

NSK

FROM *KAPITAL* TO CAPITAL
NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST
AN EVENT OF THE FINAL DECADE OF YUGOSLAVIA



NSK

FROM KAPITAL TO CAPITAL

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Curator: Zdenka Badovinac

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Introduction

The exhibition *NSK from Kapital to Capital* is the first major museum project of the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) collective, and follows the events of its individual constitutive groups, from 1980 and the Laibach poster scandal in Trbovlje through 1992, when the art collective transformed into the NSK State in Time.



The title, *NSK from Kapital to Capital*, places the exhibition in the socio-political context of the turbulent 1980s, when the old world order was crumbling and the all-encompassing system of global capitalism was starting to come into its own. All too often the work of NSK is associated exclusively in and with the context of the failing Yugoslavia and socialism, accompanied by a general disregard for the power of the collective's artistic faculty, its reflection on broader global processes, and the collective's fundamental goal: to construct a new artistic constellation that would allow them to enter the larger international dialogue in their own right.

In the final decade of Yugoslavia, NSK was no less a critic of the coming global capitalism than of the outgoing socialism, in which respect it differed both notably and essentially from the liberal critique of socialism.

In 1982, Laibach produced the poster *Death of Ideology*, featuring the Laibach cross, four disfigured faces, and images of Marx, Engels and Lenin, as if to say that Marxist thought had become transformed into an ideology only Laibach Kunst was capable of dealing with; or capital. For it was clear, even back then, that the only one actually profiting from the critique of socialism was capital, which had already started "saving" the bankrupt socialist economies of the world through the IMF. Marx's *Kapital*, his critique of political economy, was not only a thorn in the side of the capitalists, but also of Yugoslavia's communist leaders. The sharpest critics of socialism and its various deviations were the left-wingers themselves, in particular those intellectuals who insisted on a close and careful reading of Marx.

NSK's attitude and approach to capital was multifaceted. Since the early 1980s, Laibach had been drawing special attention to both socialism's subordination to Western culture and the logic of capital in which socialism was trapped; in this, Laibach was well in tune with the Slovenian alternative culture scene. As the country transitioned from socialism to capitalism, Slovenian culture production experienced the gradual withdrawal of both the state and the protection it afforded, yet receiving on the other hand no support from the state in its efforts to integrate in the international art market. NSK aspired to be economically independent and emancipate itself from state control. Developing its own economy was crucial; this was entrusted, at least in part, to the group New Collectivism. Laibach entered the international music market very early on, and IRWIN was devising strategies as early as the 1980s aimed at connecting with the international art market – a market that Slovenia has still not really entered to this day. In practice such exclusion represents a position of inequality

in the global art network. With his various actions, Dragan Živadinov pointed to this need for stronger international connections and integration, like Ljubljana's cultural capital of Europe title and the like.

 In 1990, the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung (the successor of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre and the Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot) staged a production entitled *Kapital*;  in 1991, IRWIN published a book and staged an exhibition entitled *Kapital*; and in 1992, Laibach released an album entitled *Kapital*. With these projects the three core NSK groups marked the end of ideology and the beginning of total capitalism, which many still see today as a system without a viable alternative. Unlike the prevalent postmodern art that was resigned to a society that did not boast a bright future, NSK had already established itself as an alternative institution and an alternative state in both the concrete and abstract senses of the word. The three *Kapital* projects continued, each in its own way, the artistic explorations of the three core NSK groups, using the complex language of art to draw attention to the complex, multifaceted and highly diverse character of capital.

There are many *Kapitals* and many types of capital: NSK itself constitutes its own capital in the form of its art and its working methods. NSK's collective nature, too, is a source of capital, combining the energies and synergies of various individuals dedicated to similar ideas and pursuits. In the 1980s, NSK was a collective consisting of seven groups. Some twenty people formed the core of a community that took collectivism seriously – in contrast to the lip service being paid it on the official level. These artists were part of the broader collective spirit that reigned over the close-knit alternative culture scene. The values nurtured by the alternative culture in Slovenia at the time largely coincided with those of the newly emerging civil-society movements engaged in the critique of the established order and the democratization of society. Together, the alternative culture and civil society movements developed a strong parallel public dimension. Most of these movements were left-wing and critical of the existing socialism, yet had no clear vision of what kind of system they wanted to see replace it. At least on the aesthetic level, NSK managed to articulate what other agents of civil society could not. Founding the NSK State in Time in 1992, NSK chose a global community based not on territorial or economic principles but grounded in aesthetics and thought.

NSK constructed its subjectivity through the deconstruction of various traumatic absences in Yugoslavia: the absence of the emancipatory potential of struggle for liberation, the absence of workers' rights, the absence of an original national culture, and the absence of a developed art system and a strong state. In order to find a substitute for this considerable body of absences it devised, within the framework of its aesthetic concept, a unique principle of construction that is at the same time a principle of deconstruction. NSK generally needs to be understood in terms of its complexity and ambivalence; no NSK work is merely an artefact, a painting, a theatre production, a concert, a publicity action, a provocation – as often as not it is all of these and more, all at once. The various media and approaches employed combine to form a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art that transcends the boundaries of the usual understanding of art. The exhibiting of *NSK from Ka-*

pital to *Capital* is designed to trace both the many separate events that developed and the considerable scope of the various concepts at work. Much like the 1980s marked a pivotal decade in politics, with a string of related events leading up to the bloodshed of the war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, each NSK concert, exhibition, theatre performance or other public appearance triggered processes that have not yet, even to this day, fully run their course. Employing the philosophical language of Alain Badiou, we could say that the NSK *Gesamtkunstwerk* was an event that ruptured with the established order of things. Every NSK event was a monolith with multiple meanings, new projects, and references springing from and growing out of it. NSK was not a chronicler of the era; by the same token, however, it cannot be fully comprehended without some fundamental understanding of the socio-political context of the 1980s.

Using its retro method, NSK kept looking back, to show up the present as a repeated trauma of the past and to envision a future beyond the failures of the socialist system, yet based on its own experience, and definitively beyond capitalism. NSK perceived the reality of the 1980s in all of its theatricality, in its love of the images of its own generation and of the subculture scene; and in the official pretence of sustained belief in socialism, even though both the system and the practice had clearly become a farce. With an excessive, exaggerated gesture it repeated the monolithism of the system and its ideology, underscoring the empty character of both. Performing this monolithism – with Laibach’s uniforms, with the discipline of the biomechanical movements in the SNST, Rdeči pilot, Noordung performances, and the heavy black frames of IRWIN’s *Was ist Kunst* paintings – NSK called attention to a society of discipline and collectivism dying together with its apparatus, and falling prey to the far greater force of capital and its ubiquitous, all-encompassing technological control. It seems as though NSK was founded in Orwell’s iconic year in order to mark the transition from a society of discipline to a society of control. It must also be borne in mind that NSK shared the collective habitat with the Ljubljana Lacanian School, thus, not surprisingly, recognizing in its works the libidinal economy universally underpinning all ideologies.

Not wanting to be dissident art, NSK followed Eastern European avant-garde traditions and socialist realism, adopting what appeared as an affirmative approach; not interested in improving the existing social system through critique that still subscribed to the underlying positions and values of the system, it strove for more fundamental changes framed in the form of its retro method, estrangement, over-identification, appropriation, and by underscoring the economy of pleasure. It was in relation to this that Žižek defined the Laibach and NSK method with the term *over-identification*. In 1984, it was evident that authoritarian, or generally dominant, discourse and media manipulation were no longer something outside us, but that we had internalized the “master”, which meant that external coercion was hardly necessary any longer. By repeating the symbols and rituals of several social systems in its concerts, theatrical performances, and paintings as well as its programmatic texts, codified attire and conduct, NSK essentially performed exorcisms and framed a world of alternative rules and conventions.

Whatever it was that NSK resisted, it did so in an ambiguous fashion, by juxtaposing seemingly contradictory artistic traditions: Nazi and communist, realist and abstract, Western and Eastern. Calling itself “new art”, NSK nonetheless operated with anachronistic images. In choosing the name *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, it alluded to “*Junge slovenische Kunst*”, the title of a special issue of the German avant-garde journal *Der Sturm* from 1929 featuring young Slovenian art. Like the young Slovenian avant-garde artists of the 1920s, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* strove in the 1980s to operate in the wider, international space. Internationality is inherent to both avant-gardes and contemporary art. The collective’s German name almost psychoanalytically challenged the trauma that grew out of more than one thousand years of German political and cultural hegemony over the small Slovenian nation. “New national art” presented itself both as international, i.e., capable of entering and operating in the international art arena, and as the cultural product of a small nation that can only thrive once it recognizes its inherent eclecticism based on and in relation to Eastern and Western cultural influences.

The art of NSK could be compared to such international trends as appropriation art, institutional critique, and relational art, though these descriptions fail to encompass a crucial difference, one that NSK safeguarded by coining its own terms for what it did. NSK countered the postmodern art of the 1980s with its retro method, laying bare ideological manipulation with images: Laibach with the retro-avant-garde, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre with the retrogarde, and IRWIN with the retro principle. NSK differed from Western appropriation art in that it appropriated the state itself and state institutions with its events, such as New Collectivism’s Youth Day poster and the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre’s (unrealized) *Retrogarde Event Youth Day*, which were both related to the official state celebration of Tito’s birthday in 1987. It differed from the familiar paradigms of institutional critique in that it arrived at the conclusion that there was actually nothing to criticize, since both the state and the state’s institutions first needed to be constructed. Its events involved not only the usual participation of art audiences, but ultimately made the population of the entire federation take sides in response to NSK’s various provocations, either with incensed attacks or by voicing support. Finally, NSK differed from common relational art in that its events of the early 1990s, such as the *NSK Embassy Moscow*, Organized by IRWIN, already began building a community that broached urgent questions shared by the entire Eastern European cultural space in the new circumstances.

What can we take away, what lesson might be gleaned from NSK that could be of use to us today? At first glance, the NSK fusion of mutually exclusive symbols appears to have become an essential part of contemporary imagery: on the one hand, we are witnesses to a process of complete symbolic depletion; and on the other, to a process of reactivating symbols. Today, this game of symbols is becoming uncomfortably similar to that of the dubious 1980s, making the NSK tradition more topical than ever.

Zdenka Badovinac



In 1984, three groups – the multimedia group Laibach (established 1980), the visual arts group IRWIN (1983), and the theatre group Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (1983–1987) – founded the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) art collective. That same year, the three groups founded a fourth group, the design department New Collectivism. Later NSK established other subdivisions: the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, Retrovision, Film, and Builders.

NSK built its artistic concept on the “retro” method, for which each of the three founding groups coined its own name: Laibach called it the “retro-avant-garde”, the SNST the “retrogarde”, and IRWIN the “retro principle”. After the breakup of Yugoslavia and the establishment of an independent Slovenia, the NSK groups invested their common ideas in founding the NSK State in Time in 1992. Since then, the NSK State in Time has issued passports, had its own visual identity and symbols, and opened embassies and consulates in countries all over the world.

1 NSK, From the Internal Book of Laws: Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members, 1985

1.

A member of NSK should be hard working; he should respect the concepts of NSK and its history, be compliant and co-operative in carrying out joint decisions, and irreproachable in administering the general and secret statutory and moral norms of NSK.

2.

A member of NSK is particularly obliged to act in accordance with the moral, political, aesthetic and ethical norms stipulated by the NSK Internal Book of Laws (IBL).

3.

A member of NSK adapts creatively to his environment and is wise in following and complying with the rules set by the authorities regardless of his place of residence or work. He should never, without reason or permission and power vested in him by the Council of the Organization (NSK Council), get involved in any secret political meetings or various plots that could directly jeopardise the existence and sovereignty of the Organization.

4.

In carrying out the exacting tasks, in view of accomplishing the objectives required to attain common goals, the members make use of every means permitted or required by the “Law of Action”, should the situation so require (see IBL).

5.

To cherish mutual respect, friendly and brotherly love, assistance and devotion, is a law obligatory for ALL members of the Organization. The entire association should function according to the principles of equality and harmony of internal distinctions.

6.

No personal animosity, no settling of personal conflicts or disputes may enter the Organization. The same holds true, yet even to a larger extent, of arguments related to religion, nationality or political system, which never have and never shall serve the purpose of the Organization.

7.

Once a member is inducted, the association denies each member his own freedom of choice regarding his religious persuasion, and political and aesthetic affiliation.

8.

Each membership candidate must believe in the hierarchical principle and existence of the supreme substance (ICS – the immanent, consistent spirit), occupying the uppermost position in the hierarchy of NSK.

9.

Each candidate must be aware of the past, be active in the present and susceptible to the future. He should be conscious of the tradition of the fundament, should have a feel for innovating experiments and a talent for combining the two.

10.

A member-to-be should be of sound character, emotionally balanced and of sound mental health. He should be capable, with all sincerity and conscience, of answering the following questions affirmatively:

1. Do you present yourself before this Organization, with truth and honesty, free of any prejudice that would interfere with your personal dispositions, as a free person and of your own free will, without being forced or subjected to inappropriate pressure, and present yourself as a candidate for membership in this organization?
2. Do you maturely and responsibly claim the status of member in this Organization and its pertaining privileges, having taken a clear stand on the world and its history?
3. Do you truly and responsibly pledge to perform your duties for the Organization loyally, respectfully, and in the spirit of its laws and practices?

11.

Once a novice is 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.

12.

Novices must respect elder members and the “Triple Principle”, which is the supreme designer of the Law of the Organization.

13.

During the first year of their novitiate, the novices belong to the so-called team reservoir and have the status of a student-apprentice. They first learn the law of cause and effect, which applies to the art of genuine domination and genuine subordination.

14.

When praising tradition, history and the supreme principle of NSK, each member must obey the following law of the IBL: a member should never speak of the Organization and its inner principles of action without due respect.

15.

When honouring and exposing himself through self praise, etc., a member should avoid any exaggeration and inconsistencies so as to preserve his individual and collective pride.

16.

Concerning one’s love for one’s neighbour (one’s friends, family, wife and neighborhood), 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.

17.

In his role of a social and civil being, a member should be co-operative and benevolent should the circumstances so require, to the extent that such behaviour and generosity do not harm himself, his family, and his friends in particular.

18.

As a community member and a citizen, a member of the Organization should abide by the laws designed to protect him. He should avoid any punishment and interdiction: in critical circumstances, he should not allow any prejudice, originating from what he does, to instigate a feeling of self-guilt.

19.

When a person expresses the wish to become a member of the Organization, his wish should be given careful consideration and a recommendation submitted only if and when he is found to comply with the principles of the Organization and to contribute positively, in terms of personality and activity, to the strength and promotion of its common interests.

20.

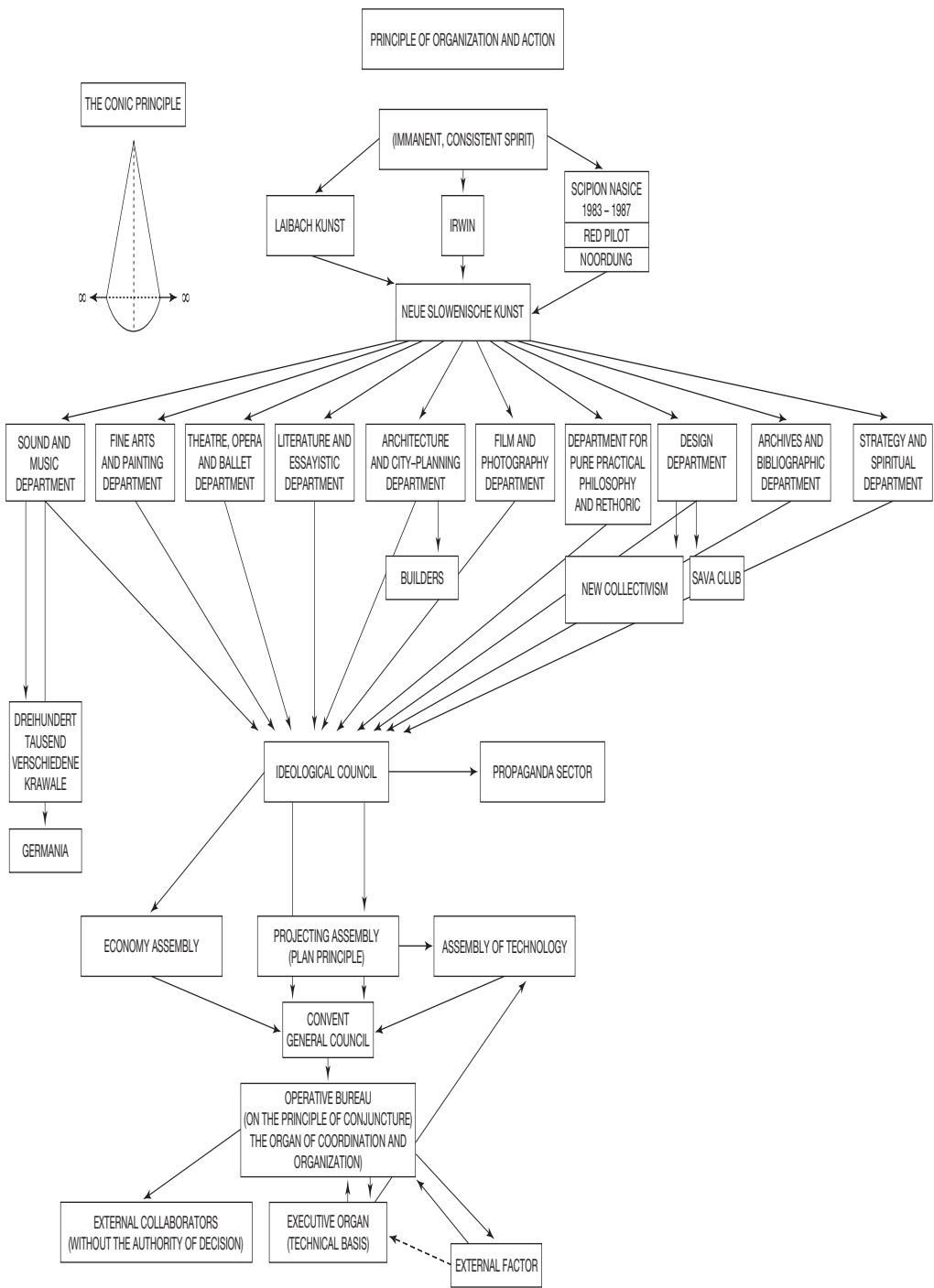
Members are recommended to devote their spare time associating with those who cooperate with the Organization.

THE FIVE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FRIENDSHIP

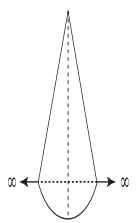
1. I shall lavish brotherly respect on you if I know you are worthy of it.
2. I shall risk danger and hardships to help you in your time of need, providing this does not harm me nor the Organization.
3. In my daily activities and when taking on special duties, I shall first mention your name and then mine.
4. I shall support you in your work and self-denial, and shall help you reach these goals as if I were in your place.
5. I shall never do unto you what I do not want you to do unto me, unless there is a common reason for that.

21.

If a member knows his place in his home group and in a wider body to which he belongs, and has particularly excelled in his work, he shall be presented with a reward according to his rank and stipulations of the IBL. Should he neglect his work, he shall be excommunicated or punished.



THE CONIC PRINCIPLE



PRINCIPLE OF ORGANIZATION AND ACTION

(IMMANENT, CONSISTENT SPIRIT)

LAIBACH KUNST

IRWIN

SCIPION NASICE
1983 - 1987
RED PILOT
NOORDUNG

NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST

SOUND AND MUSIC DEPARTMENT

FINE ARTS AND PAINTING DEPARTMENT

THEATRE, OPERA AND BALLET DEPARTMENT

LITERATURE AND ESSAYISTIC DEPARTMENT

ARCHITECTURE AND CITY-PLANNING DEPARTMENT

FILM AND PHOTOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT FOR PURE PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY AND RETHORIC

DESIGN DEPARTMENT

ARCHIVES AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC DEPARTMENT

STRATEGY AND SPIRITUAL DEPARTMENT

BUILDERS

NEW COLLECTIVISM

SAVA CLUB

DREIHUNDERT TAUSEND
VERSCHIEDENE
KRAWALE

GERMANIA

IDEOLOGICAL COUNCIL

PROPAGANDA SECTOR

ECONOMY ASSEMBLY

PROJECTING ASSEMBLY
(PLAN PRINCIPLE)

ASSEMBLY OF TECHNOLOGY

CONVENT
GENERAL COUNCIL

OPERATIVE BUREAU
(ON THE PRINCIPLE OF CONJUNCTURE)
THE ORGAN OF COORDINATION AND ORGANIZATION

EXTERNAL COLLABORATORS
(WITHOUT THE AUTHORITY OF DECISION)

EXECUTIVE ORGAN
(TECHNICAL BASIS)

EXTERNAL FACTOR

2 NSK Organigramme, 1986

NSK's interrogative rematerialization of ideology in the field of the visual assumes spectacular form in the 1986 "organigramme" (NSK organizational diagram). In 1987, Laibach described it as follows: "The NSK *organigramme* (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 the head of NSK we cooperate on equal footing with Irwin and Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot in a tripartite council led by the ICS (*the 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."

The organigramme reflects trends toward self-institutionalization within the Ljubljana alternative scene of the period. Artists, curators, punks, and others were all dissatisfied with the "official" cultural institutions, but rejected the clandestine status of extra-institutional dissidents. The Slovene alternative was based on institutions and self-definition, both within and outside existing structures. This process of institutional proliferation represented an extrapolation of the implications of the self-management system, using its formal emphasis on self-organization as a source of legitimacy to create a contra-systemic dynamic. Both the new institutions and NSK manipulated the system and its ideology to defend relatively autonomous activities. Institutions such as ŠKUC were at the far autonomous end of the spectrum of state organizations, but the creation of NSK as a wholly autonomous cultural alliance represented the culmination of trends toward self-institutionalization.

The organigramme took the process of alternative institutionalization to its (il)logical formal extreme, recapitulating and attempting to transcend the institutional anarchy of the period and the fantastically complex, deliberately opaque web of state and parastate organizations within the late Yugoslavian system. In 1990, the British authors of the last full edition of the *Rough Guide to Yugoslavia* observed. "Diagrams of NSK's organizational structure bear a striking resemblance to those in Yugoslavian school textbooks which seek to explain the country's bafflingly complex system of political representation."

The organigramme appears to symbolize the traumatic return of an inhuman, mass-organized totalitarian state. However, its significance did not end with the collapse of the Yugoslavian system, or the fall of Communism. Like many other NSK works, it looked forward as well as (because of) backward. Its menacing quality refers not just to the states of the past but to the political state of the present, to a period marked by the dominance of the corporate ideologies decoded by Naomi Klein. Branding experts' talk of the "souls" or "consciousness" of corporations betrays the continued manipulation of the mystifying and potentially hypnotic effects generated even by the most faceless and technocratic organizations. These effects are as characteristic of organized religion as of totalitarianism or capitalism. Just as Deleuze and Guattari argue that, consciously or otherwise, Kafka's work

sensed the “diabolical powers of the future” (among which they listed American capitalism as well as Nazism and Stalinism). NSK, too, may have detected the corporate future as much as exposed the present, recapitulating the stimulation of audience responses to produce “brand loyalty.” A.Mo.

