek brought Laibach to academic scrutiny in the West for their strategy of over-identification with the totalitarian spectacle, and they remain Slovenia's most famous cultural export, with a global following and an history of controversy both domestic and international. Despite their considerable influence and fame within alternative popular music (particularly the 'Industrial' genre), music is paradoxically arguably incidental to Laibach. They were originally created as a visual arts group (Laibach Kunst), choosing music as simply the most effective and immediate channel of communication. Their output is marked by an eclectic approach, with each album varying stylistically from the last. The oppressive martial-industrial of *Nova Akropola* (1986), and *Opus Dei* (1987), for example, varies enormously from the digital bricolage of *Kapital* (1992), the 'rock' of *Jesus Christ Superstars* (1996), and the synthesised interpretations of Bach fugues in *Laibachkunstderfuge* (2008).⁷ Each of these texts is an interrogation of subjectivity and genre, rather than a conventional linear development of musical form. Furthermore, in order to engage with Laibach fully, their music, iconography, literature, mythology, and the affect of their presence must be understood as a performative whole, with each element of equal import.

Slovenian cultural theorist, artist, and NSK collaborator Marina Gržinić described Laibach in the eighties as: 'the most radical avant-garde rock-and-roll exploration of the time'.⁸ From the outset their performances and texts were considered offensive to mainstream Yugoslav culture and political bodies. The name itself was scandalous in early-1980s Slovenia, being termed the group's 'ideological original sin'.⁹ Laibach was the Nazi occupation name for the capital Ljubljana, and thus resurrected

uncomfortable truths concerning Slovenian Germanisation and the trauma of occupation.¹⁰ This initial and defining act of controversy was reinforced by an onslaught of further aesthetic and ideological provocations. For example, in 1983 at the Zagreb Biennale, a Laibach concert was interrupted by the police and the group were thrown out for projecting images of Marshal Tito montaged with pornography. Moreover, their music was aggressively loud, raw, and discordant, these concerts being described by Alexei Monroe as: 'nightmarish and utterly extreme combinations of alienation, infernal noise, and brutal visual imagery'.¹¹ What added to the provocation was the wearing of austere non-specific uniforms suggesting both Italian fascist and Nazi attire, yet with the fasces or swastika replaced by Malevich's Suprematist cross. In a country that had endured occupation by both Italian and German forces in living memory, this was guaranteed to cause offence in popular opinion. It was however, the staged Slovenian TV interview in 1983 that launched Laibach's notoriety in Slovenia overnight, resulting in a four-year ban on the use of their name. An interesting parallel can be found with the outrage in Britain over the Sex Pistols interview with Bill Grundy on British television in 1976. However, whilst the Sex Pistols' transgression was swearing on prime-time television, Laibach's offence was a manifesto of militant aesthetics.

Laibach's history is interwoven with its native country, running concurrent with tectonic shifts in Slovenia's development, including a European war and Slovenia's independence. In November 1995, during the siege of Sarajevo for example, the *NSK Država Sarajevo* event took place. The national theatre in war-torn Sarajevo was declared NSK state territory for two days, with performances by Laibach, speeches, and an exhibition. In a characteristic conflation of art and life, NSK state passports issued at this event were used by several individuals to escape the besieged city. In 1996, Slovenian foreign minister Zoran Thaler ceremoniously handed Laibach's NATO album to N.A.T.O. Secretary-General Willy Claes, and the Slovenian ambassador has been known to attend Laibach performances in Britain. These examples demonstrate the way Laibach (and

the NSK) are directly connected to their country's political history.

