INTERROGATION
MACHINE

LAIBACH
AND NSK

ALEXEI MONROE

Irwin, *NSK Panorama*, showing NSK members and Slovene folk dancers, Ljubljana, 1997.
Photo: Michael Schuster.

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For the friends, family, allies, and supporters who kept faith with me throughout this long process, and even those who came and went in this time. Those who connect(ed) and those who will.

Contents

A short circuit occurs when there is a faulty connection in the network—faulty, of course, from the standpoint of the network's smooth functioning. Is not the shock of short-circuiting, therefore, one of the best metaphors for a critical reading? Is not one of the most effective critical procedures to cross wires that do not usually touch: to take a major classic (text, author, notion), and read it in a short-circuiting way, through the lens of a "minor" author, text, or conceptual apparatus ("minor" should be understood here in Deleuze's sense: not "of lesser quality," but marginalized, disavowed by the hegemonic ideology, or dealing with a "lower," less dignified topic)? If the minor reference is well chosen, such a procedure can lead to insights which completely shatter and undermine our common perceptions. This is what Marx, among others, did with philosophy and religion (short-circuiting philosophical speculation through the lens of political economy, that is to say, economic speculation); this is what Freud and Nietzsche did with morality (short-circuiting the highest ethical notions through the lens of the un-conscious libidinal economy). What such a reading achieves is not a simple "desublimation," a reduction of the higher intellectual content to its lower eco-nomic or libidinal cause; the aim of such an approach is, rather, the inherent de-centering of the interpreted text, which brings to light its "unthought," its disavowed presuppositions and consequences.

And this is what "Short Circuits" wants to do, again and again. The underlying premise of the series is that Lacanian psychoanalysis is a privileged instrument of such an approach, whose purpose is to illuminate a standard text or ideological formation, making it readable in a totally new way—the long history of Lacanian interventions in philosophy, religion, the arts (from the visual arts to the cinema, music, and literature), ideology, and politics justifies this premise. This, then, is not a new series of books on psychoanalysis, but a series of "connections in the Freudian field"—of short Lacanian interventions in art, philosophy, theology, and ideology.

"Short Circuits" intends to revive a practice of reading which confronts a classic text, author, or notion with its own hidden presuppositions, and thus reveals its disavowed truth. The basic criterion for the texts that will be published is that they effectuate such a theoretical short circuit. After reading a book in this series, the reader should not simply have learned something new: the point is, rather, to make him or her aware of another—disturbing—side of something he or she knew all the time.

Slavoj Žižek

FOREWORD: THEY MOVED THE UNDERGROUND

Why did the Slovene post-punk group Laibach have such a traumatic impact in Yugoslavia during the 1980s, the decaying years of Really Existing Socialism? The best way to explain it would be via an unexpected detour through the piano music of Robert Schumann, probably the strongest contrast to Laibach one can imagine.

"Humoresque," Schumann's masterpiece, is to be read against the background of the gradual loss of the voice in his songs: it is not a simple piano piece but a song without the vocal line, with the vocal line reduced to silence, so that all we actually hear is the piano accompaniment. This is how one should read the famous "inner voice" (*innere Stimme*) added by Schumann (in the written score) as a third line between the two piano lines, higher and lower: the vocal melodic line which remains a nonvocalized "inner voice," a kind of musical equivalent to the Heidegger–Derridean "crossed-out" Being. What we actually hear is thus a "variation, but not on a theme," a series of variations without a theme, accompaniment without the main melodic line (which exists only as *Augenmusik*, music for the eyes, in the guise of written notes). This absent melody is to be reconstructed on the basis of the fact that the first and third levels (the right- and left-hand piano lines) do not relate to each other directly, that is to say, their relationship is not one of an immediate mirroring: in order to account for their interconnection, one is thus compelled to (re)construct a third, "virtual" intermediate level (melodic line) which, for structural reasons, cannot be played. Its status is that of an impossible-real which can exist only in the guise of writing; physical presence would annihilate the two melodic lines we hear in reality (as in Freud's "A Child Is Being Beaten," in which the middle fantasy scene was never conscious, and has to be reconstructed as the missing link between the first scene and the last). Schumann brings this procedure of absent melody to an apparently absurd self-reference when, later in the same fragment of "Humoresque," he repeats the same two played melodic lines, yet this time the score contains no third absent melodic line, no inner voice—what is absent here is the absent melody itself, that is, absence itself. How

are we to play these notes when, at the level of what is in fact to be played, they exactly repeat the previous notes? The notes that are played are deprived only of what is not there, of their constitutive lack, or—as the Bible would put it—they lose even that which they never had.

It is this difference between "structuring absence" (of the "inner voice") and pure absence which provides the coordinates of modern subjectivity: this subjectivity hinges on the absent melody, that is to say, the modern subject emerges when its objectal counterpart (in this case, a melody) disappears, but remains present (effective) in its very absence—in short, the subject is correlative to an "impossible" object whose existence is purely "virtual." A true pianist should thus have the savoir faire to play the existing, positive notes in such a way that one would be able to discern the echo of the accompanying unplayed "silent" virtual notes, or their absence . . . and is this not how ideology works? The explicit ideological text (or practice) is sustained by the "unplayed" series of obscene superego rules and injunctions.

In Really Existing Socialism, the explicit ideology of socialist democracy was sustained by a set of implicit (unspoken) obscene injunctions and prohibitions, teaching the subject how not to take some explicit norms seriously, and how to implement a set of publicly unacknowledged prohibitions. One of the strategies of dissidence in the last years of Socialism was therefore precisely to take the ruling ideology more seriously/literally than it took itself, by ignoring its virtual unwritten shadow: "You want us to practice socialist democracy? OK, here you have it!" And when one got back from the Party apparatchiks desperate hints of how this was not the way things functioned, one simply had to ignore these hints. . . . Recall also the attitude toward homosexuality in a soldiers' community, which operates on two clearly distinct levels: explicit homosexuality is brutally attacked; men identified as gays are ostracized, beaten up every night, and so on; however, this explicit homophobia is accompanied by an excessive, implicit web of homosexual innuendos, inside jokes, obscene practices, and so forth. The truly radical intervention into military homophobia should not, therefore, focus primarily on the explicit repression of homosexuality; rather, it should "move the underground," disturb the implicit homosexual practices which sustain the explicit homophobia.

Take Rob Reiner's *A Few Good Men*, a court-martial drama about two US Marines accused of murdering one of their fellow-soldiers; the military prosecutor claims that their act was a deliberate murder, whereas the defense team (Tom Cruise and Demi Moore—how could they fail?) succeeds in proving that the defendants followed the so-called "Code Red," the unwritten rule of a military community which authorizes the clandestine night-time beating of a fellow-soldier who has betrayed the ethical standards of the Marines. Such a code condones an act of transgression, it is "illegal," yet at the same time it reaffirms the cohesion of the group. It has to remain under cover of darkness, unacknowledged, unutterable—in public, everyone pretends to know nothing about it, or even actively denies its exis-

tence (and the climax of the movie is, predictably, an outburst of rage from Jack Nicholson, the officer who ordered the night-time beating: his public explosion is, of course, the moment of his downfall). While it violates the explicit rules of the community, such a code represents the "community spirit" at its purest, exerting the strongest pressure on individuals to enact group identification.

Freud referred to "acheronta movebo," moving the underground, in the exergue to his *Interpretation of Dreams*, and this is what "moving the underground" as a practice of the critique of ideology means: not directly changing the explicit text of the law, but, rather, intervening in its obscene virtual supplement. And this, precisely, was what Laibach were doing throughout the 1980s: instead of submitting the explicit ruling ideology (of Yugoslav self-management Socialism) to rational critique or ironic subversion, their performances directly staged the underlying inconsistent mixture of ideological fantasies that sustained it—and this was what made them so unbearable.

The problem, however, is how to find a similar procedure today: is there, in our cynical "postmodern" ideological universe, still a place for a Laibach-type intervention, or is such an intervention immediately "coopted," neutralized? The standard leftist argument against Laibach was a variation on the famous Groucho Marx statement: "These people talk like Fascists and act like Fascists; but this should not deceive you—they *are* Fascists." In short, things are what they seem: it is not appearance which occludes the hidden essence, it is the specter (semblance) of an essence hidden behind the appearance that occludes the truth of the appearance itself. Does this argument hold? The recent events encapsulated by the name "Abu Ghraib" point in a different direction.

In his reaction to the photos showing Iraqi prisoners tortured and humiliated by US soldiers, made public at the end of April 2004, George Bush, as expected, emphasized how the deeds of these soldiers were isolated crimes which do not reflect what America stands and fights for: the values of democracy, freedom, and personal dignity. If this is true, how, then, are we to account for their main feature, the contrast between the "standard" way prisoners were tortured in Saddam's regime, and the US Army tortures? In Saddam's regime, the emphasis was on direct brutal infliction of pain, while the US soldiers focused on psychological humiliation. Furthermore, *recording* the humiliation with a camera, with the perpetrators *included* in the picture, their faces smiling stupidly alongside the twisted, naked bodies of the prisoners, is an integral part of the process, in stark contrast with the secrecy of Saddam's tortures. When I saw the famous photo of a naked prisoner with a black hood covering his head, electric cables attached to his limbs, standing on a chair in a ridiculous theatrical pose, my first reaction was that this was a shot of the latest performance-art show in Lower Manhattan. The very positions and costumes of the prisoners suggest a theatrical staging, a kind of *tableau vivant*, which cannot but bring to mind the whole scope of American performance art and "theater of cruelty," the photos of Robert Mapplethorpe, the weird scenes

in David Lynch's movies. . . . And it is this feature that brings us to the crux of the matter: to anyone acquainted with the reality of the US way of life, the photos immediately brought to mind the obscene underside of US popular culture—for example, the initiation rituals of torture and humiliation one has to undergo in order to be accepted into a closed community. Do we not see similar photos at regular intervals in the US press, when some scandal explodes in an Army unit or on a high school campus, where an initiation ritual goes too far and soldiers or students get hurt beyond a level considered tolerable, forced to assume a humiliating pose, to perform debasing gestures (like penetrating their anus with a beer bottle in front of their peers), to suffer being pierced by needles . . . ?

Are the Abu Ghraib tortures not, therefore, part of the Code Red rules? Abu Ghraib was not simply a case of American arrogance toward a Third World nation: in being submitted to these humiliating tortures, the Iraqi prisoners were effectively *initiated into American culture*; they got a taste of its obscene underside, which forms the necessary supplement to the public values of personal dignity, democracy, and freedom. No wonder, then, that it is gradually becoming clear how the ritualistic humiliation of Iraqi prisoners was not an isolated incident but part of a widespread practice, including videos of rape and murder.

In a recent debate about the fate of Guantánamo prisoners on NBC, one of the arguments for the ethico-legal acceptability of their status was that "they are those who were missed by the bombs": since they were the target of the US bombing, and accidentally survived it, and since this bombing was part of a legitimate military operation, one cannot condemn their fate in being taken prisoner after the combat—whatever their situation, it is better, less drastic, than being dead. . . . This reasoning tells us more than it intends to say: it puts the prisoners almost literally into the position of living dead, those who are, in a way, already dead (their right to live forfeited by being legitimate targets of murderous bombings), so that they are now cases of what Giorgio Agamben calls *Homo sacer*, the one who can be killed with impunity since, in the eyes of the law, his life no longer counts. (There is a vague similarity between their situation and the—legally problematic—premise of the movie *Double Jeopardy*: if you are imprisoned for killing A and you later, after serving your term and being released, discover that A is still alive, you can now kill him with impunity, since you cannot be tried twice for the same crime. In psychoanalytic terms, this killing would clearly display the temporal structure of masochist perversion: the succession is inverted—you are punished first, and thus gain the right to commit the crime.) If the Guantánamo prisoners are located in the space "between the two deaths," occupying the position of *Homo sacer*, legally dead (deprived of a determinate legal status) while biologically still alive, the US authorities which treat them in this way are also in a kind of in-between legal position which forms the counterpart to *Homo sacer*: when they act in a legal capacity, their acts are no longer covered and constrained by the law—they operate in an empty space that is still within the domain of the law. And the recent disclosures

about Abu Ghraib simply bring home the full consequences of locating prisoners in this place "between the two deaths."

In March 2003, none other than Donald Rumsfeld engaged in a little bit of amateur philosophizing about the relationship between the known and the unknown: "There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know." What he forgot to add was the crucial fourth term: the "unknown knowns," things we don't know that we know—which is precisely the Freudian unconscious—the "knowledge which doesn't know itself," as Lacan used to say. If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq are the "unknown unknowns," the threats from Saddam which we do not even suspect, the Abu Ghraib scandal shows where the main dangers are: in the "unknown knowns," the disavowed beliefs, suppositions, and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, although they form the background of our public values. This is why the assurance from US Army command that no "direct orders" were issued to humiliate and torture the prisoners is ridiculous: of course they were not, since, as everyone who knows army life is aware, this is not how such things are done. There are no formal orders, nothing is written, just unofficial pressure, hints, and directives delivered in private, the way one shares a dirty secret. . . .

So Bush was wrong: what we get when we see the photos of the humiliated Iraqi prisoners on our screens and front pages is precisely a direct insight into "American values," into the very core of the obscene enjoyment that sustains the US way of life. These photos therefore put into an appropriate perspective Samuel Huntington's well-known thesis on the ongoing "clash of civilizations": the clash between the Arab and the American civilization is not a clash between barbarism and respect for human dignity, but a clash between anonymous brutal torture and torture as a media spectacle in which the victims' bodies serve as the anonymous background for the stupidly smiling "innocent American" faces of the torturers themselves. At the same time, we have here a proof of how—to paraphrase Walter Benjamin—*every clash of civilizations is the clash of the underlying barbarisms.*

And it is here that a Laibach-type intervention is needed: again, a direct staging of this obscene supplement, of the spectacle of barbarism that sustains our civilization—-or, in musical terms, one has to play to those in power the unsung melodic line on which they have to rely. Today, the lesson of Laibach is more pertinent than ever: only such a direct confrontation with the obscene fantasmatic core can actually liberate us from its grip.

Slavoj Žižek

The explanation is the whip and you bleed.
  —Laibach

No apologies. This is not a conventional artistic biography, nor is it straightfor-
ward. NSK is a very dense and paradoxical subject, and engaging with it at the
deepest levels means operating at a certain level of complexity. NSK's work is per-
plexing, traumatic, and contradictory. Producing a holistic view of the subject
means not smoothing over or normalizing the tensions it produces. If the text is
not always fully accessible, this is because its subject is not either, and to make it so
would be to introduce dangerous simplifications of a type all too prevalent in the
media and in politics. The subject is certainly diverse, too diverse for many, but un-
like most other contemporary mass culture and art, it is not predicated on notions
of "inclusivity," and neither is this book. To understand the works and their con-
texts, it is important to perceive the oppressive density, coldness, and strangeness
that surround them, and from which they are constructed.
    There are elements of NSK that are as much pop cultural as high cultural, but
this does not mean avoiding sophisticated theories or concepts in the name of anti-
academic populism. Numerous Laibach statements and interview responses are
paraphrases of critical theory, art history, or ideological texts. Therefore the theo-
ries deployed here are either theories "sampled" by or influencing NSK, or theories
(particularly on totalitarianism and ideology) that can open up the mechanisms and
processes within the works. They are also valuable in themselves as ways into read-
ing the issues NSK raises. Theory is used functionally, and always in response to the
subject and its elements (theory and "high culture" being among the most im-
portant). The original thesis on which (some) of this text was based was written
in a very dry, formal style in order to justify what was actually a very experimen-
tal approach that rejected a lot of the standard theoretical approaches, particularly
in relation to popular music. This is a reworked text, but it does retain some of the

formality of the original, and again this is completely appropriate to the subject. Were it to be written now, some of this text might be presented differently, but the material would not change significantly.

The ambivalent, shifting nature of NSK led me to address the subject by theme, using a variety of approaches within the overall framework. Each chapter deals with a particular aspect of NSK, using different theoretical or historical sources as appropriate to each. Feel free to read the book out of sequence, by chapter or even by section, according to your interests. Chapter 1 sets out some metaphorical approaches to NSK, and some key themes. Chapter 2 discusses the contexts of NSK; this entails a summary of Slovene political and cultural history, and a summary of the problems in writing about small "unhistorical" nations. In chapter 3 we move on to the key artistic strategies of NSK, and in chapter 4 to the structure of NSK and its units. Chapter 5 examines NSK's interrogation of national themes and archetypes. Chapter 6 focuses on the controversy caused by Laibach in Slovenia, and its political effects. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with NSK performances (particularly Laibach concerts), and with Laibach's music (in some ways the least discussed aspect of Laibach). "Država" is focused on the NSK State in Time, and the role of the State as an aesthetic material. The final chapter addresses more recent developments in the NSK story.

This text it is not a dissection of its subject, or an attempt to consign it to history (rather than place it as a still active element in the history of its time). It is an intensive analysis of the most significant and powerful aspects of NSK, but gaps, contradictions, and shadows are still left intact. Brutal demystifications of complex artistic phenomena are as much to be avoided as wholly uncritical mystification. It should still be possible to appreciate the work as art that moves, confuses, agitates, or fascinates. I hope that a knowledge of its context and some of its key elements can enhance this, although some readers will not be pleased to discover some of the sources NSK uses, and certain interpretations may subsequently be more difficult to retain. Some of the converted will be discomforted, and some of the unconverted may be either reassured or even more certain that their suspicions are justified.

The point of my research has always been to establish NSK as an extremely significant subject about which it is legitimate to be uneasy or distrustful, but which nonetheless should not be excluded from the history of its time because of a preference for less problematic but infinitely lighter or more simplistic artistic phenomena. Finally, while members of NSK gave me much assistance, this is not an "authorized" version of the NSK story, but a personal attempt to reconstruct NSK's contexts and creative logics. The interrogation machine asks: What is going on beneath the surface of the works; what techniques does NSK use, and with what implications? Why has NSK been important, and how might it continue to be important in the future?

Acknowledgments

For further detailed chronological and historical information on NSK, please consult:
<www.nskstate.com>
<http://www.gla.ac.uk/%7Edc4w/laibach/laibach.html>
<http://www.ljudmila.org/embassy/>

Acronyms and Glossary

The Yugoslav federal system comprised separate parties, central committees, and administrations for each republic. Youth and other organizations also had republican/provincial and municipal/local sections. These bodies were also represented nationally via the federal party and governmental structure based in Belgrade.

Delo	Main Slovene daily newspaper
JNA	Yugoslav National Army
LCS	League of Communists of Slovenia
LCY	League of Communists of Yugoslavia
Mladina	"Youth": originally the magazine of the Slovene Socialist Youth Organization, known as the most radical magazine in Yugoslavia during the 1980s
Nazi-Kunst	Nazi art: generic term used to describe the art of the Third Reich
NK	Novi Kolektivizem (NSK design studio "New Collectivism")
NSK	Neue Slowenische Kunst (New Slovene Art)
NSMs	New social movements: in Slovenia these included feminist, ecological, pacifist, and gay groups
OF	Osvobodilna Fronta (Liberation Front): Slovene Communist-led wartime resistance
Radio Študent (RŠ)	Ljubljana student-run alternative station, established in 1969
SAWPY	Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia, nonparty forum for approved social and other groups with republican and municipal sections (SZDL in Slovene; Ljubljana section known as MK SZDL)
ŠKUC	Študentski Kulturni Center (Student Cultural Center), Ljubljana, established 1978
TSSN	Theater of the Sisters of Scipion Nasice
ZSMS	Zveza Socialistične Mladine Slovenije (Union of Socialist Youth of Slovenia)

Interrogation Machine

CHAPTER 1

PRELUDIUM

MIT TOTALITARISMUS
UND MIT DEMOKRATIE
WIR TANZEN MIT FASCHISMUS
UND ROTER ANARCHIE

—Laibach, *Tanz mit Laibach*

DIVERSION/2001

On the night of September 26, 1980, a poster bearing a strangely provocative sym-
bol appeared on the walls of the Slovene industrial city of Trbovlje. The symbol was
a simple black cross, accompanied only by the word "Laibach." A second more ex-
plicit poster bore a scene of mutilation, an assailant removing the eyes of a victim
with a knife. This, too, bore the word Laibach. The posters were intended to pro-
mote an exhibition and concert by the group bearing this name, and were its first
public act.