3 Tomaž Mastnak, The 1980s: A Retro Future

“The 1980s: A Retro Future”, conceived and compiled for our exhibition by Tomaž Mastnak, represents a narrative of the 1980s that differs from the narrative which has become prevalent since the declaration of Slovenian independence. According to the latter, the telos of the events in the 1980s was the establishment of an independent and sovereign nation-state. Mastnak indicates that what we have witnessed was rather the growing loss of independence of Slovenia. Moreover, because of the increasing entanglement of nation-states in global processes dictated, above all, by the United States, the state as such is losing its role and independence.

Even in the early 1980s, the interests of capital were overriding those of ideology in Yugoslavia, as elsewhere. As an example, Mastnak notes that in 1980 the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Slovenia blocked the publication of a new translation of Marx’s *Capital*—regardless of its relevance for the analysis of the economic processes, which a number of leftist intellectuals had pointed out.

Mastnak’s narrative, however, takes issue not only with nationalistic teleology but with democratic triumphalism as well. What really defines the 1980s is not the triumph of an abstractly conceived democracy. It is the triumph of the West in the Cold War, which appears as a process of democratization. The democratization was a mask of the Cold War that cannot be taken off. The events highlighted in this alternative narrative show the suppression of democratic movements, endorsement of coups and dictatorships, and military interventions across the globe. Repression marked the decade on both sides of the Iron Curtain. While the communist regimes of Eastern Europe made their final attempts to save themselves through repression, the triumph of capitalism was paved with the suppression of workers’ rights, dismantling of the welfare state, financial deregulation, and wars of aggression. The fall of communism paved the way for neoliberalism, which Mastnak calls capitalist extremism. The more the state was failing as a public authority, the stronger the various nationalisms grew on one side of the Iron Curtain, while neo-Nazi-fascism emerged on the other. The more the real power of global capital grew, the more individual states clung to their national symbols. This was what NSK underscored, making evident the fact that Nazi-fascism had not been conquered on the symbolic level. Instead, the state was left holding the symbols of authority, while real power had been taken over by multinational corporations.

An illustrative example of this is the oil spill caused by the collision of the tanker Exxon Valdez into a reef in 1989, and the resulting, and continuing, ecological disaster. After this watershed event the corruptive practices of multinational oil corporations only intensified, pushing the state further into the background. Z.B.

4 NSK State in Time (since 1992)

NSK State in Time was created in the autumn of 1992 by the groups IRWIN, Laibach, the Noordung Cosmokinetic Cabinet (successor of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre), New Collectivism and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy. The first citizens of NSK were the groups' members, but ever since its founding citizenship has been open to all who decide to apply for an NSK Passport. This artistic project has been running for over two decades, and has far surpassed the Vatican in the number of citizens.

The state has been a central preoccupation for NSK ever since its founding, a fact evidenced by the organisational scheme representing the hierarchical structure of the functioning of individual groups, headed by the Immanent Consistent Spirit. Both this organigramme and the "Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members" mirror documents describing the organisation of state structures in an exaggerated manner that is typical of NSK.

NSK artworks, including public statements, manifestos, and codes of attire and behaviour, bear witness to the state as one of the central themes of the collective.

In the "10 Items of the Covenant", issued in 1982, Laibach declares that when it speaks, it is not the individual that speaks; "the organization does". One of its earliest songs is called "Država" ("The State"), and it quotes the discourse of the then existing socialist state: "Our authority is the people's authority".

The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (SNST) writes in its "First Sisters' Letter": "Theatre is a State. The formal tendency of a State is stability and power, while in terms of content every state is basically disorganized. The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre proclaims this relation as the fundamental, all-embracing and eternal Aesthetic issue. ... The only truly Aesthetic vision of the State is the vision of the impossible State."

IRWIN declared itself a state artist ever since the beginning of its involvement in NSK, stating in a 1988 interview: "When declaring ourself state artists, we commit ourself to a role which, in a sense, is a performing one and void of lexical meaning. We have never wanted to operate in the sense of dissident artists." Members of IRWIN appear in public as state officials, in suits and ties.

The creation of the *NSK State* followed the *NSK Embassy Moscow* project, which had drawn attention to the need for different strategies and models of cultural production in a post-socialist world. At the centre of NSK's interests is the process of establishing self-organized forms for the production, presentation and distribution of art, largely based on East European avant-garde traditions. With this project, NSK stands as an heir to early modernist ideas of artistic states, particularly those of Kasimir Malevich, according to whom establishing an artistic state was an urgent task: "Artists of the world, of all orientations without exception, should unite to found artistic states." (Kasimir Malevich, 1928-29, a working version of an article for *Suprematist Architecture*, Ukraine).

After the *NSK Embassy Moscow* was carried out, its analysis was followed up by a text written by Eda Čufer and IRWIN, entitled "NSK State in Time". This states that "Neue Slowenische Kunst – as Art in the image of the State – revives the trauma of avant-garde movements by identifying with it in the stage of their assimilation in the systems of totalitarian states."

After the breakup of Yugoslavia and the end of socialism, NSK was one of the rare entities to offer a different vision from the emerging capitalist state by founding its State in Time. It brought to existence an artistic state, a global community based not on territorial or economic principles, but on aesthetics and cognitive principles. z.B.

5 *NSK Embassy Moscow*, Organized by IRWIN, 1992

When invited to participate in Apt-Art International in 1991, IRWIN proposed that, instead of its exhibition, the entire NSK should move to Moscow for a month.

The artistic action *NSK Embassy Moscow* took place in a private apartment in Moscow at 12, Leninsky Prospekt, running from 10 May to 10 June 1992. The Embassy was conceptualized as a live installation. In addition to the documents and artifacts of IRWIN, NSK and their guests Goran Đorđević, Mladen Stilinović and Milivoj Bijelić, an action in homage to H. P. Noordung by the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung and the daily operation of a videotheque, phonotheque and library, the central event of the project was a one-week program of lectures and public discussions organized by Eda Čufer in cooperation with IRWIN. The lecturers were Rastko Močnik, Marina Gržinić and Matjaž Berger from Slovenia, Vesna Kesić from Croatia and well-known names from the Moscow conceptual, media and philosophical scene: Viktor Misiano, Valeri Podoroga, Aleksandr Yakimovitch, Tatiana Didebko and Artiom Troitsky. The aim of this event was to confront two similar social contexts, those of the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. The meeting of individuals with similar aesthetic and ethical interests, as well as social experiences, revealed that the topic arousing most enthusiastic and intense debate was the art and culture of the 1980s, and the specific role they played in the transformation of Eastern Europe. e.č.

6 *Laibach, Geburt einer Nation, Opus Dei*, 1987

The video *Geburt einer Nation* makes extensive use of the archaic-pagan scenography of the *Krst* production. Despite – or even because of – its transgressiveness, these and other Laibach videos received extensive airplay on MTV, an institution Laibach would both benefit from and attack.

Laibach's first cover version "Geburt einer Nation" (originally "One Vision" by Queen) featured on *Opus Dei*, which inaugurated Laibach's period of greatest success and their tactic of reworking Anglo-Saxon rock "classics".

Laibach retroactively transformed "One Vision" into or revealed it as a Fascistic hymn to power, an effect amplified by the bombastic militaristic arrangement and harsh German vocal. The opening bars set a militant, uncompromising tone that creates the uncanny impression that the song is the natural expression of Laibach's *Weltanschauung*. The lyrics have obviously sinister connotations when they are sung in German by a group such as Laibach: "One man, one goal, one solution." After exposure to Laibach's intervention, Queen's song loses its innocence and neutrality. Laibach did not ascribe any specific hidden agenda to Queen (beyond

the conquest of new audiences and territories), but amplified and “made strange” the structures of unquestioning adulation (and obedience) common to both totalitarian mass mobilization and capitalist mass consumption.

A key characteristic of this and many subsequent Laibach cover versions is that although the lyrical changes are often minimal, the new arrangements and change of context are so total as to create the impression that the tracks belong more naturally to Laibach than to their original authors, and that Queen and the other groups could actually be covering Laibach’s “new originals”. A.Mo.

7 IRWIN and Michael Benson, *Black Square on Red Square*, Moscow, 6 June 1992

On 6 June 1992 between 2:00 and 3:00 p.m., the group IRWIN and Michael Benson performed an artistic action *Black Square on Red Square*. In collaboration with about fifteen people they brought a large piece of black canvas onto Moscow’s Red Square and unfurled it. The fabric covered a vast 22 x 22 meter square in this symbolic centre of the Russian capital, just east of the Lenin Mausoleum. Moscow militia did not interfere, nor did any of the numerous Federal Security Service officers (or FSB, a successor of KGB) in plain clothes who were on duty there. Passers-by gazed curiously, with a bit of confusion, at this highly unusual activity, but did not appear shocked, perhaps assuming that anything of that scale on Red Square must have been sanctioned by the authorities and must have had a purpose.

There were no announcements or prepared statements; no person appeared to be central to the event. A somewhat unusual mix of artists, art critics, curators, militia, and FSB officers, as well as tourists and native Muscovites, mingled together around the square and talked casually. Half an hour later the participants folded the fabric, took it to the edge of the square where a small bus was waiting, and drove away.

The people who re-enacted Malevich’s iconic painting *Black Square* in a real space and gave it the name *Black Square on Red Square* were a group of ex-Yugoslavian and Russian artists, critics, and curators. They were the participants in the month-long series of lectures, discussions, and exhibitions that later came to be known as *NSK Embassy Moscow*. G.G.

8 SNST, Retro-Classical Stage, *Retrogarde Event Baptism under Triglav*, Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana, 6 February 1986

In “The Founding Act” (of 13 October 1983), the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (SNST) announced its plan to revive the performing arts in three stages: underground, exorcism, and retro-classical. Foreseeing the accomplishment of this revival in three to four years’ time, the SNST also predicted the end of its activities, which would be executed in an “act of self-destruction”. The plan was founded on risk, since the retro-classical stage dictated the realization of the Scipions’ programme in the frame of an actual political-economic and production platform, which implied also the institutional legitimization of the group’s work.

The Scipions' successful breakthrough from the underground stage to the largest stage (that of the Gallus Hall) of Cankarjev dom, then a new establishment, attests both to the SNST's acumen and determination in pursuing its stated goals, and to the willingness of Slovenian institutions to not shy away from challenges, but instead overtly participate in the broader processes of democratization that were taking place in late-socialist countries in the mid-1980s.

The invitation to perform at the venue had originally been issued as early as 1984 by the artistic director of the Cankarjev dom theatre section, Goran Schmidt. He invited the Scipions to realize a celebration performance on the national cultural holiday in 1986, and the event planned for that year was a staging of the central modern Slovenian national myth, the lyrical epic poem *Baptism at the Savica* by France Prešeren.

The Scipions approached the task from a radically different angle than that dictated by a canonical reading of Prešeren. They bypassed the coordinates of such a reading (defined in the cultural climate of 1980s Slovenia by such interpretive constructs as Dušan Pirjevec's "Prešerenesque structure" or Dimitrij Rupel's "Slovenian cultural syndrome") by dislocating two basic premises of the literary work:

1. Instead of harking back to the pre-modern, mythical pagan epoch when the Slovenians lost their "national" autonomy in a battle with Germanic Christianizers (which the epic speaks about), they located a similar element of "rebaptizing" characteristic of 20th century revolutionary culture.

2. Instead of literature/language as the dominant and "nation-building" means of expression in Slovenian culture, they proposed the universally legible visual language of avant-garde and neo-avant-garde art as the indispensable element of 20th century international revolutionary culture (symbolized by, for example, Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*).

Owing to the drastic deviation of this interpretation from the traditional reading of Prešeren's myth, the artistic director suggested renaming the planned theatrical spectacle, accepting the SNST's proposal to change the title from *Baptism at the Savica* to *Retrogarde Event Baptism under Triglav*, and to shift the premiere from 8 February (the date of the poet's death in 1849, celebrated as the Slovenian cultural holiday since 1947) to 6 February.

All groups of the NSK collective participated in the realization of the spectacular event, which actualized Wagner's model of a "total work of art" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) through a complex system of retro-quotes and allusions to 20th century art. Laibach provided the music, New Collectivism designed the visual identity of the project and took charge of public relations, and IRWIN collaborated in producing the monumental set design.

Initially given the cold shoulder by local critics of diverse ideological orientations, the *Retrogarde Event Baptism under Triglav* went down in history as a major success for Cankarjev dom in terms of programme and production, and also as a manifestation of a theatre form that had a far-reaching impact on the younger generation of artists who shaped the new, post-socialist cultural climate in the 1990s. E.Č.

9 Institution Building

NSK's art can be compared with the international genre of institutional critique. There is, however, a key difference to be noted: while in the West this critique predominantly dealt with strong existing institutions and often involved proposals for their improvement, the central idea in the case of NSK focused on *building* institutions. This idea is expressed in NSK's projects and manifestos, shaped by NSK's analysis of the relation between culture and ideology, both in the local context – where the collective, by virtue of its extensive membership, their self-organisation and a strong network of like-minded people, served as a strategic stand-in for the official (and poorly developed) cultural infrastructure – and in the international context, which they aspired to enter as equal partners.

Institution building manifests in different ways, depending on the group: Laibach intervenes in the existing order of things like a Trojan horse, by declaring its adherence to the institution- and state-building order; the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, the Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot, and the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung avoid commenting directly on institutions in their performances, choosing instead to do this through their manifestos and press conferences; IRWIN treats its artworks both as artefacts and as tools for intervening into the existing local and international art system.

With all NSK groups, institution building is either overt or lurking within the many layers of individual projects; at the same time, however, it remains iconic. Although NSK does not adhere to the tradition of conceptual art, their work conveys quite the opposite. NSK is monumental, the gestures of individual groups institutionally sovereign. Certain NSK actions highlight their institutional focus in particularly iconic ways. Here follow three such events, which took place as interventions or critical commentaries outside various local institutions.

SNST, *Retrogarde Event Resurrection of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre*, public act carried out overnight on 23–24 October 1984

In its first programmatic text, “The Founding Act” (of 13 October 1983), the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre published its four-year programme, which was divided into “internal” (creative) and “external” (manifestative) parts. The *Resurrection* was part of the latter, a manifestative act addressing Slovenian institutional theatres and calling on them to “revive the performing arts”. Using the metaphor of the ninety-five “theses of Luther” – inspired by Martin Luther, who is said to have posted his theses on the door of a church in Wittenberg in 1517, thus instigating a far-reaching rift in the Christian church – members of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre posted ninety-five theses of their own on the doors of Slovenian institutional theatres in 1984. The Scipions called on Slovenia's institutional theatres to introduce a public discussion on the fundamental questions of the performing arts, inviting them to a collective revival and “to the creation of a unified Slovenian national theatre”. As part of the joint NSK action, the group IRWIN exhibited its monumental painting *The Resurrection of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre* in 1984.

Laibach outside the Moderna galerija, the National Gallery, the National Liberation Struggle Museum, and in front of the sculpture *Manifestants I* by Drago Tršar, and the monumental portal with statues of colossi. (Five photographs by Jane Štravs, 1984)

In 1984, the members of the Laibach group posed for photographer Jane Štravs outside central institutions in Ljubljana, in front of buildings and sculptures associated with state building, ideology and totalitarian impulses, that is, with all the objects of Laibach's over-identification. They left out the Slovenian National Assembly on purpose, since at the time it was not really functioning as a state institution; as the assembly of one of the six republics of then Yugoslavia it did not operate autonomously, but was largely subject to the central authority in Belgrade. Posing in front these highly symbolic institutions, self-confident and striking militant poses, the youths looked as if they were standing in front of their own doors, as if they themselves were institutions.

IRWIN's action at the opening of the 42nd Venice Biennale: exhibition in the apartment of Eleonora Mantese and the guerrilla action of putting up posters at various locations in Venice, 25–30 June 1986

Acting outside the official Biennale programme, IRWIN staged an exhibition in a private apartment, showing a selection of paintings from the *Was ist Kunst* series and putting up posters, guerrilla-style, bearing the NSK coat of arms before the Biennale opening. With the help of Crissie Iles and her collaboration connected with her work promoting and setting up the British Pavilion, an informational flyer presenting the IRWIN exhibition as part of the Biennale went into circulation, stating the location of their "pavilion" and thus having it included in the Biennale's information system. The purpose of the poster action was to promote both the exhibition and the presence of the entire NSK collective at the Biennale. The exhibition itself continued the tradition of exhibiting in private apartments or Apt-Art, which functioned as a kind of parallel infrastructure during the time of socialism and was often the only option available by which to exhibit non-official art. On the other hand, the project drew on a long tradition of rebelling against prevailing modes of selection and of intruding into dominant patterns of art presentation. Z.B.

10 The NSK Members, Photographs 1984–1992

For the members of NSK, their every appearance in public was a statement, with nothing left to chance or spontaneity. Everything was *Kunst*: posing for group portraits, appearing in the media, in the street, at private parties, or in clubs. They spread their message in the public sphere with their attire and image, with codified conduct and socializing – *Kunst* took over the NSK members' lives. Thus, at least in the 1980s, the members of Laibach would wear a uniform of sorts – the so-called *Jäger* (hunter) look or that of the Alpini – and not only onstage, but also in private. Philosopher Peter Mlakar, who often performed with Laibach, maintains

the *Jäger* look to this day. Dragan Živadinov long sported a jacket with motifs from a Mladen Stilinović work with references to Mayakovsky; he would also wear jumpsuits quoting László Moholy-Nagy. The members of IRWIN started dressing in black suits and ties from the beginning, emphasizing that, as artists, they were themselves part of their exhibition displays. The numerous photographs thus depict both NSK members' official portraits and occasions of their socializing with friends, like-minded people, and representatives of the international art scene who would come to Ljubljana in the 1980s to see what was going on here.

11 Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, *Transcentrala (Neue Slowenische Kunst State in Time)*, 1993

Video, 20.05 min., produced by TV Slovenija / Artistic programme

A documentary/artistic project about the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) movement: Laibach, IRWIN, Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung. It involves members of the core of NSK and together with them, we travel into the structure of the "utopian" NSK state, a state in time. The video *Transcentrala* is like a virtual explosion of the "rotating swastika"; splinters of this explosion take us into the very innards of NSK, saturated not only with "blood and mud", but also with most ludicrous utopias, visions, strategies, the apocalypse and self-consciousness at the end of the millennium. The group IRWIN exhibited at the Slovenian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, where the video was premiered in 1993 as part of their installation. The video was presented in the competition programme of the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival in 1994. M.G.

12 The Three *Kapital* Projects

In the early 1990s, the three core NSK groups each produced a project entitled *Kapital*, harking back to what NSK had loudly proclaimed in the early 1980s: the collapse of socialism and the dawn of total capitalism.

The three groups expressed their respective takes on the transition from one system to another in different ways, in keeping with their primary division of roles, by which the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (and its successors Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot and Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung) explored the role of religion in society, Laibach worked in the domain of ideology, and IRWIN assumed the role of chronicler of both the work of NSK and of the historicization of local traditions and sociopolitical context.

In addition to observing the differences between the three *Kapital* projects through the prism of this essential division of roles, another aspect should be taken into consideration: the shifts and changes at work in their diverse aesthetic approaches as the time of close collaboration between the NSK groups was drawing to an end.

The NSK theatre department had always avoided political commentary; whatever touched upon the sociopolitical came under the umbrella of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre's manifestative actions, which, after the theatre had transmuted

into the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, took on the form of press conferences lasting several hours and addressing issues like artists' working conditions and the need for international integration of Slovenian culture. Titling the theatre production *Kapital* thus alluded both to the working conditions artists faced upon transitioning to a new social system and to Marx's *Das Kapital* as the Bible of the 20th century.

After a decade of work, Laibach's work appears more hermetic and less involved in direct political commentary. In "Le Privilege Des Morts" from the album *Kapital*, the word "capital" refers to far more than just the triumph of capitalism. What Laibach does is repeat the title of Paul Eluard's book of verse *Capitale de la douleur*; in Laibach's case, however, it can be read as capital or as the capital of pain – either way, as pain accumulated through space and time, something on which every political or economic power builds.

In all of this it was IRWIN that captured the transition from socialism to capitalism most literally in its series of paintings *Kapital*. The works were produced during the period of the transition itself and incorporate metal plaques removed from the buildings of (former) political organizations, not as a metaphor of the transition but as the physical evidence of such. By inscribing the word "kapital" on these plaques, IRWIN marks history itself as capital, and as the historic moment to which these paintings bear direct witness. Also forming part of the *Was ist Kunst* series, these paintings tie in a far more complex concept of art, resulting from collisions between different eras as well as both individual and collective spiritual investments. Z. B.



Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot, *Drama Observatory Kapital*, Public Warehouses, Hall 13, Ljubljana, 18 September 1991



The Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot's final project, the *Drama Observatory Kapital* was based on integrating the conceptual and spatial principles of Russian suprematism and constructivism with the issues of spatial and physical reconfiguration, as broached by the reality of modern space technology. The first futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun* (1913), was put in a trans-artistic-scientific dialogue with Herman Potočnik Noordung's *Problems of Space Travel* (1928/29). The result was a performance that simulated the interior of a spacecraft (Noordung's cabinet) by enabling mechanical movement-rotation of the space inhabited by the audience (the space could accommodate 18 spectators). According to several critics, this created the feeling of film in theatre. Malevich's set from *Victory over the Sun* was reconfigured as a jigsaw of white, black and grey crosses forming the walls, which could be taken apart in front of the audience to emphasize the instability of the relation between the observer and observed, and between the exterior and interior aspects of the space.

Dragan Živadinov explained the title of the show, which was part of a series of projects with the same title by the three founding NSK groups made at the time of transition from socialism to the new Slovenian state, at a five-hour press conference before the premiere, with this event itself conceived and carried out as a performance. In it, he expounded his plan for the renewal of the local art system (into a global one) through a series of ten so-called detonations, each of which

called for a redistribution of the local system of art funding and a considerable capital investment. E. Č.

14 Laibach, *Kapital*, Mute Records, 1992, London

Kapital was Laibach's first post-Yugoslavia work, the result of a long period of re-orientation and experimentation conducted in Paris with previous collaborator Bertrand Burgalat and Sean Oliver of Rip, Rig and Panic, but little of this material was used in the final release, and most was recorded in NSK Studio Reichstag, Ljubljana, as Yugoslavia disintegrated. Yet although Laibach's 10th anniversary concert in Trbovlje had been provocatively titled *10 Years of Laibach, 10 Years of Slovenian Independence*, there was no sense of nationalist triumph or optimism about a post-Yugoslavia "democratic" future, and the back sleeve featured death masks of Laibach members and Peter Mlakar. It intensified Laibach's sceptical de-construction of the capitalist American/Western dream ("Wirtschaft ist Tot"), and re-emphasised the Germanic and Slavic aspects of Laibach, making it less immediately accessible than its previous Mute albums, but much more complex, with multiple themes and approaches.

While the title suggested it would be an intensely ideological album, it was also one of Laibach's most esoteric and even poetic releases, as (deliberately) archaic as it was (ambivalently) futuristic. The sleeves contained only fragments of the lyrics plus cryptic-esoteric phrases, making it all the more obscure. Each album format (CD, tape, vinyl) contained a different sequence and alternate, and sometimes dramatically different, mixes of the tracks, heightening the sense of a complex, unstable work in which the playful, mystifying aspects of Laibach prevailed over the militant and absolute. Even as Laibach experimented with new technology and dance influences (techno, rap), some of the references and orchestral/folk elements took it "back to the future". At the same time, science fiction was an important source for the album, specifically Godard's *Alphaville* (on "Le Privelege des Morts") and George Lucas' *THX-1138* (on "Regime of Coincidence, State of Gravity").