RETROGARDISM

The central aesthetic system to Laibach's praxis is Retrogardism.¹² Also known as the Retro-avant-garde, or the Retro-principle, Retrogardism re-mythologises totalitarian iconography and tropes, in particular those associated with Nazi Kunst and Socialist Realism. Through this strategy, Laibach examines the legacy of historical European trauma in the context of what has been termed the contemporary 'post-ideological' age. In 1992, NSK artist Eda Čufer wrote on Retrogardism as regards the NSK's Moscow action *Black Square in Red Square*, explaining that the 'Retro-avant-garde is the basic artistic procedure of Neue Slowenische Kunst, based on the premise that traumas from the past affecting the present and the future can be healed only by returning to the initial conflicts.'¹³ Retrogardism identifies with the historical avant-garde at the moment of its assimilation into totalitarianism, and in so doing illustrates the collusion between art and ideology. For this purpose, the historical avant-garde form Suprematism becomes paradigmatic to Laibach and the NSK's aesthetic system, being most apparent in their ubiquitous use of Kazimir Malevich's *Cross* (1912–23), which replaces the swastika in Laibach's ritualised spectacle. A source of much of the controversy in the 1980s was Laibach and the NSK restoring to art its problematic relationship with power, a relationship severed in the post-war West, which sought to strip Art of its taint of totalising utopian narratives, and shifted its focus to individual freedom and expression.

Retrogardism is a process of bricolage, the artistic practice of montaging found objects. Nazi Kunst iconography is juxtaposed with the imagery of Socialist Realism, religion, Völkish sentimentality, and icons of Slovenian national identity. The three dominant motifs in this visual system as evinced in Laibach and NSK are the stag, the sower/worker cipher-figure, and the Malevich cross.¹⁴ The imagery associated with grand utopian narratives has no exchange value in third-stage-capitalism

beyond that of a playfully offensive kitsch. Thus it constituted free-floating signifiers for Laibach to re-anchor, or in their words, 're-capitulate'. This re-mythologisation is key to Retrogardism, as the ideological power of the original symbols and tropes of the grand utopian narrative remain active agents, but are re-coded within the militant aesthetics of the Retro-avant-garde spectacle. It must be noted however, that although Laibach and the NSK emphatically re-activated the problematic dynamic contained within Völkish signifiers, for example antlers, the stag, the worker cipher-figure and the Zahnrad (cog), these signifiers are not quilled to any coherent ideological field. Attempts to define an ideological structure within the spectacle articulated by Laibach and the NSK is frustrated, as it is bereft of certain key components of the totalitarian ritual such as a personality cult, an enemy or 'other', or indeed any teleological or utopian drive. There is a void at the heart of the Laibach Kunst machine that must be dealt with by any Laibach audience confronted by the emphatic re-mythologisation of discredited and potentially taboo utopian energies should they attempt to identify with the spectacle. The spectacle is empty, there is no cohesive ideological structure, and the subject is left with a limited masturbatory enjoyment of the empty ritual. An example of this is the reaction of a member of the audience after a Laibach performance in Chicago in 1989:

Interviewer: Excuse me; can I have your statement about tonight's show, please?

Spectator: I think it was neo-fascist, but I'm not sure if it was a joke or not. So that's what I'm trying to figure out, do you know, are they?

Interviewer: No, I don't, but why do you think it was neo-fascist?

Spectator: Umm, well I just had an incredible like, subconscious urge to march, and I think my friend did as well. I felt pride in a country I did not belong to.

Interviewer: And you didn't like that?

Spectator: Oh no, I liked it, I just want to know if they are serious or not.¹⁵

From their inception in 1980 as Laibach Kunst, to the release of *Kapital* in 1992, Laibach were primarily a performance of the spectacle of power, leaving a palpable absence where a legitimising ideology should be. In its stead, and exposed and unable to hide behind ideology, is the obscene enjoyment.