"Laibach" was the name by which the Slovene capital Ljubljana was known dur-
ing the Nazi occupation of the city (1943–45) and under the Austrian Habsburg
Empire (the name was first recorded in 1144). Laibach's cross was not a direct ref-
erence to anything else, but had several associations. There are strong parallels with
the suprematist motifs of Kazimir Malevich. Similar crosses were often used by the
German conceptualist Joseph Beuys, the source of several Laibach/NSK concepts
and motifs. The poster also recalls the black cross markings on Second World War
German military vehicles and aircraft. The problematic associations of the name
and the ambiguous symbol (and the atrocity shown on the second poster) ensured
that the posters were removed almost instantly, and the event was banned. Since
this first public action, Laibach's effects have proliferated, and the repercussions of
the first symbolic action continue to reverberate across Europe, North America,
and beyond. Laibach was established to explore the relationship between art and
ideology across several media (including the media of "nation" and "state"). The
group has accumulated a vast body of work and a still-spreading web of rumor,
myth, accusation, and confusion. The problems this creates are obvious. In the face

1.2 Laibach Trbovlje exhibition poster, 1980.

of a dense and paradoxical mass of material with a proliferating set of implications, there is a constant danger of becoming lost in the "noise" of the group's history.

Numerous writers and theorists have addressed Laibach in their work. Those approaching the subject can choose from the work of Slavoj Žižek, Tomaž Mastnak, and other Slovene and Yugoslav authors more directly associated with NSK, plus a host of other journalists and commentators. Yet even the best of their analyses are episodic and fragmentary, and prefer to address the "grand themes" Laibach and NSK raise (art and totalitarianism, national identity in the contemporary context, the collapse of Yugoslavia, etc.), often without going into the paradoxical and dense mass of work that has provoked such responses. This book begins from and will always return to the prima materia of the works that are the raison d'être for this project.

Laibach texts themselves "sample" a host of theorists including Tito's ideologist Edvard Kardelj, Theodor Adorno, and Jacques Attali. If we also factor in the artists, politicians, and musicians whose work Laibach appropriate, the situation

proliferates: rather than a shortage of possible frameworks or approaches to choose from, there is an *excess*. Looping back to the Trbovlje action, the field is more manageable. All that feature at this stage are a name and a symbol, yet both activate a series of associations and discourses that are difficult to contain once set in motion. Even though we are dealing now only with these two elements, there are several frameworks within which to respond to this historical *yet still active* provocation: art-historical (Beuys), Slovene national history (Laibach), the power of the symbol/image, the impact of the poster. Equally, the work of any of the authors listed above or later in this analysis might open up useful approaches, but before exploring these, it is first necessary to close them down.

The approach that suggests itself is, rather, a retroactive one: to use the work of two of the lesser-known commentators on Laibach as a departure point for this interrogation. The first is Arthur C. Clarke. Of course, Clarke never wrote "about" Laibach. At the time when 2001 was written, even the most prescient observers of Yugoslavia would have found it hard to imagine the appearance of such a phenomenon. Neither did Clarke somehow "foresee" Laibach.[1] What his most famous novel does more effectively than any of the classic art-historical or semiotic approaches is to provide a conceptual-metaphorical parallel that can recast the appearance of the mute threatening symbol on the walls of Trbovlje in 1980.

Arguably, the chief protagonist in 2001 is neither the astronaut Dave Bowman nor the schizoid machine HAL, but the black monolith that reappears at crucial moments in human history (continuing to 3001 in sequels). The object absorbs light and is static, yet carries an active energy that disrupts and reshapes the consciousness of those who come into contact with it. It is a *communicative symbol*, abstract but active. Under its mute guidance, humanity discovers weaponry and technology, and uses them to establish order and power. When a second monolith is unearthed on the moon at the end of the twentieth century, it arouses intense curiosity and suspicion. It cannot be broken down or measured, and activates only when the sun's rays reach it for the first time, sending a message to the controlling intelligences in search of which the vessel *Discovery* is then sent.

Here, then, is a first crossover between Clarke's vision and the cross. The cross, as a mute but active symbol, is like the monolith in the way it *resists interrogation while itself interrogating*. In both cases people are confronted by manifested abstraction, and in both cases the symbol/object generates a proliferation of theory, speculation, and response. Just as the events of the four novels can be traced from and are generated by the advent of the monolith, so all the reactions and interventions associated with Laibach and NSK can be traced from the advent of the black cross. The "narrative" of this book and the course of Laibach's work can be framed around the cross as the constant symbol of Laibach's presence. Where and why has it appeared? When has it appeared, and how has it been received? What significances and effects has it generated? Just as in Clarke's cosmology every event and system seems to relate back to the monolith, everything in Laibach relates back to the

cross, and in different times and in different ways, Laibach relates to everything—art, politics, love, war, myth, religion, and beyond.

The cross had specifically disturbing visual-historical associations that rendered it provocative. Yet it was *simultaneously* abstract, and there is a sense in which, both in the very local context of Trbovlje and at a wider cultural level, abstraction as such can be experienced as traumatic, often provoking inarticulate hostility. Within the context of self-management Yugoslavia, four months after the death of Tito, abstraction was itself slightly suspect. The ostensibly progressive system of self-management and the federalization of the country into republics were legitimated by Edvard Kardelj as exercises in devolution and empowerment. In practice, however, the system generated hyperbureaucratization and hyperpoliticization, spreading ideology as pervasively as and even more insidiously than in the classic Stalinist model. Besides the interrepublican conflicts and rivalries which the system both generated and attempted to manage, Žižek[2] depicts a situation in which differing philosophical schools and traditions were in competition, within and between the Yugoslav republics. The implications of this will become more apparent later, but it is important to state that Laibach, as a group set up to explore the relationship between art and ideology, operated within a system of institutionalized ideological cacophony. Under conditions of hyperpoliticization abstraction is problematic because it suggests (the possibility of, or the potential for) apoliticality, artistic escapism, and *an alternative* beyond the reach of the system. The poster action, then, was unacceptable both in its abstraction and in its specificity (the evocation of painful wartime memories). If we strip away even the name and the atrocity depicted in the second poster, all that remains is the monolithic brooding presence of the cross. Yet this is sufficient to symbolize and stand for the entire range of Laibach's interventions. When the cross was subsequently encircled by an industrial cogwheel, it became starker and more threatening, acquiring even greater symbolic/disruptive power.

PROLIFERATION

Now that the Laibach-monolith motif is active, the second set of unknown, retroactive commentators on Laibach can be faded in. Not the Nietzsche that many will expect,[3] nor yet Žižek, Attali, or Adorno. The "authorial assemblage" that can best amplify the monolithic model is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Those who are familiar with both Laibach and Deleuzo-Guattarian thought may be surprised by this. The advocates of "schizoanalysis" and postlinear texts seem far removed from the monolithic core of Laibach. The answer lies in a return (or an advance) to one of their lesser-known works, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.[4] Their "interpretation" of Laibach is a retroactive extrapolation of their work on Kafka. I encountered this work at a stage when my research was almost complete, and I had a stable view of the subject. Subsequently, a series of parallels between the Deleuzo-

Guattarian analysis of Kafka and my own approach to Laibach emerged. The intention is to "sample" their work in order to amplify the conceptual structure here, but this will not in any sense be an "orthodox" application of their ideas. Rather, it will deploy and extend their descriptive-conceptual concepts where these can help to illuminate the subject.[5] While Kafka is primarily a "literary" subject, Deleuze and Guattari themselves switch constantly between forms such as "philosophy," "music," and "literature," both in *Kafka* and in their other works, cross-fading between them and using them to illuminate each other. In their own terms, a study of Kafka that was "purely" or even primarily "literary" (or even psychoanalytic) would serve little purpose. The freedom with which they move between disciplines in order to construct their own "machine of expression" has its parallels both in NSK works and in this response to them.

Laibach's methodology is based upon the amplification or "rendering audible" of the hidden codes and internal contradictions of a series of artistic, musical, political, linguistic, and historical "regimes." In 1977, Deleuze described the approach he pursued with Guattari as being "nothing more than a study of regimes, of their differences and their transformations."[6] The pair approach Kafka direct, moving almost instantly into detailed analysis of micro-effects within his work to begin to illuminate the whole. They draw attention to a series of "hidden contiguities" that Kafka brings to light between apparently or formally contradictory and disconnected elements that reveal themselves to be connected. Deleuze and Guattari[7] show how Kafka illuminates a series of hidden connections between, for instance, the familial and the bureaucratic, or the judicial and the erotic. They argue that such connections are what gives Kafka's "micropolitical" analysis its power; a similar pattern unfolds and proliferates throughout the work of Laibach and NSK.

Laibach interrogate regimes by rendering audible/visible a series of connections that "common-sense" ideology has to keep concealed in order to maintain the ideological self-reproduction of "the system." For instance, connections between rock and Fascistic mobilization, or between scientific industrialism and mystical nationalism, become apparent, destabilizing the "given" order of things. Laibach's work is both overt and covert, containing layers and periods of effects (some possibly only retrospectively activated *now* through this writing). This is what Deleuze and Guattari would term unlimited schizophrenic proliferation, a process with a momentum of its own that affects more and more sectors. Partly intuitive, partly spontaneous, not always fully rationalized, its momentum continues so long as conditions are sufficiently contradictory to generate its compulsive response.

Deleuze and Guattari describe their best-known work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, as a "toolbox" from which people should select as necessary, and their work on Kafka appears here in the same spirit. Concepts and metaphors such as "minor literature," "de- and re-territorialization," "machines," "assemblages," and others can

all amplify the subject when they are applied to and mixed into Laibach and NSK's own terminologies. The music, videos, paintings, texts, installations, architectural designs, posters, and other NSK works under interrogation here—and, above all, Laibach—are structurally paradoxical and ambivalent entities. The works can be simultaneously traumatic, tautological, disorienting, ambivalent, and seductive. Deleuze and Guattari's descriptive paradigms are fluid and plural enough to accept and to utilize contradiction, discrepancy, and nonlinearity. This flexibility derives from the fact that, as is pointed out in the "Translator's Introduction" to *Kafka*,[8] they do not treat their own terms as fixed, but make them "tremble" and "stutter," playing with their mutability and inconsistencies (this linguistic manipulation has parallels with NSK's use of its own specific terminologies).

Although Laibach have never referred to, "sampled," or cooperated with Deleuze and Guattari, these factors make their work as relevant to NSK processes as the work of (for instance) Žižek or Attali. In their work on Kafka and elsewhere, they constantly refer to proliferating effects that can radiate out from a text, an image, or a piece of music, and never claim that their interpretations are static or finished. Obviously, the self-consciously "unfinished" status of much postmodern art has little surface relevance to NSK, whose works are often necessarily monumental, and have a defined aesthetic of closure and fixedness. In fact, even the NSK Embassy/Consulate events of the 1990s are less "fixed" than they seem, and the NSK State in Time contains an active element of flux and transitory motion. What is important to stress at this stage is that the works continue, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, to "proliferate" in their effects and significances; for that reason, this survey is not an attempt to "fix" NSK but to explore its proliferations, and also to facilitate future interpretations.

If we loop back to the Laibach-monolith paradigm, the relevance of this approach should become clearer. Deleuze and Guattari's diagnosis and manipulation of plurality, flux, and ambiguity in seemingly the most "static" elements enables a descriptive "proliferation" of the monolith. They characterize Kafka's work as a "machine of expression," and Kafka himself as a "machine-man,"[9] but they are keen not to invoke the "negative" associations of the machine or the mechanical. Laibach's mode of self-presentation was initially strict, collectivist, and relentless:

> Laibach is an organism, composed of individuals as its organs. And these organs are subordinated to the whole, which signifies a synthesis of all the forces and ambitions of the members of the whole. The aims, life, and means of activity of the group are higher—in strength and duration—than the aims, life, and means of the individuals which compose it.[10]

It is on this basis that Laibach can be characterized as an (interrogation) machine, and as monolithic. Yet Deleuze and Guattari stress that "*The line of escape is part of the machine*" (emphasis added). This implies that no matter how discrete, fixed, or closed a regime/system/machine appears to be, it always contains within its

coding possibilities of escape, supersession, obsolescence, disintegration, or mu-
tation. As Žižek might put it, there is always an excessive element that can often
frustrate or incapacitate a system if it is revealed.[11] This can manifest itself as con-
tradiction, inconsistency, paradox, or even excessive self-identification of the sys-
tem. These shifting elements are the ones manipulated by both Kafka and NSK, and
both "machines of expression" themselves exemplify them.

Laibach, then, can—must—be seen as monolithic or machinic, yet this does not
imply "singular," "static," or "rigid." Totalitarianism itself is not a single mono-
lithic entity but a series of reactions and abreactions; a proliferating and mutating
process that is as much internal as external, and structured by the antagonisms and
contradictions that surface in NSK's interventions. In using the cross as the symbol
of the monolith, and tracing its proliferating and mutating presence across media
and across territories, in exhibitions, concert halls, posters, and elsewhere, it
becomes apparent that Laibach and NSK function as a plural monolith (and an em-
bodiment of paradox). Here a final parallel with Clarke's work arises. In the un-
folding of his saga beyond 2001 (2010, 2061, 3001), the monolith proliferates and
spreads.

THE INTERROGATION MACHINE

Laibach, then, is a "plural monolith," and the proliferation of the cross as its sym-
bol in the work of the other NSK groups[12] demonstrates a type of "monumental
flux." There is an underlying unity in the processes that are active in NSK, which
becomes apparent in detailed interaction with the works. However, this unity,
which NSK has codified as "Immanent Consistent Spirit," pulls attention back to
the paradoxes of these processes.

Flux (and motion) are maintained by NSK's refusal of definitive identification
or alignment with any external movement, trend, or position. One of the key en-
ergies from which the works draw their dynamism is a "law of contradiction" or
dissonance. Malevich conceptualized a strategy of contradiction that could pro-
duce "a dissonance of maximum force and tension."[13] This dissonant energy, pro-
duced by confrontation between (among others) socialist realism and Nazi-Kunst,
is what gives Laibach's work its force and momentum—yet, as Erika Gottlieb[14]
points out, this "law of contradiction" is as typical of totalitarian ideology as of the
artistic avant-garde.

Irwin's 1989 print from the series Red Districts Sower[15] is a strong illustration of
NSK's law of contradiction. A primitive sower figure strides purposefully for-
ward—not through fields, but through a stylized depiction of the heavy industry
of Trbovlje. This sets up an immediate visual contradiction between industrialism
and pastoralism, provoking the popular view that equates industry with the
negative and pastoralism with the positive. Yet this is only the first level of discrep-
ancy. NSK works do not always identify explicitly the sources of the works they

"retroquote," and some of the active layers in a work depend specifically upon the sources of the motifs used.

In this case, the red-washed woodcut images of Trbovlje were originally produced in the 1950s by Janez Knez, father of Laibach's Dejan Knez. They first reappeared on the 1985 Laibach album *Rekapitulacija* (Recapitulation), which also included black-and-white photos of the area. Irwin's 1989 version is itself a proliferation of their 1985 *Red Districts* series, in which Knez's images were reversed, set in heavy frames, and overlaid by coal and blood. The bloodstains have the paradoxical effect of making the industry depicted seem calm and peaceful, but also of visual romanticization and archaicization (making archaic). The lack of activity and the age of the buildings cast them as symbols of a past revolutionary-industrial future (in postwar Yugoslavia, Trbovlje played an explicit ideological role as symbol of industrial progress).

The figure, by contrast, seems to invoke benign associations of an idealized past, but seems ungainly and misplaced, a mystical symbol confronting becalmed icons of socialist progress. The deliberately unresolved and proliferating tensions of this collision create a forcefield of conflicting dissonances, each mutating and restructuring the other (a process NSK also refer to as "retro-engineering"). Even if we attempt to limit the implications of the image, multiple possible questions and approaches suggest themselves here. Is the sower striding into the future or the past? If industry is the past historical force here, is fundamentalist antitechnological pastoralism somehow symbolic of the present or the future? What precisely is the equation being made between the two systems and their icons?

The image and all its counterparts throughout the NSK project bring into visibility what Deleuze and Guattari term "hidden contiguities." In *Kafka* they discuss the way in which the author's writings contain moments when "two diametrically opposed points bizarrely reveal themselves to be in contact."[16] NSK's work is composed primarily of such moments, which affect a far wider range of regimes and practices than Nazi-Kunst and socialist realism. This correspondence between Kafka and NSK could be formulated as a shift from Kafka's "machine of expression" to Laibach and NSK's collective function as an "interrogation machine."

NSK works function precisely by manipulating paradox, and neither assimilating nor resolving their contradictory sources. NSK's own texts intensify this effect, raising questions even as they seem to answer them. The cumulative effect is a machine of expression that interrogates the onlooker as well as the sources of the works, placing on them the responsibility to process the contradictions generated. NSK interrogates their sources and their interrelations simultaneously, raising questions of censorship, artistic value, the nature of national identity, historical memory, past and future realities. The interrogation machine (an intensification of the plural monolith) mutates and proliferates to bring everything into its scope.

None of these processes is "one-way"; reactions set off counterreactions and similarly, while the book interrogates the material, the material interrogates the

1.3 Irwin, *Red Districts Sower*, 1989.

book. Going further, it can be argued that Laibach's stage performances in particular, and the NSK "project" as a whole, represent *"an interrogation of interrogation"*—in other words, of all hegemonic political and intellectual power mechanisms as such.[17] Yet, as Irwin's *Sower* illustrates, the project and its modes of operation are not easily contained or defined. Within an NSK action, boundaries between conceptual interrogation and aesthetic (re)production are in a state of constant flux, and the works never remain at the level of a "pure" formal deconstruction but always retain the paradoxical, uncanny qualities that create fascination both with the original sources and with their remanifestations in NSK works. All the diverse interventions simultaneously add to the mystique of the groups, and contribute to the overall *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In effect, these processes represent a type of mystifying demystification executed via a type of (re)constructive deconstruction. This is apparent in Laibach's comment on the German group Einstürzende Neubauten: "The Neubauten are destroying new buildings and we are restoring the old ones. At this point we are replenishing each other."[18]

An image such as Irwin's *Sower* (one of the most frequent NSK motifs) mystifies in the sense both of increasing mystique and of creating mystery through problematic juxtapositions, activating the interrogation of the sources and the viewer. An associated pattern that can be detected throughout NSK is the restoration of mystique to qualities and systems that have either been stripped of it, or deliberately conceal their irrational roots. In the first category lie a series of absolute and

traditional forms and archetypes, which have been denuded of their mystery under both socialism and capitalism. Supposedly archaic and outmoded categories such as God, nation, religion, hunting, and others guaranteed to arouse distrust and discomfort (but also fascination) within contemporary consciousness reemerge in the works, challenging narratives of modernity and progress. Under the regime of the market, those forms that are not saleable are destroyed or stripped of their power through commercialization and dilution. The performance of absolutism in Laibach and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy directly confronts these trends, *yet is very much of its time.*

> The de-mythologization of traditional mythical values is caused by ideological and technological interests of the *"technological universe"*; this process is a direct and indirect expression of a wider planetary *"civilizing"* process aimed at improving and increasing production and consumption of hubris. The destructive force of de-mythologization is aided by the process of secularization, degradation of mythical contents and by replacement of these contents with models of the *"consumer society,"* which in turn constitutes the category of *"consumer mythology."* The artificial and programmed currents of *"purification"* of these mythical contents represent the greater part of this process. The system of oppression undertakes the purification of memory in order to drive the *"dangerous institutions"* out of it. Our tendency towards re-mythologization means that we have realized the significance of the contents of tradition and of traditional values of innovation. (Laibach)[19]

It must always be remembered, though, that these absolutes coexist in dissonance with contemporary elements—samples from dance music or pop art, for instance. The process is effectively a *holistic representational strategy* that amplifies rather than represses contrasting and inconvenient elements. NSK restores repressed elements not as a retrograde neo-archaism but as part of what it terms a *"retrogarde"* strategy that interrogates contemporary stylistic and political regimes through a return to styles and moments relegated to obscurity by political correctness or changing fashion, both of which are often actively suspicious of archetypes per se.