Kapital's iconography was strongly retro-futurist. Laibach performed the tour concerts wearing silver face paint (alluding to British conceptualists Gilbert and George) and the video for "Wirtschaft Ist Tot" ("The Economy is Dead") showed Laibach piloting a homely Slovenian spacecraft using vintage wireless sets, while silver-painted women dug coal and operated industrial machinery.

Kapital was performed across Europe and North America, and an extract from its Athens concert appears in Michael Benson's NSK documentary *Predictions of Fire*. It was also performed in Berlin's Volksbühne during the 1993 *NSK Staat Berlin* event. Just as each format of the album varied, so the ambitious live versions were different again. *Kapital's* many instrumentals were performed in full with live variations, and the vocal samples that appeared on the studio album were sung live, as were the rap lyrics to "Hymn to the Black Sun". The ambitious film sequences, some of which were used only on this tour, carried the group closer to its ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. A.Mo.

The *Kapital* series of paintings by IRWIN was first shown at the Eqrna Gallery in Ljubljana in December 1990, and then in 1991 at the National Gallery, at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, and at New Langton Arts in San Francisco, at the Clocktower Gallery and the P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York, and at the District of Columbia Arts Center in Washington.

In the early shows, the paintings were hung on fibreboard panels mounted with photographs of earlier IRWIN exhibitions. This hanging scheme was first abandoned for the P.S.1 show, where (taxidermy) hunting trophies were interspersed between the paintings. Generally, IRWIN tends to exhibit the *Kapital* series together with a selection of works from the *Was ist Kunst* series to underscore their organic kinship and self-generative power.

Defining the *Kapital* series are five round paintings featuring a royal stag in the centre, a “capital trophy”, while the backgrounds refer to either IRWIN motifs or socialist iconography. One of the works thus has portraits of Lenin, Tito, Marx, and Engels located on the edges of the painting, on the east–west and north–south axes. The stag is painted at the point where the axes cross, as if to point to IRWIN’s geopolitical location at the intersection between East and West, in a place as yet undefined and, thanks precisely to its indeterminateness, representing market potential.

The artists started working on the five large paintings in the fall of 1990, i.e., at a time when socialist Yugoslavia still (formally) existed; the series was completed in 1991, when socialist Yugoslavia was virtually defunct and the nameplates of political organizations such as the League of Communists were being taken down off buildings. Easily obtaining these plates at the time, IRWIN incorporated them into all five of the paintings and wrote *Kapital* on them. Thus instantly given a new life, they stand for the experience of socialism as IRWIN’s capital. IRWIN defines both its own work and its history as its capital. Once IRWIN started displaying these paintings together with mounted hunting trophies, the concept of capital became even more multifaceted: now it also referred to the fact that art is always a trophy, no matter what the system, serving both ideology and capital equally well.

Like all IRWIN work, the *Kapital* series addresses the issue of the art system and the way it is determined by geopolitical relations. Rather than merely commenting, it devises veritable strategies for filling in the gaps resulting from the absence of a developed art system and market in our region. Actually, IRWIN’s paintings draw attention to the symbolic capital that the East can use to enter the international market. IRWIN’S attitude to the market is multifaceted: the market is the principal mechanism of Western domination, and at the same time still the only relatively sustainable means of international integrations in art. IRWIN is well aware of the fact that sooner or later, every history becomes a commodity and must therefore be constantly presented as such, and that one must operate according to this market logic, since doing otherwise would mean naively allowing somebody else to have and handle one’s symbolic capital. On the brink of the collapse of socialism and Yugoslavia, IRWIN was aware that its symbolic capital was precisely this very same historic moment.

An integral part of the project is also the book *Kapital*, published by Collaborator/Edinburgh. In it, IRWIN and Eda Čufer put forward the thesis of Eastern European modernism standing in contrast to and confrontation with Western modernism as a universal concept. The authors offer that there is a difference within the same; that is, that there are different modernisms to consider in the East and the West, and different production conditions and perceptions of art to take into analytical consideration. By the same token, Eastern and Western avant-gardes should be rethought in terms of how they were defined by the socialist regimes and the Western art market respectively. In this respect, the market (together with its market mechanisms) comes out winner in the East-West relation, since it fostered ever-new isms and made possible their replication beyond the Western world. The *Kapital* project thus creates and expresses the need for a different understanding and description of art production, one focused more on differences than similarities. Z.B.



IRWIN is a collective of five painters – Dušan Mandič, Miran Mohar, Andrej Savski, Roman Uranjek, and Borut Vogeljik – founded in 1983. (Until 1985, the collective also included Marko Kovačič and Bojan Štokelj.) At the beginning of the following year they named the group Rose Irwin Sélavy, and wrote a programme setting out the principles governing their work: the affirmation of national visual arts based on emphatic eclecticism and on the simultaneous use of diverse, often contradictory styles. They summed up their artistic philosophy in the term *retro principle*. In contrast to the then-predominant postmodernism, they drew on the tradition of conceptual art.

Shortly after the *Back to the USA* exhibition, held early in 1984, IRWIN started working on several projects that focussed on various Slovenian art groups or movements that it recognised as crucial reference points for defining its own activity. In addition to artistic relevance, there were two other selection criteria: the contemporaneity and close connectedness between IRWIN and the other groups that co-founded NSK the same year, and the importance of Slovenian impressionists and of the OHO group for the development of Slovenian visual arts and of Slovenian society in general.

One of IRWIN's most important projects is the series titled *Was ist Kunst*, which refers to the Laibach group. Evolving over more than thirty years, this series of paintings currently numbers several hundred works mounted in heavy, often black frames; the key theme of the series is exploring the ideological context of art. It started with the appropriation, development and transformation of motifs used by Laibach Kunst, that is, the iconography of socialist realism, Nazi propaganda, religious art, the art of avant-garde movements and archetypal Slovenian works of art. Another guiding principle of IRWIN's art is the priority of the chosen motif over artistic style, which is described as "the dictate of the motif" over "the dictate of style". The mode of execution is thus secondary to the motif. The author is also secondary, and the works were all signed collectively, with the painter regarded as the chronicler of his time and culture. With clearly formulated self-imposed limits the artists have ensured their autonomy and established a form of their own, taking a critical stance towards both formalist modernism and postmodernist formulas, towards adopting stylistic and cultural influences from the West, as well as towards an ideological celebration of various values reflected in art in the East.

IRWIN has developed a specific strategy of institutional critique, drawing attention to the exclusion of Eastern European art from the international art system, as well as strongly contributing to the emergence of artistic histories of Yugoslavian and Eastern European art, as evidenced by the *Fra-Yu-Kult* and *NSK Embassy Moscow* projects, which it carried out in collaboration with other NSK groups.

1 IRWIN, Early Graffiti Projects

Graffiti exhibitions: *Sv. Urh. Slaughters and Tortures in Slovenian Primorska and Štajerska*, *Bauhaus – Face to Face with Ana Monró Theatre*, *Medieval Twilight – Russian Ecclesiastical Art of Icons*, *For Long I Hoped and Feared*, *Hysteria and Her Retro Friends*

In the years 1983 and 1984, a group of artists (most of them still students at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts) who would later take on the name of Rose Irwin Sélavý, produced graffiti paintings on paper and on walls and presented them at exhibitions in Disco FV, in the former chapel of a student dorm at Kersnikova 4, and in the ŠKUC Gallery. By taking up the graffiti form, they could distance themselves from institutional (post)modernist art and position themselves within mass (rock and punk) culture, which meant a wider audience and more impact. They also anticipated the gradual destruction of their pieces; and in fact, visitors would tear them and write on them, traces of former graffiti mingling with the new in the same space. Already in the first texts that accompanied their exhibitions, the group laid down the groundwork for their future strategies of action and representation, defined their working procedure as “a principle of retro-presentation” and introduced the concept of “manipulating the memory of the (already) seen”.

The first exhibition, *Sv. Urh. Slaughters and Tortures in Slovenian Primorska and Štajerska*, on the dance floor of Disco FV (16 November 1983), was the work of Marko Kovačič, Dušan Mandič, Andrej Savski and Roman Uranjek. Graffiti paintings on paper depicting hangings, slaughter and bodies in numbered coffins, were based on photographs from the book *Mučeniška pot k svobodi* [Through Martyrdom to Freedom] (1946), which documented massacres and torturing of Liberation Front activists and partisans by Italian fascists, the Home Guard, the White Guard and German Nazis during World War II. Adapting the subject matter to the club venue and its social mores, the authors correlated the ritual of torture with the ritual of dancing and with behaviour typical for a rock disco club. The second exhibition in Disco FV was *For Long I Hoped and Feared*, (Prešeren Day, 8 February 1984). For this, the group, now joined by Borut Vogelnik, chose the topic of eroticism, depicting sexual activities (both homosexual and heterosexual) and sadomasochistic practices. The exhibition also underlined the fact that pornography, which was forbidden in Yugoslavia at the time, could only be represented in an artistic context.

In contrast, in the “chapel”, graffiti was painted directly on the walls as part of a theatre cabaret show *1492 or Is There Anything at All a Pre-war Stripper Can Still Show Today?* by Ana Monró Theatre. On one occasion, for *Bauhaus – Face to Face with Ana Monró Theatre* (December 1983), the graffiti works were based on photographs of scenes from the Bauhaus theatre, an important historical

model for the artists. On another, they were associated with Orthodox icons and their overall effect (*Medieval Twilight – Russian Ecclesiastical Art of Icons*, February 1984).

The graffiti for *Hysteria and Her Two Retro Girlfriends* (offices of the ŠKUC Gallery, March 1984), whose central motif was Rank Xerox, a character from the comic strip magazine *Frigidaire*, accompanied by some other images (the cross, the silhouetted figure), completely transformed the office, giving it a typical new wave or “alternative” appearance. The intervention was not, however, without consequences: with this gesture, the IRWIN group symbolically moved into the ŠKUC Gallery and strongly influenced its cultural policies to come. B.B.

2 IRWIN, *Back to the USA*, ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana, 2–7 March 1984

Nicholas Africano, John Ahearn, Jonathan Borofsky, Richard Bosman, Neil Jenney, Robert Kushner, Matt Mullican and Cindy Sherman

Execution: R IRWIN S (Marko Kovačič, Dušan Mandič, Andrej Savski, Bojan Štokelj, Roman Uranjek and Borut Vogelnik)

The first “classical” exhibition of the group referred to the travelling exhibition *Back to the USA* (1983–1984) organized by German curator Klaus Honnef to present artists from the New York scene and to promote postmodernist tendencies in Europe. The Ljubljana repetition offered “reconstructions” of selected pieces from Honnef’s exhibition. The artists did not follow their models particularly closely: some pieces were altered, reproduced in different formats or used different materials or techniques.

Mandič executed Sherman’s photography series *Untitled* as video stills. Vogelnik “reconstructed” Bosman’s painting *Sunday Morning* as a story and depicted it as three separate scenes in woodcut. Kovačič combined the motif of the face (Mullican) with words (Indiana). Štokelj cast busts of his colleagues in plaster (Ahearn), while Savski brought together the duality of Jenney’s motifs and style in a single image. Some models were found outside the exhibition catalogue context, notably Borofsky’s works. Kovačič doubled the sculpture *Hammering Man*, fashioning both figures after his own image, and did a street performance with his friends. The installation *Man with Briefcase* was adapted by Uranjek to the smaller exhibition venue, with the silhouetted figure painted on a sheet of plastic in foreshortened perspective. The painting *Harbingers of the Apocalypse* by Mandič was based on a copy of Goran Đorđević’s painting made by Borofsky. Differences in materials and execution may not have been critical, but they did point to the very different circumstances of production in Yugoslavia and in the West, as well as to the different statuses enjoyed by artists.

The invitation read “Retro Principle: The Principle of Manipulation with the Memory of the Visible Emphasized Eclecticism – The Platform for National Authenticity.” There was also a “Mondrianesque” discus-thrower and the R Irwin S logo, while the front of the card featured a collage (Venus de Milo with a man’s head and a military cap, appropriated from J. Th. Baargeld, with the addition of a circular saw blade as an aureole) and the logo of the original exhibition. Two posters were produced for the exhibition: one printed (Mandič), with rows of red Latin crosses on a black background and the stencilled message “1968 Is Over. 1983

Is Over. Future Is Between Your Legs”; and one photocopied (Kovačič), depicting anal coitus, with the exhibition title written over the phallus. The Xerox catalogue (*Galerija Škuc izdaja* no. 21) contained several texts (Borut Vogelnik and Miloš Gregorič; Atlanta, Aleksander, Mandič; Tomislav Vignjevič), including the group’s programme based on the “retro principle and the dictate of the motif” (Andrej Savski and Roman Uranjek).

The week-long exhibition included daily events (video, film, music). Integrating all these different aspects into a unified whole positioned the ŠKUC Gallery as both “total event venue” and as a regular meeting point for a heterogeneous audience. The overt copying and the practice of appropriation adopted for this exhibition represented a rupture in the (post)modernist artistic scene in Slovenia, attracting significant attention, first in the local and wider Yugoslavian contexts and later internationally as well. B.B.

3 IRWIN, *Red District*, Mala galerija, Ljubljana, 1985

The first *Red District* exhibition was held at the Mala galerija, a former Moderna galerija outpost exhibition space, in October 1985. In this series of prints, IRWIN referred to the industrial realism of the prints made by Trbovlje artist Janez Knez in the 1950s and 1960s. His motifs had already been repeated by his son, Dejan Knez (a member of Laibach), and so in doing this IRWIN played a double chronicler role: chronicler of local tradition as well as of Laibach Kunst.

The exhibition included a series of linocuts printed on paper that had been soaked with animal blood, with black coal edges and set in gilded frames. In addition to this series, IRWIN produced an object, *Red District* (1987), based on an enlarged print by Knez. Bronze casts of a male sculpture’s muscular back were placed at the corners of the gilded frame. Standing on supports fashioned from found remains of a tombstone, the object was designed to appear monumental, like a socialist-realist altar. In fact, there was little monumental socialist-realist art in Slovenia, and even what little there was made the artistic establishment uncomfortable, a fact brought to attention by, among others, works such as *Red District*.

Both the series of smaller-scale prints and the large object were based on enlargements of prints works by Janez Knez, who even signed the print used for the latter. In reproducing these prints on a much larger scale, IRWIN retained all the traces of cutting typical of a linocut. A traditional printmaking technique was thus fused with a pop art procedure.

The catalogue of the exhibition at the Mala galerija states: “At present, the District has changed its face; among the factories and the mines, the contemporary industrial worker emerges, no longer voiceless and chained in a valley surrounded by hills; now, he is the socialist working man, with an organic sense of class loyalty. There are very few towns where the contrast between the old and the new is as stark as in Trbovlje. The heritage of the old capitalist society has had to retreat before the new socioeconomic relations, whose protagonists are the long-oppressed working class, all the working people and citizens who are building the path to further development through realising shared and general interests. LAIBACH KUNST”

Just as the group enlarged the socialist-realist prints of Knez, IRWIN also applied Laibach Kunst's intentional exaggeration and usage of the contemporary socialist jargon extolling the status of the worker to degrees that went far beyond the real circumstances of workers' lives.

IRWIN constructed its art on the suppressed truths about the industrial region of Zasavje. They set "the blood of miners" in frames as if it were a holy relic, in order to preserve the emancipatory potential of the local workers' history, as well as of the rebellion against fascism, which had been very strong in the region, as the regenerating power of art. Z.B.

4 IRWIN–OHO, *Like to Like*, Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana, 1986

In 1985, IRWIN carried out the project *Like to Like*, first presented in 1986 at Cankarjev dom in Ljubljana. It drew on the tradition of Slovenian avant-gardes, specifically OHO, which had emerged in the mid-1960s first as a movement, then as a group and then, in the early 1970s, as a commune whose members aspired to fuse art and life. OHO carried out most of its work in the countryside, in close contact with nature and its natural rhythms.

The members of IRWIN began by creating four oil paintings employing motifs of various OHO works from 1969: Tomaž Šalamun's haystack, David Nez's mirrors, and Marko Pogačnik's family of fire, air and water. Then in June the same year, they exposed their paintings to the four fundamental elements: earth, fire, water, and air. Andrej Savski buried his haystack painting overnight; Borut Vogelc seared the image of the burning field with a blowtorch; Dušan Mandič submerged the canvas depicting plastic bags on water in a river, keeping it there for an hour; and Roman Uranjek exposed his painting to air by strapping it to the roof of a car and driving from Ljubljana to Trbovlje. In the end, Marko Pogačnik, the leading OHO figure, offered that these IRWIN paintings fell within the overall concept of OHO.

These four actions were doubly documented: both on photographs and in the traces left on the paintings as a result of their exposure to the elements. With these oils on canvas, framed in genuine leather, IRWIN "preserved" the ephemeral material left by OHO actions, returning it to the keeping of art institutions. IRWIN's intervention was fundamentally ambiguous: on the one hand, they decided to musealise conceptual practices, and on the other, they exposed their oil paintings to the effects of OHO's primeval elements, thus consciously inscribing themselves within the same tradition.

With this project IRWIN was commenting on the fate of earlier avant-gardes, which, despite resisting musealisation and the art system, ended up absorbed by it. For this, the scarcest of documentary traces left over from OHO's projects and allowing for their reconstruction were sufficient. IRWIN reconstructed these works primarily in order to bring OHO, which in the 1980s still remained on the sidelines of official history, to wider attention and as central to its own interests – that is, to the interests of contemporary art. In this way it drew attention to the fate of radical art, slowly moving from the margins towards the centre of the art system through critical references and repetitions in the work of new generations of artists. It is

this real-world power of art, constructed through the self-contextualisation of artists within local traditions, that IRWIN was pointing to. Z.B.

5 Fra-Yu-Kult, Franciscan Monastery, Široki Brijeg,
Bosnia-Herzegovina, 25 August – 20 September 1990

“In 1989, in collaboration with Jadran Adamović, we developed the idea for the permanent collection Fra-Yu-Kult, which was then and still is in many ways unusual for the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Jadran Adamović was on good terms with the monks of the Franciscan monastery in the town of Široki Brijeg, which in the 1980s changed from being a remote town in the mountains of Herzegovina that served only the local population into being a destination for Roman Catholic pilgrims from all over the world. For a miracle had taken place in Široki Brijeg; the Mother of God had appeared there. The Franciscan brothers in the local monastery, who were traditionally known for their support of the arts, decided to take some of this unanticipated influx of money and set it aside for art. And so we suggested that they purchase works by the most radical artists of the 1970s and 1980s from the whole of Yugoslavia – artists who at the time were not, for the most part, included in any state collection. The brothers agreed with this proposal and left the selection process entirely up to us; as a result, the collection was able to circumvent state formulas, institutions, curators, and critics, developing only through the participation of artists, so that what was, literally, an artists’ project came about through the help of the grace of God. The collection was accompanied by a catalogue, which, along with rather extensive discussions of the works, also included lengthy interviews with each of the artists; consequently, this catalogue is one of the very few – if not the only – detailed presentations of art in the 1970s and 1980s on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.” B.V.

(Excerpted from the catalogue IRWIN: Retroprincip (Künstlerhaus Bethanien: Berlin, 2003), pp. 200–201.)

IRWIN saw its participation in the assembling of this collection as part of its art, which is both an aesthetic concept and a pragmatic gesture aimed at building an art system, which did not exist in Eastern Europe at the time. Later on, IRWIN dubbed a series of such collaborations *Construction of Context*, and explained these in its Retro Principle diagram in 2001. Z.B.

6 IRWIN, *Slovenian Athens*, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana,
22 October – 24 November 1991

The project *Slovenian Athens* started in December 1985 with a “Missive” from IRWIN, inviting Slovenian artists of various schools and generations to produce works using the motif of the sower. The purpose of the project was a “planar and plastic” reconstruction of Slovenian modernism. This was a period during which IRWIN explored various grand narratives of Slovenian history – the impressionists, the OHO Group – as well as documented the projects of other NSK groups in its

own work. At the centre of *Slovenian Athens* was an icon of Slovenian art, *The Sower* by painter Ivan Grohar (1907).

IRWIN's "Missive" was followed by an exhibition in Moderna galerija, although only later, in 1991. Most of the works were only executed after a renewed invitation some months before the exhibition; some were earlier works, and some were made roughly a year after the original "Missive".

Out of the 60 who were invited, 43 Slovenian, Yugoslavian and foreign artists chose to participate in the exhibition. Those who refused did so predominantly because they were unwilling to take part in IRWIN's "manipulations". Owing to the numerous refusals from Slovenian artists, to the point that the exhibition was in real doubt, the IRWIN group and the exhibition curator, Marina Gržinić, extended the invitation to artists from across Yugoslavia. In fact, those who accepted the invitation also embraced IRWIN's retro principle, whether consciously or not. The exhibition took place in Moderna galerija from 22 October to 24 November 1991, that is, once Slovenia had become independent; and was accompanied by a catalogue containing texts by respected art historians and theorists.

The title of the project refers to ideas developed by certain Slovenian intellectuals, particularly Josip Vidmar. In the essay "The Cultural Problem of Slovenian Identity" written in the 1930s, Vidmar imagined Ljubljana as the spiritual centre of Europe, with an eye to Jože Plečnik's design for the Slovenian Parliament building.

IRWIN's choice of the sower motif and their allusion to a grand intellectual dream, which, if fulfilled, would have raised Slovenia above its provincial status, was intended to deconstruct national myths. IRWIN's concept was based on the "dictate of the motif", which is a prerequisite for the juxtaposition of different styles and aesthetic concepts and in order to gain a distanced view of history – that is, a view from outside the logic of development of modernist styles and its concept of originality. IRWIN used the relation between the original and the copy as its basic tool for the deconstruction of national history. At the centre of this endeavour was *The Sower* by Ivan Grohar. The motif of the sower has been present in European art since the Middle Ages, and the early modernists were particularly influenced by the composition of mid-19th century realist painter J. F. Millet. To the simple motif of farm work familiar from Millet's painting, Grohar added a symbolic dimension, bringing together the landscape of the country and the experience of a largely rural nation with international imagery and modern style. Thus, the *Slovenian Athens* project placed the national art icon in a wider, international field of references, where there is no question of an original motif, but rather one of difference. The difference, however, lies not in the logic of linear development, but rather in repetition, which is always bound to specific contexts. Hence, any national art is inherently unoriginal, and reflection on it has to start at the point where both the original and the copy have ceased to exist. Certain authors – including Adrian Kovacs and David Stein, along with Laibach Kunst and the IRWIN artists – demonstrated a particularly acute awareness of a different understanding of history, one beholden neither to national icons nor to copying Western or Eastern models, but to recognising the non-linearity, eclecticism and exclusionary logic of history.

In parallel with the *Slovenian Athens* project, IRWIN also developed the idea for a series of five paintings, which was first displayed at Riverside Gallery in London

in 1987, in the context of a one-off project that presented all of the NSK groups.

In addition, the idea of Slovenian Athens was included in an (unrealised) international spectacle, entitled *The City of Ljubljana – Slovenian Athens – The Capital of Europe*, which would have involved all NSK groups and taken place from 14 to 21 September 1988. z.B.

7 IRWIN, *NSK Embassy Moscow – Interiors*, 1992

After organizing the *NSK Embassy Moscow* between 10 May and 10 June in a private apartment on 12, Leninsky Prospekt, IRWIN made five paintings, with which the group members hoped to preserve the experience of the event.