RETROGARDISM AND THE EAST-WEST DIVIDE

In 1992, the Croatian artist Mladen Stilinović exhibited an artwork bearing the legend ‘an artist who cannot speak English is no artist’. Stilinović is making a point about the totalising hegemony of Anglo-American aesthetic discourse. Stilinović’s comment on the impossibility of dialogue between Western and Eastern European aesthetic discourse was echoed by the Serbian playwright Biljana Srbljanović in 1999. In her acceptance speech for the prestigious Ernst Töller Award, Srbljanović added her voice to those of the Eastern European artists struggling to be heard under the dominance of Western cultural determinants:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is difficult for me to thank you for awarding me this prestigious award. For, who am I? My identity is stolen by world politics, national politics. It is definitely lost somewhere during the last war. I can’t find it, no matter how hard I try. I can’t find it at any “lost and found” office at any airport I have been to. I can’t find it in any language, in any culture.¹⁶

These Balkan artists are interrogating a missing vocabulary for articulating Eastern European art outside a Western contextualisation wherein they are forced to learn not only the language of the West, but the archetypes and stereotypes which structure that language.¹⁷ According to Stephen Mansbach, these givens were the result of Western art historians advancing Modernism as the consummate transnational aesthetic idiom, a vision that is incapable of incorporating the varied ways Eastern European artists embraced ‘local cultural legacies, national conventions, and individual character in creating a style simultaneously modern in its formal display and highly topical in its references.’¹⁸ This reductive strategy on behalf of the West resulted

in a misrepresentation of Eastern Europe, often in order to serve specific ends. It is in this cultural climate that cultural theorist and artist Marina Gržinić coined the neologism ‘*Easthetics*’, in an attempt to codify a new approach to aesthetics independent of the Western discursive field.¹⁹ Similarly, in 1999, IRWIN, the visual artists of the NSK, launched the seminal *East Art Map* project; an attempt to articulate an art history of Eastern Europe and thus generate a discursive vocabulary.

Retrogardism directly reflects Eastern European aesthetic praxis, and in the 1980s it was re-contextualised by Gržinić as the new ‘ism’ from the East.²⁰ As such, Retrogardism struggled to be recognised in hegemonic Western aesthetic discourse. Symptomatic of this was a misunderstanding of Retrogardism by the Western press as ironic, postmodern, or even playful. For example, the search for a reassuring pastiche or irony in Laibach by the Anglo-American press frequently resulted in the use of expedient phrases such as ‘tongue-in-cheek’, ‘flirting with fascism’, and ‘Wagnerian’, finding an irony in Laibach not substantiated by anything in their literature or music. This reading was both an attempt to render palatable the incongruity of an overt grand utopian narrative form, and reflected a Western chauvinism and myopic approach to history. Britain, for example, has not directly experienced the trauma of totalitarianism, nor the phenomenon of total war.²¹ This degree of separation from the visual and audio codes referenced by Laibach and the NSK, resulted in a failure by the West to effectively and fully engage with their discourse.

In order to examine the difficulty the Anglo-American West had in negotiating the complexities of Laibach and the NSK’s aesthetic system, it becomes necessary to further interrogate postmodernism in the context of Retrogardism’s employ of the iconography and tropes of history. Retrogardism may be understood as a product of an Eastern European cultural identity discourse – as defined by the West – but it may also be said to be indicative of a perceived increased emphasis in Eastern European aesthetic autonomy following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. Retrogardism must not be confused with the ludic pastiche of Western postmodernism, and this was

central to Laibach and the NSK's aestheticising of an East-West nexus. The Retro-avant-garde is not what Baudrillard would describe as playing with the pieces of history, it is distinctively Eastern European, whilst in comparison, postmodernism is a *Western* discourse, a discourse that fails to reflect the Central and Eastern European experience of history. In order to effectively engage with Laibach Kunst or the NSK, this fundamental divide between Western postmodernism and Eastern European aesthetic praxis must be understood.