The NSK strategy is particularly oriented toward rendering visible/audible/perceptible what Žižek[20] terms the "hidden underside" of systems and regimes. These are irrational or disturbing qualities that contradict the public face of a system and, if brought to the surface, impede its functioning and perpetuation. The self-management system in Yugoslavia sought to associate itself with modern progressive values of local involvement, technocratic improvement, and humane socialism. By manipulating the language of Tito, Kardelj, and official discourse, and appearing openly to advocate totalitarianism and de-individualization, Laibach were anticipating the publicly repressed but still strong totalitarian and irrational impulses present within the system. Similarly, the interventions in the field of pop culture, particularly the reworkings of songs by Queen, the Rolling Stones, and others, were attempts to highlight the unacknowledged links between rock as a mass entertainment form and Fascistic mobilization. By restoring these repressed

qualities, Laibach create a type of *parasitic attachment* that interrogates both the system and the hidden absolutes that consciously or unconsciously structure it, setting into motion their contradictions and, as Žižek argues, "suspending their efficiency."

These interventions are sometimes necessarily brutal or bombastic, but this does not preclude an equally extreme or intense conceptual subtlety. Indeed, without an underlying subtlety and acuteness, many actions might have remained at the level of provocation for provocation's sake. As well as the brutality, an element of (re)mystification is essential to the levels of (de)mystification active in NSK works. Inevitably these paradoxes will affect this book, but rather than repress this possibility, the strategy of choice is an approach grounded in direct readings of and extrapolation from the works themselves. A text that attempted pure/formalistic objectivity would be likely to produce unconscious biases and contradictions, and could still be recuperable as propaganda. Equally, an attempt to produce a more propagandist work would entail its own contradictions. There is a framework that is active here, but it should be loose enough to allow for a variety of tactics to be employed in interaction with the subject. The appropriation of Clarke and Kafka illustrates and is an analogue of NSK's own appropriations. It is intended to show both the tactics that will feature here and the still-proliferating and potentially limitless number of approaches that the subject can provoke and generate. The "outcome" will emerge from a series of engagements, and as detailed an interrogation as is possible. It is its own objective.

BACK TO THE FUTURE (PREDICTION)

Dina Iordanova[21] has analyzed the way in which Western and local expectations of "Balkan" tendencies (manifest in clichés such as "cycles of violence" or "age-old hatreds") become self-fulfilling prophecies, and the past is reinterpreted exclusively in the light of the present. It is tempting but oversimplistic to talk about literal "prophecies"—members of NSK manifested tendencies or symptoms in their works, but did not predict the specific forms in which these would emerge. Some of the NSK works that will be discussed here can be seen as having picked up (or constituted) the first signals of future events (to which they can certainly be linked), but perhaps it is oversimplistic to assign them the status of actual prophecies—many NSK works have "turned out to be" prophetic, but others have not.

Again, the Deleuzo-Guattarian analysis of Kafka can be helpful here. Deleuze and Guattari claimed that Kafka's "machine of expression" was prophetic: "Capitalist America, bureaucratic Russia, Nazi Germany—in fact, all the diabolical powers of the future—are knocking at the door of Kafka's moment with segmental and continuous blows."[22]

In other words, Kafka's interrogations of the bureaucratic process were already symptomatic of future developments. I would argue that it is more precise to claim

that the works diagnose nascent tendencies, implying or sketching the worst-case scenarios: "Kafka opens up a field of immanence that will function as a dismantling, an analysis, a prognostics of social forces and currents, of the forces that in his epoch are only beginning to knock at the door."[23]

A similar set of analytic-predictive mechanisms are active in the NSK project. In particular there is a repeatedly observable "delayed-action" effect whereby references that seemed obscure or out of place when they first emerged have retroactively been clarified by subsequent events. To take a small example: the lyrics of Laibach's *God Is God* (1996) assumed an uncanny new meaning after September 11, 2001: "You shall see hell clear in the sky, You shall see darkness, You shall see good and evil, You shall see city walls crumble and towers fall."

A strange combination of poetic intuition and systematic political and cultural diagnosis repeatedly brings these new effects to light, and many of the works later provoke moments of rediscovery. The identification of a previously unknown source or a sudden new event returns the observer to the source text, which is cast in a new light. The meanings and significances of individual NSK works and the project as a whole continue to proliferate, and Laibach's work in particular continues to transmit, even over a space of several years.

In fact, this uncanny quality is located precisely in the type of analysis of their times carried out by the groups. The depth and force of the works derives from the fact that they interrogate not just specific cultural and political agencies and forces, but the intangible traces and shadows of events and trends. The "magical dimension" of the industrial process mentioned by Laibach in 1982 in the "Ten Items of the Covenant"[24] referred also to the "magical" dimensions of politics and culture, to the same obscene and excessive ideological elements that recur in the analyses of Žižek. So, rather than attributing uncanny predictive powers to NSK, it is more precise to say that NSK works turn out to be predictive because they are able to detect and amplify the predictive power of the uncanny in the present.

Unlike Deleuze and Guattari's Kafka, who detected the "diabolical powers of the future," NSK works do not feature only the imminent presence of the future. The pervasive "retro" trope in the NSK project symbolizes the extent to which it "predicts" the past *as the future*. The projections in the works feature the uncanny return of nightmarish archaic elements which, according to dominant cultural and political narratives, belong to the past, but which NSK demonstrate (if not at the time, then subsequently) already symbolize the future, and are (potentially) predictive rather than "archaic." The implications of the analysis produce a manipulation of the diabolical powers of the past. Retrogardism is concerned with the future of the past as well as the more obviously "retro" past of the future.[25] In the 1992 Laibach documentary *Bravo*,[26] Žižek argues that the war-torn contemporary Balkans do not represent Europe's past but its future, and it generally turns out to be the "past" or "archaic" elements in NSK's work that turn out to (have been) the most acutely predictive.

The Deleuzo-Guattarian discussion at the start of this chapter was intended not just to illustrate the "plural monolith" concept but also to show the plurality of possible approaches to a phenomenon as complex and multidimensional as NSK. It would be possible, and at least partially productive, to base the entire analysis on a Deleuzo-Guattarian framework, although the academic fashionability of their concepts is as much a disincentive as an incentive, and a systematic application of this approach would close as many avenues as it opened. Instead, their concepts are used as grains or "samples" deployed when relevant, faded out when not. The same principle guides the use of other theories here. Some, such as those of Žižek or Attali, have obvious and repeated relevance to the subjects discussed, but none of this should become dominant. A free-floating entity with an autonomous logic is for many (friends as well as enemies) disturbing as such, but seems most appropriate to the nature of the subject. Žižek's emphasis on the traumatic non-categorizability of NSK provides a theoretical basis for presenting NSK as a *category-in-itself*. This does not mean shying away from the elements that provoke NSK's critics but emphasizing its radical ambiguity, locating any positive effects within this rather than trying to flatten out the terrain for a seamless narrative purged of tension or contradiction. Yet this will no more be a "Žižekian" analysis than a postmodern or historical one, nor will it adopt any label or align itself to any school. It will engage with various disciplines and authors as necessary. This plural and nonaligned approach is the only way to represent NSK's monolithic plurality.

CHAPTER 2

Bloody Ground, Fertile Soil (NSK Contexts)

NSK works are intimately connected to Slovene history, and also to Yugoslav and European history, deriving their power from highly specific historical references. Understanding this history is essential to a thorough analysis of NSK. The *Bloody Ground, Fertile Soil* alluded to in the early Laibach song[1] is, in effect, the Slovene historical experience. Situating NSK references and symbolisms in this context explains much that otherwise appears arbitrary, perverse, or obscure, illuminating certain recurrent historical themes within the NSK project. These include Slovene authoritarianism, the emphasis on nation-building through cultural activity, and the plural nature of "the nation" itself. NSK's work can be read as a type of *spectral history* of the repressed paradoxes and wounds structuring Slovene culture and identity. Such a history is based on the gaps and breaks, the nightmarish, problematic, and unassimilable elements at the core of national identity: all those elements which nationalist historiographies seek to repress or to silence.

SLOVENIA

According to the authors of the first comprehensive English-language account of Slovenia,[2] the survival of the Slovenes as a distinct group with their own state is a "miracle." The decade-old Republic of Slovenia has a population of just under two million, inhabiting a strategic intersection between the Adriatic, the Alps, and the Pannonian plain. Slovene-inhabited territory once stretched deep into present-day Austria and Italy; assimilation and colonization have pushed Slovene minorities back to border regions. The Slovenes have had to face both the strategic attractiveness (and vulnerability) of life on a north-south, east-west crossroads, and the fact that all the larger adjacent nations have made claims not just on the territory but on the Slovenes themselves.

These pressures have created a *structural paradox* within Slovene identity, which Laibach have consistently manipulated. Laibach's simultaneous deployment and embodiment of apparently incompatible Slav and Germanic archetypes has generated much confusion. Since the Slovenes are generally seen as the most heavily Germanized and Westernized of the Slavs, the emergence of the Slavic elements was particularly striking. At a time when much thought in Slovenia was concerned with distancing the country from other Slav cultures, NSK produced a spectacle which—even if it was not overtly "Slavophile" in the aggressively politicized Russian sense—still celebrated the Slav aspects of Slovene identity and culture. NSK expressed and manipulated the key structural contradiction of Slovene identity: between the Germanic and South (Yugo) Slavic cultural spaces and identities.

The spectacular tensions this clash has created have manifested themselves repeatedly in Slovene history and culture, but awareness of them should not overshadow the other influences on Slovene territorial and conceptual space. On the Adriatic coastline the towns were largely Italophone, with the surrounding countryside inhabited by the Slovene and Croatian peasantry. On the southern borders

there is a significant linguistic overlap with the "Kajkavian" dialects of Croatian. The folklore and dialects of the Prekmurje region on the Hungarian border are particularly distinctive, and illustrate another influence on Slovene culture. Contemporary writers on national identity, such as Benedict Anderson, constantly stress the constructed and nonhomogeneous nature of national identity, and these arguments are particularly applicable to Slovenia.

"Slovene identity," then, is a markedly *plural* category of diverse elements bound by an underlying linguistic similarity.[3] To some extent, "being Slovene" is a default or negative category, a label referring to those who were obviously *not* Italian, Austrian, Hungarian, or Croatian, or those who refused these identities. Each of the bordering cultures has either attempted violent or institutional assimilation of the Slovenes within its borders, or claimed that the Slovenes are actually a lost variant of the national norm. In the nineteenth century, for instance, Croatian writers arguing for linguistic assimilation claimed that the Slovenes were actually "Alpine Croats." Pan-German nationalists and advocates of full assimilation of the Slovenes into the Germanic sphere refer to the Slovenes as "Windisch." While this label is often used as an insult, it also forms the basis of a theory that the "Windisch" are effectively a "lost" Germanic tribe who have come under Slavic cultural influence but can be restored to a "true" Germanic identity.[4]

Many of these assimilationist drives are basically motivated by the need to justify geopolitical ambitions and the strategic desirability of Slovene territory, and they all tend to claim that self-declared Slovenes within their borders are indulging in some perverse kind of identity fantasy, or have been corrupted into misidentification. Yet whatever the motivations, the repeated attempts not simply to erase the Slovenes but to "claim" them, as well as their territory, are striking. Given these pressures, it is clear that the survival of a distinct Slovene culture and identity can indeed be described as a "miracle." Economic, military, and cultural pressure all drove Slovene self-assimilation into Austrian and Italian culture, yet a core of the population stubbornly persisted in its sense of distinctness long enough for processes of cultural renewal and construction to commence in the nineteenth century.

Laibach's assertive "Slovenism" was inextricably linked to its performance of "Germanism" or "Germania" (German(ic) mania), and this represented a major symbolic reversal of the assimilation of Slovene culture into the Germanic sphere. Arguably, Laibach's performance and popularity in Germany represented the completion of a process of autonomous Slovene cultural development, the first time a distinct Slovene identity successfully asserted itself in the global cultural market. With NSK, Slovene culture began (to use Althusser's term) interpellating (hailing) the surrounding cultures, rather than vice versa.

Another key paradox of Slovene cultural identity is that this culture was constructed within the framework of larger state structures: Habsburg, Italian, and Yugoslav. Only with the establishment of the second Yugoslavia after World War II, and the subsequent federalization of the country into largely self-governing re-

2.1 Laibach, *Svobodna Jugoslavija* (Free Yugoslavia), 1984.

publics, could Slovene culture, for the first time, develop free from both external and internal threats from the surrounding assimilationist powers. Gow and Carmichael even claim: "Both ideologically and practically, Communist Yugoslavia was a greenhouse for Slovenia and the Slovenes."[5]

Unlike the Slovene nationalists of the late 1980s, who argued that membership of the Yugoslav federation was inimical to national interests and culture, Laibach has also drawn attention to the role of the Yugoslav structure in Slovene cultural development:

> Safely in the lap of Yugoslavia, we were able to consider the key issues of our common metaphysics unburdened and with certain (self-) critical historical distance. The favorable liberal-communist climate and innate discipline made it possible for the Slovenians—in spite of the socio-economic blockades of the socialist self-management system—to reach enviable spiritual and satisfactory material prosperity with regard to other European nations.[6]

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

"Slovenes" arrived on their present territory in the sixth century as part of a westward wave of Slav migration. The Slovene capital, Ljubljana, was founded by the Romans, and known by them as Emona. The identity of the pre-Slav inhabitants of the area is obscure, but according to some theories elements of the Slovene population are descended from the pre-Roman Etruscan civilization. Before the German conquests of the ninth century, the pagan Slovenes had an independent kingdom known as Karantanija, centered on the Austrian province of Carinthia, still home to a large Slovene minority.

During the ninth century the Bavarian church initiated a systematic, militarized program of colonization and Christianization. The NSK 1986 production *Krst pod Triglavom* (Baptism under Triglav)[7] focuses on the final defeat of the pagan Slovenes by the Christian Germans, which marked a crucial moment in national history. From this moment, the majority of Slovenes were drawn into the Catholic Germanic sphere. During the subsequent millennium of Austrian rule (which ended only in 1918), Slovene culture and identity grew increasingly distinct from those of the other South Slavs in Croatia, Serbia, and beyond, and was drawn into the Central and Western European *Kulturraum* (cultural space).

Apart from a series of peasant rebellions in the sixteenth century, and Turkish raids, Slovene history after the conversions was more or less stable until the Reformation. German became the language of commerce and education, and the peasantry became the principal bearers of cultural identity. By the time of the Reformation, the Slovene ethnic base was beginning to stabilize after five hundred years' attrition from assimilation and the southward spread of German colonization. One author[8] describes the Reformation period as the true beginning of a distinct Slovene spiritual and intellectual life.

The Reformation's emphasis on the production of religious texts in the vernacular accelerated the development of written Slovene. The reformer Primož Trubar (1508–86) produced the first Slovene grammar (paradoxically, published in Germany). Significantly, Trubar chose Latin script in preference to Gothic for printed Slovene. Recognizing the national implications of this religious dissent, the Counter-Reformation took especial care to suppress the new culture emerging in the Slovene lands. Nearly all copies of Slovene works produced during the Reformation were destroyed.

Roter[9] states that the Reformation "did not leave behind any large or decisive traces due to the systematic and violent counter-reformation." However, the reimposition of orthodoxy was not complete, and small numbers of Slovene Protestants preserved their knowledge in tiny mountain settlements or within closed noble families, the last group permitted to remain Protestant.[10] The Slovene Reformation contained elements of both religious and national awakening, yet the Slovenes were unable and unwilling to formulate any national demands at this time. They were at such an early stage of national reorientation that the Reformation had only a limited impact prior to its suppression. The suppression of Slovene cultural development and the association of piety with loyalty were necessary from the Imperial point of view, but were also useful in weakening a renewed Slovene self-awareness that could hinder assimilation. Later Slovene nationalists view the re-Catholicization of popular sentiment as an aid to Germanization, just as the initial Christianization of the Slovenes has come to be viewed as much as an enslaving as an enlightening process.[11] This theme played an important part in NSK's Krst, and the military component of the conversion process is symbolized in the 1985 Laibach poster in which a military chaplain baptizes subdued-looking peasants.

Only after the Reformation was it possible for a written Slovene culture of an international standard to move beyond the documentation of peasant folklore. The Reformation also set a pattern inasmuch as even modest efforts at cultural development were from this time linked to dissent, initially religious and subsequently political.

From the eighteenth century onward, a German-speaking Slovene intelligentsia of poets, writers, and priests began to rediscover national folklore, and work began on codifying the written language. Romantic nationalism idealized the surviving traditions of the uneducated, and thus partially un-Germanized, peasantry. As elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe, however, the peasants, the nominated guardians of the national spirit, were, initially, far more concerned by issues such as land reform than by the national question, and this attitude was even more prevalent among the Church hierarchy.[12] By the time of the 1848 revolutions, Slovene consciousness was growing both in politics and in culture and figures such as the national poet France Prešeren played a key role in this process. In the late nineteenth century, Slovene (nationalist) liberals began determined efforts to reverse Germanization and secure greater autonomy, encountering resistance from

2.2 Laibach, *Baptism below Triglav* poster, 1985.

Vienna and Austrians living in Slovenia, as well as the Church. Slovene political na-
tionalism took the form of progressive bourgeois liberalism, with a national pro-
gram that was more radical than that of their rivals on left and right. The Catholic
Clerical Party, however, always commanded the majority of popular support, and
the Liberals' power base never spread beyond the municipal administration of Lju-
bljana. Clerical-oriented intellectuals had a deeply ambiguous attitude to the na-
tional revival.[13]

A smaller group in Slovene politics advocated a Yugoslavist or "Illyrian" posi-
tion, arguing that the Yugo (South) Slav peoples were deeply related, and should
aspire to political and cultural unity both as an ideal and as a means of defending
the individual nations against predatory neighbors. By 1914, Slovene politics was
increasingly assertive, and Slovene cultural life was growing in strength. As the em-
pire began to disintegrate under the pressure of war, Yugoslavist opinions came to
the fore. Besides the sentimental and cultural appeal of Yugoslavism, the Slovenes
were aware that outside the empire they would be extremely vulnerable to aggres-
sive territorial threats from Italy.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SHS) was created in November
1918. The new state (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929) had a parliamentary system but

was also a monarchy, and the Serbian royal family retained considerable power. Under Clerical leadership, Slovenia secured a reasonable degree of autonomy from the centralist policies of Belgrade.[14] In the interwar period, the University of Ljubljana was created, and Slovene cultural life developed more freely. There was a clear economic and cultural divide between the ex-Habsburg territories in Slovenia, Vojvodina,[15] and Croatia, and the rest of the country. Almost from the outset, complaints were voiced in Slovenia and Croatia about alleged economic exploitation of their resources by the impoverished south of the country. By the 1930s, national tensions had become acute, particularly between the Croats and Serbs, and the state was never economically or politically strong or stable.

Many Slovenes and Croats faced a far worse situation under Italian rule. The Treaty of Versailles awarded Italy up to half of Slovene-inhabited territory, including the entire coastline. Italian-controlled territory extended as far inland as Postojna, less than an hour from Ljubljana. Violence against the Slav population of Trieste,[16] which had until then been the largest Slovene-inhabited city, commenced with the destruction of the Slovene cultural hall and suppression of all Slovene cultural activity by the Fascists. From 1927, a brutal Italianization policy was initiated against Slovenes and Croats inhabiting Italian-occupied territory. This process has been characterized as "the attempt to liquidate the Slavs."[17] All names (including those on gravestones) were Italianized, public speech in Slovene or Croatian was outlawed, and even children were punished for such infringements. By the time Yugoslavia was invaded by the Axis, a Slovene resistance group, TIGR, was already fighting Italian forces in this zone.

WAR

The experience of the Slovenes and Croats under Italian rule was a precursor to what befell the rest of the Slovene population when Italy, the Third Reich, and Hungary occupied the rest of Slovenia following the declaration of war on Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941.[18] The Italians occupied Ljubljana (renamed Lubiana), but pursued far milder policies here than in the Slovene territories they occupied prior to 1941.[19] In contrast, the ideological importance to the Reich of permanently submerging—or, if necessary, eradicating—Slovene identity soon became apparent. On April 26, Hitler visited the northern Slovene city of Maribor (Marburg in German), and addressed German forces and collaborators with the command: "Make this land German for me, as German as is the rest of Styria."[20] According to Barker: "Every effort was made to eliminate all elements of Slovene culture and replace them with German culture."[21] The process followed the Italian pattern: hundreds of thousands of Slovene books were destroyed, monuments demolished and names Germanized. Those Slovenes who were not deported (30 percent of the Slovene population under German control and 90 percent of the intellectuals were sent to

Germany in 1942) were to be assimilated by all means necessary. In the Hungarian zone, similar Magyarization policies were enforced.