The five painters of IRWIN agreed on common points of departure on which to base their paintings. They agreed to:

1. use the same format of the base board on which a photograph of the display of IRWIN's paintings on the walls of the apartment at 12, Leninsky Prospekt would be mounted under Plexiglas,
2. attach their paintings onto the base with a webbing strap tied in the shape of a cross, in order to point out the mobility of their paintings,
3. shape the label with the data on the paintings and the project like a certificate bearing the stamps of IRWIN and NSK.

8 IRWIN, *Was ist Kunst*, 1984–

IRWIN's project *Was ist Kunst* (WIK) started in 1984 and is still ongoing. The title refers to the series of performances by Serbian artist Raša Todosijević *Was ist Kunst?* (1976–1981).

The first public exhibition of *Was ist Kunst* took place in 1985 in the Sarajevo club Collegium Artisticum. Next, it was shown in the ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana and immediately after that, in the former studio of graphic designer Matjaž Vipotnik. This was followed by exhibitions in Belgrade and Zagreb. Thus, *Was ist Kunst* was recognised as a revolutionary event in almost all the capitals of former Yugoslavia as early as in the first year of its existence.

Each *Was ist Kunst* painting is created in various artistic styles, ranging from medieval to modernist and avant-gardist, from totalitarian art to pop culture. It also brings together a variety of motifs associated with the chronicler role played by IRWIN within the NSK collective. This means that it directly appropriated motifs developed by Laibach and established links with other NSK groups and with Slovenian art generally (for instance in the projects *Birds of a Feather (Like to Like)* and *Slovenian Athens*). *Was ist Kunst* is based on typical Laibach motifs such as the sower, the stag, the coffee cup, the drummer boy, and the metal worker. These motifs also had a place in the inscription on the brass plaque on which IRWIN – as if this were a classical museum piece – added “Laibach” to their own name, in order to stress, at least initially, Laibach as their principal thematic motif.

Laibach's imagery is complemented by many other motifs closely associated with various appropriated styles. In the *Was ist Kunst* series, socialist motifs are

associated with various realisms: Lenin, for instance, is depicted in the manner of official portraits from the Soviet Union, that is, in 19th century realist style, while the motif of the worker is usually appropriated from socialist realist sculptors such as Lojze Dolinar; the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart from one of the pre-modern styles; Slovenian lakes and mountains from Slovenian romantic landscape painters such as Anton Karinger. And finally, abstract motifs are borrowed, among other sources, from both Giotto's golden backgrounds and the blue paintings of Yves Klein. As with other NSK groups, one of IRWIN's central motifs is the cross, usually the black cross associated with the black cross of Kazimir Malevich.

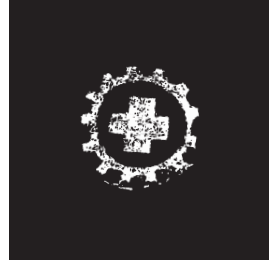
A very particular theme developed by IRWIN is *Malevich between Two Wars*, that is, a suprematist painting of Malevich sandwiched between two realist images from the national-socialist era, which came after (!) the avant-garde – just as in Malevich's own work, where his abstract work was followed by his figurative art of the 1930s.

The teeming imagery brought together by *Was ist Kunst* calls into question any notion of purity and originality; in fact, it speaks about the inherent eclecticism of national cultures, in particular smaller cultures like the Slovenian. Hence, IRWIN called their method “emphatic eclecticism”.

The paintings in the *Was ist Kunst* series are also heterogeneous in terms of materials, which are used both for their significance and their conceptual value. IRWIN deconstructs traditional painting by using traditional techniques, such as oil on canvas; the literal dimension is further underscored through their use of materials, which are not only described by means of painting, but also directly incorporated in their works.

Heavy frames made of tar, timber and coal, often in collaboration with other artists, particularly Slovenian sculptors, play a particular role in *Was ist Kunst*. The unified appearance of the frames expresses a collective endeavour and a common concept aiming at unmasking the way images are manipulated by ideologies and markets. On the one hand, the frames demarcate the autonomous space of each work of art; on the other hand, they tie the works together. In public spaces, *Was ist Kunst* paintings are usually displayed together, but at the same time, they are conceived as market objects intended to hang in private apartments, and their formats are adapted to that purpose. These paintings do not hide their antagonistic nature as both critiques of the art system and its products.

The five IRWIN painters follow “the dictate of the motif”, in order to determine, as a group, which motifs are repeated most often across the more than 500 paintings. In 1996, six motifs picked out from among mutual interactions became the basis for the series *IRWIN Icons*, which represents the continuation of the *Was ist Kunst* project still to this day. The motifs-turned-icons in this process consist of the cross, the sower, Malevich between two wars, the stag, the coffee cup, and the drummer boy. Z.B.



The group **Laibach** was formed on 1 June 1980 in the industrial town of Trbovlje. Laibach works as a team (collective spirit) according to the principle of industrial production and totalitarianism, which means that the individual does not speak; the organization does. The flexible and anonymous membership works on the quadruple principle (Eber – Saliger – Keller – Dachauer), which – predestined – conceals in itself an arbitrary number of sub-objects.

Soon after its foundation, Laibach declared that its name was a materialised idea on the level of an enigmatic cognitive symbol. The name Laibach first appeared in 1144 as the original name of Ljubljana, then again in the era of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, and finally in 1943, at the time of the German occupation of the Slovenian capital. The controversy around the name and the group's provocation reached its peak in 1983, when the presidency of the Ljubljana City Committee of the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia banned all public manifestations of the group under this name. The first legal concert in Ljubljana after the ban was lifted only took place in 1987.

Besides the name, the key Laibach motif is the cross, which is charged with performative power. The Laibach cross is an independent symbol integrating a number of artistic, totalitarian and religious references: from the cross of Kazimir Malevich, to the Greek cross and the black cross that German military vehicles and aircraft bore during World War II. The black Laibach cross, featured on posters, fanzines, paintings, the sleeves of its members' uniforms, flags, at concerts and on album covers, is not intended for any sort of social identification, but is instead a sign to arouse social fascination. Laibach also shocked with its use of Nazi iconography, treating it as a taboo topic that had to be brought to awareness and connected to the totalitarian impulses within the socialist society.

In its artistic productions Laibach brings together a variety of artistic practices, following the concept of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) and producing a wealth of self-designations in the process. To this end, Laibach Kunst refers to the group's artistic principle, which is most evident in exhibitions, but covers the whole of its work. Laibach's approach to art and the social and political reality is *retro-avant-garde*. The material for its work is taken from various locations and times, copied and montaged, while sometimes it intervenes directly into existing models. Through its motifs, militarist image, and manifestos quoting various seem-

ingly incompatible sources, from political speeches to hunting club regulations, Laibach explores the relationship between art and ideology.

On the one hand, its industrial aesthetics serve to emphasise the group's origin, referring to the working-class and revolutionary traditions of the Red District and of Trbovlje. On the other, Laibach returns to the industrial era in order to use its almost archaic iconography to deconstruct the post-industrial nature of both socialism and capitalism, as well as that of the cultural industry. Laibach's heavy, booming industrial music draws on a number of sources, from Bach and Wagner to more contemporary classical music by Holst and Penderecki, and from Kraftwerk's electronic music to pop.

Laibach has consistently collaborated with other NSK groups. One of the most important of these collaborations is certainly the soundtrack album *Baptism under Triglav*, created for the production of the same name by Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre.

1 Laibach, *Alternative Slovenian Culture*, Delavski dom Trbovlje, Trbovlje, 27 September 1980

The members of the Laibach group wanted their first public show to take place in the Delavski dom Trbovlje (Workers' Cultural Centre) in September 1980, as part of the exhibition *Alternative Slovenian Culture*, which was to be produced in collaboration with the Students' Cultural Centre ŠKUC in Ljubljana. The choice of proletarian Trbovlje as the location of the event was intentional; like other smaller towns, Trbovlje stood well outside the cultural scene in the privileged capital of the republic, Ljubljana. On the day of the exhibition, three controversial posters appeared in the town; the local authorities had them removed from the walls that very afternoon and banned both the exhibition and all related events.

The largest of the posters, featuring the names of the participating visual artists and musicians, served as an informative invitation to the exhibition. It was black, with the names of the artists written in white, and on the right side was a mining symbol composed of two hammers. The other two posters, of smaller dimensions, were less informative and referred to the Laibach group. One of them featured a violent stabbing scene from John Carpenter's classic horror film *Halloween* on a black background. The drawing was rough, expressionistic, the features unfinished. Under the drawing ran a contrasting, neatly ordered inscription of the German name "Laibach". The other poster featured a black equilateral cross on white background, and under it, again the inscription "Laibach". The equilateral cross, later also called the Laibach cross, became a recognisable and permanent symbol of the group, triggering a host of associations, on certain occasions even replacing the group's name.

A composition of red crosses also features on the only preserved painting intended for the Trbovlje exhibition. Interestingly, a similar painting with black crosses was prohibited by the exhibition committee, while the red crosses were apparently less controversial and therefore permitted.

The posters were accused of insulting public morality and socialist humanity and of stirring up religious intolerance; criticism continued in newspapers and

on the radio. The debate raged under the name “The Black-and-White Shock in Trbovlje”. The provocation and the shock were principally to blame for the failure of the exhibition *Alternative Slovenian Culture* in Trbovlje, but the events did announce the emergence of Laibach on the scene as well as its strategy.

Laibach only returned to Trbovlje a full ten years later. The group’s first public show in its “hometown” took place in the industrial setting of the Trbovlje Power Station. A.Mi.

2 Laibach, *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst*, Srećna Nova Umetnost Gallery, SKC, Belgrade, 14–18 June 1981

In June 1981, the first exhibition in the series *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst* took place in the Galerija Srećna nova umetnost [Happy New Art Gallery] in the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, and included paintings, prints and documents associated with the workers’ movement. Laibach music tapes were played throughout the four-day exhibition. The larger paintings were created on wax paper meant for wrapping meat and shared common subjects – narratives of violence – as well as stylistic traits: coarse brushstrokes in a neo-expressionist manner. The only piece from the exhibition known to have been preserved is *Tarquinius and Lucrece* (1979), a variation on the motif of stabbing, also familiar from the night-time poster intervention in the town of Trbovlje.

At the time the gallery (known today as Srećna galerija [Happy Gallery]) was known as a centre of fanzine production, so the exhibition was accompanied by the first Laibach fanzine (and the first Slovenian fanzine ever), composed of documents related to the revolutionary history of Trbovlje mineworkers in the period between the two world wars. The fanzine was made using a Xerox machine, which emphasised the effect of the grainy black-and-white images made blurry through the process of photocopying.

The fanzine was a sort of chronicle of the Trbovlje community, highlighting the inscription of Laibach as part of a new era, whose path was prepared by the revolutionary spirit of the Red District. This is also the focus of the visuals reproduced in the fanzine. The archival documents and photographs of a workers’ assembly, of military dictatorship, of industrial buildings and of the torturing of Liberation Front activists were interspersed with images of contemporary Trbovlje and with Laibach motifs. One such motif was the four disfigured faces from the arsenal of Arnulf Rainer, associated both with the fourfold anonymous membership of the group, Eber – Saliger – Keller – Dachauer, and with the mutilated bodies of dead rebels and miners. The image was also used on a poster entitled *Smrt ideologije* [*The Death of Ideology*]. The upper part of the poster features four disfigured faces, while below are portraits of Marx, Engels and Lenin. According to the custom of the time, there should also have been a portrait of Tito, but instead there is a blank space. In another version of *The Death of Ideology* poster, the space is occupied by a portrait of one of the members of Laibach.

The exhibition in the Happy New Art Gallery was dominated by the imagery of workers’ expressionism. It explored themes such as freedom, manipulation of both individuals and the masses, issues of totalitarianism and democracy, torture

and oppression. The Laibach group took an engaged stance, expressed through images and dealing in shock; by exploring the original, local theme of the Trbovlje mineworker movement and their rebellion, it sent a clear message that the revolution was still ongoing. With the exhibition in the Happy New Art Gallery, the group's identity and character were clearly established; and it became obvious that music was only one aspect of a wider principle of action called Laibach Kunst. A.Mi.

3 Laibach, *Air Crash Victims*, Disco FV 112/15, Ljubljana, 12 January 1982

The first performance of the group Laibach in Ljubljana was staged in the cellar of Disco FV 112/15 at the campus in Rožna dolina, which played an important role in the alternative culture scene of the 1980s.

On 12 January 1982 an environmental exhibition, *Air Crash Victims*, was staged at the venue. It was a rapid reaction to a national tragedy, the crash of an Inex-Adria aircraft in Corsica, which killed all 180 passengers and crew on board. The exhibition included black plastic rubbish bags filled with garbage, parts of store-front mannequins sticking out of them. This was a direct allusion to the accident; similar bags had been used for the purposes of removing the bodies of the crash victims in Ajaccio. The walls of the room were covered in photocopied clippings of newspaper reports about the crash, barely legible after being copied several times over. Also included were two posters from the Trbovlje late-night poster intervention, as well as both versions of the *Death of Ideology* poster.

The troubled atmosphere, further exacerbated by elements of horror aesthetics and an alienated distance to the event and coverage of it, was made all the more intensely palpable by the first public performance of the group in Ljubljana, as documented in photographs of the event. According to members of the audience, the performance was extremely loud and a powerful audio-visual experience, based on repetitions and transformations of sound. In order to create an atmosphere, Laibach uses sounds and images as tools to provoke fear and fascination. Sound is understood as a force in the form of terror with therapeutic effects. Hence the idea proposed by Laibach: violence as a cruel need that has to be obeyed. Alongside a bass guitar and drums, the group also employed a turntable, a tape recorder, a megaphone, a homemade synthesizer, a modulator, a mixing desk, a radio and a microphone in order to ramp up the noise and the brutality. One of the then members Srečko Bajda commented on the instruments they used: "On the one hand, the instruments were created out of necessity, because we didn't have any. On the other hand, it was about the idea that a new music requires new machines. Mastering the means of production was crucial. This was in keeping with the tradition of 20th century avant-gardes, especially noise, futurist and concrete music, but it also corresponded to the practice of contemporary industrial music bands." A.Mi.

4 *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst*, ŠKUC Gallery,
Ljubljana, 28 April 1982

Each of the Laibach exhibitions in the ŠKUC Gallery took place over the course of a single evening (from 6 to 10 p.m.), like a soirée, and would attract numerous audiences and provoke strong reactions.

The first exhibition was experimental in character, combining the practice of Xerox montage with a noise concert of the Laibach Kunst group, Dreihundert Tausend Verschiedene Krawalle (300,000 V.K.). The event was announced on Xerox posters featuring a black cross inside a cogwheel, and drew outrage because of the use of German and because of the word “Krawall” [din, racket]. The invitation leaflet was similarly provocative: it bore the taboo image of Hitler visiting the Great German Art Exhibition (Munich, 1937) on one side, and a programmatic text on the other. The text asserted, for the first time, that art and totalitarianism were not mutually exclusive, that individual artistic freedom was an illusion, and it announced “a demasking and recapitulation of the official ‘trans-avant-garde’”.

Along with reworked and labelled socialist-realist graphics with Red District motifs by Janez Knez (and graphic prints transferred onto sheets of black polyvinyl), the exhibition included large images of the Laibach cross and two full-wall compositions created from black-and-white photocopies. One of these featured a classic painting of a stag (an appropriation of Sir Edwin Landseer’s *Monarch of the Glen*, 1851) against a background made up of multiplied images of a metal worker (after the poster for the First Congress of the Metalworkers’ Association, 1945). The second composition was constructed from multiplied positives and negatives of human figures, which produced the effect of a grainy pattern as a result of multiple rounds of photocopying.

The tension grew in the gallery and at some point during the concert, when the noise from the recorded sounds, the bass guitar and the singer had already reached a considerable level, empty bottles were suddenly hurled into the audience from outside. The event was interrupted and the venue visited by police.

This exhibition was the actualisation of a point in the Laibach Kunst programme that spoke about the depersonalisation of art and about its political character; it also introduced the method of appropriation and the subcultural form of Xerox, which enabled new procedures of image construction and of juxtaposing various ideological and cultural codes. B.B.

5 *Laibach, Ausstellung Laibach Kunst*,
Srećna Nova Umetnost Gallery, SKC, Belgrade,
15–18 May 1982

The woodcut *The Scream* (1980) exemplifies the early artistic practice of the Laibach group, that is, their appropriation of existing images, which was to become an important strategy of artistic production for the group and later for the entire Neue Slowenische Kunst collective. *The Metal Worker*, *The Stag*, *The Red District*, *The Sower* and *The Coffee Drinker* are just some of the more recognisable motifs that Laibach adopted as part of its own visual language.

The original painting *The Scream*, by Edward Munch, expresses the anguish of an individual who becomes traumatised by depersonalisation, which results in his distorted perception of both his surroundings and of himself. In Laibach's print, the screaming figure is set in an industrial environment. Behind it looms the Trbovlje cement factory, inspired from a 1964 print by Janez Knez. The scream of existential desperation is expressively echoed in the curling smoke spewing from a factory chimney in the background. Munch's primal scream is escalated to an industrial scream. The scream is the sound of the band Laibach, whose name is written in capital letters at the bottom of the print.

The Laibach image of *The Scream* was used for a poster that announced the three-day exhibition *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst* at the Srećna nova umetnost (Happy New Art) gallery of the Students' Cultural Centre in Belgrade in 1982. The exhibition wound up with a concert that marked the first time Laibach employed smoke bombs as part of their special effects.

In 1983, the third issue of *Punk Problemi* (a series of special issues of the journal *Problemi*), appeared, designed by Dušan Mandič. The cover featured the screaming face of Dejan Knez painted in black and white, resembling a skull. The same year, Laibach shot their first staged music video for the song "*Mi kujemo bodočnost*" ["*We are Forging the Future*"] at Disco FV. For the video, directed by Richard Heslop, the faces of the Laibach members were painted the same way Knez was for the *Problemi* cover. Dejan Knez moved among them with stiff, jerking movements like a zombie, like a body risen from the dead, implying the kind of social commentary as expressed in *The Scream*: again, the emphasis is on the anonymous, depersonalised position onto which viewers might project their own fears. At the end of the video, which drew inspiration from the classic horror film by George A. Romero, *Night of the Living Dead*, appear the disfigured faces featured in the poster *Death of Ideology*. A.Mi.

6 Laibach at the *Novi Rock Festival*, Križanke, Ljubljana, 10 September 1982

One of the best-known Laibach concerts, which has come to assume cult status, took place in September 1982 as part of the *Novi Rock Festival* of alternative music at Križanke in Ljubljana. The concert kicked off with a provocation: the group was introduced with the words taken from one of the numerous protest letters that expressed people's outrage at its German name – "Is it possible that a youth band in Ljubljana – the first Hero City of Yugoslavia – has been permitted to wear a name that forces us to recall the bitter memories of Laibach!"

The tension was only exacerbated by the violent scream of the instruments and came to a peak when Tomaž Hostnik walked onstage wearing military boots and an officer's uniform. He complemented his totalitarian appearance by roaring out Mussolini's words at a confused and enraged audience: "Cari amici soldati, i tempi della pace sono passati!" [Dear friends, soldiers, the times of peace are over!]. All kinds of objects were hurled onstage from the audience, and a bottle fragment hit Hostnik in the face, injuring him. Nevertheless, Hostnik continued with the performance: standing at full attention, head raised high, he faced the audience, with his bleeding face for all to see.

This event can be said to have marked the final severing of ties between Laibach and the punk rock movement. The Novi Rock audience were predominantly drawn from punk and new wave subcultures, who saw Laibach's concert as a direct provocation, which enabled Laibach to move conclusively away from this audience and establish a new one. In fact, from the very beginning, what Laibach shared with punk was largely their simultaneous emergence and subsequent presence on the alternative scene, under the same conditions and at the venues the new punk scene could offer. In distinct contrast to the raw, immediate sincerity of the punks, Laibach developed a strategy based on manipulation. Their rebellion also included an authoritarian, militarist image, propaganda manifestos and totalitarian statements. A.Mi.

7 Laibach, the *Touch of Evil* Concert, Moša Pijade Hall, Zagreb, 11 December 1982

The farce of totalitarian government performed by Laibach at the Novi Rock festival was further developed at a show in Zagreb. The Zagreb concert was later dubbed *Touch of Evil*, and took place on 11 December 1982, at the Yu Rock Movement festival. Laibach performed at the Moša Pijade Hall, erecting, as it had at the Križanke venue in Ljubljana, a large canvas painting of the *Metal Worker* to serve as the backdrop.

All the band members donned uniforms of the Yugoslavian People's Army. For the first time, they also wore bands with black equilateral crosses on their sleeves.

The concert was particularly memorable for its use of smoke bombs. As with the military uniforms, band members had smuggled the smoke bombs from the army, so as to make their show more realistic. One of the smoke bombs went off too soon, injuring a friend of the band. Military police reached the venue along with paramedics, and one of the band members tried to keep them from entering the hall for as long as possible. When asked why they were wearing Yugoslavian army uniforms and using means of combat, they answered that they were working on war-related subject matter. Just as Laibach had incorporated the incident provoked by the audience into its performance at the Novi Rock festival, the intervention of the repressive organs of the state became part of the Zagreb event.

Another unusual feature of the concert was that it was performed despite the absence of the drummer. This created a particular atmosphere, enhancing the performative quality of the event. The magazine *Polet* published a review of the concert, saying "Laibach [had] shifted the focus from simulating industrial noise to performing songs such as 'Cari amici soldati', 'Jaruzelski', 'Država' [The State] and 'Svoboda' [Freedom]", which were to become iconic Laibach songs.

Touch of Evil was also the last concert that Tomaž Hostnik played with Laibach; ten days later, he took his own life. The news of his death was announced in a Radio Student programme by Igor Vidmar, to the accompaniment of the Kraftwerk song "Ohm Sweet Ohm". Vidmar followed up by reading Tomaž Hostnik's farewell poem, "Apologia Laibach", which is regarded as the poetic manifesto of the group. A.Mi.

8 Laibach, *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst – Regime Trans-Avant-Garde*, Prošireni Mediji Gallery, Zagreb, 6 March 1983

A year after the *Touch of Evil* concert, Laibach was invited to stage an exhibition at the PM Gallery (Prošireni mediji / Expanded Media). The title of the exhibition was *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst – Regime Trans-Avant-Garde*. The exhibition poster reproduced the motif of the four disfigured faces that had appeared in the first Laibach fanzine as well. In the centre of the poster is the word “Laibach”, and under it, a worker within a cogwheel. There was also an invitation leaflet for the exhibition: the first page shows a soldier in German uniform and helmet, pointing his index finger at the viewer. This is a variation on the famous and much-imitated “Your Country Needs You” poster, created for a military recruitment campaign. The reverse side reproduced the manifesto “Art and totalitarianism are not mutually exclusive”, which had been first published a year before, on the reverse side of the invitation leaflet for the exhibition *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst* at the ŠKUC Gallery in Ljubljana.

Music played at the opening of the exhibition included the song “Lili Marleen”. This was followed by a video programme that featured recordings from the Zagreb concert *Touch of Evil*, and *Halloween* from the Novi Rock concert in Ljubljana, as well as the video “Seven Songs” by the band 23 Skidoo, which was to play a joint concert with Laibach a month later, at the 12th Music Biennial in Zagreb.