At the height of their impact in the West, Laibach and the NSK articulated an Eastern European-Western nexus as both a point of creative frisson and of communication. Their texts were a platform interrogating the East-West divide, and as part of this process often re-affirmed such. For example, Laibach in performance expressed the fear and allure of the dark European *Other* for the Anglo-American West. In the video for *Sympathy for the Devil* (1988), Laibach appear in the role of feudal overlords in a hunting lodge, wearing furs and feasting beneath mounted stag heads. Here Laibach cast themselves not only as the 'devil' of the track, but as the barbaric Eastern Europeans of the Western imagination, forever locked in a Teutonic Dark Age. In this text and many others, Laibach over-identify with the fantasy of Eastern Europe as commonly represented in Western reportage. This coding continued into the 2000s; in the narration accompanying the recording of 'Now You Will Pay' (2003) from Podgoršek's *A Film about WAT* (2004), Laibach assume the persona of the 'barbaric' East:

Arabs, Negroes, Jews, Turks, Mexicans, Gypsies, Slavs. They are barbarians. Not sophisticated enough to know the difference between enjoyment and pleasure. We must admit that Laibach belongs to them as well. In fact we have always proudly considered ourselves true barbarians coming to the rich west from our secret eastern hideouts.²²

Laibach 'made strange' the West by adopting the guise of the exotic fantasy of the Eastern European *other* and thus reflecting its gaze back upon itself. Dominant Western cultural givens were challenged

by role-playing the Western *other*. When Laibach defined the West as 'the Western part of Asia', this was a pointed inversion of the hegemonic viewpoint of Eastern Europe as being appended to the West.²³

Eastern European stereotyping, Western ignorance and a fascination for the exotic were all part of the spectacle of Laibach's agency in the West, and this is a defining factor in their role as nexus. Laibach operated within a Western representative economy that validated performance groups or artists hailing from the Eastern Bloc as obsessed with ideology, over-identifying with an ideological surplus that Eastern European artists were expected to possess. In the words of Miško Šuvaković, the position of artists and groups such as Laibach and the NSK is complex, 'for they deconstruct not only post-Socialist culture and history, but also the wish of the Western art system to see and identify the artist in such a culture as an asymmetrical and exotic *Other*'.²⁴ Characteristically, Laibach at once affirmed and denied this prejudice, exploiting the desire of Western culture and its art institutions to understand the post-Socialist artist as a degeneration or caricature of Socialist culture and Socialist Realism. In her article on Eastern European Performance Art, *Body and the East*, Zdenka Badovinac writes that 'just as Western art has mainly presented itself to the relatively isolated East as reproduced in magazines and books, so the East has been presented in the West with a small quantity of poor-quality documents, with white spots in retrospectives of European art, and with the myths of official art and the suffering dissidents.'²⁵ The West is the dominant position in this dialogue, having the power to create new trends and dictate the boundaries of the visible. According to Badovinac, the only way Eastern European art can remain credible in this representative economy is by an expressed ideology.

In these perspectives, Laibach's performances in the 1980s were the Western nightmare of the monolithic totalitarian East made flesh. As such, this served the function of fulfilling a Western fantasy of the totalitarian East, but this is an illusion undermined by Laibach (and the NSK). The incoherence of the ideological field caused by the dissonance and repetition of disparate signifiers creates a defining

void at the heart of Laibach's spectacle. It can be said that the more emphatic Laibach's performance of the totalitarian ritual was, the more the projected desires and fantasies of the West were magnified and exposed. Laibach and the NSK revealed to the West its own spectres. What then is the West's subject position in relation to Laibach's gaze? In this formula Laibach are passive, it is an indirect critique; it is the West whose gaze is reflected.