The extreme physical and cultural aggression with which the Slovenes were now confronted forced many into active resistance. Previously the Slovenes had never engaged in more than token physical resistance[22] to cultural (as opposed to economic) aggression, but the severity of the occupation and the concerted attempts at de-Slovenization compelled strong reaction. Barker notes: "Under Totalitarian rule many took up physical resistance who might otherwise have resigned themselves to assimilation."[23]

Nazi and Italian violence, then, actually reinforced a sense of Sloveneness, which might actually have been more vulnerable to less brutal assimilation tactics. On April 27, 1941, in Ljubljana, the OF (Osvobodilna Fronta) resistance movement was formed by liberals, Christian Socialists, Communists, and some other smaller groups. Yet the nationalist character of this mobilization was soon overshadowed once the Communist-dominated Slovene Partisans subscribed to the 1943 Jajce Agreement on the creation of a postwar Yugoslav federation. Although the OF and the Yugoslav Partisan movement as a whole did support Slovene claims for sovereignty in the areas of Italy and Austria inhabited by Slovenes, the class war against internal enemies was often the main priority. The OF was nationally organized but fought for a federal, multinational state rather than a Slovene national state.[24] In fact, large sectors of the population, overtly and covertly encouraged by the reactionary Church hierarchy,[25] actively collaborated in an anti-Communist struggle that took priority over the defense of Slovene national interests.[26] The collaborationist ideologues saw the OF as a Communist menace to European, Christian values from which only Germany offered protection.

Despite its ambiguities, the OF represented the greatest show of defiance by Slovenes since their original military subjugation at the end of the ninth century. Rusinow presents a view of the OF's significance which challenges the view that Communism was inimical to the nation: "in its ranks and in its spirit, the Slovene people, one of the most 'unhistorical' of Europe's nations, found themselves at last and laid the ground for the Slovene national renaissance that has played a vital role in the history of post-1945 Yugoslavia."[27]

This comment may seem naive or excessive, but it refutes contemporary nationalists who claim that Slovene development was entirely stifled under Communism.[28] The Slovene Partisans received assistance from both Soviet and Anglo-American sources, and in the final phase of the war they managed to liberate most Slovene territory.[29] In practice the conflict was as much a civil war as a national liberation struggle, and whichever side had been victorious would have shown little mercy to its opponents. Anti-Communist Slovene émigrés point to atrocities and massacres committed by the OF, but the collaborationists were scarcely less brutal than their Nazi allies. In the last days of the war, a stream of defeated collaborationists fled into British-occupied Austria in the hope of escaping Communist vengeance.

Many of those later returned by the British were executed or imprisoned.

After 1945, the Partisan movement was central to the iconography and ideology of Yugoslav socialism; the heroic struggles of wartime were constantly invoked to legitimate the system. As in Britain, the war was an omnipresent cultural and political theme in national life, the source of numerous films, novels, memoirs, and other structural elements of the dominant ideology. Its predominance was reflected in NSK's work. Irwin have compared the founding of the OF to that of NSK, and Laibach made frequent references to the Partisan movement in the 1980s.[30]

YUGOSLAVIA 1945–91

The indeterminacy, ambiguity, and paradoxes surrounding both Slovene culture and NSK's representation of it also persist in relation to many Yugoslav topics. Yugoslavia stood in an intermediate geographical and ideological space between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Besides the constitutionally recognized nations (Serb, Croatian, Macedonian, Slovene, and Bosnian), Yugoslavia contained a wide range of other peoples ("nationalities") ranging from the two largest groups (Albanians and Hungarians) to a host of smaller peoples: Ukrainians, Slovaks, Roma, Italians, and others. There was a clear cultural divide between the "Catholic north" (Slovenia, Croatia, parts of Vojvodina) and the "Orthodox south" (Serb-inhabited areas of Croatia and Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia). Besides the religious difference (which dates back to the Byzantine era), there were contrasting experiences of foreign colonial rule—Italian, Austrian, and Hungarian in the north, and centuries of Turkish rule in Bosnia, Serbia, and Macedonia. These differences were emphasized in nationalist arguments as Yugoslavia collapsed, ignoring the significant linguistic-cultural similarities between the Serbs, Croats, and, to a lesser extent, Slovenes and Macedonians.

The institutions and ideology of postwar Yugoslavia were shaped by the need to maintain ideological differentiation in relation to both Cold War blocs, and the need to balance centralist and decentralist political and national forces within the country.[31] The impetus of the "nonaligned"[32] self-management ideology (devised largely by Tito's Slovene deputy, Edvard Kardelj) resulted in an extreme process of institutional proliferation. Institutions had federal, republican, and local levels, and the Party itself was federalized. The ideological imperative to ensure that economic, national, youth, and other socioeconomic groups were represented found expression in the creation of semi-autonomous cultural and social institutions, each with its own agenda and style. This tendency was more marked in Slovenia than in the other republics, ·which did not go as far in implementing the decentralizing principles of self-management. This situation often bred confusion, since jurisdictions were not clearly demarcated and there was a far more complex command structure than in other socialist states.

Gow[33] speaks of the "endemic multiple contradiction and complexity" of the system (or federation of systems). NSK directly incorporated the fearsomely complex ideological and institutional structures of Yugoslavia, and the alienating quality of some works stems largely from this reprocessing of the Yugoslav ideological cacophony and its combination with other disturbing signifiers. The institutional structure, and its ideological content, were key NSK sources.

After 1945, Yugoslavist "Brotherhood and Unity" ideology set the limits of Slovenist cultural expression. There were occasional cultural scandals, but the first challenge to political and economic stability in Slovenia did not come until 1969, at the time of the so-called "Slovene Roads Affair." When it emerged that the previously agreed construction of major roads in Slovenia was being shelved in preference for work in other republics, demonstrations were held, and the republican assembly protested publicly. The Slovene Party was subsequently rebuked by the federal authorities, and had to accept the decision. The Slovene Party leader even had to issue a statement that Slovenia had no intention of secession.[34] Such nationalism as there was in Slovenia during this period, however, was primarily economic, and far less assertive than Croatian nationalism at this time (open expression of national sentiment had always been problematic for the Slovenes, whereas the Croats, and particularly the Serbs, had not had to disown their identity to such an extent so recently in their history).

The decentralizing 1974 Yugoslav constitution limited the jurisdiction of the federal authorities in Belgrade (which traditionally took a more conservative line) over cultural and other questions specific to the individual republics. In Slovenia, these conditions gradually permitted the Slovene youth organization (ZSMS) to adopt increasingly radical social and cultural policies. Under its protection, small but highly important institutions such as Radio Študent (1969) and the Ljubljana student cultural center ŠKUC (1978) developed. These were marginal spaces of partially tolerated dissent produced by the ideological momentum of the system itself, and both played a critical role in supporting Laibach and NSK. Such institutions were also partly the result of the regular economic and cultural interchange with the West that distinguished Yugoslavia from the Eastern bloc proper. Yugoslavs shopped in Austria and Italy, and were able to watch foreign TV stations and import a surprising range of foreign films, music, books, and magazines.

Inasmuch as a more liberal orientation was possible in Slovenia, it was due not purely to cultural factors but to the very structure of the Yugoslav system and its interaction with some distinctive Slovene attitudes to culture and politics, which, during the 1980s, became a site of spectacular difference with the other republics. Just as Yugoslavia was exceptional within Europe, Slovenia was (perceived as) exceptional within Yugoslavia. While the Slovene language is related to Serbo-Croat, it has many peculiarities and was difficult for other Yugoslavs to learn.[35] Another factor that differentiated Slovenia from the rest of Yugoslavia was the German influence on its language and culture. Laibach's manipulation of this was one of the

most provocative aspects of its work in the 1980s, and it disturbed as many Slovenes as Yugoslavs.

At both the republican and federal levels, there were constant tensions between authoritarian and libertarian interpretations of self-management. In the early 1980s, ZSMS and the "new social movements" in Slovenia, alongside other forces elsewhere in Yugoslavia, argued for a more literal reading of the concepts of self-management that would facilitate rather than repress alternative political and social activity. The "official" interpretation of self-management was more limited, and intended to manage interethnic and other tensions, eliminating the need for alternative practices.

Tito's final decade saw a combination of superficial prosperity (fueled by extravagant Western loans) and a degree of increased authoritarianism after 1974. In terms of national-political (as opposed to cultural) self-expression, the mid-to-late 1970s were, on the surface, a calm period in which "the Slovene question" played little public role. Even after greater republican autonomy in 1974, "bourgeois nationalism" remained as much an anathema to the authorities in Ljubljana as to those in Belgrade.[36] If anything, the politico-cultural climate after 1974 was harsher than before, and Tomc even states that for youth subculture, it was as harsh as it had been in the immediate postwar years.[37] However, he stresses the extent to which the repressiveness of the 1970s derived at least as much from a conservative social climate as from state action. The economic crisis that began in 1979, and Tito's death in 1980, exacerbated tensions within the system, creating catastrophic possibilities in culture as well as politics.[38] The cultural response to the process of economic and political polarization experienced in Yugoslavia in this period echoed that of Britain in the punk era of the late 1970s, and by 1985 Ramet was talking about an "apocalypse culture" in Yugoslavia, marked by the presence not just of local punk and heavy metal scenes but of even more provocative phenomena such as Laibach.[39] In response, Mastnak[40] claims that in the early 1980s the authorities undertook a "delegation of repression." Residents' associations and other social institutions were used to help suppress alternative activities. Slovenia and Yugoslavia as a whole experienced the same transition from 1970s pop culture to economic recession as Western Europe. If we factor in the coexistence of a part-imported, part-indigenous pop culture along with a hyperideologized and historically traumatized national culture, the manifestation of alienation and resistance in punk mode is not surprising.

The 1980s in Yugoslavia were marked by a challenging of almost every political and cultural taboo. In 1980, only right-wing émigrés would seriously have envisaged Slovene or Croatian independence, or a Greater Serbia, yet by 1990 these national projects dominated the political agenda. A rotating collective leadership weakened federal authority and strengthened that of the republics, all of which experienced varying degrees of nationalist resurgence. As the economy weakened rapidly, the legitimacy of the state was increasingly openly questioned, and politi-

cal mobilization assumed an increasingly ethnic character. There was a struggle for power at every level of society, not least in culture, and many of the first signs of this process emerged in Slovenia. The NSMs combined theories of civil society with the most utopian implications of self-management ideology to press for greater autonomy at every level, from the right to wear punk badges to the right to a free press. By the mid-1980s the republican leaderships' priority was to legitimize themselves within their national territories. From 1987 onward, the republics were in open conflict over the future of the state, and tensions rose rapidly.[41] Slovenia was democratizing rapidly, and the radical tolerance pioneered by the alternative movements was (temporarily) becoming a mainstream value. When, in 1988, the JNA put on trial four Slovenes accused of leaking reports of a planned military intervention in Slovenia, there was national mobilization in the name of democratic values. After this so-called "Slovene Spring," events moved rapidly toward the election of the Demos coalition government in 1990. Slovenia and Croatia's demands for democratization and a confederal Yugoslav system were rejected by Belgrade, and relations had broken down irreparably by the time the two states declared independence in June 1991. In 1992, NSK moved from *Gesamtkunstwerk* to "State in Time," criticizing and symbolizing the forces of disintegration in Yugoslavia and beyond, preventing any easy identification between NSK and the new national state.

COLLABORATION, AUTHORITARIANISM, AND SELF-OPPRESSION

Laibach's work interrogates all authority mechanisms, and refers to the extreme social and ideological polarization and violence that have marked Slovene society. Laibach's severity is expressive of unresolved social tensions. While nationalist narratives tend to blame external authorities and ideas—the Habsburgs, Yugoslavia, the Third Reich—for national misfortunes, they pay less attention to the extent of Slovene self-oppression. Ideological polarization within Slovenia often led to its advocates collaborating with external forces, above all during World War II. Such collaboration represented persistent reactionary and conformist tendencies active within Slovenia. By restaging these tendencies, NSK dramatized their persistence.

> The renouncement of slavery blazons a phony mask; born is the slavery of slaves that have been slaves since time immemorial and have gotten so thoroughly used to slavery that it has become their flesh and blood. Eagerly and without inquiries [sic] as to its master or its orders, servility spreads its shadow over the world. Slaves, selling themselves willingly, *are more eager than the master himself.* Eagerness and solemn artistic pride spring forth.[42]

This Irwin statement is probably the clearest expression of NSK's exploration of this tendency, the context for the violence and authoritarianism in the works of NSK and Laibach. Discussing the attitudes of other Yugoslavs toward Slovenes, Thompson quotes Professor Djordji Marjanovič of Macedonia's League for Democracy:

Slovenia is something quite exceptional. . . . The "Slovene Syndrome," we call it. It is an axiom of penology that you must not imprison anyone longer than ten years. Then people stop being citizens, they become another kind of human being, mentally so altered that they can't survive outside of prison. So it is with nations. The Slovenes lived under German domination too long. If a people is to keep its pride, the maximum is 500 years, like the Macedonians. More than that is insupportable. . . . They have the mentality of servants, and now they dream of returning to the breast that nurtured them. If they separate from Yugoslavia, they may well disappear within two generations, assimilated by the German nation.[43]

Similarly, Ramet claims: "lacking any tradition as a separate state, the Slovenes were somewhat more disposed to docility."[44]

A historical inhibition from acting in defense of national and cultural self-interests even in extreme circumstances is to some extent understandable. Small in numbers, and with no forces of their own, the Slovenes alone stood little chance of successfully rebelling against any of the controlling powers, and fears of severe retaliation inhibited action. The "foreignness" of the states the Slovenes lived under has even been cited as a cause of high national rates of exile and suicide,[45] and made it harder to imagine political alternatives.[46] However, the conformism referred to by Marjanovič and in the Irwin statement cannot be explained entirely by tactical pragmatism and the lack of a national state, just as the violence and authoritarianism in Slovene history cannot be attributed wholly to foreign occupiers. This history reveals a type of overzealous conformity that has taken the form of militant collaboration with domestic and foreign authoritarianism, even to the extent of identifying with states hostile to the preservation of Slovene identity. Until Slovene independence, all the state authorities on Slovene-inhabited territory relied on this tendency to maintain order. The violence and authoritarianism of Laibach and NSK are not alien, aberrational phenomena, but references to a repeated Slovene tendency toward self-oppressive authoritarianism and collaboration. Laibach shattered the Slovene stereotype of passivity and conformism, while manifesting the harsh authoritarian aspects of the national character.

Church and Authority: NSK and Religion

In the nineteenth century, the Slovene church and the Clerical Party helped to inhibit nationally assertive policies. Clerical policies sought to make Slovenes identify with an ultra-Catholic world-view associated with the empire. Yet the Clericals saw their policies as more effective than nationalism, believing that loyal conformism, plus Church-led economic and educational initiatives, best served Slovene interests.[47]

Yet even this moderation encountered resistance when it conflicted with (ethnic) German interests, and the Clericals were unable to exert decisive influence in Vienna, even on local issues such as bilingual schools.[48] Paradoxically, it was only in Carinthia that the Church was more active in defending Slovene identity. The Slovene case was perceived as being so bound up with clericalism that it was op-

posed not just by pan-German nationalists but also by Austrian liberals, who in any case advocated Greater Germanism. Despite these frustrations, and the fact that the actual conduct of Vienna could never match its idealization by the Clericals, their loyalty held almost until the final Habsburg collapse in 1918, and they maintained opposition both to Slovene nationalism and to pro-Yugoslavism.

Within the first Yugoslavia, the Clerical influence was more productive, and Clerical leader Anton Korošec managed to secure a favorable position for the Slovenes within the new state. However, with the onset of war in 1941, and faced by the threat of a Communist takeover, the Church hierarchy entered into open and active collaboration with the anti-Communist but equally anti-Slovene Axis forces.

Given this substantive record of collaboration, the postwar peak of repression was relatively brief, and not as fierce as it might have been. Since the war, the Church has been sufficiently confined to (sometimes grudgingly) accept a secondary role. But while its hold is declining, it is popularly suspected that elements in the hierarchy still aspire to the degree of influence the Church exerts upon politics in countries such as Poland. The Church was ambivalent about the pacifist/gay/feminist/ecological NSMs, and is inherently suspicious of Ljubljana's cosmopolitanism. The ambiguous record of the Church as a national advocate in Slovenia means that (even) NSK seeks to distance itself from this strand of domestic authoritarianism and its traditionally regressive impact on national energies. Laibach have taken a relatively unambiguous stance against religion (while citing God), sampling traditional Marxist critiques: "Religion represented the obsessive neurosis of humanity, and Christian ideology, with its religious activity in critical periods of history, is the most important mass-psychological means of preparing the ground for a takeover by Fascist ideology."[49]

The NSK *Internal Book of Laws* (IBL), point 16 ("Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members"), states: "Concerning one's love for one's neighbor (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."[50]

In the view of nineteenth-century romantics like Prešeren, the forcible conversions of the Slovenes by the Germans (as opposed to the peaceful Slavic missions of Saints Cyril and Methodius) were synonymous with enslavement. *Krst* was partly based on Prešeren's account of this process, and is in some ways a continuation of this anticlerical romantic tradition. However, NSK, particularly Irwin, frequently employs Catholic motifs, sometimes juxtaposed with Communist symbols.[51]

Exorcism and baptism are recurring themes, and the Laibach track *Vade retro (Satanas)* refers to exorcistic ritual. Christian symbolisms have shaped the Slovenes at least as much as the successor ideologies of Communism and capitalism, making them essential to a complete "retroquotation" of the national past and its dominant ideologies. NSK alludes to the repressive power the Church lost and still aspires to, recapitulating the Church's position as a formally "extrapolitical" institution.

2.3 Irwin, *Spine*.

Despite this ambivalence, ethereal and mystical themes and ritual do feature in NSK works, particularly in drama performances such as Noordung's *Prayer Machine* (1992). NSK texts are sometimes explicitly spiritual in tone, but such (actually informal) spirituality is entirely vested in the performance, and is abstract—NSK no more has a concrete spiritual agenda than a political one.

OBSCURITY AND EXPOSURE: SEARCHING FOR THE SLOVENE

> Neue Slowensiche Kunst is an organized cultural political campaign for the renewal
> of Slovene national art on the European level, a rigorously planned establishment of
> an authentic cultural space at the crossroads of two worlds, a negation of spiritual
> smallness and a deliberate attack on the established cultural monopoly of the West.[52]

Despite the success of its football team, its musicians, and its intellectuals, and the
respect the country has gained, Slovenia remains obscure, and is still frequently con-
fused with the even less known Slovakia. Academic discussions of Slovenia are often
subsumed under studies of (ex)-Yugoslavia as a whole, and it remains a recondite
subset of Balkan or Slavonic Studies. Slovenia is also often ignored in media discus-
sion of both Central Europe and the Balkans (as one of the smallest of the new EU
states, it is mentioned far less often than Hungary, Poland, or the Czech Republic).

The Slovene need for exposure, however, is partly ambivalent. Various com-
mentators have noted that outside the cities, parochial and provincial values are
seen as positive. Slovene identity is often described as based on the complex and
forbidding national language. Foreign commentators, among others, note the
conflict between the Slovenes' pleasure and surprise at outsiders' interest in the
language and a desire to preserve its exclusiveness, a semiconscious fear of giving
away too much of the national "core." In the past, Slovene identity was often pre-
served by secrecy, and the continued (if slightly lessened) obscurity of the coun-
try is not just externally imposed.

Information about Slovenia is widely dispersed and rarely synthesized, and an
image has to be assembled from a diverse series of fragments. Neither for Slovenia
itself nor for NSK is there one stable body of literature. This diverse material has to
be synthesized into a coherent resource if we are to forge a new approach to "the
Slovene question" as it relates to NSK. The extent to which NSK quotes its national
history means that even specialized works on particular periods of Slovene his-
tory often reveal the sources of specific NSK references. Much of the material in En-
glish was written by nonacademic writers and émigrés with political and religious
agendas.

Most Irwin/NSK catalogues are dual- or even triple-language publications, nor-
mally including English and generally containing theoretical commentaries on the
works. The NSK monograph (1991) was available for only a short time in Britain,
and the English-language version is long out of print. The majority of NSK publi-
cations are limited editions that are not available even via mail order, only from the
relevant galleries or NSK archives, and the quantity of accessible information is
greatest in Slovenia itself.