The paintings that formed the core of the exhibition included *The Red Metal Worker*, *The Metal Worker’s Group*, *The Self-Portrait of Tomaž Hostnik*, *The Sower I*, *Pure Landscape* and *Forme uniche della continuità nello spazio*. The most distinct of the works was a small 1981 painting entitled *Natura morta*. The still life depicted a coffee cup decorated with a swastika, which someone slashed and destroyed in the course of the exhibition. The gallery management was subjected to political pressure, so the exhibition was closed prematurely after only three days. The members of Laibach were escorted to the railway station by the police and told to go and display their beautiful creations elsewhere.

At the Zagreb exhibition, Laibach used the language of political manipulation, which represents – according to their manifesto “10 Items of the Covenant” – the only way to avoid political manipulation in art. A.Mi.

9 *Totalitarizem, Nova revija II*, 13–14 (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1983)

In 1983, the foundational programmatic manifesto of the Laibach group, “10 Items of the Covenant”, collectively written by its members a year before was published, for the first time officially and in its entirety, in the literary journal *Nova revija* 13–14 (1983). It emphasised ten key starting points for the group’s work, such as following the models of industrial production and totalitarianism, collectivism and member anonymity, analysing the relations between ideology, culture and politics, negating the originality of ideas, practising provocation and manipulation, and identification with ideology. The covenant also described the concepts for two Laibach subgroups – the Germania and Dreihundert Tausend Verschiedene Krawalle.

And it was *Nova revija* that first published the Laibach Kunst organigramme, which was created in 1982 and later used as a model for the Neue Slowenische Kunst organigramme. It offered a schematic explanation of the principles of the group's organisation and activity, with various centres and goals.

The tests were published under the title "Action in the Name of Idea" under an ad-hoc rubric entitled "Totalitarianism", as demanded by Laibach in a letter addressed to *Nova revija*. The letter also stressed the purpose of publishing this contribution: raising the fighting morale of the readers. The contribution started with a full-page reproduction of *The Metal Worker*, followed by two quotes by Hitler ("Art is a sublime mission") and Stalin ("Artists are engineers of human souls"). Also published in *Nova revija* were the poetic manifesto "Laibach Apology" and other key poems; by way of an afterword, Taras Kermauner contributed a theoretical essay with the title "X+(-)11=?" and the subtitle "Reflections on recent Slovenian poetry". A.Mi.

10 Laibach, *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst – Monumental Retro-Avant-Garde*, ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana, 21 April 1983

For this exhibition, Laibach printed a poster with a reinterpretation of *Coffee Drinker* (a popular painting by Slovenian artist Ivana Kobilca, 1888) in Xerox and montage techniques: the coffee cup bore the Laibach sign (cross in a cogwheel). The same image was used for the invitation leaflet, while the other side featured a passage from the "Rayonist Manifesto" (1913) on the rejection of individuality and on the use of copies and of all historical and contemporary styles. Below the passage, it was announced that this exhibition "represents the end of the era of movement, of searching, of stylistic and aesthetical innovations" and "a more mature, critical re-evaluation of art". (In the same year, the journal *Nova revija* 13/14 published the organigramme and the programmatic text "Laibach: 10 Items of the Covenant", adopted in Trbovlje in 1982.)

The exhibition was an homage to deceased group member Tomaž Hostnik, and his figure had a central place, featuring in the documentary photographs from the 1982 Novi Rock festival and in the painting *Self-Portrait of Tomaž Hostnik* (signed I.S.). Besides the already familiar (reworked and labelled) socialist-realist graphic prints with Red District motifs by Janez Knez, there was a colour painting of *The Metal Worker* hanging over the entrance to the courtyard, as well as black-and-white versions of the same motif scattered around the room. There were also a number of oil paintings with additions of honey, grain or tar, constructed from appropriated pieces and featuring Laibach crosses as well as other interventions and montages. The following works were displayed (the titles may have been added later or they had no titles): *The Funeral of the Communist Hostnik* (Carlo Carrà, *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli*, 1910–11), *The Laibach Group* (El Greco, *Laocoön*, 1608–1614), *Shifted Figure* (Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913), *Trees by the Brook* (Marcel Duchamp, *Pharmacie*, 1914) and *The Sower (gefunden)* (Albin Egger-Lienz, *The Sower and the Devil*, 1921, combined with the black square featured on Malevich's tombstone). The exhibition also

included a 30-minute video with repetitive rhythmic montage, *Documents of Oppression*, which the group had produced for a concert at the 1983 Zagreb Music Biennale. In this video, Laibach and Marijan Osole–Max introduced the full range of available (VHS) ways of manipulating the picture, as well as aspects of the cut-up technique: procedures of cutting, transformation, combination, repetition and montage of “found” clips from two older documentary films (on duodenum surgery and on Yugoslavian post-war industry) and of sequences from a pornographic film in Super 8 format.

The exhibition took place just before the joint concerts of Laibach and two English groups, 23 Skidoo and Last Few Days, in Ljubljana and Zagreb. At the same time, Laibach and Last Few Days released a music cassette, *The Instrumentality of the State Machine*, featuring a long interview for the magazine *Džuboks*, and physical exercise scenes (produced by the visual arts section of ŠKUC: *Galerija Škuc izdaja* no. 17). Both groups were already getting ready for their joint *Occupied Europe Tour*. B.B.

11 Laibach, *We Are Forging the Future*, 12th Music Biennial, Moša Pijade Hall, Zagreb, 23 April 1983

The appearance of Laibach at the 12th Music Biennial in Zagreb in 1983, at the Moša Pijade Hall, was announced by a Laibach Kunst poster depicting a Nazi assembly in Nuremberg.

Laibach had a joint show with the English bands Last Few Days and 23 Skidoo, entitled *Mi kujemo budućnost* [*We are Forging the Future*]. The show started at midnight and was, by arrangement, scheduled to go on until 5 a.m.

The concert included an installation composed of four video monitors on each side of the stage; they screened the video *Documents of Oppression* by Laibach and Marijan Osole - Max, with the propaganda film *The Revolution Is Not Over Yet* by Milan Ljubić (1971), celebrating the successes of socialist Yugoslavia, screened in the background occasionally. At certain points in the film, when Tito was shown giving a speech, a pornographic scene on Super 8 film was repeatedly projected over it, so that both scenes were superimposed. Understandably, this resulted in a scandal. The concert organizers, the police and even soldiers rushed into the hall and attempted to end the concert amidst complete chaos. Even once the power was cut all three groups continued to play until they were physically removed off the stage.

These events resulted in a large-scale inter-republic scandal, followed by a media witch-hunt against the group. The Croatian League of Socialist Youth publicly stated that “it was aware of the artistic provocation that was the modus operandi of the Laibach group, but that the Zagreb show was a case of political provocation, with which Laibach had endangered the limits of artistic freedom.” They demanded that their Slovenian counterparts take concrete measures against the group. Laibach answered by publishing a letter in *Mladina* magazine, describing their provocative interdisciplinary intervention as “consciously going beyond the form of the rock concert and raising the critical awareness of individuals through a process of montage of associatively charged meanings”. And the controversial

screening of pornographic images was justified with a reference to the American tradition of experimental film.

Some months later Laibach was supposed to see the release of its first album, *Nebo žari* [*The Sky Glows*] by the national public broadcasting organisation, ZKP RTV Ljubljana. Due to the scandal, however, this did not happen. Later the same year, during its first big European tour *The Occupied Europe Tour 1983* Laibach signed a record contract with the Belgian label L.A.Y.L.A.H. A.Mi.

12 Laibach and TV Ljubljana, *XY-Unsolved*, TV Interview, 23 July 1983

In 1983, Laibach accepted an invitation to the cultural-political programme “TV Weekly” with journalist Jure Pengov, broadcast on national TV. They staged a controversial appearance, executed like a meticulously directed artistic performance. The group had accepted the interview exclusively on their own terms. They wore Yugoslavian military uniforms, the journalist had to supply his questions beforehand, and the interview took place at the ŠKUC Gallery, with the image of *The Metal Worker* and posters depicting a Nazi assembly in the background. The interview was aired directly after an item about the violence of Trieste Neo-Fascists perpetrated against the Slovenian minority in Italy.

The screen showed five young men fixedly staring straight ahead, their faces illuminated from below. The camera kept moving from one face to another and to the insignia on their uniforms. They answered questions by reading out statements prepared in advance. With one such statement they pointed to themselves as the first TV generation, expounding on their relationship with the medium of television as follows: “LAIBACH is aware of the manipulative abilities of modern media instruments (and the system which connects them), so it exploits fully the repressive power of media information in its propaganda actions. In this case, the instrument is the TV screen.”

After the interview, in a conclusion added after the fact, Jure Pengov addressed the public, calling for a political lynching of the group. His appeal was successful. A flood of strongly-worded reactions from shocked and outraged viewers poured in and the Ljubljana committee of the League of Socialist Workers banned the group from public performances under the name Laibach. A formal ban, registered in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, remained in effect until February 1987.

Laibach reacted as well, publishing a statement in the *Mladina* magazine. In the statement, the group distanced itself from fascist and neo-nazi tendencies, called for the host Pengov to step down because of his unethical accusations, and invited the public to discuss the activities of the Laibach group and to critically analyse the real manifestations of fascism in Slovenia, in particular the fascism of information such as in the case of the “TV Weekly” programme. A.Mi.

13 Laibach, *Document. Occupied Europe*, ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana, 5 May 1984

The *Document. Occupied Europe* exhibition was organized despite the ban on performing and on the use of the name Laibach that was then in effect. It presented posters, photographs and videos from *The Occupied Europe Tour*. The exhibition was accompanied by the release of the cassette *LAIBACH: Resurrection in Berlin*, with recordings from a concert in Metropol in Berlin, and the publication *Over the Europe* documenting the tour and its reception in the media (produced by the visual arts section of ŠKUC: *Galerija Škuc izdaja* no. 23). There was also a poster featuring a metal worker, hammer raised above his head, astride the (Laibach-) “occupied Europe”. This was to be the last Laibach exhibition for a long time (until 2005). The tour had been decisive for Laibach’s breakthrough on the international music and music publishing scene. But even before and during the tour, it underwent significant changes in the group’s membership; there was also a change in strategy, which now focused on producing concerts and albums, on creating an integrated performative and visual image, and no longer included visual arts projects and gallery exhibitions of paintings and print materials.

In the 1980s, alongside (polaroid) photography, tape recording and video, Xerox represented an “instant” medium that was easily available, fast and cheap, and not subject to censorship and control. Laibach used Xerox and video techniques, which had transformed the status of the copy, introduced a particular aesthetic and enabled simpler ways of appropriating, transforming and recontextualising images, to produce a number of videos, invitations and leaflets, print publications and music cassette covers, wall collages and graphic prints, as well as elevating the poster (in Xerox and screen printing techniques) to the status of an independent bona fide medium. B.B.

14 Laibach Concerts in Germany 1985–1987

In February 1985, Laibach performed at the two-day Atonal festival in Berlin. The festival was dedicated to avant-garde electronic and experimental music. In the 1980s, it hosted, among others, groups such as Einstürzende Neubauten, Test Department and Psychic TV. During the concert, the frontman Milan Fras smeared his face and head with honey and gold paint, an allusion to the Joseph Beuys performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, in reference to the redeeming and regenerative aspects of artistic creation. In one of its early interviews, Laibach stated: “Our performance has a cleansing (exorcism!) and regenerative (honey + gold) function.” Its practice of terror in the form of sound/force, which was supposed to have a therapeutic effect on the audience, was explained in a similar vein.

In November of the same year, Laibach embarked on its first independent tour, to West Germany, entitled *Laibach über dem Deutschland – die erste Bomardierung*. The musical bom(b)ardment started at the Arena Hall in Munich. The poster for the tour employed a montage of a photograph by Jane Štravs depicting band members posing in militant postures, wearing uniforms, bombers flying across the

sky above their heads. For the concerts they wore hunting clothes and the stage was decorated with stag antlers. By way of an introduction to the concert, which only increased the tension and unease in the audience, their driver would split firewood on the stage. At the concerts, a rabbit would be brought to the stage, again referencing the performance by Beuys.

At the time, Laibach shows were characterised by a cold, militant-classicist form, strict military rhythms on percussion and the sound of horns, classical music models and lyrics in German and Slovenian. According to the group's own explanation, its militant classicism was "a form bringing together the mechanicalness of the organic rhythm and the confusion of intuitive auditory interventions into the Harmony of the Beautiful Idea".

This phase of militant classicism also left its mark on the music that Laibach went to create in collaboration with theatre director Wilfried Minks. In November 1987, the group performed live music for the production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg. Laibach's appearance on stage included a large cross, divided in two halves. Band members stood and played on the separated halves, which were brought together at the end of each act. A similar silver cross was later featured on the cover of the album *Capital*. It was in this production that Peter Mlakar joined the band, delivering his very first pre-concert speech in Hamburg. It was also at this point that the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy was founded, becoming an integral part of the Neue Slowenische Kunst collective. A.Mi.

15 Laibach, *No Fire Escape in Hell*, Manchester Poly, Manchester, 4 September 1986

In 1986, Laibach was invited by the controversial British choreographer and dancer Michael Clark to collaborate on the dance performance *No Fire Escape in Hell*. From the orchestra pit, they provided live music accompaniment for the third part of the performance, which followed the transformation of dancers into public personalities and on into deities. In that "play of light and shadow", according to Clark, Laibach's music and appearance represented the shadow: a frightening and aggressive element, the sheer force of their sound encouraging or even compelling the dancers to dance with more intensity than usual. As a result, the performance produced a raw fusion of music and classical ballet moves, and ended up expressing an eclectic blend of Eastern and Western aesthetics.

At the time of the performance, Laibach was already established on the London music scene with the albums *Die Liebe [Love]*, *Nova akropola [The New Acropolis]* and *The Occupied Europe Tour 1985*. They were also in the process of recording a new album, *Opus Dei*, which was released a year later by the British record label Mute Records.

The performance *No Fire Escape in Hell* travelled to continental Europe, the United States, and to Australia. When Laibach wanted to perform it at the BITEF festival in Belgrade, the festival management would not allow them to perform live. So the show was staged using recorded music, and they were also obliged to censor the video recordings of a patriotic speech by Tito.

In 1986, director Daniel Landin created the short film *Država* [*The State*]. It was shot in the London theatre Saddlers Wells, home of the *No Fire Escape in Hell* performance, and with the collaboration of Michael Clark; sequences from the film were also used for a music video. From an aesthetic point of view, it is widely seen as one of the most totalitarian videos of the Laibach group. The strict military posture, as well as the fusion of striking rhythms, the sound of Wagnerian horns and atonal elements, give the impression that the dancers are performing a ritual dance, while Laibach dictates: “Cari amici ballerini / i tempi del teatro sono passati.” [Dear friends, dear dancers, the times of the theatre are over.] The video *Država* emphasises the indeterminacy of this historic period. In fact, this is one of the key characteristics of Laibach: the ability to take viewers/listeners out of their own time. A.Mo.

16 The Ban on the Name Laibach

Following the interview on “TV Weekly”, which had drawn widespread attention, the presidency of the Ljubljana committee of the Socialist League of the Working People passed a resolution on 29 June 1983 to the effect that the German name of the Laibach group was inappropriate, and that the group’s use of it had no legal basis and contravened the ordinance on the proper use of the coat of arms, the flag and the name of the city of Ljubljana. They also banned any public appearances of the group. Despite the ban on the name, Laibach retained a public presence in Slovenia, doing so through exhibitions and through the publication of concert photos by Jane Štravs, Jože Suhadolnik and Dušan Gerlica. At the end of the year, the group went on their first European tour, entitled *The Occupied Europe Tour*; their next – anonymous – concert in Ljubljana, played despite the ban, took place on 21 December 1984 at the Malči Belič children’s home. The secret concert was announced with posters featuring a black cross on a white background; the only concrete information posted was the time and venue. The banned Laibach name was replaced with a symbol, the black Laibach cross, in keeping with the group’s statement given during the TV interview of the previous year: “The very name and the sign are the visual materialisation of the Idea at the level of an enigmatic cognitive symbol”. The concert was dedicated to the memory of Tomaž Hostnik.

The first legal Laibach concert in Ljubljana after the five-year ban, *Svoji k svojim* [*Birds of a Feather*], took place on 17 February 1987 in the Festival Hall. In the lead-up to the concert they played recorded partisan songs outside the hall, and German songs from the same time inside the hall. The concert was played in a hall full to bursting and marked the end of an era, a sense of final recognition and the beginning of a new epoch. In keeping with this, the group’s approach to aesthetics and music shifted from radicalism and extreme industrial style towards a more accessible and communicative music. A video of the concert was used by director Goran Gajić in his film about Laibach, *Zmaga pod soncem* [*Victory Under the Sun*] (1987).

Only days after the legalisation of the both the name and the Laibach group, the poster scandal broke across Yugoslavia, sparked by a provocative draft for a Youth Day poster designed by New Collectivism. A.Mo.

17 Laibach, Yugoslavian Tour *Sympathy for the Devil*, 30 March 1989

Laibach's concert at the sold-out Tivoli Hall in Ljubljana on 30 March 1989 kicked off the Yugoslavian part of the tour *Sympathy for the Devil*, named after the group's album featuring cover versions of the eponymous Rolling Stones song, which had appeared the year before. The poster for the tour was designed by New Collectivism and was a variation on the cover of Laibach's album *Sympathy for the Devil*, depicting an exemplary six-member Aryan family taken from a Nazi propaganda poster promoting higher birth rates. In the background, instead of the Germanic eagle from the reverse of the Deutsche Mark coin, was the reverse side of the Yugoslavian dinar, with the SFRY coat of arms and the six burning torches well in evidence.

At the time of the Yugoslavian tour, demands for democratisation and for a fundamental restructuring of the Yugoslavian state were being openly expressed in Slovenia; and a sense of foreboding, of impending war and the disintegration of Yugoslavia loomed.

After the successful concert in Ljubljana, Laibach continued the tour in Sarajevo, at the CDA Mladost Hall; this was their Sarajevo debut, never having been allowed to play in Bosnia and Herzegovina before. Next, the band played at the Zagreb Sports Hall, where they tested the limits of the audience's endurance by introducing the concert with recorded excerpts from nationalist speeches by Slobodan Milošević and with *gusle* music (the *gusle* is an instrument that holds a special place in Serbian cultural heritage). The tour continued with concerts in Rijeka and Split, in Croatia. The provocation, however, escalated with the group's two shows at the Students' Cultural Centre in Belgrade. Each concert was prefaced with a speech given by Peter Mlakar of the Neue Slowenische Kunst Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, in which he would address the Serbian nation, warning it of the imminent catastrophic war to come. The speech would be given in German and Serbian, and begin with the words: "My Serbian brothers! You are the masters here. But we are not going to allow you to be violated," which the audience recognised as the nationalist call to battle given by Milošević in Kosovo. All the while a Third Reich film entitled *The Bombing of Belgrade* ran in the background. A.Mo.

18 Discography

Laibach, *Through the Occupied Netherlands*, Staatsape, 1984, Amsterdam

As it faced increasing restrictions at home (such as the ban on the use of its name and obstruction of its album release), but still had opportunities for touring and recording abroad, Laibach began to document its live actions and issue them as cassettes, following the industrial tradition established by Throbbing Gristle. Its first cassette (a split release with Last Few Days) was issued by ŠKUC in April 1983. Over the next two years several more Laibach live recordings would appear on cassette, three of which were Dutch recordings (this one, *Ein Schauspieler and Live in Hell*).

Holland played a key role in the international industrial network, with the venues represented on this release (De Kapel, The Hague and NL Centrum, Amsterdam) being key stops on the touring circuit, also hosting groups such as Test Dept. Holland was also home to the Staalplaat label, which would become a vital force on the scene. *Through the Occupied Netherlands* was the first release on its Staaltape cassette sub-label.

Compared to the visuals used for the Laibach/Last Few Days release, this had a starker and stricter aesthetic, looking more like an “official” than an underground product. The cover featured a propagandist image of a gymnast wearing a vest with the Laibach cross. The starkness of the figure made it seem like a visually totalitarian artefact in its own right. The use of the gymnast as a dynamic totalitarian signifier anticipated Laibach’s use of black and white footage of a gymnast (Miro Cerar) later used in the *Država* video.

Recorded on two consecutive nights near the end of the first leg of the *Occupied Europe Tour* in 1983, the shows documented were part of a four-city Dutch part of the tour (The Hague, Amsterdam, Eindhoven, Maastricht), which preceded the final date in London. These were Laibach’s first two Dutch appearances and although the set lists were the same, there are audible differences between the shows, with the first being a soundboard recording and the second a more live one, complete with applause. “Sila” and “Brat moj” would appear on Laibach’s first vinyl release (on the Belgian L.A.Y.L.A.H. label) the following February, and all the other songs performed here, except “Dokument moči” and “Kolone”, would eventually be released on *Rekapitulacija* and *Laibach* in spring 1985. “Cari amici soldati” had also opened the group’s 1982 *Novi rock* performance. Its appropriated Mussolini statement, “Dear friends, soldiers, the time of peace has now ended!”, retained a chilling power, despite the absence of its former declaimer, Tomaž Hostnik. Recorded in the most dangerous weeks of the New Cold War of the early 1980s, the tape is the sound of a group from the Yugoslavian interzone reaching NATO territory and of Dutch audiences’ first encounter with the full force of the Laibach phenomenon. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Rekapitulacija* 1980–84, Walter Ulbricht Schallfolien, 1985, Hamburg

Rekapitulacija was the first Laibach album released outside Yugoslavia, on the provocatively named Walter Ulbricht Schallfolien label. Effectively a compilation of the first phase of Laibach’s work, it featured both known and previously unheard works. “Cari amici soldati” was taken from a recording of the infamous 1982 Križanke concert. Elaborately packaged and designed, it signalled the attention to detail that would mark this stage of Laibach’s career.

Many of the lyrics were poetic and even mystical, and a numinous haze hung over much of the music. Its uncanny quality manifested what Laibach’s “Ten Items of The Covenant” calls “... the mystical dimension of alienation, which reveals the magical component of the industrial process.” Through sound and imagery it presented heavy industry as a site of arcane and monumental struggle, dramatising its radical ambiguity. It “made strange” the symbolic role of industry in the ruling ideology, infecting it

with mysticism and fatally archaïcising it. Industry thus appeared as a spectre from a nightmarish, archetypal past, rather than the promise of a gleaming technocratic future.

Although a Western release, it is one of the most intensively Slovenian, and even *local*, of Laibach's albums. It was rooted in the sounds, atmosphere, history and poetics of Trbovlje and the Red District, and was also a mark of respect for local industrial labour and its achievements. On the album's artwork Laibach used Janez Knez's *Red District* series. Knez's work became a key NSK signifier, often reused by Laibach and IRWIN as a key visual building block of their *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The sleeve notes and photographs reference the revolutionary history of Trbovlje and the polarisation of Laibach's spiritual home. The front cover presented an archetypal Slovenian rural scene (originally by Božidar Jakac), featuring a small church and a *kozolec* (hayrack). Those confronted by it had to decide if it was symbolically contaminated or enlivened by the Laibach cross. The album exposed Western audiences to highly specific Slovenian symbolism, as well as to a language almost entirely unknown beyond its home country.

Rekapitulacija also manifested the totalitarian core of the monumental retro-avant-garde. "Perspektive" was a statement of Laibach's methodology and 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, bruitism, disco. Disco rhythm, as a regular repetition, is the purest, the most radical form of the militantly organized rhythmicity of technicist production, and as such the most appropriate means of media manipulation."