Laibach's interpretations of well-known Western popular music recordings are perhaps the most apparent example of Laibach's exploration of the creative potential of an East-West nexus. In the 1980s, Laibach achieved notoriety in the West with their re-codings of Opus' Euro-hit 'Life is Life' (1987), and Queen's 'One Vision', which they renamed 'Geburt Einer Nation' ['Birth of a Nation'] (1987). The originals' upbeat rock rhythms were translated into a triumphalist martial cadence suggesting a hidden totalitarian agenda behind Western popular music. This re-coding is part of a wider strategy wherein Laibach inverted the dominant given that Western democracy is a by-word for freedom, and is therefore seen as not only free from the mass mobilisations of totalitarianism, but is also a perceived position of opposition to such. As Monroe has pointed out, 'Laibach's politicised interrogation of popular music indicates that the western style entertainment sphere contains ideological power structures that are far more refined and less visible than those of totalitarian propaganda.'²⁶ Laibach have spoken on this strategy of demonstrating to the West the uncontested perception of Pop/Rock music's given as oppositional cultural space:

Pop culture is the Social Realism of the West. It is the social theatre. Why we deal with Socialist Realism and Nazi Kunst so much is because the relationship between art and ideology is so clear. The basic problem is that westerners believed that they were – in contrast to those in the East – free, and that they alone were doing pure art and pure music whereas Easterners had to make ideological art. It's not true. It's basically the same model, except it's more sophisticated in the West.²⁷

Laibach are here challenging a Post-Socialist perception commonly held by those in Eastern Europe and the West, which understood the latter as liberators, bringing democracy and freedom to a blighted East emerging blinking out of totalitarian darkness.

LAIBACH AND THE SACRED

Writing in the 1980s, when Laibach's cultural impact was at its peak, Taras Kermauner referred to Laibach as 'psycho-hygienists', in response to the radical ambiguity of their re-enactment of the totalitarian spectacle. For Kermauner, art has two roles in culture: the 'humanistic, humanly and socially sustainable, protective, stabilising, symbolic' on one side, and the 'mystically bloody, sacrificially oppressing, and sacredly disturbed on the other.'²⁸ Kermauner posits that Laibach enact the latter to perform the function of the former. However, this is too neatly balanced, this formula excuses Laibach's ambivalence by placing their praxis in a comfortable binary narrative. Nevertheless, in one sense this definition is correct. As a transgressive narrative, Laibach can be aligned with abject-transgressive groups such as Whitehouse, or Coil, whose celebration of the scatological and excessive violence arguably represents the return of the repressed. However, with Laibach and the NSK, this transgression is incidental, it is not a reason for being. Laibach's actual 'transgression' is to occupy the space of an inassimilable narrative, what Žižek refers to as the 'sticky core of pleasure.'²⁹ At Yale University in 1961, what became known as 'The Milgram Experiment' was conducted in order to examine the nature of authority.³⁰ Authority figures in lab-coats urged on subjects to continue a process of administering electric shocks to unseen participants, despite their audible suffering. This experiment was certainly a revealing study of the power of authority, yet the limit of its reach was that it failed to interrogate an enjoyment in subordination, the libidinal charge of power, or indeed even degrees of potential sadism. It could be argued that in this sense the Milgram Experiment is reassuring, as it implies that the locus of the violence inherent in a system is its organisational structure. By way of contrast, Laibach's radical spectacle would suggest a different reading. Laibach unapologetically

embraced the allure of the libidinal overwhelm of power, and the jouissance in the subjugation of self. Their music, texts and mono-statements were monumentalist, and the individual or individualism was not recognised as a valid value-system in either Laibach or the NSK's aesthetic.³¹ This inassimilable 'sticky core of pleasure', exposed by Laibach, and the necessary aesthetic vocabulary required, becomes transgressive.

This discourse of transgression in Laibach's context remains a defining element of their interpellative quality, operating within the concept of the 'sacred' or 'magical' as outlined by Michael Taussig in his book *Defacement*. Taussig argues that 'sacred things are defined in many Western languages by their astonishing capacity for pollution, danger and filth, the Latin root *sacer* meaning both accursed and holy'. By resurrecting, or 're-mythologising' the repressed (in Laibach's case, the utopian energies of the Grand Utopian Narratives), in re-coding the rejected faecal matter of European history, Laibach can be said to fulfil the function of Taussig's sacred. To explore this point further, analogy may be drawn with Žižek's notion of the fascination of cinema, which he describes as the return of faecal matter. In Žižek's theory, the subject's desires are excrement flushed away into what he calls a 'nether world', the fascination of cinema being the return of this repressed dimension.³² Here, both Žižek and Taussig's formulas can be applied to support the argument that Laibach functioned in the dimension of the sacred. That is to say, the Anglo-American West have 'flushed away' historical European trauma, but are fascinated by its return in popular culture and as a synecdoche for evil.