Much material on Slovenia is available within the much larger body of work on
Yugoslavia. However, in common with the other smaller republics (Macedonia,
Montenegro and, until it was forced into prominence, Bosnia-Herzegovina), Slove-
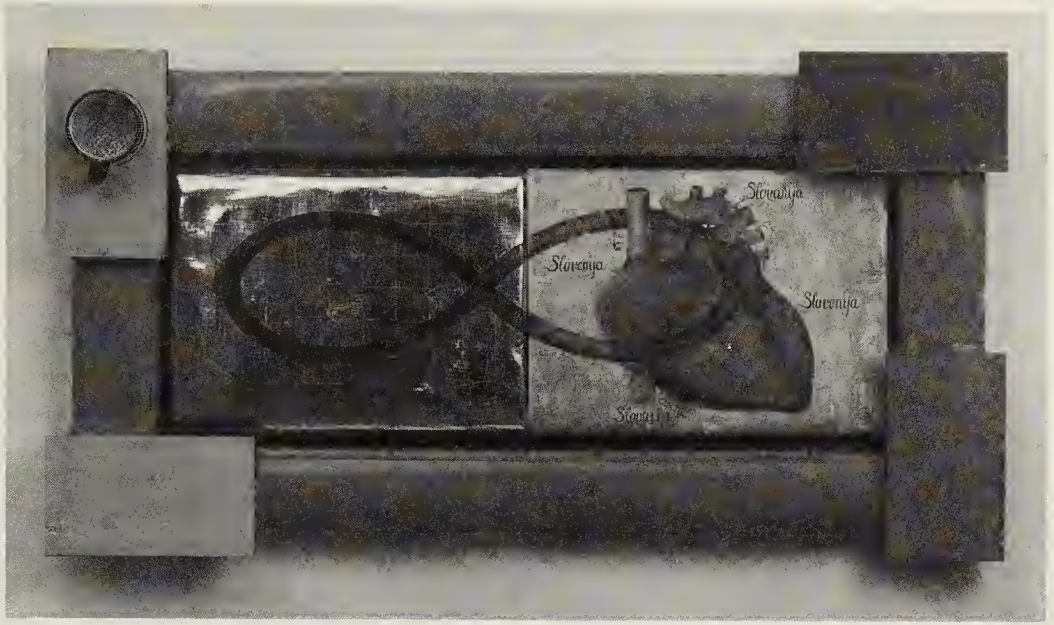
2.4 Irwin, *Desna strana* (Right Side), 1992.

nia generally receives far less attention than Serbia and Croatia. It is often necessary to "chase" references to Slovenia, as very few works deal with it as a discrete topic.[53]

The legal status of small nations in larger states affects the writing of their histories—Slovak and other writers argue that foreign authors almost inevitably focus their research on federal rather than provincial or republican capitals. The agendas and perspectives of Prague and Belgrade will generally predominate over those of Bratislava and Ljubljana, just as those of London or Madrid traditionally relegate those of Cardiff or Barcelona. This is partly the result of a kind of Realpolitik that prefers not to probe beyond official centralist historiography, and parallels the preference of Western governments for dealing with larger political entities. One author observes:

> Although Western specialists in Eastern European history have usually regarded it as their task to make the West familiar with the entire ethnic panorama of the polyglot region, they have in practice often been selective in the favors they bestowed on each nation. They have incorporated in their work, in modified form, the outlook and prejudices of the nations which they "adopted." To give the most conspicuous examples, they viewed Slovak history through Czech eyes and Ukrainian history through Polish (or Russian) eyes. In so doing, they have in fact created a second-class status for certain nations.[54]

As the most economically developed republic, Slovenia was in a stronger position in relation to Belgrade than (relatively underdeveloped) Bratislava was in relation to Prague. Yet there was a continuous tension between the ideological priorities of pan-Yugoslav history and attempts at national historical knowledge. The

threat in the late 1980s that the Yugoslav educational system would be centralized was certainly not an insignificant factor fueling Slovene separatism.

No Western work on Slovenia or other nations of "second-class status" can be free of these issues. There is huge scope for purely historical (as well as art-historical and cultural studies) research on Slovenia, not least the construction of a framework covering all periods in minimal detail for English-speaking researchers. The obscurity of the subject is such that the work of familiarization is both necessary and dangerous, in that an attempt merely to make the Slovenes [more] "visible" as the subject of historical, cultural, and political processes may overwhelm the project as a whole. The "bringing into consciousness" of a little-known group can easily serve as an end in itself, and as the NSK methodology suggests, it is difficult to carry out subtly.[55] The centralist biases active in such fields "drown out" smaller voices. The militancy with which Laibach and NSK successfully penetrated the Western market challenged the "natural" order of things, in which no music or art from Slovenia could hope to make its voice heard, or be perceived (if at all) as anything other than an exotic folk culture (with all the patronizing condescension that goes with such a status). Not only Slovene but also Macedonian and Bosnian culture have been seen as exotic, if not perverse, variants of the Serbo-Croatian norm. The work of compensating for such biases against colonized or submerged European peoples is still at an early stage, and to challenge this is to challenge both geopolitical realities and, sometimes, academic notions of good taste.

There seems to be an implicit attitude that to "adopt" such European[56] nations and identities, and attempt to replace them within historical knowledge, is, de facto, suspect. This springs from the fact that in such cases there is inevitably a very fine line between disseminating knowledge and nationalist advocacy. However, a strong assertion of the right of such peoples to (scholarly) recognition generally sheds light on the far more aggressive regional nationalisms that try to stifle smaller cultures, as Austrian and Italian nationalism still resists full recognition of the Slovenes.

Researchers who leave unquestioned the historiographies of dominant regional nations are rarely challenged, while those who seek to counter these views by insisting on the inconvenient difference of certain groups are accused of siding with nationalism.[57] The mere act of "adopting" such a people as a subject of research will always be condemned in some quarters, academic as well as nationalist, and can actually reinforce sympathy for the regional "overdog." The danger is that this provokes an equally strident and uncritical advocacy (even though this could not begin to compete in vehemence with the forces ranged against the recognition of such identities). Only serious academic criticism should cause the researcher to modify his or her presentation of such nations to avoid explicit advocacy. Awareness of this danger might persuade the researcher into an overapologetic, diffident mode of presentation that begs the academy to tolerate the distasteful necessity of

asserting (however mildly) the inconvenient experience of an obscure people. Appeasing such opinion can be politically advantageous, but it will disfigure research. A partial, apologetic picture of a nation whose identity is contested is no more objective than a partial, celebratory advocacy of it.

The holistic, spectral reading of history that emerges in NSK's work is actually the best guarantee against bias, and it should be remembered that some of the fiercest criticisms of NSK have come from traditionalist/nationalist opinion. Therefore the Slovenes are presented, not as a heroic, but as a surprisingly resistant people whose identity has been threatened both by larger regional powers and by repressive domestic ideologies. Awareness of the Slovene tendency toward de-Slovenization is crucial to understanding the NSK mode of Slovenism (culture-based Slovene self-assertion). Assembling the details of a repressed identity inevitably entails a degree of assertiveness in order to overcome the weight of ignorance obscuring it. Such assertion does not, however, equate to nationalist advocacy. It is simply an "amplification" process, necessary to pierce the systemic "noise" of dominant historiographies.

THE SLAVIC CONTEXT

NSK is as much a transnational as a Slovene phenomenon, and relevant comparisons can be made not just with Yugoslavia but also with the wider Slav context. Besides being informative, such comparisons are contrary to one strand of contemporary Slovene thought. Echoing the pan-German nationalists who still claim the Slovenes as a "lost" Germanic people, some assert that they are not originally Slavic but Etruscan in origin. While there may be some evidence for this, the fact remains that it is seized on by those who wish to downgrade the Slav-ness of the Slovenes. Just as the terms "Balkan" and "Southern" became increasingly pejorative terms in Slovenia from the mid-1980s, a similar desire to dissociate from what is "Eastern" and "Slavic" is a persistent Slovene undercurrent. This trend makes the situation of Slovenia within the Slav continuum a necessary counterweight to attempts to de-Slavicize the Slovenes.[58]

Just as the Slovak historical experience provides productive comparisons, so a Soviet/Russian perspective is highly relevant, although primarily for ideological rather than historical reasons. Much of the totalitarian and avant-garde art retro-quoted by NSK is Soviet, and naturally Russian authors provide an important perspective on the methodology of artistic totalitarianism. Particularly in the last decade, there has been no shortage of material in English providing a Russian view of issues central to NSK.[59] Golomstock's *Totalitarian Art*[60] is a comparative work addressing Italian, Nazi, and Communist Chinese as well as Stalinist art, and is important in that it provides a systematic Slav account of totalitarianism. NSK's rise to prominence coincided with the peak of postmodernism, and various authors, notably Aleš Erjavec, deal with NSK from this perspective. The work of Fredric

Jameson and the other principal Western postmodernists can be applied to aspects of NSK's praxis, but it is insufficient to the extent that it makes little reference to cultural conditions in state socialist societies and has, if only by omission, been slow to accept the existence of postmodern conditions and activities in Central and Eastern Europe. It is in this respect that the work of Epstein is indispensable. One of his key theses is that in their eclecticism, Stalinist art and society were already structurally postmodern, and thus that postmodernism is at least as much an "Eastern," Slav experience as a Western one. Stalinism's displacement of earlier forms of Marxism was already a displacement of modernist ideology, and socialist realism was a variant of postmodernism.[61] Extrapolating from Epstein's work, it can be argued that Tito's precocious (1948) discarding of Stalinism and the development of self-management took ideological postmodernization a stage further than elsewhere in the Eastern bloc. Epstein's is probably the most comprehensive study available in English of the issues affecting cultural production in the Slavic/ex-socialist context. Erjavec and Gržinić's Ljubljana, Ljubljana[62] is an extensive summary of Slovene culture in the 1980s, and some material is available on recent Yugoslav art.[63] It is only with the release of the collections Arteast 2000,[64] Primary Documents,[65] and Impossible Histories[66] that more material on contemporary and avant-garde art in east central Europe and Yugoslavia has become available in English.

Finally, Bulgarian author Elka Tschernokoshewa[67] has discussed the tendency of the Western media to present routine events in apocalyptic terms, purely because of their location in Eastern Europe. This tendency is what Laibach manipulate in staging Western phobias about the barbaric and monolithic totalitarian "East."[68]

The Intellectual and Artistic Context of NSK

NSK reflects a unique combination of artistic and theoretical influences, and their interactions with the Slovene and Yugoslav environments. Slovenes as well as other Yugoslavs worked as Gastarbeiter in West Germany and elsewhere, and borders were more open than anywhere else in the socialist states. Western tourism was encouraged, and many crossed the country en route to Greece and other destinations. Living in the most prosperous republic, the Slovenes were able to spend more on Western consumer imports than other Yugoslavs.

Despite this, the main cultural centers of Yugoslavia prior to the 1980s were Belgrade and Zagreb, which, since the political liberalization of the 1960s, had begun to achieve recognition in the West. In this period, socialist theories of art were discarded and displaced by contemporary trends, particularly conceptualism. By the mid-1970s a reassessment of the artists involved in "the Slovene historical avant-garde" was under way. Slovene futurists, constructivists, and other experimental artists then returned to visibility in the 1980s in a synergistic interaction between the use of their motifs by NSK and their reassessment by art historians and aestheticians.[69]

The Slovene artists most associated with the conceptual style are the group OHO (1966–71), an idealistic collective working in a variety of media, from film and photography to design to installation and land art. OHO were the most distinctive Slovene artists of their period, and achieved international as well as domestic recognition. In 1985, Irwin acknowledged OHO in the joint project Irwin-OHO Birds of a Feather.[70]

In 1978, a retrospective of OHO works was the first exhibition at the new gallery in Ljubljana connected to ŠKUC. Pankrti (Bastards), Slovenia's first punk group, performed at the opening of ŠKUC, and this symbolized the role ŠKUC would play in championing punk and alternative culture in the 1980s. From 1980 to 1982, ŠKUC was run by Dušan Mandič, a member of Irwin and its forerunners, and from 1982 to 1987 by Marina Gržinić. ŠKUC hosted Laibach's earliest projects, and its publishing wing issued cassettes by the new punk groups, and catalogues of the work of local and international artists. ŠKUC was controversial from the outset, attracting particular condemnation (and publicity) when it hosted Laibach exhibitions, and published albums by Laibach and other "unofficial" groups such as Borghesia. It even published the document LAIBACH: The Instrumentality of the State Machine, a collection of early statements with an explicitly totalitarian tone. In effect, a state-subsidized institution published and subsidized material and activities by which the security and ideological arms of the state felt deeply threatened.

Sometimes operating at the edge of legality, ŠKUC was barely tolerated, and had a fragile administrative and economic status. During the period 1981–84, when sporadic efforts were still made to harass and suppress punk and other alternative phenomena, ŠKUC was forced to close several times. Despite this, ŠKUC was able to nurture and promote new initiatives across a range of media, and provided vital institutional support for Laibach and many other musicians and artists. Gržinić[71] characterizes the strategy of ŠKUC and the artists associated with it as the "perversion" of the ways in which art was normally received. Just as in the British punk subculture, Xerox played a key role in the distribution of information and flyers, but also in artistic practice.

ŠKUC actively cooperated with its counterpart in Belgrade, SKC, which also hosted exhibitions and concerts by Laibach. Two Serb artists in particular had an influence on the emerging techniques in Slovenia. "Was ist Kunst?" was a slogan first used by the Serb artist Raša Todosijević in the 1970s for a series of performance actions in Yugoslavia and beyond. Erjavec and Gržinić[72] place especial emphasis on a 1981 exhibition by the Belgrade artist Goran Đorđević entitled Harbingers of Apocalypse after a painting produced in 1969, which he later disowned. In 1981 he commissioned fifty Yugoslav and foreign artists to produce replicas of the original work as a commentary on the value of the copy over the original. This exhibition was highly influential, and an emphasis on and manipulation of visual repetition is one of the key distinguishing features of the work of Laibach, NSK, and other Slovene and Yugoslav artists of the period.

The other characteristic feature of ŠKUC activities was an emphasis on multimedia projects that blurred the distinctions between artistic techniques and between art and popular culture, with the latter being particularly evident in the exploration of graffiti and video techniques. These activities, comprising projects that typically worked within at least three separate media or techniques, and evaded easy categorization, also influenced the music scene. Laibach have always collaborated with artists in other fields, and the group is itself a multimedia unit working through text, music, and art. Conceived as an analytical unit exploring the role of ideology and art, it chose music because of its status as the most ubiquitous contemporary form, but it was always active beyond the sphere of music. Its first planned event was an exhibition as well as a concert.[73] The multimedia aspects of Laibach's work reflect the structure of the alternative cultural scene in Ljubljana, and the shared interests among many of its leading practitioners. Even if it were desired, the type of strict segregation found in larger creative communities would be a structural impossibility within the microcosm of Ljubljana (population 300,000), where networking and cross-fertilization are inevitable. Many Slovene alternative bands such as Borghesia, Videosex, and 2227 have had a creative interest in other forms, principally drama, performance art, video, and graphics. Until 1987, it was easier for Laibach to mount exhibitions than to stage public performances, which inevitably attracted more official attention due to their greater potential impact and higher profile. Laibach's work in painting, video, and text was an integral part of the much wider alternative praxes that were emerging. Even when banned from performing, Laibach maintained a presence through work in other media, and via ŠKUC and the alternative network. Despite the similarities between Laibach and other artists, however, they only formally allied themselves with Dušan Mandič and the other members of what would become Irwin, and otherwise sought to maintain a certain distance. NSK, to the extent that it shared methodologies and networks with the wider alternative sector, would at times function as a part of that sector, but was always concerned to maintain clear points of differentiation. In this respect, Laibach's 1982 term "monumental retroavantgarde" was particularly important in suggesting that Laibach, and subsequently NSK, represented an autonomous school or category.

Laibach members attended art history lectures at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana, where they mixed with fellow students, artists, and future members of other NSK groups. Theorists, dramatists, artists, and other elements of the emerging parallel intelligentsia, whose views were incompatible with the official career structures, gathered around key alternative networking points such as Radio Študent (broadcasting to the Ljubljana area) and ŠKUC. Members of all three NSK founding groups were previously known to each other. Although the majority of the members were actually from outside Ljubljana, all worked or studied there. Besides social links, all three groups explored similar areas such as the functioning of ideology, the impossibility of originality, and a retro-orientation (a creative praxis

based on the recycling of previous styles and motifs), which made their coopera-tion seem natural. An institutional, collective form was chosen as an expression of their de-individualized public stance, and also as a key theme in what was becom-ing the dominant strand of Laibach's work: the "demasking and recapitulation" of totalitarian regimes and mechanisms. NSK was one of several parallel structures formed by alternative Slovene groups to provide institutional security, solidarity, and resources in the face of their (pre)marginalization by official media and insti-tutions. Gržinić and others constantly emphasize this trend of alternative institu-tionalization; the fabrication of sympathetic bodies that would serve as safe spaces for experimentation and a more secure base for the penetration of the mainstream than informal dissident-type groupings. In a lecture given at the NSK Embassy Mos-cow event in 1992, she observed:

> In the eighties we, in Ljubljana, tried to overcome the counter-cultural discourse, the mentality and the attitude towards institutions in general. We were striving for the formation of our own institutions and communication networks. We didn't want to live as small individuals gathering in holes. Instead, we wanted to establish conditions for the survival of our own social and mental structure.[74]

Those who were involved in this new scene were committed to challenging so-cial and political boundaries, but they were not interested in assuming the tradi-tional role of marginalized dissidents, insisting on the right to realize high-profile projects that would reach beyond an "underground" scene. Postmodern theories of recycling and repetition had a real presence within Slovene alternative art, and the thinking of ŠKUC and Slovenia was increasingly (though far from exclusively) exposed to what Western theorists termed the postmodern condition. This context further weakened the appeal of a classic modernist mode of dissidence, which seemed less relevant within a developing media society. The self-institutionalizing dynamic (which found its most grandiose expression in the establishment of NSK) symbolized the refusal of the alternative sector to accept the legitimacy of any ex-ternal (political or conceptual) limitations on its ambitions. The artists associated with ŠKUC acted as if there were no constraints—or, in the case of Laibach and NSK, incorporated external (political) restrictions into the works in an attempt to transcend them. So, besides the creation of new networks and autonomous insti-tutions, there was also a concern to create alternative imaginary spaces in which existing social and artistic conditions might be viewed differently.

ZSMS/New Slovene Youth

Most alternative phenomena emerged under the patronage of ZSMS, which, from the early 1980s onward, took an increasingly assertive stance advocating pluralism and experimentation, becoming a key force in the democratization of politics. The role of ZSMS reflected both the search for new sources of legitimacy after Tito's

death, and a schizophrenic attitude within state institutions torn between what op- ponents characterized as "Stalinist" tradition, and innovation based both on self- management idealism and on Western theories of civil society. Facing grass-roots pressure from below, and seeking new credibility as a progressive forum in gen- uine sympathy with youth rather than the state, it first enabled discussion and fa- cilitated alternative networks under its protection, and later actively promoted and identified itself with the NSMs and alternative culture, including NSK and punk. This sector of the self-management state neutralized and exposed as impotent openly authoritarian (as opposed to bureaucratic) attempts at repression, provid- ing an institutional shelter that could have been removed only under conditions of near-martial law. Alternative activities were threatened and restricted, but on a far smaller scale than elsewhere in Yugoslavia, and they had a strong enough base to be able to draw international attention to alternative culture, further insuring against repression.

This cooperation was made easier by the fact that, as Mastnak[75] shows, most of the alternative institutions consciously shied away from and were suspicious of "vanguardism." NSK and the historical processes on which it was built had already occupied such terrain, intentionally or otherwise drawing off some of the venom which might have been directed against the NSMs, which did not seek confronta- tion and, even without the foil of NSK, had to operate in a hostile climate. By the time of its 1986 congress, ZSMS aligned itself more or less enthusiastically with "the alternative" in both its political and its cultural forms, even demanding the legalization of Laibach's name and activities, sparking further media controversy. The decision to permit NSMs to register under its umbrella enabled even previously silent potential supporters of alternative values to "come out" without undue risk, although the majority of Slovenes "came out" in defense of democratization only under duress in 1988.