Rekapitulacija's haunting combination of mystical, industrial, national and totalitarian elements demonstrated the depth and scale of Laibach's engagement with these themes, which would intensify further within NSK's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Neu Konservativ*, Semi legal, 1985, Hamburg

In 1985 Laibach began its first West German tour (the country in which the group has toured most intensively), provocatively entitled *Die erste Bom[b]ardierung über dem Deutschland* (the first bombing over Germany). At home Laibach had been accused of re-opening disturbing memories of occupation and collaboration during the war, and in Germany they deliberately triggered memories of mass bombings, not only through the title of the tour but through one of its most iconic posters, in which Laibach members wearing Yugoslavian army fatigues and black cross armbands stand implacably against a sky filled with World War II bombers. Presenting this in Hamburg, site of the notorious 1943 fire bombing, was especially provocative, but the group had a local ally in the promoter Uli Rehberg, who would release *Rekapitulacija* on the West German label Walter Ulbricht Schallfolien, named after the former East German head of state.

Laibach discovered that Rehberg had conducted his own poster/graffiti campaign for the show, and after they departed he began work on an ironically-titled 1,000 copy bootleg vinyl of the performance. Presented with this *fait accompli* Laibach retroactively made it "semi-legal", supplying the cover artwork. As on

Nova akropola, one of Landseer's iconic stag images was used – in this case an agonised dying stag. This sketched image and the title instantly added a *völkisch* touch, intensifying this aspect of Laibach's image. Photos from the concert also show the group performing with a stag's head mounted at the front of the stage – an element that soon became integral to its stage presence.

Both in the title of the tour and those used on the related album the German language was (mis)-used as a ready-made. "Ti, ki, izzivaš" is listed as "Du Der Du Herausforderst" – and such strange constructions added an alienating, uncanny aspect, also demonstrating the superior stance Laibach took in relation to Germany, symbolically reversing a millennium of cultural domination.

The arrangements have interesting variations compared to the studio versions, with a wide range of live vocal and atonal noise effects used. "Die Liebe" features heavy vocal processing and is a more rock-oriented version than the previous release, also featuring warped jazz touches. "Du Der Du Herausforderst/Der Staat" feature drones and electronic elements, more guttural than classicist. Compared to the Dutch live recordings of the period, the audience in Germany is more enthusiastic and less hesitant.

In 2003 Laibach authorised an official CD release of this self-sanctioned unofficial recording on the British label Cold Spring. In 2014 it was re-released as a vinyl picture disc with revised *Ehrenscheibe* artwork featuring mock bullet holes around the head of the stag, as well as Teutonic script: a final auto-mythological artefact three decades after the album's first release. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Laibach*, Ropot, 1985, Ljubljana

Laibach appeared at the mid-point of the four-year ban on Laibach's use of its name in Slovenia, and following the group's illegal Ljubljana performance in December 1984 (later documented on the album *M.B. 12.84*).

It had a troubled history. As with the illegal performance, the Laibachian cross stood in for the name on the cover of this legally un-nameable album. By this point, the polemics around the group, its name and symbolism were so extensive that the black cross was no longer just a recognizable symbol for Laibach's core audience, but something that a much wider part of the population were coming to know and, in many cases, fear.

On 31 May 1983 Laibach signed a contract with the RTV Ljubljana label for its first album, *Nebo žari* (*The Sky Glows*) and recording sessions took place in September 1983. Facing obstruction from the producer and then the unexplained cancellation of the contract due to official pressure, in February 1984 Laibach used some of these recordings for its first 12" single with the Belgian label L.A.Y.L.A.H., featuring "Boji", "Sila" and "Brat moj" (the last two of which also appeared on the album *Laibach*).

Laibach was eventually able to release its first domestic album only in semi-clandestine form, via ŠKUC, the one Yugoslavian institution brave enough to challenge the official blockade of the group (and marginal enough to be allowed to do so). Yet the complexities of the Yugoslavian system did leave gaps – the group's name appeared on the back cover and the album was pressed by Jugoton in Za-

greb, but only at a price. On this first vinyl pressing of the album Tito's sampled voice (from a speech defending Yugoslavia's non-alignment) was removed and replaced by an audible scratch, implying a record being angrily pulled off a turntable. With this condition met, *Laibach* was released on 27 April, the date of the founding of the wartime Liberation Front in Slovenia.

The artwork was monochromatic and ominous, and for the nameless cover design Laibach referenced the German photomontagist John Heartfield (whose anti-Fascist credentials were not in doubt). Inspired by Heartfield's *Wie im Mittelalter, so im Dritten Reich*, Laibach presented figures crucified on its own black cross. While the first figure hangs in Heartfieldian martyrdom, a second, nightmarish figure is suspended in front of another version of the cross wielding an avenging axe. Behind the death-like figure the outline of Heartfield's axe-swastika (later used more prominently on the *Opus Dei* artwork) overlays a now-asymmetrical and more impressionistic black cross. The artwork also featured a circle of thorns, a motif that IRWIN would also use, alongside the ubiquitous industrial cogwheel.

Much of the material featured here also appeared on *Rekapitulacija*, released two weeks later in Germany. This concentrated, officially-compromised collection includes what remain some of the most anthemic Laibach works, such as and "Mi kujemo bodočnost", "Država" and "Brat moj", which have since been re-styled and revived in the group's post-2009 performances. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Ein Schauspieler*, Staaltape, 1985, Amsterdam

18 months after the concerts featured on *Through the Occupied Netherlands*, Laibach returned to Holland for the final leg of the *Occupied Europe Tour*. In the meantime its sound had moved definitively into militant classicism, and it was now a part of NSK. Following an invitation from Staalplaat and the AMBASADE organisation, two Dutch concerts were organized in February and March 1985. As before, these were recorded and issued by Staalplaat/Staaltape. In 2011 they were re-released in the Laibach boxset *Gesamtkunstwerk Dokument 81-86* on the German label Vinyl On Demand.

The first concert was a return to the NL Centrum, but the second was a new and unique venue, the dramatic ecclesiastical setting of Amsterdam's Posthoornkerk. On the rear of the A5 cassette booklet two Laibach members pose in the interior of the church, with a projection of the Laibach cross high in the nave behind them, complementing the floor plan of the space, laid out in the form of a cross. This image alone, even without the accompanying sounds, suggested Laibach's drive towards *Gesamtkunstwerk* – and was a strong declaration of intent. The front cover was in an evocative but clumsily naive style, depicting the story of the revelation of St. Hubert – a stag with the sign of the cross between its antlers (this is also the source of the image used on Jägermeister bottles, and at Laibach's 1985 London show a fan wore a Jägermeister bottle top as a *de facto* Laibach badge – an early example of what Laibach call *Volkskunst*).

"Vier Personen" is one of the coldest, strictest Laibach tracks, and was a powerful opening to the NL Centrum concert. This version is marked by live bass, a

sign of how Laibach would gradually re-introduce more conventional rock instrumentation over the next two years. This was followed by another lengthy version of “Nova akropola”, with the vocalist emphasising the Fascist war cry *Eia, eia, ala la* and the Italian lyrics. A punishing version of “Die Liebe” ends suddenly with distant, nervous applause. The following “Ti, ki izzivaš” is one of the outstanding versions of this song, with the sampled strings reverberating massively in the hall.

This period was the height of a sonic arms race among artists on the industrial scene, and Laibach pursued a deliberate strategy of escalation, always attempting to remain at the leading edge of the form. Laibach used the invitation to perform in the monumental 19th century Posthoornkerk (threatened with destruction in the 1970s and resurrected as a venue in the 1980s) as a chance to demonstrate its sonic firepower, exploiting the hall’s unique acoustics and its organ. Both are already audible on the ferocious version of “Nova akropola”, but become more evident on the colossal “Vade retro”, its demonic aura only enhanced by being performed in a church. The highlight is “Organofonija” – this ready-made abstract work features distinct movements with strings, percussion and organ to the fore, augmented by distant, distorted vocals. One particularly malevolent organ sequence would be heard on “Vojna poema” on *Nova akropola*, while some of the horn samples were used much later in one section of the *Macbeth* soundtrack. It is one of the least-known but most intense sonic representations of the monumental retro-avant-garde. A.Mo.

Laibach, *The Occupied Europe Tour 1985*, Side Effects Records, 1986, London

This document of Laibach performances on its pioneering tour of Western and Eastern Europe conducted while prohibited from performing under its own name at home was released in April 1986, and featured embryonic live versions of tracks from *Nova akropola*, released only two months before. It appeared on the Side Effects label, which had just released *Vhutemas archetypi*, a compilation featuring Laibach alongside the industrial-oriented groups S.P.K (founder member Graeme Revell owned the label), Lustmord, Gerechtigkeits Liga and Hunting Lodge, with artwork by New Collectivism.

The artwork was based on images first used in 1983, and again at Laibach’s May 1984 ŠKUC exhibition *Occupied Europe Tour Documents*. The version used on the front cover was printed in stark silver and black. In the background was an old Yugoslavian map of Europe, and in the foreground two monumental sculpted male figures with a sword. The source was a 1935 war memorial by the German sculptor Georg Kolbe. The visual effect was monumental and intimidating. Other such figures were used on the back sleeve and disc labels, with the NSK logo featured on the A-Side label (its first appearance on a Laibach release). A final, perplexing detail was an extract from a 1985 Ronald Reagan speech, in which he expressed the hope that in the next century there would be a “United States of Europe”, ranging from Lisbon to Moscow.

Many performances on this tour were recorded, and several were released as bootlegs or by Laibach directly. This was the band’s first official live release, and

the tracks were selected as definitive examples of Laibach concerts, recorded between December 1984 and July 1985 in Ljubljana, Hamburg and London, with the Ljubljana material recorded by Radio Študent. The tour itself coincided with the most dangerous phase of the New Cold War, and symbolised the tensions affecting Western and Eastern Europe at that time.

The tantalisingly brief opening track, “Perspektive”, was very different to the version on *Rekapitulacija*, featuring Tito’s voice and pounding, cavernous percussion. The 13-minute plus version of “Nova akropola” included blood-curdling, distorted vocals and more prominent drums. During “Vojna poema”, the distorted Partisan song, confused chatter from the audience is audible.

A short but urgent version of “Panorama” was marked by powerful live drumming, while Ti, ki, izzivaš had an especially malevolent vocal. “Die Liebe” used a sample of a German woman, present only on live and single versions of this song. This was a sparser and more dance-oriented incarnation, with sparse drumming, growled vocals and siren-like sounds. “Vade retro” revealed the heart of Laibachian darkness, making more use of the braying stag sound and featuring colossal repeated drum impacts. After an urgent, raw version of “Država”, a Laibach member states “Unsere Geschichte ist eine Geschichte der Kämpfen zwischen die Klassen” (“Our history is a history of struggles between classes”), a trace of Laibach’s “political poetry”. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Nova akropola*, Cherry Red, 1986, London

Nova akropola’s release in February 1986 on the British label Cherry Red was a natural move for a group with British antecedents (Throbbing Gristle, Joy Division, The Pop Group) and connections (Laibach had spent extended periods in London, and performed with Last Few Days and 23 Skidoo on the *Occupied Europe Tour*).

Compared to *Rekapitulacija*, *Nova akropola* was a colder and more fanatical work, with a more regimented and dynamic sound. Laibach’s “militant classicism” comprised its existing established industrial/noise elements augmented by extensive use of samples from contemporary (Penderecki), classical (Holst) and film music (Bernard Herrmann), plus rigidly militaristic rhythms and fanfares.

The stark silver/black artwork used Anselm Kiefer’s 1981 *Innenraum* (based on Hitler’s chancellery) as a backdrop, and in the foreground was the second most frequent NSK motif after the cross, the stag. This version was *The Monarch of the Glen* by Edwin Landseer (1851), first used by Laibach in the 1982 work *Multiplied Steelworker with Stag*. Numerous versions of the Landseer stag were also used in IRWIN works, and, based on its traditional function as a signifier of power and esoteric knowledge, it became one of the key symbolic building blocks of NSK’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

The sleeve notes represented a shift from the hyper-ideological “political poetry” used in earlier statements and some of the album’s lyrics and samples (such as those in “Država” and “Panorama”), to a more romantic and lyrical form, with a strong dose of mysticism. Prophetic and bombastic verses made mysterious allusions, with a reference to “the leaden casket on the Hochfeiler” alluding to

esoteric theories concerning treasures supposedly buried there by the SS at the end of the war, another poetic “touch of evil” intensifying the group’s dark aura.

Sonically and lyrically, the effect of *Nova akropola* on many listeners was to induce a sublime terror, and in many ways this is the most extreme Laibach album, both psychically and musically. “Die liebe” transformed love, perhaps the key signifier of the pop ideology, into a demonic, all-conquering totalitarian force. The punishing, militaristic percussion, sinister orchestral samples, and hunting horns recast love, as applied to notions of the nation or state, as a blind, merciless source of sublime terror. “Država” is one of the most militant Laibach tracks, still played live by the group. The opening orchestral fanfare recalls the bombastic tones of Ron Goodwin’s soundtrack to the Alpine war film *Where Eagles Dare*, and it recapitulates actual state propaganda, casting the state as a benevolent provider under which freedom and progress militantly advance. “Vade retro” (“Get back” in Latin) refers to an exorcistic ritual, and while Laibach claimed that its actions were purifying rituals the album seems to invoke demons as much as expel them, prophesying war and resurrecting past terrors (as seen in “Krvava gruda – plodna zemlja” and “Vojna poema”) as a retroactive warning of things to come. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Opus Dei*, Mute Records, 1987, London

Opus Dei (literally *The Work of God*, but also alluding to the ultra-conservative Catholic group) was recorded in November 1986, at the end of a momentous year for Laibach in which it enjoyed growing success abroad. Domestically, the award of the ZSMS Zlata Ptica prize to NSK following *Krst pod Triglavom* bolstered Laibach’s political position, as did the support of ZSMS for the normalisation of Laibach’s legal status. Signed to Mute Records, Laibach now had the backing of one of the main independent labels and were able to record in Studio Tivoli, the most important in the country. Here Laibach met Slavko Avsenik Jr., who became a key collaborator. Besides his family’s musical heritage, Avsenik had studied jazz composition and also film music, attending also lectures by Jerry Goldsmith. Laibach invited him to arrange the orchestral and choral parts of their new works, adding cinematic and bombastic elements that created an uncanny effect, lending some songs a strongly 1940s atmosphere. Mixing was completed in December in London, and the first single, “Geburt einer Nation”, released in January 1987. This was followed in February by the group’s triumphant first legal concert in Slovenia since 1983, shortly before the release of the album, which reportedly sold 100 000 copies in its first six months.

Opus Dei was a shift from industrialism and militant classicism to a more direct and apparently populist sound. Laibach was now receiving coverage in the mainstream Western media, including TV, despite the fact, or perhaps because of it, that the group’s tone was uncompromisingly condescending to the “countries of real capitalism” and Anglo-Saxon rock culture. Confronted by Laibach’s “new originals” (re-Germanised re-capitulations of Queen and Opus) parts of the British media focused on the parodic aspects of this technique, fixating on the bombastic arrangements as proof that it must “really” (only) be a joke (and so not worthy of serious discussion).

The snippet of the U.S. anthem played at the start of *Geburt Einer Nation* alluded to Laibach's symbolic assault on American-dominated Western popular culture, and anticipated by almost two decades its version of the anthem released on *Volk* (2006). The video included scenes of Laibach in Cankarjev dom and extracts from *Krst pod Triglavom*, re-used to promote Laibach and NSK in the West. The second single, "Opus Dei (Live Is Life)", transformed a populist hit into a paean to *völkisch* belonging: "The feeling of the people is the feeling of the land". The slower, pounding German version, "Leben Heißt Leben", contained an interlude in which the chorus was spoken as if it were a profound piece of poetry. The album's themes included national identity, war, and pop culture, and it drew on a range of sources and samples, including English freemasonry, the wartime poetry of Ezra Pound, and speeches of Winston Churchill. The artwork continued the austere silver/grey/black colour scheme of *Nova akropola*, but added provocative new symbolism – most aggressively Heartfield's axe-swastika on the inner sleeve and disc labels. It also featured the NSK logo, and the huge impact of *Opus Dei* certainly helped raise the profile of the collective. It was also the first Western Laibach release to be released in Yugoslavia. The ZKP RTV Ljubljana version appeared in the autumn and included a number of reprinted reviews, including one from Britain's Communist newspaper, *The Morning Star*, calling Laibach "The Soldiers of Freedom". A.Mo.

Laibach, *Krst pod Triglavom – Baptism under Triglav*, Walter Ulbricht Schallfolien, 1987, Hamburg / Sub Rosa, 1988, Brussels

When Laibach produced its *Krst pod Triglavom* soundtrack in 1986 it was still a year away from being allowed to perform under its name again in Ljubljana. Its presence in this NSK *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the largest-ever Slovenian theatrical production, presented in the state-funded Cankarjev dom, was a test of the state's preparedness and a sign of shifting attitudes. Laibach was mentioned in the publicity for the production, and members of the group were also present on stage.

Issued in November 1987 as a joint release between Walter Ulbricht Schallfolien (which had released *Rekapitulacija*) and the Belgian label Sub Rosa (which has released various rare Laibach tracks on compilations). It is one of the most lavishly-packaged Laibach releases, and also a memento of the production as a whole. The booklet featured scenes from the production, along with texts and statements, none in English. Since *Krst* was never performed outside Yugoslavia, and the only widely-available footage is shown in the "Geburt Einer Nation" video, the album was the main way for those not present at the performances to try and reconstruct what might have happened, and what it might mean.

The music was as cryptic and monumental as the visual design, and the original versions of the release came in a box set whose design mimicked Deutsche Gramophon releases. Without knowledge of the historical references or the classical sources of the sounds, *Krst* could be perceived as something wholly Slovenian. It was possible for Western audiences to believe that rather than being what one musicologist called a "'sampling' opera" produced by an underground group, it was the work of massed choirs and orchestras in the services of a mass movement (depicted in the *NSK Organigramme* poster included with the vinyl album). Four of the tracks appeared on the CD version of *Opus Dei*, but the majority

were unreleased. Sources included Wagner, Bruckner, Orff, Shostakovich, Liszt, the partisan song “Počiva jezero v tihoti” and, on the memorial piece “Hostnik”, Kraftwerk. This was a recording of Igor Vidmar’s farewell reading of “Apologia Laibach” in December 1982, here serving to place Hostnik into the spectral national pantheon created in “Krst”. Laibach sonically invoked the paradoxes of Slovenian culture through a series of audio citations and references to pantheonic figures of Slovenian and European culture.

The music is as mournful as it is heroic, featuring sinister orchestral motifs and sound effects. “Apologija Laibach” is a monumental piece that returns to the ominous mystical atmospheres of *Rekapitulacija*. The track “Krst” is both the most utopian and sinister piece. Malevolent electronic tones and a solemn spoken incantation gradually give way to euphoric brass fanfares, suggesting the possibility of a passage from defeat to victory. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Let It Be*, Mute Records, 1988, London

Like 1994’s *NATO*, *Let It Be* was composed exclusively of “new originals”, which were among the most elaborate and excessive of Laibach’s career. The original Beatles’ album was disowned by Paul McCartney, unhappy with the final mix by Phil Spector. It was widely seen as a sub-standard document of their disintegration, and Laibach described it as “a cheapskate epitaph, a cardboard tombstone, a sad and tatty end of an era”. Yet rather than perform a demolition job on an already shaky structure, Laibach re-built it into something much grander and more imposing than it was in the first place. The artwork used the square portrait format of the original cover, replacing photos of The Beatles with painted portraits of Laibach. On the rear Laibach again used Nazi-era art, this time Werner Peiner’s sinister *The Horsemen of the Apocalypse*.

In Laibach’s hands the lyric “get back to where you once belonged” assumed a more sinister meaning, but this also referred back to the ambiguous original, which some white power groups actually believed was a racist message, while The Beatles claimed it began life as a parody of British racism. Some of the other songs were so trivial that it was hard to extract any deeper meaning from the lyrics. Instead, Laibach monumentalized the originals’ weaknesses through massively excessive orchestration, erasing almost all trace of the rock and roll-oriented originals through a totalitarian mode of duplication. Classical string arrangements, semi-operatic vocals, hunting horns and martial drums both buried and salvaged *Let It Be*. It emerged from the same sessions as *Sympathy for the Devil*, recorded with the involvement of French producer Bertrand Burgalat.

These “new originals” transcended the mediocrity of the original works, imposing an (ironically) epic and heroic tone, both sophisticated and barbaric. Laibach thus challenged Western assumptions about Eastern artists being unable to produce music to the same level as their Western counterparts by producing something more sophisticated and multi-layered than the creatively bankrupt originals. Poignantly, it was this material that Laibach performed on its final Yugoslavian tours before the outbreak of war, and the tragic, bombastic atmosphere of the album very much reflected its era.

The female-fronted “Across The Universe”, which Mute released as a Christmas single, was far more dignified than the original, and while it seemed unusually romantic for Laibach, the line “nothing’s gonna change my world” also had a totalitarian implication that was particularly ironic as the socialist systems of the East began to collapse. “For You Blue” is a grandiose and martial epic that clears the way for the album’s finale, “Maggie Mae”. The only trace of The Beatles version of the English folk song is the title, the music and lyrics are entirely replaced by the *volkslied* “Auf der Lüneburger Heide” and elements of the “Hunters’ Chorus” from Carl Maria von Weber’s *Der Freischütz*. Here Laibach took its *völkisch* image to the limits of absurdity, parodying the Germanic originals with ludicrous, squealing guitars. Yet it retained a stirring, anthemic quality, and when performed live could seem darker and more militant. A small proof of its success is that on YouTube one fan describes the track as “the Best Beatles Song Ever”. It is also rumoured that Paul McCartney gave his own verdict on the work, playing it before his shows in this period. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Macbeth*, Mute Records, 1990, London

In September 1987, Laibach were invited by Peter Zadek, the intendant of Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg, to participate in Wilfried Minks’ *Macbeth*, a follow-up to *Andi*, a successful collaboration with Einstürzende Neubauten. Laibach created the scenography, centred on a large silver cross (later re-used for the “Wirtschaft ist Tot” video) replacing the traditional curtain, and opening and closing between each scene. Laibach members stood on the cross and added live drums, horns and chants to the pre-recorded soundtrack. The group first appeared in hunting clothes, and each time they re-appeared between scenes they wore less, ending bare-chested wearing only *kniebundhosen*. Laibach’s appearance combined with the oppressive, martial music sharply divided opinion amongst the audience and media, with some interpreting the group as neo-fascist, despite the theatre’s radical tradition, and its efforts to explain the relevance of Laibach’s approach to a play centred on militarism and the seductive temptations of absolute power.

The soundtrack (released in a 32-minute form in 1990) used music performed on location in Hamburg, but also samples from various horror soundtracks. Though almost purely instrumental and covering a narrower range of music, it used similar sampling techniques to *Krst*, perpetuating the illusion that the group had much greater (orchestral) resources than it actually possessed. It (re)-created Laibachian temporal displacement, evoking the catastrophic atmosphere of the 1940s.

Macbeth also referred to Rudolf Hess, who died in August 1987. The first half is entitled *NJC + 11*, referring to the fuselage markings of the plane Hess used to fly to Scotland. The second half opens with *10.5.1941*, which is named after the date of Hess’ flight and features the sound of a 1940s-era plane passing overhead. The strange, conspiracy-riddled tale of this flight amplified the air of madness and catastrophe surrounding the play, as well as Laibach’s interpretation of it. Even more provocatively, the back cover featured a (per)version of Anselm Kiefer’s 1973 work *Deutschlands Geisteshelden*, with a parachuting figure representing Hess at its centre. Kiefer was seen by some on the left as politically ambivalent, or even

suspect, due to his manipulation of supposedly long-dead Germanic cultural archetypes and Nazi-era references, and this “touch of evil” made it natural for Laibach to adapt his work, first used by the group on the *Nova akropola* artwork, and also used later by IRWIN.