CONCLUSION: RETROGARDISM AS MEMORY MACHINE

By re-mythologizing iconography associated with 20th Century European trauma, Retrogardism functions as a memory machine, an attempt to restore the discarded detritus of history to a new aesthetic form, one that returns to the traumas of the past to cast new light on the present. As such it operates within Gržinić's Easthetics, employing a discourse removed from the Western experience of history,

ideology, and national identity. Rather than develop an aesthetic system that seeks to refute art's collusion with totalitarianism by over-compensating and adapting the utopianism of the historical avant-garde to the localised individual politics of personal expression and freedom (as was the case in the post-war West), Laibach returned to the past to reclaim and deconstruct that problematic utopianism. However, rather than depict the Grand Utopian Narratives and traumatic histories as Europe's shame, Laibach appeared to embrace totalitarian rhetoric to the point of triumphalism. Turning away from these oppressive narratives leaves the problems and taboos untouched and the cracks simply papered over. Johannes Birringer puts it succinctly when writing on the subject of Laibach ideological ambiguity, that 'fascism may have been defeated militarily in the last world war, but the West never deconstructed and destroyed it symbolically and politically'.³³ In re-mythologizing the myths and iconography of twentieth century European Grand Utopian Narratives, Laibach demonstrated that far from being safely in the past, historical European trauma remains a festering open wound.

References

- Aulich, James, and Marta Sylvestová. *Political Posters in Central and Eastern Europe 1945–95*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Badovinac, Zdenka. *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999.
- Birringer, Johannes. *Performance on the Edge: Transformations of Culture*. London: Athlone Press, 2000.
- Conover, Roger. "Against Dictionaries: The East as She is Spoken by the West". In *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, edited by IRWIN (collective). London: Afterall, 2006.
- Čufer, Eda, IRWIN, and Marina Gržinić. "NSK State (In Time)." Accessed 30 August, 2011. <<http://www.muufi/amorph03/downloads/pdfs/nsk.pdf>>
- Djurić, Dubravka and Miško Šuvaković, eds. *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant Gardes, and Post-Avant Gardes in Yugoslavia 1918-1991*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003.
- Erjavec, Aleš. *Postmodernism and the Post-Socialist Condition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Gržinić, Marina. "Total recall – Total Closure". In *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, edited by IRWIN (collective). London: Afterall, 2006.