On May 25, 1986, Youth Day, ZSMS and *Mladina* presented the annual "Golden Bird" cultural prize to NSK. As Laibach in particular were still highly contentious, the award cannot be seen as a painless attempt to court popularity, or to boost the credibility of ZSMS. Rather, it demonstrated the ascendancy of those who were in sympathy with the alternative agenda, and that the scale of NSK activities could no longer be ignored:

> If the relation of top LSY [ZSMS] officials to the punk subculture was more or less limited to declarations of intent, it was for the simple reason that ex-punks were of no "use value" to them. Laibach, however, became a [sic] love at first sight for the official youths. Laibach and *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK) . . . were more an artistic avant-garde than a rock movement. Seeking inspiration in historical avant-gardes (above all socialist realism and Nazi art), they used mass culture as a medium to reach a wider audience with their counter-cultural messages. They preached that the West is decadent and the "new man" is needed to save it; that collectivism will tri- umph over individualism as a result of a cultural revolution spearheaded by NSK

shock troops. All this rang a familiar bell for official youths, reminding them of their own not so distant counter-cultural past. On top of that, NSK ideology could always be interpreted as a critique of, rather than an apology for, totalitarianism. Better still, as artists, Laibach and their comrades could represent, as punk rockers could not, a legitimate cultural platform for LSY. Soon the youth organization began to finance numerous projects of the avant-garde as parts of LSY alternative cultural policy, setting it apart from the party's political activities.[76]

ZSMS and other associated bodies even commissioned NK to produce poster designs, and subsidized other NSK activities in a mutually exploitative process that brought work and opportunities for intervention to NSK and radical kudos to ZSMS. This accelerated what became known in the rest of Yugoslavia as "the Slovene syndrome": a complex of attitudes and controversies initially generated by the Slovene alternative and its supporters. Many leading figures of the Slovene alternative sector are now part of the establishment, pursuing policies—such as NATO membership—that are completely at odds with the supposed spirit of the alternative movements. Although there was much genuine idealism at the time, ZSMS's championing of alternative values was itself a power strategy, and to some extent based on mutual and even cynical exploitation, as the subsequent careers of many of its protagonists suggest. This sense of radical difference eventually merged into the nationalist politics of the late 1980s, but the sense of Slovene distinctiveness underpinning Slovenia's (relatively moderate) nationalism was built partly on the momentum of the alternative sector.

The organic, natural sympathy between the democratizing ambitions of the youth leadership and alternative culture and politics (and the hidden nostalgia felt within ZSMS for a vanguardist NSK-type stance) produced a natural and pragmatic partnership, but this situation was not inevitable, and was unusually pronounced in Slovenia. The situation in the USSR under *glasnost* was more complex. Unofficial groups (*neformaly*) were brought under the umbrella of the Komsomol (Soviet youth organization), but in a far more mechanical fashion born not out of shared aims but out of the Komsomol's desire to divide and rule, maintaining its traditional vanguard position and attendant privileges. However, as Hilary Pilkington[77] points out, the strategy was differentiated, so that groups such as heavy-metal fans, whom the Komsomol did not find useful and/or acceptable, remained beyond the pale, and were even further excluded by differentiation tactics. Groups were to be absorbed where they were useful, or rejected—the informal sector per se was not embraced or promoted, but selectively assimilated.

In contrast, ZSMS openly embraced and aggressively defended "the alternative" as such. By the mid-1980s, even alternative manifestations as extreme as Laibach were seen as inherently progressive by the Slovene youth leadership, due to their democratizing effects in enforcing debate. The Slovene alternative was supported as a positive category, not on the basis of internal differentiation between good or bad, although some alternative manifestations were more helpful to ZSMS than

others. Under *perestroika*, a less absolutist but more repressive attitude defined the situation. The Soviet example illustrates how crucial the "enlightened" attitude of the Slovene youth leadership was, and the extent to which the alternative depended on ZSMS arguing for non-negotiable principles of civic society and radical tolerance. With democratization, ZSMS attempted to preserve an alternative political position, but in practice this proved impossible, and the Komsomol was equally unsuccessful in securing a future for itself. The supersession of ZSMS, however, was arguably a sign of its success. It forswore "vanguardism" to such an extent as effectively to dissolve itself as a political force, yet ZSMS helped to establish and defend a space for alternative cultural values.

NSK's relationship to this process was paradoxical, and ambiguity constituted the space NSK inhabited. The issuing of militant (and paradox-laden) statements was integral to the overall NSK *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as was the recapitulation of various authority mechanisms. Laibach's condemnation as Fascists on the one hand, and cooption by liberal Marxist and civil society theorists on the other, indicates the difficulty in separating cause from effect, and the extent to which NSK consciously shaped (and was shaped by) events.

As Žižek argued in 1987, alternative theorists overlooked the fact that "there is a certain surplus [in NSK] which will not let itself be subsumed" in democratizing tendencies.[78] Žižek insisted that the unassimilable surplus or "incredible core of enjoyment" in the NSK spectacle ultimately frustrates the attempts of both opponents and defenders to use NSK as a "point of suture" for their own narratives. Writing at the height of the Slovene alternative's success (which was actually a prelude to its absorption), Žižek argued that an awareness of the "nightmarish" elements of NSK should not be repressed, and he has sometimes criticized Laibach for not retaining a more absolute, traumatic position. Like its defenders, those arguing for the suppression of NSK (and the whole alternative scene) used NSK as a point of suture to justify their characterization of new tendencies in Slovenia as Fascist (and to justify the enactment of repressive measures). This analysis locates NSK in an ambiguous space of its own. Obviously, NSK benefited from—and, in functioning as a litmus test of tolerance, contributed to—the flourishing of alternative thought and institutions, but it remained in its own camp, cooperating to mutual advantage yet remaining apart.

Whatever the ambiguities of this relationship, both sides were aware that the fate of this apparently neototalitarian cultural movement was implicitly linked to the suppression or otherwise of the NSMs and the alternative, which in many ways seemed diametrically opposed to much of the NSK ethos. The interests of the two ran parallel, and cooperation was mutually beneficial in the shared aims of reenergizing the cultural sphere and public debate. Retroactive interpretations that characterize NSK as an unambiguous protagonist in democratization overlook the complexities both of NSK and of the political situation, and fall into the set lines of literalist thinking that NSK discourse both incites and recapitulates. NSK applied

its demasking and recapitulation methodology to its surroundings consistently and extensively across the maximum number of media, and the development and refinement of this was a goal in itself. NSK was a distinct institution with a complex, nonprogrammatic set of free interactions with various institutions and processes.

Sometimes, as with the 1987 Poster Affair, the dynamic of NSK operations would produce concrete sociopolitical effects, but the fact that NK members themselves were taken aback by the reaction to their poster does not suggest an intention to do more than examine certain issues via their methodology.

Some of the continued resentment of NSK in Slovenia may stem from a feeling that it received significant assistance and publicity without ever quantifiably contributing much in return, or displaying any sense of gratitude or humility. This, however, would have been a fundamental breach of its ambiguity, and by drawing attention to Slovenia, and providing semi-sympathetic media with a constant flow of material of genuinely international significance, NSK added critical weight to a scene which might otherwise have seemed far more obscure. NSK might argue rhetorically that its contribution has been made to the cultural life of the "nation" (as a conceptual entity), in terms that are not fully tangible, yet it is a coherent aspect of its stance that it feels no need to defend itself via contrition, or any explanation that strays far from its standard paradoxical communicative framework.

CHAPTER 3

Was ist Kunst?
(Actually Existing Retrogardism)

> I think that any intelligent, sensitive person living in a society like this will tend to feel alienated.
>
> —John Burnside[1]

Žižek once claimed that Laibach's underlying message was "We want more alienation"—in other words, that the group was expressing and using its own alienation to carry out a dissociation from its compromised environment (and even to distance this environment from itself). The mission to "explore the relationship between art and ideology" entailed exploring and overcoming the alienated condition of both, within post-Tito Yugoslavia and beyond. As opposed to the punk tendency to celebrate alienation in itself, NSK has employed its own alienation, and materials that are in themselves alienating, to transcend an alienated field, attempting to mark out a utopian space in the process. Laibach employed alienating and oppressive images, sounds, words, and techniques in order to "demask and recapitulate" certain contemporary realities. This process of disintegrative over-identification entails manifesting repressed and problematic elements in distorted and overamplified forms in order to escape them.

NSK techniques can be seen at one level as inevitable, in that they sometimes appeared mechanically predetermined but were also spontaneous, intuitive (ab)-reactions by the individuals involved to the peculiarities and contradictions of the conditions in which they found themselves. Economic decline, Cold War tensions, degraded pop culture, and omnipresent ideology fused into a series of regimes structuring NSK's environment, and created an imperative to overcome and explore the alienation these conditions generated. NSK's response was partly intuitive, partly playful, partly brutal, and partly systematic, and the combination of these techniques was militant. The extent of NSK's impact is related to the fact that its exploration was not a stable process; it generated its own disintegrative and contradictory effects but, in Laibach's terms, remained "fused to the grid of time."

The utopian elements and impulses in NSK projects were directed against the alienating banality of everyday routine in culture and in politics. Just as the grand socialist narrative that structured postwar Yugoslavia was degenerating into corruption, cynicism, and compromise, Laibach in particular insisted on (appearing to) restore the heroic, transcendent mode of imagining that the postmodern era has largely proscribed. Laibach's statement that "Socialism must be brave enough to remain 'barbaric'"[2] seems to express a romantic longing for the heroic avant-garde phase of revolutionary struggle, as opposed to the compromised banalities of "actually existing" socialism, the contradictions of which it forensically exposed.

The impacts of this process within its environment should not be interpreted as the goals of a preplanned program. The robotic, fanatical elements of Laibach's militancy do not just imitate ideological subordination, but point to the fact that

3.1 Laibach, *The Enigma of Revolution*, 1981.

the process is not fully conscious or controlled, and that its outcomes cannot be wholly predicted, even by its protagonists. NSK neither set out to nor consistently worked toward Slovene political (as opposed to cultural) independence, or for the victory of capitalism. Some of the most pessimistic Laibach pronouncements have come after these changes, and even in the 1980s NSK's use of socialist iconography often had a mournful character, as if the system had already changed (which the fact of NSK's activities suggested was actually the case). The central object in Irwin's 1991 installation *The Age of Gold* used now-defunct nameplates from Slovene Party premises, alongside a Laibach banner and memorial headstones. Laibach's *Entartete Welt* (1992) also mourns an (unspecified) Golden Age, and while NSK has used the symbols the defunct party system playfully, and —to many—disrespect-fully, none of them has a triumphant character. NSK's stance is fundamentally paradoxical and ambivalent. There is no doubt that its interventions impaired and degraded the symbolic efficiency of the dominant ideology, but much of the time it was criticizing the system with its own rhetoric and symbols in a process that was no more immune to the law of unintended consequences than any other.

Rather than being oriented against the dominant system within NSK's domestic context (which was itself a mixture of systems), the alienation experienced by its members is more profound: as much horror of life as a celebration of it. Perhaps the most extreme expression of this was the 1982 Laibach exhibition *Žrtve letalske nesreče* (Victims of an Air Crash), a series of stark black-and-white graphics of the casualties of a recent air crash involving Slovene passengers. This element of NSK projects, which has faded with time, was not specific to any particular system. If it expressed horror and alienation, it was as much general as specific: a horror at the world as such, and all the particular forms and systems that structure contemporary existence. In such works, Laibach in particular explored not only the fascination of trauma as a taboo, but the trauma of fascination. While this exploration owed a debt to the macabre conceptualism of Throbbing Gristle, or J. G. Ballard's explicit dystopianism, it was also concerned with illustrating the ambivalent status of fascination as such even while manipulating it. Laibach presented the abject and obscene but always had higher ambitions, and used rather than celebrated alienation.

NSK's extremity and militancy represented an attempt to exercise the "right to respond" to imposed signals that Naomi Klein[3] discusses in relation to "branded culture"—to construct a dialogue with an alienating environment. The communication of this response was achieved not through oppositional deconstruction but through an aggressive invasion of the mainstream that always aimed to transcend the marginality of (its origins in) alternative culture. It is important not to assume that this is a closed chapter, and that severe alienation no longer exists in postsocialist Slovenia or elsewhere. The conditions of enforced cultural passivity that Klein identifies, and that Laibach in some respects foretold, mean that asserting the right to respond to alienated and contradictory conditions is ever more urgent.

Yet alongside the alienated elements of reality in NSK works runs a "new conservatism" which seems to emphasize classicist aesthetics and eternal values. In the contemporary context this is in itself provocative, particularly when it breaches the taboo on totalitarian art. There are romantic, pastoral utopian elements of the type (ab)used by both Nazism and Stalinism in NSK's work, alongside far more contemporary, knowing strategies. Despite these ambiguities, there are moments in NSK works, and in the collective State in Time project, that seem overtly romantic and escapist. These contradictory moments reveal an idealism that NSK refuses to repress to suit fashion or consistency. The grand horizons and heroic gestures may be far from reality, and bound up with militant irony, yet they remain seductive and inspiring, violating the *Denkverbot* (conceptual taboo) against the direct expression of vision. Ultimately, though, NSK's art is an anti-escapist art. The momentum that enabled it to talk in utopian terms came from intensive engagement with or interrogation of real political, economic, historical, and cultural issues and complexes. The NSK interrogation machine is as much for (re)engagement as for flight, and its "virtual" elements only reflect contemporary conditions. The NSK project (the

totality of the processes and engagements described here) is a mechanical, semi-conscious mode of exploration, with its own momentum. The art and concepts constructed by it are built from tensions, conflict, and dissonance, and express the contradictions of the world as such. It is analytic, and to this extent "deconstructive," but it also reconstructs from diverse and fragmentary sources, executing a *mystifying demystification.*

SYSTEMIC DISSOCIATION (OVERIDENTIFICATION AND DISIDENTIFICATION)

> We are not nobody's appendages of nobody's politics
> —Tito/Laibach

What NSK both is and is not . . .
One of the most striking examples of this strain of alienation is NSK's tendency to disidentify itself from trends and tendencies even as it quotes them. NSK's operations are based on a paradoxical process of overidentification and disidentification—creating distance by approaching too closely the intimate conceptual space of a dominant "thing."

The unique Yugoslav political system was the *prima materia* of this process, but also an illustration of it. The system contained hybrid elements of both state socialist and market systems, plus its own distinctly "local" elements. This distinct stance, which began pragmatically, was subsequently codified into the doctrines of self-management and, crucially, nonalignment. Laibach's use of Tito's statements extolling the Yugoslavs' way of marking out their own nonaligned space is crucial. Like the system, Laibach appeared to identify with (use) elements from diverse and contradictory sources, yet militantly insisted on the distinctiveness of its path. There were constant tensions under the surface, yet until the end, Yugoslavia refused to be included in any category other than nonaligned (which it had itself created). Yugoslavia could never be definitively placed in any category but its own, despite (or because of) the fact that in some respects it identified very closely with other systems. The same is true of NSK. It deliberately contains elements that seem to leave no possible doubt as to where it (really) stands politically and culturally, yet also others that negate or are antithetical to these, and could also be taken definitively to "prove" its stance. NSK does not pretend to "originality," or conceal its sources, yet neither does it accept them as the basis for categorization.

As the lyrics quoted at the beginning of chapter 1 suggest, Laibach is involved in a playful or provocative *dance* or flirtation with a series of regimes and processes that is never "consummated." Ultimately, Laibach never comes to a halt, or sets up home in any camp but its own. Elements that Laibach seems to fix in monumental form are actually set into flux, while trivial or ephemeral sources simultaneously appear to be monumentalized. The mechanics of this process become clear only through detailed interrogation of the works and their construction.

Laibach seem to take a delight in confounding the expectations they raise—either by including contradictory or ironic elements, or by disowning any possible connection to the tendency they have "sampled." Laibach and NSK works are permeated with either direct borrowings from or references to conceptual art, particularly that of Duchamp, Fluxus, and Beuys,[4] all of whom they cite at some stage.[5] Similarly, NSK presentation and performance techniques are at the very least post-conceptual, and a clear lineage is visible. When people realize that NSK is not political in a literal, party-political sense, they often default to an interpretation that it must therefore be "purely" conceptual, yet this allows no space for NSK's simultaneous use of traditional and totalitarian art. NSK's *modus operandi* could be described in some respects as "militant conceptualism," but this description remains inadequate. NSK may use traditional elements in a manner that can be understood as conceptual, but it sees limitations in pure conceptualism, which was simply one weapon in its arsenal, and which it has never seen itself as an "example of":

> If the term "*conceptualism*" means a certain artistic practice (and idea) of modern art, which *renounces* its own actualization, then LAIBACH has nothing in common with this practice, except oppositions. LAIBACH articulates itself through its own actualization and signifies the triumph *over* conceptualism. Every classification and determination from the standpoint of primary LAIBACH tendency is incorrect and meaningless, although in picture and word we do not reject the label "*trans-historical (real) realism*" as a preparatory phase towards the triumph of the "*manumental retrogarde.*"[6]

There are also explicit references to pop art and postmodern techniques, borrowings from Warhol and Xerox art, and a use of multiple repeated motifs. Yet Laibach again sought to disown these tendencies even as they quoted them, almost seeming to use them in order to illustrate their redundancy or decadence.

> POP art is only one of the forms of *reactionary realism*; a conscious reproduction without the search and exposition of the meaning of the depicted (as modern realism demands). The rejection of the meaning of what is depicted indicates resistance to the depiction of truth and its overt repression. Furthermore, POP art is linked through a distant artificial irony to a certain aspect of social nihilism; LAIBACH KUNST rises above such tendencies and wants to show the truth as it should be, restoring to things and people their unadulterated meaning.[7]

These (contradictory) stances do not stop Laibach using such styles. Indeed, Laibach can condemn them so thoroughly because they used them—or, more accurately, used them against themselves and the systems they overtly or covertly represent. The same applies to other forms NSK uses although not all are acknowledged or denounced in such dramatic terms. More rarely, admiration is expressed for material that has been used, but even this is double-edged or ambivalent, praising something for qualities it would itself deny, such as the militant qualities of disco.[8] This duality sometimes suggests that Laibach particularly love what they seem to denounce, and vice versa. For instance, Throbbing Gristle,

an acknowledged influence on Laibach, have also been heavily criticized by them (see chapter 8). There is a series of artists and tendencies praised by NSK, but such praise may be as unwelcome as critical appropriation by NSK.

In conclusion, we could say that because of this duality, NSK's use of any particular tendency or style implies neither acceptance nor rejection, simply the fact that what is being used has some significance (often previously unremarked), or contributes to the wider project. It follows that no matter how closely it engages with a certain quality or system, the presence of this is as likely to be a means of dissociation as association. What is in question is even a type of disidentification through overidentification. The same conditions apply to the artists' "political palette"—the use of particular political discourses or ideological themes, such as heavy industry, are never one-dimensional, and can imply both negative and positive attitudes simultaneously on the part of NSK. In the case of both dominant styles and dominant ideologies, NSK does not flee from but escapes through overidentification. Inasmuch as there is "a" final resolution of these contradictions, it is either in the onlooker's perception or within the collective framework of NSK as Gesamtkunstwerk.

Retrogardism/Retroquotation

> We take a part of this and a part of that; we blend the various parts and compose a totality or a new structure by binding or pasting the parts together. We steal here and there and transfer all appropriations into new relations, creating imperishable compounds from their original content which we convert in the procedure of misappropriation.[9]

The dual process of over- and disidentification with a series of diverse elements, and the resulting noncategorizability, mark out the "retro" space conceptualized by Laibach and expanded by the other NSK groups.[10] The creation of this and other categories (themselves syntheses of diverse sources) seemed designed as a preemptive fixing against external definition or positioning. The retrograde is both a self-defined "overcategory" and another example of paradoxical dissociation, in this case from the notion of the avant-garde. This is a formulation developed to acknowledge the use of material of the revolutionary avant-gardes while differentiating Laibach (and later NSK) from the avant-garde as such (and its eventual fate): "We are acquainted with the aberrations and contradictions of the disillusioned artistic avant-garde. We have no intention of reproducing or interpreting it. The ideology of surpassing has been surpassed,[11] and it must never happen again that the spectator-consumer confuses the packaging with art."[12]

NSK groups employ what they describe as the "retro principle,"[13] applying similar "retro" methodologies and aesthetic practices across fine arts, drama, design, philosophy, film, and other spheres. Rather than attempting directly to effect avant-garde, revolutionary transformations, NSK combines avant-garde and pop

elements with Nazi-Kunst, socialist realism with conceptualism, modernism with folk art, Slovene impressionism, and other diverse elements. Rather than discard or transcend the past (to which the avant-gardes now belong), NSK attempts to work through it, exploiting its repressed energies. The intent is to open up new possibilities for the future—not through "year zero" revolutionary negation, but through the critical interrogation and reworking of past material.