Musically, the contrast with the de-constructionist sound of the band Einstürzende Neubauten could not have been greater (as Laibach stated, “the Neubauten are destroying the new buildings and we are restoring the old ones”). There are moments of humour in the brass arrangements and theatrical effects (the sounds of rain and thunder), but the predominant impressions (re)-produced are colossal, relentless force and a strongly tragic air. On 11 October Laibach performed a powerful concert at the Schauspielhaus, including very rare live versions of “Ohne Geld”, “Die Zeit”, “Agnus Dei (Exil Und Tod)” and “Wutach Schlucht”. During the group’s residency in Hamburg Peter Mlakar began formal cooperation with Laibach, and he can be heard making short statements during this performance. *Macbeth* was a high point in Laibach’s orchestral-sampling style, and its scale, force and symbolic ambiguity strongly enhanced the perception of NSK as *Gesamtkunstwerk*. A.Mo.

Laibach, *Sympathy for the Devil*, Mute Records, 1988, London

Like many of their generation, Laibach had grown up with groups such as The Rolling Stones and, like their Western counterparts, had been fascinated by the Satanic, transgressive glamour surrounding them. After introducing the concept of the “new original” on *Opus Dei*, this now became central to its work. *Sympathy for the Devil* was released in September 1988, a month before the release of *Let it Be*. Released in Britain and Germany on two 12" singles and CD single, it was the first Laibach release to appear simultaneously in Yugoslavia – a sign of the group’s partial domestic normalisation and its commercial power.

The sleeve was one of Laibach’s most uncompromising uses of Nazi imagery, using a poster for the Nazi KdF (*Kraft durch Freude*) organisation, depicting an ideal Aryan family dwarfed by a colossal Prussian eagle. Slightly less confrontationally, the second 12", *Sympathy for the Devil II* featured a socialist-style sculpture and United Nations insignia, an example of Laibach’s appropriation of international organisations, which climaxed with *NATO* (1995). The back sleeve featured a map of international time zones, which would reappear in New Collectivism’s NSK State imagery in the early 1990s.

Retrovision’s video knowingly manipulated Western fears of Eastern barbarism while parodying Stones-style rock excess. The scenes in Predjamski grad show Laibach feasting in a feudal, pre-modern mode, before they march through spectacular caves (Škocjanske jame) holding blazing torches, and finally pose with a mother and her daughters in a ruined courtyard (an abandoned film set) – a symbolic counterpoint to the ideal Nazi family on the sleeve.

The Yugoslavian edition and 1990 mini album featured eight highly varied interpretations of the song, including Laibach sub-groups 300.000 V.K. and Germania, each contributing vocal and instrumental mixes, the latter the results of a period of intensive studio experimentation and collaboration, anticipating Laibach’s future use of dance music. The “Time for a Change” mix opened with laughter and

a sinister spoken vocal preceding a pummelling beat and organ chords. “Dem Teufel Zugeneigt” (also the title of the May 1989 Austrian tour) was a faster, more aggressive version that started with a sampled speech by John F. Kennedy and combining a guttural German vocal with 1960s-style sitars. “Anastasia” was a bizarre experiment mixing choral and brass samples, electro beats, classical piano and a Russian vocal sample. Germania’s female vocal-led “Who Killed the Kennedys” dance mix mocked rock machismo, sampling Jagger’s voice and the strained rehearsal footage from Godard’s experimental 1968 Stones film *One Plus One*. Indeed, this documentary was the main source of the samples used on the album, to the extent that some of these tracks could almost act as an alternative soundtrack. The film samples supported Laibach’s aesthetics as effectively as the song’s lyrics: “And maybe the devil is God in exile.” A.Mo.

19 Laibach Music Videos

***Die Liebe*, 1986, directed by Marijan Osole - Max**

***Krvava gruda – plodna zemlja*, 1986, directed by Marijan Osole - Max**

***Life is Life*, 1987, directed by Daniel Landin**

***Sympathy for the Devil*, 1988, directed by Retrovision (Peter Vezjak)**

***Across the Universe*, 1988, directed by Bucko i Tucko**



The **Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre** (SNST) was founded on 13 October 1983 with “The Founding Act”, a programmatic text in which the anonymous members set out the group’s programme, organizational structure and modus operandi, and announced its plan for eventual “self-termination” once its goals had been achieved. The SNST’s basic objective, as stated in “The Founding Act”, was to “revive the performing arts”. To this end, the group launched a three-stage programme divided into a “creative” part (theatrical productions that were unfailingly referred to as “retrogarde events”) and a “manifestative” part (actions and texts aimed at public relations activities). The three stages of the SNST were as follows:

Stage 1: Underground: the group announced its existence and publicly distributed its programme, staged its first production, the *Retrogarde Event Hinkemann* (1984), and carried out its *Resurrection of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre* action.

Stage 2: Exorcism: the SNST staged the production of the *Retrogarde Event Marija Nablocka*.

Stage 3: Retro-Classical: here, the aim was to break through to one or more stages of national institutions; this was realized with the *Retrogarde Event Baptism under Triglav*, produced by Cankarjev dom (and staged in its Gallus Hall).

The events of the various stages were all accompanied by programmatic texts, laying out the SNST’s creative method: it was based on the *retro* approach (art using art as its creative material, “art from art”), which was also developed by the other groups of the NSK collective. The SNST named its version of this method “retrogarde”, to underscore its active nature and aim to break through from the underground stage to the retro-classical one. In addition to focusing on retrogarde, active, and event-based work, the group also framed (in the “First Sisters Letter”) its programmatic task of analyzing the relation between theatre and state. Both theatre and state are based on the production of events (performativity); as a result – so the Scipions claimed in their programmes – the methods and the effects of the theatre and the state are often indistinguishable from one another (“Theatre is a State”).

The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre took its name after the Roman consul Scipio Nasica, who ordered the destruction of a theatre (a point noted by Antonin

Artaud). As it had predicted in 1983, the SNST ended its activities between 1986, when it announced its imminent self-termination, and 1987, when it carried out the *Act of Self-Destruction* (by preparing an unrealized spectacle-event for the Youth Day 1987 celebration). After the self-termination the theretofore anonymous theatre members identified themselves as Eda Čufer (dramaturge), Miran Mohar (set designer), and Dragan Živadinov (director).

In January 1987, the **Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot** was founded. Alluding in its name to Slovenian avant-garde poet Anton Podbevšek's journal from 1922 (meaning Red Pilot), it was the successor of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, although with radically different goals, purposes and orientation (laid out in its programme published in the daily *Delo*). Rather than turning back to history, like the SNST with its retro orientation, Rdeči pilot set its sights on the ultramodern future dictated and shaped by advances in science and technology. Further, instead of focusing on the event, like the SNST, Rdeči pilot centred on the act of watching and observing (the Observatory), a key part of both theatre and science. The spatial organization of watching, a basic element in theatre, is always treated as a unified space in Rdeči pilot's projects, rejecting the division between stage and auditorium or actors and spectators, uniting the two poles into a dynamic yet unified space that the director Dragan Živadinov called "inhabited sculptures". Similar to how SNST had explored the relations between the theatre and state/religion/ritual, Rdeči pilot probed the relations between the theatre and science and technology. In the *Drama Observatory Fiat* the space was shaped like a spacecraft simulator, in which the spectators "observed" the action through three apertures that on the one hand organized the gaze like various instruments used in science and technology (camera, microscope, telescope), and on the other symbolized the three fundamental theatrical forms – drama, opera, and ballet. It was through these forms that Rdeči pilot aimed to reconsider the contemporary conditions of man as a being of emotions and instincts, and to observe human adaptation to a world that is transforming into an algorithmic product of rationalized science. In the productions that followed – the *Ballet Observatory Fiat* (1987), the *Ballet Observatory Zenit* (1988), the *Drama Observatory Zenit* (1988), the Opera Observatory Record (1989, unrealized project), and the *Drama Observatory Kapital* (1991) – the director Dragan Živadinov (who made frequent changes to his team of co-workers in that period of socio-political and aesthetic transition) developed his philosophy and poetics of theatre space ("inhabited sculpture") down to the last details, and deepened the understanding of the relation between the theatre and science and technology. In 1991 the *Drama Observatory Kapital* was staged, in which the "cabinet" of the Slovenian pioneer of space science Herman Potočnik Noordung (or rather, the spatial logic of his geostationary satellite, in dialogue with the spatial logic of suprematist and constructivist art) was presented, and this process led to a spontaneous transformation of the Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot into the

Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung. Dragan Živadinov explained this transformation at a five-hour press conference (performance), also presenting his plan of work until 2045 to the journalists. Among the items on his agenda (called "detonations") there was also the systematic mythologizing of

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Herman Potočnik Noordung, whose scientific work and pioneer spirit Živadinov set out to honour not only with theatrical productions like the *Prayer Machine Noordung* (1992), but also by taking other actions. The latter started in the early 1990s with Slovenian and English translations and international distribution of Potočnik's book *The Problem of Space Travel: the Rocket Motor*, and culminated with the opening of KSEVT, the Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies, in Vitanje, Slovenia in 2010. E.Č.

1 SNST, Underground Stage, *Retrogarde Event Hinkemann*, private apartment, Titova Street 14, Ljubljana, 23 March 1984

On 13 October 1983, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (SNST) laid out in "The Founding Act" its plan to revive the performing arts. This was divided in three stages: the underground, exorcism, and retro-classical. The *Retrogarde Event Hinkemann* was the SNST's first event-performance, premiering in a private apartment, in the home of film director Igor Šmid. 29 spectators were invited to the premiere and repeat performances, with the printed invitations sent to them including programmatic texts, information on the event, and specific instructions on how to attend it. Half an hour before the beginning of the event, a man dressed as a priest would meet the spectators at the intersection of Titova (now Slovenska) and Cankarjeva Streets, and direct them to the entrance of the building at no. 14. There, a man in a Yugoslavian Army officer's uniform would direct them to the second floor, where they were met by a Sister, who took them into the room where the event was performed.

Dramaturgically based on the motifs of Ernst Toller's expressionist drama *Hinke-mann*, the performance was just the central part of the underground stage, the objectives of which were to introduce a theatre group without institutional backing into the public space, to devise the "retrogarde" method of work and a recognizable aesthetic, and to form a creative team.

The artistic director for the Cankarjev dom theatre section, Goran Schmidt, saw the event-performance and invited the SNST to Cankarjev dom (still under construction at the time), where they presented the performance a few times in the basement spaces. In 1984, the *Retrogarde Event Hinkemann* was further staged at the Cultural Centre Remetinac in Zagreb, and at the International Theatre Festival BITEF in Belgrade. E.Č.

2 SNST, Exorcism Stage, *Retrogarde Event Marija Nablocka*, former studio of Matjaž Vipotnik, currently the Slovenian Theatre Institute, Mestni trg 17, Ljubljana, 25 May 1985

In "The Founding Act" (of 13 October 1983), the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre (SNST) announced its plan to revive the performing arts in three stages: underground, exorcism, and retro-classical. The *Retrogarde Event Marija Nablocka* was the Scipions' second event-performance, premiering in Slovenian designer Matjaž

Vipotnik's apartment and studio while it was being renovated. The spectators were invited to the premiere, with the invitations including the SNST's programmatic texts in addition to the event's location. The spectators were met by two costumed actors outside the building and then led, one at a time, through a dark, narrow passage crammed full of actors, to his or her seat in the event's set-as-sculpture.

Based on an early Bertolt Brecht's drama, *Baal*, the work was conceived as a spatial and sensory alternative to the canon of realist-naturalist theatre then prevalent in institutional theatres. The set design introduced a spatial model – based on the concept of an “inhabited sculpture” – that countered the division between stage and auditorium, and thus broke the principle of the “fourth wall” underpinning institutional theatre. The event was named after Marija Nablocka, a Russian immigrant actress who had introduced psychologically realistic acting, based on the Stanislavski approach, to Slovenian theatres. It was this canon of acting that the Scipions targeted with their “exorcism”, wanting to replace it with avant-garde (e.g. Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, the estrangement effect) and neo-avant-garde approaches to acting and performance.

After the premiere and repeat performances in Ljubljana, the *Retrogarde Event Marija Nablocka* was also staged in Zagreb, in Belgrade at the International Theatre Festival BITEF, in Edinburgh at the Fringe Festival, and in Amsterdam as part of the city's 1987 European Capital of Culture project. E.č.

3 SNST, Retro-Classical Stage, *The Act of Self-Destruction: Artistic Event Youth Day*, 1987 (unrealized project)

After announcing, in September 1986, its self-termination at a press conference at the International Theatre Festival BITEF in Belgrade, where it staged a performance of the *Retrogarde Event Baptism under Triglav*, the group planned another event-performance to symbolically end its activities in an *Act of Self-Destruction*. Approached by the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, whose turn it was to organize the annual all-Yugoslavian celebration of Youth Day (also called the Tito Relay) in 1987, the SNST wrote a script and production book for the spectacle part of the project earlier in the year. Other NSK groups were also involved in designing the event. The SNST was to stage the introductory spectacle at Lake Bohinj a few weeks before Youth Day (which was celebrated on 25 May). All of the delegations of Yugoslavian youth would gather at 6 a.m. and, after watching the event staged on a specially built pontoon-bridge in the middle of the lake, carry on the relay toward Belgrade. All work on the project stopped when the “poster scandal” broke out, caused by a controversial poster designed by New Collectivism as part of the overall visual identity of the event. Eventually the project was cancelled altogether, but the SNST nevertheless viewed it as a successfully executed *Act of Self-Destruction*, in which, as the final programmatic text stated, “the observation of the relations between the theatre and the state and the theatre as a state had achieved its climax.” E.č.

4 Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot, *Drama Observatory Fiat*,
Dom Malči Beličeve, 17 May 1987

The successor of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, the Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot (alluding in its name to Slovenian avant-garde poet Anton Podbevšek's journal from 1922, meaning Red Pilot) was founded while the SNST was still in the process of "self-termination" through the *Artistic Event Youth Day* (whose realization was scheduled for April-May 1987). The new theatre group laid out its programme in a text published in the daily *Delo* in January 1987, setting its sights on the ultramodern future dictated and shaped by advances in science and technology, unlike the SNST's retro orientation. Instead of focusing on the "event", as SNST did, Rdeči pilot centred on the act of watching and observing (the Observatory), a key part of both theatre and science.

The spatial organization of watching, a basic element in theatre, is always treated as a unified space (set design), which the director Dragan Živadinov called "inhabited sculptures". In the *Drama Observatory Fiat* the space was shaped to resemble the interior of a spacecraft, putting the spectator in a situation that could potentially be taking place in zero gravity. The title of the first observatory, *Fiat*, alludes to the Latin phrase *Fiat iustitia, et pereat mundus* (Let there be justice, though the world perish), which was here applied to theatre/science: *Fiat theatrum/scientia, et pereat mundus*.

The spectators observed the action through three apertures (triangular, cross-shaped, and square) that on the one hand represented the scientific focus on observation, and on the other symbolized the three fundamental theatrical forms – drama, opera, and ballet. It was through these forms that Rdeči pilot aimed to reconsider the contemporary condition of man as a being of emotions and instincts, and to observe human adaptation to a world that is transforming into an algorithmic product of rationalized science.

Taking the myth of the Argonauts as its frame of reference, the *Drama Observatory Fiat* explored the relations between the sexes (Jason and Medea) and strong emotions like love, loyalty, betrayal, and revenge.

After its Ljubljana premiere, the *Drama Observatory Fiat* was staged at numerous international theatre festivals. E.č.

5 Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot, *Ballet Observatory Fiat*,
in collaboration with the Randy Warshaw Dance Company,
Kotor, Montenegro, 17 July 1987

In 1987, the Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot invited the choreographer Randy Warshaw (a former dancer in the legendary dancer and choreographer Trisha Brown's company) and dancer Meg Stuart (now a choreographer) to collaborate on the group's second project, the *Ballet Observatory Fiat*. The focus of this work was to consider what happens to the thoughts and emotions of a top-level dancer in the process of the total body reconfiguration he or she must undergo when following a disciplined, daily training routine. However, the collaboration between Rdeči pilot and the Randy Warshaw Dance Company was not realized in full, due

to the absence of director Dragan Živadinov, who had been summoned to do his compulsory military service, and ended up in jail because of his refusal to do so. The *Ballet Observatory Fiat* nonetheless premiered in Kotor, with later repeat performances in the Students' Cultural Centre (SKC) in Belgrade. E.Č.

6 Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot, *Ballet Observatory Zenit*, Cultural Centre Novi Zagreb, Zagreb, 7 May 1988

The second series of productions-observatories, titled *Zenit* after a Yugoslavian avant-garde magazine, investigated, according to the programmatic text printed on the *Object Zenit*, the theme of the “zenith of the human epoch”. The ritualistic kinetic choreography of the *Ballet Observatory Zenit* first introduced the theme of a hero and foregrounded the motif of a spacecraft, both of which would go on to become central themes in director Dragan Živadinov's subsequent work, in particular in his Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, established in 1991. In the Rdeči pilot cosmogony, a hero is an individual who feels called upon to constantly transcend and push at the limits of the still visible and observable, i.e. the zenith, thereby changing the definition of everything human. Because, according to the programmatic text, “Man is a transitory form, changing in front of our eyes”. E.Č.

7 Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot, *Drama Observatory Zenit* produced by Mladinsko gledališče, Central Railway Station, Ljubljana, 6 December 1988

Further developing familiar Rdeči pilot themes and motifs, such as the hero, spacecraft, and “inhabited sculpture”, the *Drama Observatory Zenit* was staged in a specially built monumental object: a train car turned into a spacecraft and with a boxcar attached to it, both parked on a refuge siding at the Ljubljana Central Railway Station. The audience would enter the boxcar one by one, receiving a ritualistic blessing from Dragan Živadinov at the door, and then had to stand still in utter darkness in the crowded car. After a prolonged period of adjusting to the dark, the spectators were pushed, again one at a time, into the train car/spacecraft where the performance-observatory was played and onto a tiny gallery from which they had to look up to the raised platform/stage spanning the length of the space. Taking T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* as its point of departure, the *Drama Observatory Zenit* performed in its metalanguage the emancipation from the weight of Christian history (the horizontal position of the spacecraft underscoring gravity) and the “exorcising” of the NSK retro aesthetic from the cosmokinetically conceived space explored by Rdeči pilot. The allusions to the NSK collective included Nazism (the boxcar recalled the way Jews were transported to concentration camps), the motif of the Alps on the ceiling of the spacecraft, and such typical Laibach and IRWIN symbols as mounted hawks, black crosses, the Sacred Heart, and the exorcist's words *vade retro* (“go back”), written in neon light at the dramatic climax of the work. E.Č.

- 8 Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot, *Opera Observatory Record*, produced by Narodno pozorište, Novi Sad, 1989 (unrealized project)

The *Opera Observatory Record* was an unrealized project by the Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot, which had been fully developed before the group encountered complications in the production. The libretto (Eda Čufer and Katarina Pejović), musical score (Tekton/Branko Mirt in collaboration with Peter Šavli), set design (Samo Lapajne and Matej Mihelčič) and production book (Dragan Živadinov) focused on the heroic mythologizing of the Slovenian scientist and pioneer of space technology Herman Potočnik Noordung. After the Rdeči pilot artistic team broke up, director Dragan Živadinov took up this subject again, making it the central theme of his next project, the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, founded in 1990, while the Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot was gradually being phased out.

Rdeči pilot's final performance was the *Drama Observatory Kapital* in 1991 (see page 24). E.Č.

- 9 Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, *Prayer Machine Noordung*, co-produced by the Slovenian National Theatre, Opera and Ballet Ljubljana, and Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana, 11 December 1992

The first production of the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung (which constituted director Dragan Živadinov's next step in the sustained explorations started by the predecessor theatre groups the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre and the Cosmokinetic Theatre Rdeči pilot) was a recapitulation of the previous groups' philosophy of theatre space as performed and authored by Živadinov, and at the same time an act of subtle mythologizing of the Slovenian pioneer of modern space technology Herman Potočnik Noordung. In place of the focus on the event by the SNST (in its retrogarde events) or on function of observing by the Rdeči pilot stage (in its drama, ballet and opera observatories), the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung foregrounded the ritualistic and mythogenetic power of the theatre, this time organized as a "prayer machine" in content and form. The space-set design openly transposed the idea of positioning the spectators (already present in the *Retrogarde Event Marija Nablocka*) from a rustic-humanistic miniature to a monumental, ultramodern, post-humanistic space-time machine, which left them (deprived of their physical individuality and motion by the authority of the space – a spacecraft simulation) no place of retreat except profound meditation, which was also dictated by the authority of the images surrounding them. In addition to the spatial references to *Nablocka*, the *Prayer Machine Noordung* alluded to the SNST's final production, the *Retrogarde Event Baptism under Triglav*, in its form as a Wagnerian total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), although radically redefining its historical-civilizational perspective. *Baptism* was a "prayer machine" with the cultural and political function of paying homage to a mythological construct of the 19th century, the nation-building potential of France Prešeren's poetry, and

the tradition based on this myth. The cultural and political function of the myth about Noordung, celebrating the work of the Slovenian scientist and inventor of the geostationary satellite Herman Potočnik (who assumed the pseudonym Noordung) was – as Živadinov explained at the press conference before the premiere of the *Drama Observatory Kapital*, at which he laid out his plan of work through 2045 – to open up the mythological space of a future not shaped by poetry and national identification, but by universal postulates of science and technology. These have already changed humankind, depriving it of the body, capturing it in a loop of freely rotating images hyperstimulating human emotional and mental functions. The formal effect of the “film in theatre” experience, which some critics had found already in the *Drama Observatory Kapital*, was emphasized in the *Prayer Machine*. According to Živadinov, the time dramaturgy of contemporary theatre differs from traditional dramaturgy in that it appropriates the logic of film dramaturgy, although this appropriation has not yet been consistently employed in the realm of the theatre space dramaturgy. The manipulation with physical, and not just mental, motion introduced by Živadinov’s artistic events (e.g., putting the spectators in the position of being collectively moved by a mechanical device, like in *Kapital*, or statically determined, like in the *Prayer Machine*) causes estrangement, affirming the mutual dependence between automated physical and mental processes controlled in the modern world by science and technology. E.č.



Builders was formed in 1985 in Ljubljana as the Neue Slowenische Kunst's department of architecture and urban planning, on the premise of reconstructing Slovenian architecture. The members were Andreja Medvedič, Staša Zupančič, Aljoša Kolenc, Aleš Prijon, and Andraž Torkar. All were students at the Ljubljana Faculty of Architecture. Builders was active, intermittently, until 1992.

The group carried out the following projects:

- Renovation of the apartment of T. Lorenčič, 1985,
- *Retro-building miniatures*, 1986,
- *Gesundes leben – Frohes schaffen*, 1987,
- *Ausstellungssaal der Ausstellung*, 1987,
- *Gradoustrojstvo*, 1987,
- *New in the Old*: competition project, 1987,
- *Fiat Haus*, 1988,
- Set design for the film *Silicon Horizon*, 1988,
- *Slovene Territory* (a project on the colonisation of Slovenian soil) and *Ossuary for Slovenia*, 1991,
- project: furniture for the gallery Anonimus, 1992.