- Gržinić, Marina. "On the Re-Politicisation of Art Through Contamination". In *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, edited by IRWIN (collective). London: Afterall, 2006.
- Gržinić, Marina. "Linking Theory, Politics, and Art". In *Third Text*, 21(2) 2007, 201.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Kermauner, Taras. "Laibach Kunst – A Structural Analysis. A Lethal or Playful Challenge to Totalitarianism". In *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst: Recapitulation*, edited by Wiktor Skok, and Naomi Henning. Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2009.
- Laibach, director. *Laibach*. DVD. London: Mute, 2004.
- Milgram, Stanley. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. London: Tavistock, 1974.
- Monroe, Alexei. *Interrogation Machine*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005.
- NSK, ed. *Neue Slowenische Kunst*. Translated by Marjan Golobič, Los Angeles: AMOK Books, 1991.
- Podgoršek, Sašo, director. *Laibach*. DVD. London: Mute, 2004.
- Stefanovski, Goran. "Tales from the Wild East". In *Theatre and Performance in Eastern Europe: the Changing Scene*, edited by Dennis Barnett, and Arthur Skelton. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2008.
- Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Wilde, Jonh [sic]. "Pantomonium". In *Melody Maker*, 24 December 1988, p. 19.
- Fiennes, Sophie, director. *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*. DVD. London: Lone Star, 2006.
- Žižek, Slavoj. "A Letter from Afar". In *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst: Recapitulation*, edited by Wiktor Skok, and Naomi Henning. Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2009.
- Notes**
- ¹ Jonh [sic] Wilde, "Pantomonium," *Melody Maker*, 24 December 1988, p. 19.
- ² Eda Čufer, IRWIN, and Marina Gržinić, "NSK State (In Time)", <<http://www.muu.fi/amorph03/downloads/pdfs/nsk.pdf>> Accessed 30 August 2011.
- ³ Sestre Scipion Nasice were renamed Red Pilot Cosmokinetic Theatre in 1987, and in 1995, Noordung Cosmokinetic Theatre. IRWIN were initially known as Rose IRWIN Sélavy, after a pseudonym used by Marcel Duchamp.
- ⁴ The NSK State in Time was created in 1992 and comprises a state without borders or territories, complete with its own citizenship and passports (some of which were used to flee a besieged Sarajevo during the Balkan conflict). The NSK State in Time is not a 'micro-nation'.
- ⁵ Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), 247.
- ⁶ The albums counted are the primary releases only. For example, imports are not included, nor that there are three variations of *Capital* (1992).
- ⁷ The phrase 'martial-industrial' here refers to 'industrial' music incorporating martial themes.
- ⁸ Marina Gržinić, "Linking Theory, Politics, and Art," *Third Text*, 21(2) (2007), 201.
- ⁹ Alexei Monroe, 158.
- ¹⁰ In Slovenia, Ljubljana is also known as the 'Hero City', a title it acquired in recognition of its resistance history in WWII.
- ¹¹ Alexei Monroe, 158.
- ¹² Retrogardism is axiomatic to all NSK praxis.
- ¹³ Eda Čufer cited in Roger Conover, "Against Dictionaries: The East as She is Spoken by the West", in *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. IRWIN (collective), (London: Afterall, 2006), 356.
- ¹⁴ The Malevich cross and the stag – particularly antlers – continue to be symbols employed by Laibach, although less frequently.
- ¹⁵ *Laibach*, DVD, directed by Laibach (London: Mute, 2004).
- ¹⁶ Goran Stefanovski, "Tales from the Wild East" in *Theatre and Performance in Eastern Europe: the Changing Scene*, ed. Dennis Barnett and Arthur Skelton, (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2008), 164
- ¹⁷ In order to provide a stable platform for analysis, in the context of this paper the 'West' refers to those nations who were part of the post-war West, and Eastern Europe primarily refers to the former Eastern Bloc. I have chosen these delineations as it is the dialectic between these two concepts that is apposite to Laibach and NSK praxis.
- ¹⁸ Stephen Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1999), 4.
- ¹⁹ Marina Gržinić, "On the Re-Politicisation of Art Through Contamination" in *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. IRWIN (collective), (London: Afterall, 2006), 484.
- ²⁰ Gržinić, *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, 328.
- ²¹ Britain has been separated both symbolically and geographically from continental Europe by the English Channel, and the difference is apparent. In living memory mainland Britain has not been occupied by another nation, it has not known total war directly, nor a scorched-earth policy. In the British media, the bombing of Coventry on the 14th November 1940 is often cited as a cataclysmic wartime event. However, the death toll of 568 does not compare with that of Hamburg, Leipzig and Cologne, for example. In Dresden in 1944, over the two nights of the 13th and 14th of February, allied bombing and the subsequent firestorm phenomenon killed an estimated minimum of 25,000 people.
- ²² *Laibach*, DVD, directed by Sašo Podgoršek (London: Mute, 2004).
- ²³ *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, ed. NSK, translated from the Slovenian by Marjan Golobič (Los Angeles: AMOK Books, 1991), 49.
- ²⁴ *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant Gardes, and Post-Avant Gardes in Yugoslavia 1918–1991*, ed. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 96.
- ²⁵ Zdenka Badovinac, *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), 5.
- ²⁶ Alexei Monroe, 57.
- ²⁷ James Aulich and Marta Sylvestová, *Political Posters in Central and Eastern Europe 1945–95*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 80.