The retrograde paradigm and the linked concepts of the retro principle and retroquotation emphasize the "back-to-the-future" tendency in the art of the 1980s, and the fact that NSK presents itself as being as much restorative as destructive, moving back in order to move forward. Žižek argues that socialist realism arose as an attempt to humanize the Russian avant-garde tendency toward extreme depersonalization.

> The Russian avant-garde art of the early 20s [futurism, constructivism] not only zealously endorsed industrialization, it even endeavored to reinvent a new industrial man—no longer the old man of sentimental passions and roots in traditions, but the new man who gladly accepts his role as a bolt or a screw in the gigantic co-ordinated industrial Machine. As such, it was subversive in its very "ultra orthodoxy," i.e. in its overidentification with the core of the official ideology. . . . What was perceived in the West as the ultimate nightmare of liberal individualism, as the ideological counterpoint to the "Taylorization," to the Fordist ribbon-work, was in Russia hailed as the *utopian* prospect of liberation.[14]

Retrogardism uses both the threatening collectivist, mass-industrial energies of the avant-garde, and its socialist realist negations. The "subversive ultra orthodoxy" Žižek describes is also partly applicable to retrogardism, but the apparent "ultra" nature of its engagement with a particular regime is always undermined by antithetical and contradictory elements that intentionally introduce an extra dimension of ambiguity. Again, there is a simultaneous (and typically totalitarian) movement in NSK: back (forward) to the total utopianism of the avant-garde, and forward (back) to the classicist values of socialist realism and Nazi-Kunst (which also existed in competition with "Fascist modernist" tendencies in design and architecture). The retrogarde is in a sense "meta" utopian or futuristic, using similar heroic and romantic language to generate a distinctive effect, while fully aware of and commenting on the contradictions of the avant-garde. The NSK "project" was utopian to the extent that it sought to create a new space of articulation, but also postutopian in its lack of a direct agenda beyond the sphere of culture.

Retrogardism locates the contemporary in the past and the (imminent) contemporaneity of elements from the past. Retrogarde characteristics that are more closely related to NSK's use of totalitarian and national/folk imagery are monumentalism and romanticism—both, in their different ways, provocative to contemporary tastes because of their association with the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Romantic folk and national imageries are at the very least problematic, but NSK plays up rather than trying to conceal their even more problematic status when they are

placed in a Germanic context. Catholic iconography, pastoral images, and NSK's repeated use of the Sower motif all help to soften its militant collectivism. Yet the "romantic" aspects of NSK also find expression in the heroic, monumental designs of the Builders (Graditelji), or the stellar aspirations of Noordung. Laibach initially referred to the "Monumental Retro-Avantgarde,"[15] reflecting both the scale of its ambitions and the centrality of monumentalism to the retrogarde aesthetic.

The extent of NSK references to (and from) history and critical/cultural theory shows an awareness of the problematic nature of invoking such moods and desires, but this does not prevent their use. NSK works do contain genuine romantic, utopian, and monumental moments, but the accompanying texts do not repress the problems these generate, but reanimate the debates surrounding them. None of these elements can be isolated from the others, and if we look at NSK works as a whole, it is impossible to separate expression from commentary; sources are analyzed and qualified even as they are deployed in their most archetypal forms. There is a sincere apparent desire in NSK works to reshape the world on a scale that inevitably requires the use of tactics as extreme as those of the avant-garde or Fascist modernism. Yet there is a simultaneous awareness of the consequences of these tactics when applied literally, and the fact that ultimately they tend to fail by their own standards, never being absolute enough to overcome reality completely. Nevertheless, there were romantic elements in all these attempts to reshape the world that can fascinate—totalitarianisms do not succeed entirely through force, but also through their ability to enchant, seduce, and inspire.

Running alongside elements that are apparently deadly serious, and inextricably bound up with them, is a deep vein of black irony and absurdism. Laibach in particular are aware of striking ludicrous poses, and often use apparently trivial musical material, but this does not mean that everything is "really" a joke. Besides the militant strand of the avant-garde, there are also surrealistic and Dadaist tendencies at work, yet again these do not cancel out the very serious ambitions and the points being made, only qualify them and add to the complexity of the whole. The most serious moments can be highly comic, and vice versa. Gottlieb[16] has characterized Orwell's writing in 1984 as a type of "militant irony" constructed in great detail with a highly serious polemical intent. The militant-irony paradigm both describes the polemical/critical aspects of NSK interventions, and explains the almost indistinguishably fine line between parody and paean. This aspect of NSK bears only a superficial similarity to the knowing, commercialized, "so bad it's good" mode of irony. Just as it is a mistake to see the scope of NSK's criticisms as limited to the socialist system, it is equally mistaken to imagine that ultimately none of it is "for real." The degree of both concealed and overt irony can vary from image to image and action to action, and Laibach imply that it is for the observer to disentangle this relationship:

> Humor is a moral irresponsibility of a person in relation to the factual nature of actual relations between individuals and community; it is an alibi which permits all

kinds of compromises, denies the demands set by reality and affirms the principle of satisfaction.

According to Darwin, *laughter* is an expression mostly common to idiots and according to English psychologist M. W. Brody, it represents the concluding part of aggressive usurpation.

It is well known that the word "humor" springs from England and the English are proud of it; however, it is also well known that England has nothing left to laugh at. Its humor is a leftover of narcissoid hedonism, its weapon against the outer world and a proof of its pseudo-domination over the actual situation.

In art, we appreciate humor that can't take a joke.[17]

All the key retrogarde elements listed above, plus others, are always present in NSK works, but in constantly shifting proportions—at times black humor may predominate; at other times romanticism and frequently contradictory elements will be present in equal strength, generating friction, confusion, and fascination.

A basis for this strategy of combination can be found in Laibach's "Monumental Retro-Avantgarde" text, which incorporates an extract from a 1913 manifesto by the Russian avant-garde Lučizem group:[18] "We proclaim that copies have never existed and we recommend painting from pictures painted before our times. We claim that art cannot be judged from the viewpoint of time. We acknowledge the usefulness of all styles for the expression of our art, those past as well as present."[19]

Laibach appropriated this utilitarian technique—all styles, no matter how contradictory, can be of equal use—as the basis of a visually and conceptually distinctive means of expression that could examine and criticize styles even as it used them. In practice, Laibach's denial of originality and references to the dictation of the motif referred not only to Lučizem but to recycling and repetition themes in the work of contemporary Serbian artists, and American postmodernism. What was distinctive about NSK's emerging techniques at the beginning of the 1980s was the scale, range, and contentious nature of the materials and styles it used.

By 1985, Irwin had conceptualized this approach as "emphatic eclecticism." The process both allowed access to the dissonant energies generated by combinations and introduced destabilizing, mystifying elements to problematize and deliteralize the tendencies it quoted. This is apparent in the combination of Nazi typography and Slovene folk imagery, or pop art and socialist realism. Just as NSK refuses to repress the contradictory or traumatic elements of its sources, it also refuses to limit the choice of material according to notions of artistic or political correctness—potentially, *everything* can form the raw material of NSK work. Even the most obscurantist early Laibach texts contained clues to indicate awareness of the problematic issues surrounding the use of certain material, and NSK's works have contained consistent attempts to "auto-theorize" its stance. Irwin state:

The retro principle makes use of tradition in a direct and indirect way (quoted in its original purity). Due to the current interest in it, even a complete identification (a

3.2 Irwin, *Resurrection of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice*, 1986.

quotation) acquires a historically productive character. The unveiling of identity is carried out through a certain mode of reinterpretation which establishes space for a personal account, and the motif becomes the element which determines the method of execution (style). Historical facts are losing their special immanent character and their role in the context of time, being transformed into everyday's [sic] conscious experience.

The artistic process is transformed into a demonstrative exploration of the previous language models by way of collective consciousness of individual collective forms.[20]

NSK's emphatic eclecticism is (and wants to be seen as) more systematic, militant, and focused than the playful, largely depoliticized eclecticism of Western postmodernism. The symbolisms of competing and antithetical stylistic, political, and social regimes are placed in opposition to each other without the contradictions being fully resolved. This type of eclecticism is a means of revealing the underlying hidden connections not only between art and power but also between formally competing ideological systems that structure the contemporary environment. No detail in NSK is accidental, even if some details are random or deliberately misleading—they all lead on to some historical, artistic, or political reference. (For instance, Laibach's use of a rabbit on stage in early performances, and Irwin's use of hare images, both reference Beuys's performance art.) Within NSK works and proj-

NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST

3.3 NSK insignia.

ects there are layers and levels of both concealed and overt meanings which audi-
ences are left to uncover for themselves, and many of which may remain unidenti-
fied without chance discoveries of the sources.[21] NSK statements are very often
quotations, or collages of quotations, from frequently incompatible and rarely ac-
knowledged sources. Some references will be fully understood only by those with
specialist knowledge or a local connection; others will be completely missed, par-
ticularly those that refer to lesser-known artists and themes.

The symbol of the retrogarde is the NSK logo, itself a combination of eclectic
elements. At its heart is the ubiquitous Laibach/Malevich black cross, with the
German anti-Fascist designer John Heartfield's infamous axe-swastika overlaying
it. Also present are two other generic Laibach signifiers—an industrial cogwheel,
and antlers. The banner at the base of the object features the names of NSK's three
founder groups—Red Pilot (formerly TSSN), Laibach, and Irwin. The logo also

features a spinning atom at the base of the design and, in place of a torch flame, the three-peaked insignia of the OF. This is a typical retro movement, back/forward to mid-twentieth-century notions of scientific progress and forward/back to arcane national symbolism. The overall visual effect is simultaneously archaic and industrial. The logo exemplifies NSK's use of repeated generic motifs representing the work of the individual groups and the collective as a whole.

HOW THE EAST SEES THE EAST

One of the key aspects of retrogardism is the nonrepression of problematic elements of social and historical experience. In the ex-Yugoslav and postsocialist spaces this holistic, noncensorious approach inevitably entails the presence of the dominant totalitarian symbolisms that marked these spaces. Many people in the West find it hard to accept that anything from this period can be considered part of cultural "heritage," and dispute the fact that anything of value could have emerged during it. Even in the postsocialist context, art produced in Eastern Europe remains problematic, with many artists feeling under pressure wholly to disown their local context, and in particular local (socialist) cultural history. Yet there are precedents for the use of past symbolisms in the West as well as the East. The totalitarian motifs used by NSK are "retro," and in this respect absolutely contemporary given the popularity of "retro" styles and designs in postmodern culture. Posters, typography, and iconography from the socialist period are now commonly recycled in retro design both within the postsocialist zone and beyond. Although there is more obvious correspondence between these techniques and contemporary Western culture, the eclectic juxtaposition of imageries and concepts from different historical contexts is equally characteristic of the (post)socialist context. Epstein argues that Western authors have often overlooked the inherent postmodernity of Eastern totalitarianism, which in some respects anticipated Western postmodernism:

> Far from being antithetical to postmodernism, ideology supplies a unique forum for the postmodern interplay of all conceivable ideas. Paradoxically, Soviet Marxism, the philosophy least expected to be involved in postmodern debate, helps us to provide an explanation. The ideology of Soviet Marxism has always enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most conservative and antimodern belief systems of the twentieth century. Totalitarianism was assumed to exclude the sort of relativism that flourished in Western culture and laid the basis for the transition to postmodernity. However, glasnost and perestroika have shed new light on this ideological system which, if regarded in the process of its formation, reveals a stunning example of relativism inscribed into totalitarian thinking. Totalitarianism itself may thus be viewed as a specific postmodern model that came to replace the modernist ideological stance elaborated in earlier Marxism.[22]

Epstein draws out a series of lesser-known artistic practices from the pre-*glasnost* period to illustrate that, as well as a structurally postmodern (Stalinist) ideology,

Russia has had an (underground) artistic scene producing postmodern culture for far longer than is known or acknowledged in the West. If Epstein's argument about the early postmodernity of much Soviet (and, by extension, all state socialist) thought and culture is correct, then it should be no surprise that techniques that are to some extent postmodern (eclecticism, retro, irony) had a strong presence in Yugoslavia, where the ruling ideology was more markedly eclectic than that of the USSR. Forced to negate and to select elements of both socialism and capitalism, self-management was structurally eclectic. NSK's eclectic engagements with this ideology revealed the influence of this complexity on cultural practice in the Yugoslav context.

Just as Epstein and, through their work, Laibach are concerned to challenge Western preconceptions about the "backwardness" of the East, so the Croatian-born American sociologist S. G. Meštrović has stressed that the postsocialist societies are not "tabulae rasae" or void spaces for the insertion of Western economic and cultural ideologies: "The East European individual is not lost in a sea of circulating fictions, but is smothered in cultural traditions. Far from being a cultural desert, life in formerly communist nations constitutes a rich and often overwhelming experience of cultural symbols drawn from previously repressed national, religious and other traditional sources."[23]

Moreover, such an individual is located within a greatly expanded infosphere in which, despite the massive influx of Western culture, Communist as well as pre-Communist influences survive and compete for attention. The single totalizing ideology has been relegated, but it has not disappeared, and it inevitably forms part of the joint cultural heritage of the Eastern bloc. One of the key effects of Laibach's work is to demonstrate that susceptibility to ideology has not disappeared. It finds open expression in Slavophile nationalism and the overt Fascism of the Pamyat movement in Russia, or ex-Yugoslav nationalist paramilitarism. Yet even where these movements have become the new dominant ideologies that legitimate and enforce post-Communist regimes, they do not go unchallenged. Their competitors for hegemony are the ostensibly neutral or pragmatic Western market and cultural doctrines. Thus ideological struggle in formerly socialist Europe has not ceased, but it has diversified and been renewed. Western popular culture—and, to a lesser extent, the new business ideology—present themselves as once-banned guarantors of freedom rather than potentially hegemonic ideological agencies intent on a reactionary de-politicization of economic issues.

Laibach's politicized interrogation of popular music indicates that the Western-style entertainment sphere contains ideological power structures that are far more refined and less visible than those of totalitarian propaganda. If anything, the post-socialist context is more ideologized than ever before, scarred by conflicts and fusions between archaic, modern, and postmodern ideologies, and by ideologies that present themselves as nonideologies. Each of these ideologies employs its own forms of "Newspeak" (hegemonic ideologized discourse), and with the proliferation of ideologies and signals in the postsocialist context, the numbing, paralyzing

effects that Françoise Thom[24] attributes to ideological language on the Soviet model are multiplying: "Confronted by the terror of nothingness which ideology brings, man instinctively seeks refuge under the wing of some tyrant, unaware that in so doing he is handing himself over to the very thing he fears. Compared with sheer nothingness, tyranny always looks like the lesser evil."[25]

Thom's analysis and Laibach's success help to explain what the West sees as perverse antidemocratic political choices made in the East. Against the ideologized chaos of the postsocialist context, monolithic certainties are attractive and familiar refuges. Totalitarian dogmas provide a point of continuity amidst chaos, even gaining an additional attractiveness. It is important to remember that Laibach's illumination of a continued susceptibility to tyranny applies at least as much to Western as to Eastern societies, and that their greatest success has been achieved in Western Europe and North America. Laibach manipulate the totalitarianism (or hegemonic drives) latent within every social or ideological system, exploring their contradictions *ad absurdum*. For instance, in order to stage an effective demonstration of the normally concealed or unnoticed power mechanisms in rock concerts, Laibach have to recapitulate, or overemphatically simulate, them to such an extent as to provide a dangerously credible representation of tyranny.

Laibach's art is a call not to action but to (enforced) reflection, and an attempt to transcend the series of ideological and cultural regimes with which Eastern and Western societies and individuals are confronted. Laibach give every appearance of preaching with totalitarian zeal, but their actions are not conventionally political. Laibach's is a conceptual-aesthetic approach that simultaneously sets up, illustrates, and frustrates the desire for identification, but this necessarily entails ambiguity. Laibach present what Žižek describes as "an aggressive inconsistent mixture of Stalinism, Nazism and Blut und Boden ideology,"[26] and this is shot through with paradox and mystification. For every Germanic image there is a Slovene or a Communist one; socialist realist elements in their artwork are combined with motifs from pop art, the avant-garde, or Nazi-Kunst. The key effect produced by these compounds is fascination through paradox and ambiguity. The difficulty in trying to reconcile such diverse and contrasting elements makes political recuperations and appropriations of Laibach's work (as, for instance, Fascist or Communist) problematic. Its shifting, volatile contents have at some point offended or threatened Christians, Fascists, nationalists, democrats, and socialists. The dissonant energy produced by confrontation, gives Laibach's work its force and momentum, yet—as Gottlieb[27] points out—this "law of contradiction" is as typical of totalitarian ideology as of the artistic avant-garde.

Totalitarian signifiers provide an element of familiarity for the postsocialist audience exposed to Laibach (and an element of exotic, taboo fascination for Western audiences). While these signifiers may have violent or painful associations, they also present elements of continuity with an inherent local meaning that is absent from Western cultural imports. These factors are useful in explaining Laibach's popular-

ity in the "former Eastern bloc." Laibach's totalitarian-derived choreography and packaging offer much that is familiar to such audiences. This "negative" familiarity is complemented by the ubiquitous familiarity of the songs Laibach perform—even ex-Soviet audiences are by now overfamiliar with the works of Queen, the Rolling Stones, and others. Even in heavily altered forms, the songs are a (relatively) light-hearted element, offsetting Laibach's potentially alienating aspects. The experience of growing up within a state socialist system also means that the overt presence of ideology within popular culture is nothing new to such audiences.

The shared, Eastern/Communist heritage that facilitated the acceptance of Laibach and NSK in the "Eastern" context was examined intensively at the NSK Embassy Moscow, the first significant visit by NSK to ex-Soviet territory and the public debut of the NSK State in Time. During the event, subtitled "How the East sees the East," Slovene, Serb, and Russian artists and critics discussed the problematic status of Eastern artists. In collaboration with these individuals, Irwin produced the Moscow Declaration, which unapologetically insists on the value of the Eastern European cultural perspective:

A. The history, experience and time and space of Eastern countries of the 20th century cannot be forgotten, hidden, rejected or suppressed.
C. This concrete history, this experience and this time and space have created the structure for a specific subjectivity that we want to develop, form, and reform; a subjectivity that reflects the past and future.
G. This context and developed subjectivity are the real base for our new identity, which is taking a clear shape (also in the shape of new social, political, and cultural infrastructures) in the last decade of this century.[28]

The text insists on the global value of the totality of the "Eastern" experience (including its totalitarian aspects), and retroactively codifies a series of initiatives enacted since 1980 by NSK groups and related artists (such as Mladen Stilinović or Ilya Kabakov)[29] who have used socialist elements. It takes an explicit stance that advocates a holistic view of the Eastern cultural heritage, and thus runs contrary to the selective, nonholistic narratives of contemporary East European nationalists who attempt to write off the socialist period in its entirety. NSK groups actively challenge the relegation of Eastern art and experience through an unapologetic and forceful assertion of their Eastern identity that fascinates Western audiences. What is confronted in this statement, and in NSK's work generally, is what Central and Eastern European artists and critics experience as a regime that enforces Western control of the art market, and continues to relegate "Eastern" artists to an exotic but secondary position.[30]

Although Slovene artists operated under a far less repressive system than their Russian counterparts, there are enough coincidences of interest and experience between them (particularly the fact that both sets of artists operated in a system in which there was no formal art market) to make the appearance in 1990s Moscow

of Slovene artistic groups using problematic totalitarian signifiers a natural (if not uncontroversial) event rather than an alien intrusion. The *Moscow Declaration* and the interest in NSK in postsocialist territories demonstrate that the use of totalitarian imagery for the creation of an authentic Eastern mode of artistic expression has a wide resonance in these territories.[31]

Retrogardism, then, is quite distinct from Western retro (which it has influenced), particularly in its militant assertion of Slav/Eastern and totalitarian qualities that were unfashionable at the time of Laibach's foundation, and seem particularly subversive and disruptive in the "postsocialist era."