Builders employed aesthetics and elements from historical sources, particularly from totalitarian regimes in recent history. Their message was socially provocative, in the spirit of NSK.

The formal expression of Builders was based on retro-avant-garde principles, incorporating quotations and collages consisting of contemporary and historical forms and reworked symbols. Builders employed a specific language of architecture and urban planning, which had been used to establish the code of socially committed expression within the specific medium of architecture, and within the aesthetics of the NSK movement during the disintegration of authoritarian regimes at the end of the 1980s.

Builders' ideological orientation is well-illustrated by the following quote from a manifesto it presented publicly on the steps of the National and University Library in Ljubljana in May 1985. In the name of the desubstantialisation of the stale ideology of patriotic Slovenianness, they read their manifesto in English:

What matters is not agreement or disagreement with what we love, with our faith, which is absolutely not the base of our ideas. It is not the question of creating

truth where there is none. We are, however, strict and relentless if we see that foul blends with fair, friend associates with foe. This is why our method is the method of social totalitarian realism, incompatibly linked with unrealistic humanism, this strong relativism. Was it not Lenin who said that of all art, construction is the most important? "And the one most accessible to people," added Stalin. A.K. & A.P.

1 Builders, Competition Project *New in the Old*, RIBA, 1987

In 1987 Builders entered a project titled *New in the Old* into the RIBA International Student Competition.

This was a project to reurbanise the capital through symbolic ideological interventions on the four sides of the city, by erecting and reinterpreting archetypal architectural elements from Slovenian and European history.

The ground plan shows the directions for the realisation of individual interventions, as well as their influences.

The project was displayed at the Royal Academy in London as part of a presentation of competition's results.

Print on glass, screen printing, iron frames – *Laibach-Ost*, *Laibach-Süd*, *Laibach-Nord*, *Laibach-West*, and a map of Ljubljana. A.K. & A.P.

2 Builders, *Ossuary for Slovenia*, 1991

The *Ossuary for Slovenia* project (the NSK Mausoleum) was created for the Slovenian state to mark its independence on 26 June 1991. It was placed at the geometric centre of Slovenia in the area of Spodnja Slivna, near the village of Vače in the Litija municipality. The *Ossuary* was a central part of the urbanism project *Colonisations of the Slovenian Soil*, displayed at the *Slovenian Athens* exhibition at the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana in 1991.

Real object: height 20 m, ground plan dimensions 10 x 10 m

Model (reconstruction of the lost original): Scale = 1 : 20, height 1000 mm, ground plan dimensions 500 x 500 mm, samba, brass. A.K. & A.P.

3 Builders, Project: Furniture for the Gallery Anonimus, 1992

This project was part of a wider process of reconstructing existing second-hand pieces of furniture to produce new objects. These were to be returned to their original contexts as transforming agents, marked with subversive aesthetics.

The furniture was created for the gallery Anonimus in Ljubljana.

Table and chair, 1992

Table: 1000 x 1000 x 800 mm

Chair: 430 x 540 x 930 mm

Timber, steel, polyester, Plexiglas, brass, leather. A.K. & A.P.



In 1986, NSK produced an “organigramme” – a conceptual organizational structure, showing existing groups, planned groups and abstract groups that never had or never would materialise. This was the first mention of a “Department for Pure, Practical Philosophy and Rhetoric.” All the NSK groups were adept at the production of rhetorical and theoretical texts, so a central body was partly superfluous. The organigramme represented the sections’ individual texts and statements as well as collaborative NSK texts not ascribed to a particular group. Yet this was followed by the establishment of an actual

Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, symbolizing NSK’s intellectual ambitions. It was created in 1987, by and for the philosopher, editor and NSK associate Peter Mlakar, during Laibach’s residency at Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg.

Mlakar found a natural affinity between NSK and his own elemental neo-Hegelian or neo-neo-Platonic discourse, and had already been aware of and on good terms with NSK for some time. Among his influences he lists apophatic philosophy, Hegel, de Sade, Heidegger, Freud, and the atmosphere of his hometown, Škofja Loka, a thousand-year-old castle town northwest of Ljubljana. He had contributed a theoretical piece to the anthology *Punk pod Slovenci* (Punk under the Slovenes) in 1985, and worked in the same year with Dušan Mandič of IRWIN on the editorial board of the periodical *Problemi* when it published a special NSK issue. He also wrote *The Beauties of Carthage* – the first S/M story in Slovenian literature. A.Mo.

4 Speeches

Initially Mlakar collaborated most closely with Laibach, giving speeches as a prologue to concerts in Germany, Austria, and Yugoslavia. These speeches are always relevant and specific to their location, or to political and historical contexts, and are frequently as provocative as the concerts they introduce. For a “rock” audience, the very fact of being forced to listen to such a complex discourse is itself already a provocation, regardless of the content.

One of the most highly charged speeches was given at Belgrade in 1989, delivered in German and Serbian and incorporating Milošević’s nationalist slogan

“No one should dare to beat you!” Mlakar also assumed the role of “master of ceremonies,” providing addresses and texts for formal NSK occasions from internal events to gallery openings and record launches. A.Mo.

Two Addresses Delivered at the Concert of Laibach in Vienna, Kaiser Franz Joseph Reitschule, June 1988

Concert of Laibach, Belgrade, April 1989

5 Writings

In addition to these addresses, several longer texts have been issued, many around themes such as God, the devil, and eroticism, and others still dealing with national questions. The tone is often very Hegelian, the texts laden with references to “God/transcendence,” “spirit,” “Being”, “nothing”, “absolute”, “infinity” and “enjoyment”. Their essentialist and theatrical tone has much in common with some Laibach texts, and the Department has a close affinity with Laibach. The texts recapitulate previous philosophies in the classic retrogarde style, but they are not simply a philosophical adjunct to other NSK activities. They consciously explore and stress NSK’s interest both in totalitarianism and in spiritual issues, and firmly implant an absolute, all-encompassing – albeit apersonal – deity within the NSK *Weltanschauung*. “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 and for itself.” A.Mo.

Peter Mlakar, *Lepe Kartažanke*, Ljubljana: ŠKUC, 1985

P. Traven (Peter Mlakar), *Mera in čut*, Ljubljana: ŠKUC: distribucija B. Borčič, 1988

Peter Mlakar, *Spisi o nadnaravnem*, Ljubljana: Oddelek za čisto in praktično filozofijo pri NSK, 1992

Peter Mlakar, *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (Speeches to the German Nation), Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1993



The **Film** department, led by Igor Zupe, then a student of film directing, focussed largely on the phenomenon of the Heimat film in all its ideological dimensions. The key creations of this section were *From the Mouths of Animals*, the production book for a Heimat film by Miran Mohar and Andrej Savski (1984), a retrogarde retelling of the story of the nation through familiar NSK symbols such as the black cross, the stag antlers, the hunter, the hero, Mount Triglav etc., and *Beauty and the Nation*, a 1985 Heimat film about Slovenian composer Marij Kogoj. The latter was directed by Igor Zupe and produced by the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (AGRFT) of the University of Ljubljana, and used the narratives of three key characters – the intellectuals Bratko Kreft, Taras Kermauner and Josip Vidmar – to explore the typical fate of the Slovenian avant-garde artist, torn between creative frenzy and existential anguish. Bratko Kreft spoke about the opening night of Marij Kogoj's opera *Črne maske* [*Black Masks*], Taras Kermauner recounted the existential anguish experienced by Kogoj on the streets of Ljubljana, and Josip Vidmar described the story of Kogoj's failed attempts to establish himself on the international music scene.

These testimonial scenes were linked together by shots of a Cubist Triglav, onto which short excerpts from Mako Sajko's short documentary on stag fighting, *Tourney at the Šumik Waterfall*, were projected. This was a transposition of the last scene from the production book for the Heimat film *From the Mouths of Animals*, which was never produced and which would have ended in retrogarde fashion, with an intervention by Laibach at the north face of Mount Triglav: the members of the group were supposed to hang a suprematist cross on the Aljaž Tower, thus re-baptising it.

Along with Laibach tracks, the film was accompanied by music by Marij Kogoj, performed for the occasion by composer Jakob Jež and singer Olga Jež, while the visuals included paintings by the IRWIN group as well as a portrait of Marij Kogoj by Veno Pilon; the set was designed by Miran Mohar. d.o.

6 Film, Production Book for a Heimat Film *From the Mouths of Animals*, 1984

7 Film (Igor Zupe), *Beauty and the Nation*, Heimat Film, produced by AGRFT, 1985



Novi kolektivizem (NK) / **New Collectivism** is a design studio established in 1984 to provide design services and ensure the consistent overall image of Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK).

At the founding of the NSK collective, the three groups set up a fourth one, the design department New Collectivism, consisting of one member from each of the other NSK groups: Dejan Knez, Miran Mohar, Darko Pokorn (NC member) and Roman Uranjek.

New Collectivism first designed a coat of arms for the Neue Slowenische Kunst collective, and then went on to produce mostly catalogues and posters, album covers and special promotional objects, the most notable among them the Suitcase for Spiritual Use, made in the context of the *Baptism under Triglav* project. New Collectivism was also entrusted with marketing these products, and thus with shaping NSK's own economy.

Besides work for Neue Slowenische Kunst, New Collectivism offered design to outside clients, especially to cultural institutions both in Slovenia and abroad. This work included various cultural products, especially theatre posters, book designs, magazine covers, corporate design and exhibition design.

Like other NSK groups, New Collectivism freely employed the retro principle method, which involved the eclectic use of relevant motifs and their reinterpretation. It also employed the procedures of montage. In the 1980s, New Collectivism often stirred up public opinion by juxtaposing motifs and symbols from heterogeneous and often antagonistic political and cultural contexts. Posters produced using this method were undoubtedly one of the high points of political poster design in Slovenia.

One of New Collectivism's most notable projects in this sense was the work that set off the so-called poster scandal. The group's entry for the best Youth Day poster competition in 1987, organized that year by the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, was based on a Nazi painting by Richard Klein entitled *The Third Reich. Allegory of Heroism*. After this entry won the competition it caused one of the most serious scandals in the history of Yugoslavia, in what was already a time of increasing instability, which would end with the violent disintegration of the country. New Collectivism reacted to the Ten-Day War in Slovenia by producing posters and putting them up around Ljubljana with the help of their friends.

Indeed, theirs were the only posters publicly displayed during the war in Slovenia. New Collectivism also collaborated in establishing the NSK State in Time project, designing its passport and other state insignia.

8 NK, Laibach Kunst Posters

Laibach Kunst had been making posters since the early 1980s; when NK was founded in 1984 with Dejan Knez as one of the founding members, the posters came under the remit of NK. Laibach's work typically uses various names and personas, thus some of the posters made for Laibach concerts and tours can be found under the label Neue Kunst Handlung.

Ever since the earliest posters, like *The Black Cross* (1980), Laibach has employed and relied on shock value. The black cross is a performative sign that needs no additional information. Part of the shock connected with Laibach's posters comes from its use of Nazi iconography, which Laibach actually treats as a taboo topic, but one that must be recognised as connected to the totalitarian impulses within the socialist order.

Laibach's posters are predominantly black-and-white and draw on the tradition of the expressionist poster, on Dadaism, Futurism and on the work of German artist John Heartfield, who used photomontage as an effective anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist device in the 1930s. Among Laibach's posters modelled after Heartfield is *Draft for Public Competition on the Centenary of the Death of Karl Marx* (1983), featuring a Laibach figure pinning Marx's beard on Hitler. Laibach drew much of its Nazi-era iconography from the photo magazine *Signal*, published by the German Wehrmacht during World War II in various languages of the occupied and allied countries for propaganda purposes. Another important source was the magazine *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich*.

Some Laibach methods, such as interventions into existing works of art, were close to those of Austrian painter Arnulf Rainer, whose *Death Masks* from the 1970s served as very literal inspiration for the poster with four disfigured faces created for the exhibition at the Prošireni mediji Gallery in Zagreb in 1982.

Alongside the more familiar iconography, Laibach's posters also feature symbols such as locusts, the harbingers of apocalypse, Beuys's cross (in addition to the Laibach cross), Heartfield's axes and paintbrush, cogwheels and wreaths. The typeface taps into similar sources: the crosses and inscriptions on German military aircraft, details of Heartfield's axe, and *Signal* magazine's signature typeface. All these models were transformed by Laibach through photocopying and montage. Sometimes Laibach would also hand-paint individual letters, as in the underlined word Laibach, which became one of the emblems of the group.

Most posters were made for Laibach concerts and tours, but some had no direct connection to such occasions and led an independent existence as it were. Laibach also contributed posters to other NSK groups projects. One of the most important collaborations of this type involved individual NSK groups creating posters for the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre's production of *Baptism under Triglav* (1986). Laibach modelled its poster after an image published in *Signal*, depicting a German priest re-baptising Russian women and children with a fiery hand. Z.B.

9 The Poster Scandal, 1987

At the end of February 1987, various Yugoslavian newspapers published a draft version of a Youth Day poster designed by the studio New Collectivism. It soon became apparent that the federal commission responsible for selecting the best of the poster proposals had, supposedly unwittingly, approved a remake of a propaganda picture from the Third Reich, provoking a veritable storm in both political and artistic circles. The scandal came to be known as “the poster scandal”.

25 May marked the birthday of Josip Broz Tito and the national holiday dedicated to Yugoslavia’s youth. Ever since 1945, the celebration had included a relay race in Tito’s honour, renamed the Youth Relay in 1957, which involved young people in all Yugoslavian cities carrying a baton with their messages to Tito. The Leagues of Socialist Youth of the Yugoslavian republics took turns organising the race, and in 1987, it was the Slovenian League’s turn.

Like every year, the organising committee issued a public call for poster and relay baton design proposals, and New Collectivism submitted their own entry. Their draft proposal was based on a work by a Third Reich German painter, Richard Klein, but included some key substitutions – the Yugoslavian flag had replaced the Nazi one, the dove of peace instead of the Germanic eagle, the conical cupola from Jože Plečnik’s design for the Slovenian Parliament instead of the torch in the figure’s hand, and Slovenia’s Mount Triglav appearing in the background.

As it turned out, New Collectivism’s entry was selected by the committee. Then an article by engineer Nikola Grujević, published in the Sarajevo-based newspaper *Oslobođenje* on 24 February, which noted the similarity between the draft and Klein’s painting, provoked a storm of reactions in the media and complicated the subsequent course of events. Politicians and newspapers from other Yugoslavian republics accused Slovenian political leaders of supporting Slovenian nationalism and separatism and of undermining Yugoslavian unity. The League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia was forced to distance itself from the poster and cancel it. The members of New Collectivism were accused of the crime of insulting the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and a public prosecutor proposed a hearing.

New Collectivism’s reaction to the accusations was to produce a poster with a statement of their artistic position. They were supported by the ŠKUC Gallery, which opened a retrospective exhibition of their posters on 9 March. There followed a series of posters in which the Yugoslavian flag was replaced with flags of other, democratic and parliamentary countries. Had the inflamed passions not subsided the posters would have gone on an international exhibition tour.

However, the storm soon blew over and a year after the scandal broke the Ljubljana Public Prosecutor’s Office dropped the charges, claiming the poster remake was simply an act of artistic expression. A new poster and a new baton were chosen, and the year’s Youth Relay unfolded according to standard practice, with all of the usual ceremonies, but for the very last time. D.O.

10 NK, IRWIN Catalogue Series

As the design section of NSK and for all of the groups under the NSK umbrella, New Collectivism has created promotional and informational material, communication and a great array of other work, on posters, album covers, catalogues, informational objects and NSK merchandise, as well as various events, press conferences, exhibitions and more. In the process they have ensured the particularly harmonised overall image of NSK. They also designed the IRWIN exhibition catalogues for the group's international events over the years 1987–1994. The series of nine catalogues has a highly unified look with unmistakable covers, taking inspiration from the rocks typical of the regions where the exhibitions took place. T.P.P.

11 NK, Theatre Posters

Besides designing for NSK, New Collectivism has worked regularly on projects for external clients, including theatres and opera houses. The theatre posters designed by New Collectivism for the Slovenian National Theatre Drama in Ljubljana, the Croatian National Theatre in Split and the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad echo the methods characteristic of NSK: there are appropriations, montages and recycling of heterogeneous visual elements and styles from various periods of cultural history. Despite drawing largely on art and theatre history, so that they are not explicitly political or provocative, these posters can also be understood as representing a subtle yet biting commentary on the role of (national) theatre in the construction of national identity. An exception to this may have been the poster for *Top Girls* at the Drama Theatre in Ljubljana, which featured an apparently nonsensical (given the subject of the piece), yet witty and clever use of Churchill's portrait (by analogy with the surname of the playwright, Caryl Churchill) – which ultimately proved too much for the theatre's managing board, which refused to release the poster.

New Collectivism also designed all of the posters for the Drama Theatre's 1985 season, starting with the poster for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which became the starting point for the design of the whole series. By repeating elements of the basic motif, which tied together the different productions as their common denominator, New Collectivism gave the theatre and the season a recognisable identity. At the same time, however, the scheme was also subverted and rearticulated slightly with each new poster, as the form and meaning of the basic motif were transformed in keeping with the thematic and other particularities of each individual production.

The posters created for the Croatian National Theatre in Split in 1986 were designed along a similar strategy as those made for the Drama Theatre in Ljubljana. Again there was a series of posters where part of the initial motif was retained, while the other half of the poster varied according to the subject of the production.

The same type of complex interplay between formal and thematic relations between the fragment (each individual production) and the whole (the theatre season) is in evidence in the posters for the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad as well. The basis for the series of posters for individual productions was the opening poster, consisting of eight sections, which announced the theatre

season 1989/1990. In the process of elaborating posters for individual productions, the eight titles and eight interconnected scenes that comprised the initial poster were further developed and new elements added to them to create new visual and thematic wholes. At the end of the season, the posters for individual productions could be brought together again to create another large poster made up of 16 sections. T.P.P.

12 NK, *Mladina* Magazine Covers

The covers created by New Collectivism in the period 1987–1991 for the weekly magazine *Mladina* reacted and referred to current political, social and cultural events. While the 1987 cover, featuring the throne of the Carantanian princes in flames and the title “Laibach Trst Ljubljana Celovec” [Trst and Celovec are Slovenian names for Trieste and Klagenfurt, as the two towns have large Slovenian minorities], alluded to issues of national culture, and the 1991 cover commented on the cultural capital of Europe, the remaining three covers addressed important political events such as Insurrection Day or Youth Day. The 1988 Youth Day cover, featuring Tito hacking at the Nazi flag with a sword, was an ironic reference to the “poster scandal” (1987), while the cover published two years later on the same occasion combined the face of Adolf Hitler and the colours of the Yugoslavian flag. Surprisingly, these magazine covers were not censored. This was partly a manifestation of the then political atmosphere in the republic, which resulted in an overload, such that despite the provocation the covers simply could not generate the sort of stormy response that some earlier NSK creations had produced. In a time of increasingly terse relations between the Yugoslavian republics, the *Mladina* covers commented on the idea of homogeneity and on the suspicion that this common country was falling apart. By playing with a range of eclectic, provocative and contradictory sources, by confronting and combining iconographies, symbols and motifs of totalitarian and socialist regimes, New Collectivism has remained faithful to the retro methods of NSK, which laid bare the ambivalence and paradoxes of national culture and identity as well as the heterogeneity of Yugoslavian unity. T.P.P.

13 NK, War Posters

The war posters were both an immediate reaction to the events during the Slovenian war of independence, and, on a more general level, a commentary on the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and on the increasing economic and political inequalities between the republics in the course of the 1980s, culminating in the proclamation of Slovenian independence. The Yugoslavian People’s Army announced air raids on Ljubljana and carried out a number of attacks across Slovenia. In the first days of the fighting, at the peak of uncertainty, New Collectivism produced and printed “war posters” on their own initiative, putting them up around Ljubljana. The three posters employed the rhetoric of propaganda, symbols, and imagery of opposing political and social regimes to

draw attention to the hidden contradictions and traumatic issues at the heart of the ruling ideology. The posters share the familiar motif of the recruiter pointing his finger at the viewer, but it is associated with recycled motifs and concepts from various political, artistic and historic sources as well as from other NSK groups. The title and slogan of the *Buy Victory* poster, for instance, are taken from an early Laibach poster; the figure bears the typical Laibach headwear and its body is represented as a black cross, which also crops up in the background of the *Bloody Ground – Fertile Soil* poster. The basic source for the latter is the figure from a recruiting poster of the German armed forces, here depicted wearing Mercury's winged helmet, a frequent Laibach motif. The third poster is *I want to fight for a new Europe* [the phrase was written in Serbo-Croatian], on which the image of Kitchener from the original British recruiting poster (1916) was substituted with a deformed image of Nikola Tesla. As noted by Alexei Monroe, the third poster, juxtaposing the chequered pattern from the new Croatian flag (based on the flag of the World War II Ustaša regime) with a visual style referencing propaganda of the 1930s and 1940s together with the ambiguous slogan, suggested that the "new" Europe that was being fought for was in fact none other than the old Europe of wars and violence. The militarist imagery of these posters triggers both ambivalent and disturbing associations, challenging the democratic image cultivated by Slovenia in order to win international sympathy and justify its demand of independence. The war posters testify to New Collectivism's commitment to the radical ambivalence that characterised NSK as a whole even in times of political crises, despite the fact that such conditions and demands generally require taking an unambiguous stance and clearly choosing sides. T.P.P.



Retrovision was the film and video section of the Neue Slowenische Kunst collective, charged with keeping up with the fast-developing media landscape that characterised the 1980s and 1990s. This turned out to be an important venue where the collective could take on not only its own public image, but also the very mode of mass communication of information.

The head of Retrovision was director Peter Vezjak, who directed a number of NSK music videos, advertisements and TV programmes on culture and the international projects of NSK. The idea was to use the medium of television to keep the audience up-to-date on NSK projects. In 1988, Retrovision created a TV spot for the theatre show *Zenit*, performed at the Ljubljana railway station in collaboration with the Mladinsko Theatre, and in 1989, a series of three TV clips featuring the Laibach group. Taken together these were entitled *NSK News* and broadcast on TV Slovenia, closely following the daily news format, but only reporting on news concerning the collective. Later the same year came an hour-long TV film on the Laibach group, documenting the group members' climb to the top of Mount Triglav, where they raised their characteristic symbol, the black cross within a cogwheel.

Retrovision also produced numerous documentary videos on the work and actions of NSK, such as *Video on NSK* (1987), *NSK in Vienna and New York* (1988), and particularly Laibach music videos, like *Sympathy for the Devil* and *Wirtschaft ist tot [Economy is Dead]*; thanks to the growing popularity of the genre, these came to represent a key aspect of the group's work. D.O.

14 Retrovision (Peter Vezjak), *NSK News* 1, 2, 3, TV Ljubljana, 1989 (3 x 20 min.)



NSK from *Kapital* to Capital

Neue Slowenische Kunst – an Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia

11 May – 16 August 2015

Exhibition curator and author of exhibition display concept: Zdenka Badovinac

Assistant curator: Ana Mizerit

Project coordinator: Marko Rusjan

Exhibition programme: Adela Železnik

Exhibition design: Bevk Perović arhitekti

Publication and wall text design: New Collectivism

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NSK from *Kapital* to Capital
Neue Slowenische Kunst – an Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia
Exhibition guide

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