²⁸ Taras Kermauner, "Laibach Kunst – A Structural Analysis. A Lethal or Playful Challenge to Totalitarianism" in *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst: Recapitulation*, ed. Wiktor Skok, and Naomi Henning, (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2009), 58

²⁹ Slavoj Žižek, "A Letter from Afar" in *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst: Recapitulation*, ed. Wiktor Skok, and Naomi Henning, (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2009), 101.

³⁰ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. (London: Tavistock, 1974), 17–26.

³¹ Both Laibach and the NSK are collectives where (until recently), artwork by individual members was not credited.

³² *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, DVD, directed by Sophie Fiennes (London: Lone Star, 2006)

³³ Johannes Birringer, *Performance on the Edge: Transformations of Culture*. (London: Athlone Press, 2000), 109.

Simon BELL

Anglia Ruskin universitetas, Kembridžas, Jungtinė Karalystė

„LAIBACH“ IR ISTORINĖS EUROPIETIŠKOSIOS TRAUMOS PERFORMANSAS

Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje pristatomas tyrimas apie performatyvų Slovėnijos meno kolektyvą „NSK“ („Neue Slowenische Kunst“), tiksliau – apie šio kolektyvo grupę „Laibach“, kuri veikė kaip „Atminties mašina“, atkurdama istorinę Europos traumą ir statydama ryškius totalitarinių ritualų performansus. Tad „Laibach“ istoriją pristato kaip šiuolaikišką ir aktyvų Rytų bei Vidurio Europos politinį vienėtą.

Jugoslavijos iširimo metu „NSK“ buvo daugiadisciplininis *Gesamtkunstwerk* (LT *Visuminis meno kūrinys*), kurį iš pradžių sudarė trys grupės: „IRWIN“ (vizualieji menai), „Noordung“ (teatras) ir reikšmingiausia jo kūrybą pristačanti grupė „Laibach“ (muzika). Slavojaus Žižeko apdovanota „Laibach“ grupė laikoma kontroversiškausia Europos muzikos grupe ir žinomiausiu Slovėnijos kultūrinio eksporto produktu. 2017 metais grupė „Laibach“ sulaukė daug prieštarūnų vertinimų kaip pirmoji Vakarų grupė, pasirodžiusi Šiaurės Korėjoje.

Taikydami retrogardizmo strategiją ir estetinę sistemą, kuri būdinga Rytų Europos estetikos praktikai, grupė „Laibach“ ir „NSK“ iš naujo mitologizavo totalitarinę ikonografiją, siejamą su nacistinės Vokietijos menu ir socialistiniu realizmu, kurį šiuolaikinis kapitalizmas gali susieti tik su įžeidžiu kiču.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: „Laibach“, Rytų Europa, performansas, „NSK“, totalitarinis, retrogardizmas.

Gauta: 2019-03-29

Parengta spaudai: 2020-05-05

Simon BELL

PhD Simon Bell is a lecturer in theatre at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK. His research interests include European Performance Art and theatre, incorporating historic avant-garde performance,

European history and politics, and contemporary cultural activism. This research directly interrogates the representation of the twentieth-century European traumatic historical in contemporary performance theory. He is also a freelance director/practitioner of over 150 productions for the theatre, and for the last

24 years, Associate Director with the Cambridge Shakespeare Festival. He is also Resident Director of

Theatre of the Wheel, and Co-founder and Artistic Director of The Regenerator Theatre Company.

E-mail: simonbell@hotmail.com