REPROCESSING

The totalizing and subjectivizing force of fanatical, totalitarian modes of mass repetition is in the foreground of industrial production and discipline, and therefore also of Laibach's work. Yet the mode of repetition active in Laibach is not a simple mass (re)production of the symbols and concepts, but a re-creation of these from already used materials. Applying the industrial/scientific metaphors that occur frequently in NSK works to the techniques that produce them, reprocessing presents itself as an appropriate framework. In one sense, reprocessing is simply another form of recycling, what might be called (or is saleable as) the "human face of industry," but in practice the recycling of certain spent materials can have a literally sickening power, and the processors may be unaware of its long-term effects, or prepared to overlook them in the interests of short-term productivity. Recycling derives its force from the reactivation of the core strengths of materials considered "spent" in any other context. This means that when they are reactivated, even as part of a new overall form or fuel, a degree of their original essence (whether positive or negative) is inevitably reactivated too. Just as recycling of now-toxic elements carries with it the promise of new value, a transcendence of the original toxicity, so Laibach's representation of supposedly spent but obviously still toxic materials is justified by references to the therapeutic value of such a terrifying and potentially catastrophic process.

As self-described "engineers of the human soul," Laibach can be compared metaphorically to scientists who consciously release harmful elements into the environment, on the grounds either that while they may be toxic they are not statistically dangerous, or that it is necessary for economic or scientific progress. However, just as the broad mass of both critics and consumers (and a great part of their audience) remain to be convinced of the therapeutic (as opposed to aesthetic or discursive) possibilities of Laibach's work,[32] very frequently only the increasingly mistrusted "scientists" themselves (often pretend to) believe in the safety, or the acceptable risks, of their work. The modernist faith in scientific progress that NSK reprocesses, however, is increasingly severely questioned, and perhaps because of this Laibach never seek to justify themselves except via intimidating the-

3.4 NK, *FIAT*, 1987.

oretical language, and do not even try to pretend that they are concerned with possible unintended effects.

Laibach state at the end of the *Bravo* video: "Our only responsibility is to continue to be irresponsible"[33]—meaning that Laibach have a responsibility only to their own principles and operations. Thus, although Laibach often claimed to anticipate at least some of the effects of their work,[34] the reference to irresponsibility might be taken as a partial admission (which some contemporary scientists still cannot make) that experimentation with, or the manipulation of, volatile materials can have unpredicted and possibly undesired effects. In this statement about irresponsibility, Laibach preemptively shift the blame for any such problems to the nature of the materials themselves, for which they are not responsible but without which they cannot work. Even the peaceful (as opposed to consciously malicious) and controlled release of toxins into an environment can have bizarre and unpleasant side effects, perhaps even for the scientists themselves, and there is also the constant danger of reprocessing operations going critical, or of undetected leaks. The more volatile the material, the more difficult and important it is precisely to calibrate a dosage which will be medicinal (homeopathic) rather than harmful. Most importantly, when a process is repeated in a new environment, the materials may well interact with the new context in a bizarre or dangerous fashion. All these (metaphorical) dangers are true both of literal and abstract, NSK-type reprocessing and of their scientific equivalent, and this awareness works against NSK claims

of total safety and precision. However, it does not preclude beneficial effects; it is simply that addressing the dangers and unpredicted side effects attendant upon their work helps to form a complete and balanced (descriptive) picture of NSK's impact.

Although the anti-oppressive or beneficial effects of NSK's work are increasingly acknowledged, it is impossible to state with absolute certainty whether such effects were really anticipated (or retrospectively claimed), and the same is true of any negative effects. Of course, NSK definitions of what constitutes positive or negative, especially in terms of its works' effects, is an issue in itself, and it must be remembered that its criteria of judgment may have certain formal bases, but they are inevitably changeable and subject to variable factors such as playfulness and the disparity between members' individual subjective opinions or statements[35] and "finished" NSK judgments, or stances. Viewing these techniques as reprocessing operations accounts for the ambivalence and danger surrounding them, and casts the "fuel" used by NSK in a new light.

RETROQUOTATION

Before examining the ways in which retrogarde techniques interrogate the linguistic and visual components of totalitarianism, it is important to clarify the mode of quotation used by NSK. Direct textual quotations, paraphrases, and samples by Laibach in particular are even more extensive, though less often identified than NSK use of visual material. These techniques are underlaid by the same techniques of dissonance and eclecticism. These processes have significant overlaps with hip-hop strategies of lyrical and musical sampling, and neither political correctness, conventional logic, nor stylistic politics stands in the way of sampling anything that may be useful. Retroquotation retroactively introduces viral mutations into the sampled texts, destabilizing and restabilizing them within the context of the overall NSK *Gesamtkunstwerk*. A single statement can contain samples or paraphrases of diverse and contradictory texts, but because textual sources are the least frequently identified NSK material, it is possible to maintain the illusion that the texts are original statements rather than what Laibach term "new originals" created from existing as well as new materials. As in other respects, the responsibility for decoding and identification of the texts' sources is left to the audience. The two primary sources of NSK textual samples are spent political and theoretical texts—particularly ideological, psychological, and art-historical sources.

The mechanics of this process are most visible when a mixture of techniques is applied to the source material—both verbatim extracts and textual mutations. The following example compares the "base" text used by Laibach to describe the track *Decree* to Laibach's reprocessed version. The original text is derived from the sleevenotes of a 1958 edition of Holst's *The Planets*. *Decree* samples the opening movement *Mars, the Bringer of War*, but the text selected to describe it is a combination of

the original descriptions of Saturn and Mercury. Passages directly retroquoted by Laibach are in shown in bold:

> "Saturn, the bringer of Old Age." **No one can hear this unmoved.** It is the most poignant of music, **the tragedy of old age is unfolded before us. The decaying flesh—the withered muscle**—the cadaverous voice—**the toll of the bell**—senility—Time with the Scythe, "the days when strong men shall bow themselves, the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened."

> "Mercury, the Winged Messenger," the God of Speed, **swift in thought and action**—the author of the **flash of lightning,** the leap of the tiger, **the swoop of the eagle, the flight of the arrow, the sparkling of phosphorescence on rippling water.** All things that move with speed are from him, and he rejoices in their celerity.[36]

> Laibach: *Decree:* **No one can hear this unmoved. The tragedy of old age is unfolded before us. The decaying flesh—the withered muscle—the toll of the bell. . . .** Then LAIBACH'S "DECREE"; **swift in thought and action, a flash of lightning, the swoop of the eagle, the flight of the arrow, the sparkling of phosphorescence on rippling water. All things that move with speed** are with them.

This example is significant on several levels. First, it illustrates the way in which Laibach chose material with poetic and mystical qualities that would heighten the sense of grandeur and mystique surrounding the group, which at that time remained an extremely shadowy and sinister phenomenon. Laibach could be confident that 1958 sleevenotes were a safely obscure source, and the fact that the same LP was present in my parents' home, and fascinated me from an early age, is sheer chance—without this coincidence, it is extremely unlikely that I would have detected the source. It also shows the subtle resequencing and alteration techniques which Laibach would later apply to the lyrics of rock and pop "classics" in order to bring out their underlying meanings while retaining the basic structure. Finally, this example also illustrates the constant proliferation and repetition of certain motifs in Laibach and NSK works. This text was Laibach's first use of a "Mercury motif" that has recurred throughout their work, particularly during the period of the *Kapital* tours (1992–93), when Mercury's winged helmet featured both in Laibach's costumes and in related graphics, as in the painting *Spieltour*. The figure of Mercury (god of speed and communication) demonstrates Laibach's repeated use of mythological archetypes with a rich range of associations.

As ever, Laibach provide some of the most spectacular examples of this process, yet the texts of all NSK groups repeat motifs and use extensive retroquotations. The work of the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy in particular is based on the systematic application of these techniques to the subject of philosophy as such, often using specialist and arcane sources which again typify the NSK process as one of mystifying demystification, both revealing and obscuring.

3.5 Laibach, *Spieltour*, 1991–1998.

DEPERSONALIZATION AND LINGUISTIC ALIENATION

> Language stops being representation in order to move towards its extremities or limits.[37]

The "coldness" of Laibach's early public appearances was supplemented by an apparent neototalitarian discourse of a severity rare even in the more hardline states of the former Eastern bloc.[38] Laibach statements raise the same fears that are unleashed in the group's stage performances (absolute depersonalization and totalitarian discipline), although they are arguably closer in tone to Russian avant-garde texts than to Nazi or socialist realist ones. Laibach's language was that of a total corporate entity communicating via a highly complex mix of provocative rhetoric and deliberate mystification. Laibach appeared to communicate via totalitarian "mono-

declarations"[39] allowing only one possible meaning, but this mode actually bred confusion and mystification rather than certainty. The use of this mode actually attempted to demask and recapitulate totalitarian linguistic strategies.

Early Laibach interviews consisted of formal prepared statements given in place of face-to-face meetings.[40] For the first few years of Laibach's activity, this was the normal form of "interview," and when Laibach did commence face-to-face interviews, they always tried (with little success) to have quotes attributed simply to "Laibach," or at least to "Laibach's spokesman." NSK's collectivism differentiates the work from the overtly ego-driven works of "auteur" directors or celebrity artists. By definition, this stance is anti-egotistical, and in this respect an ethical position is apparent: an insistence on the value of shared collective effort rather than individualism. For these reasons, NSK's collectivism can be read as much as a critique of Western consumerist individualism as of Eastern totalitarianism.

The emphasis on the group rather than the individual represents an attempt to preserve freedom of action in the face of the "totalitarian" demands of the Western star system that Laibach have (in common with Adorno and others) repeatedly condemned: "The Star system has its own rational foundation: in the fascist form of totalitarianism, it helped the people to transcend their immediate traumatic existence by identification with the leader. The Hollywood principle awakens belief and recognition that there is a world in which the fulfilment of dreams is a reality."[41]

The "sampling" of Adorno[42] illustrates Laibach's recapitulation of the discourse of critical intellectuals as well as of the ruling system. The cultural pessimism of many Laibach statements echoes closely the tone and atmosphere of Adorno's critiques of the "culture industry." Adorno's description of the seductive magic of irrational language used by Fascist demagogues[43] also helps to explain Laibach's use of paradox and tautology. Contradiction helps to create a sense of fascination in an audience, generating speculation about "true" meanings and a sense of awe at the apparently rational deployment of what seems irrational. Through their use of language and their entire mode of communication, Laibach—and subsequently NSK—created the impression that there must be a hidden mystery or a final solution underlying these contradictions. This was essential to constructing a dangerous simulation of a totalitarian machine.

Laibach distilled the competing Western and local theories present in Yugoslavia after the liberalization of the 1960s. In this period, Western philosophy and theory became increasingly influential, and different authors became associated with different Yugoslav "schools" and institutions. This trend also affected the Party, and even the army. Soviet thought was treated with suspicion, because of the legacy of the break with Stalin in 1948 and the Party's desire to differentiate itself from Stalinism. All these ideologies supplemented and existed in parallel with the all-pervasive self-management discourse (itself an eclectic mixture of various ideological schools), which was a constant presence within all social institutions.[44] According to Žižek, the paramount schools within Slovenia were Heideggerianism

among the opposition and Frankfurt School Marxism within the Party. In between these two lay an Althusserian school attacked by both camps, and the small Slovene Lacanian School around Žižek. One or more of these competing discourses structured the modes with which the different institutions communicated with the public, and Žižek notes, for instance, that the army's justifications of its military-ideological doctrines ("General People's Defense"[45]) employed Heideggerian language. This situation amplified the oppressive aspects of each theory, creating an infinitely more complex reality than existed in other socialist states. NSK texts allude to and incorporate elements of most of the principal theories, and "recapitulate" the terror instilled in the subject by tautological and contradictory discourse.[46] Laibach fused the competing theories into its own distinctive language. Besides Adorno's critique of popular culture, Laibach pronouncements on the role of the mass media also incorporate the work of Althusser and Jacques Attali, and both Hegelian and Heideggerian references are apparent in the texts of the Philosophy Department.

The resulting synthesis evokes Thom's discussion of linguistic totalitarianism, and her description of its use of "pedantry as a means of intellectual terrorism."[47] Laibach's use of language is terroristic in that it is explicitly designed as a disorienting, alienating device as violent as its sounds and images. In both its associations and its mode of expression Laibach's language is designed to be oppressive, an analogue to the violence of the concerts. Asked in one early interview about their bureaucratic mode of communication, Laibach explicitly stated that their work is based on the linguistic-conceptual terror of ideology:

> Such a form of interview is the limit of comprehension, within which the subject is prevented from feigning ignorance and *communication through noncommunication*. The way of its formation is simultaneously also a *process of permanent repression on linguistic models*, and thereby also on the subjects which construct them. Such a form reduces the possibility of individual influences on the structure of the expression itself to a minimum; it is dictated through the totalitarian structure and understood as the *right to incomprehensibility*. (LAIBACH thus constantly degrades every communication on the level of the word, turning it into ideological phraseology.) The assimilating capacity of the consumer is limited and depends on:
> a: the knowledge of the symbol(s)
> b: the level of development of the consumer
> c: the technique of perception (speed-reading).
> The consumer can only influence the third factor; LAIBACH recommends a selection of sources of information.[48]

Laibach's "right to incomprehensibility" expresses one of the clearest features of the group's work: a defence of ambiguity, and of the right not to have to explain every detail of an artistic process, or adopt clear political stances. Besides ambiguity, Laibach texts, images, music, and concerts also allow for simultaneity. The texts refer simultaneously to several sources and associations, and deliberately leave the

resulting paradoxes to be resolved by the "consumer." They are oriented toward a series of regimes, and adopt the linguistic and other codes of these regimes in order to render perceptible characteristics normally kept hidden by such regimes. In this case, Laibach simultaneously make use of and draw attention to the repressive and nonsensical, "noncommunicative" qualities of ideological discourse. Besides these elements, Laibach add the appearance of remorseless totalitarian repetition, openly stating: "Relentlessness in language is such a comfortable thing." Constant repetition creates a numbing, fascinating effect, emphasizing oppressive elements and illustrating the trauma of repetition as such.[49]

Laibach texts were heavily informed by and frequently incorporated extensive "samples" of official self-management discourse, so that complaints about their incomprehensibility were double-edged. A standard aspect of the official politico-linguistic environment was "made strange" (incomprehensible) by juxtaposition with contradictory modes of discourse. It was the fact that it was not emanating from a "recognized" official source (and also that it referred to a more brutal historical era) that made it so disturbing. The distress caused by this "incomprehensible" discourse also indicates the centrality of language to Slovene identity; for a nonofficial group to manipulate and bureaucratize the national language was not just transgressive but was seen by some as anti-Slovene, particularly given the number of Germanic symbols recirculated by the group.

The ruling discourse was simultaneously ubiquitous and invisible. Laibach could appropriate the codes of self-management ideology precisely because almost no one, Party ideologues included, had actually read their core texts in any detail. The raw material of the system was still active, but unclaimed and unused, awaiting a use. Žižek claims that in practice, developed totalitarian ideology has abandoned pretensions to the truth: "It is no longer meant, even by its authors, to be taken seriously—its status is just that of a means of manipulation, purely external and instrumental; its rule is secured not by its truth-value but by simple extra-ideological violence and promise of gain."[50]

Self-management was characterized by the offering of actual material gains—the short-term prosperity of the late Tito period—and the (generally concealed) threat of force. Laibach's response to the alienation generated by the gap between the dominant cluster of ideologies and dysfunctional reality again suggests comparisons with Kafka. Deleuze and Guattari[51] interpret the "becoming-animal" process in *Metamorphosis* as an answer to the inhumanity of the (bureaucratic) machineries that were increasingly impinging on daily life at the beginning of the twentieth century. Laibach's response to similar conditions was based not on flight but on becoming "more X than X itself," becoming systemic/state/machine-like—apparently colder, more systematic and ruthless than the system itself.

Laibach acknowledge the mechanisms of these manipulations, but the group never relinquishes ambiguity, and insists that responsibility for the assimilation and interpretation of its work lies with the consumer. The texts extrapolate more

than they explain, and provide no easy closure to the questions raised by the phenomenon as a whole. The paradoxes inherent in the juxtaposition of diverse elements prevent straightforward assimilation, and make enjoyment of the spectacle problematic. This presents inevitable problems of interpretation. Even as the texts are cited, it must be remembered that the texts themselves are integral to the performance of ambiguity and paradox which Gottlieb[52] identifies as key totalitarian tactics used to create confusion and a sense of dependence on those authorized to deploy such abstractions.

Careful readings of the texts reveal chinks in Laibach's impenetrable facade. Laibach apply neo-Duchampian techniques based on the manipulation of discursive "ready-mades" taken from diverse and contradictory sources, which in combination generate paradox and ambiguity with the effects Gottlieb describes. Another later influence on Laibach, and source for these methods, was William Burroughs's cut-up technique. Early Laibach texts paraphrased Soviet and Nazi statements blended with quotations from Tito, Kardelj, and other Yugoslav leaders. The language of self-management was often fiendishly complex, and the convoluted tautologies and paradoxes of Laibach's statements recapitulated this aspect of the group's political and psychic environment.[53] Discontinuities between Laibach statements actually represent consistency, and are informed by a pragmatic principle of structural contradiction that allows the totality "Laibach" to appear monolithic, while generating this appearance from diverse and heterogeneous elements. While the statements have very specific political implications (both in Slovenia and beyond), they also represent an attempt to transcend the inertia and disturbing associations of the sources. Aesthetic reprocessing and redeployment of these sources brings out the uncanny, metaphysical qualities which scientific socialism demonized even as it manipulated.[54] Laibach used these esoteric elements of ideology to produce what they group provocatively termed "political poetry," revealing a concealed aesthetic at the heart of ideology. Laibach and NSK texts worked over and intervened in a series of languages and discourses structuring their context: self-management jargon, art-historical text, critical theory, English and German. Versions of the linguistic procedures established by Laibach are present in the work of all NSK groups, particularly NK and the Philosophy Department.

THE QUESTION OF TOTALITARIAN ART

The position of LAIBACH on traditional art is *selection*, which must rediscover and reevaluate history, return power to the institutions and conventions and decrease the distance between artistic expression and collective consensus.[55]

Art and totalitarianism are not mutually exclusive. Totalitarian regimes abolish the illusion of revolutionary individual artistic freedom. LAIBACH KUNST is the principle of conscious rejection of personal tastes, judgments, convictions . . . ; free de-

personalization, voluntary acceptance of the role of ideology, demasking and reca-
pitulation of the regime "ultramodernism."

He who has material power has spiritual power, and all art is subject to political ma-
nipulation, except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation.[56]

According to the text NSK State in Time, the retro-avant-garde is "based on the
premise that traumas affecting the present and the future can be healed only by re-
turning to the initial conflicts."[57] The retro technique is based upon a return to the
ideological conflicts that informed the original works used by NSK.[58] Through
such traumatic returns, NSK works reactivate both dystopian and utopian motifs
as an attempt to transcend currently active artistic and cultural regimes. In both
work and statements, Laibach and NSK display a concern to engage with the total-
ity of the art-historical styles confronting Slovene artists, including the totalitarian
styles of socialist realism and Nazi-Kunst. NSK groups refuse to recognize any
boundary between these and avant-garde or folk styles, or to refrain from using
imagery that retains a partly taboo status. This apparently transgressive combina-
tion of modernist, avant-garde, and totalitarian styles can be seen in the light of
Groys's analysis of the totalitarian tendencies already active within the Russian
avant-garde.[59] The standard interpretation is that the idealistic avant-garde was
crushed by the totalitarian force of socialist realism, but Groys shows that the avant-
garde itself held ambitions to total political as well as artistic power.

Similarly, the apparently contradictory combination of Nazi-Kunst and social-
ist realism reflects new art-historical accounts of the period that have emerged
since the 1970s. Laibach statements directly engage in the debate over the aesthetic
value of such styles:

Our work refers to the entire history of art, politics and mankind in general. If any-
thing, Soc Art and Nazi-Kunst have in common the prejudices of art historians
who deny both a place in history of art on the grounds that they are not authentic his-
torical styles. They are only allowed to serve art history and its museum keepers as
definitions of what art is not. As long as this is the case, art history will only stay a col-
lection of prejudices, and a collection of prejudices is only useful if it is not called art.[60]

NSK pronouncements on totalitarian art, and its aesthetic manipulation of it,
refer to the ongoing critical debate on its worth. As students of fine art and art his-
tory, members of both Laibach and Irwin were fully acquainted with such debates,
and while their work has not to date appeared in any of the literature on totalitar-
ian art, it can be read as a contribution to the ongoing dispute over the value of ex-
plicitly ideological art. NSK texts from the 1980s speak of classical and monumental
values in art, addressing the continuing (but largely denied) power and value
of such styles. In practice, the assertion of these qualities was used by NSK to
carve out an abstract utopian space with no links to actual political movements. A
collection of essays edited by Golsan[61] challenges the exclusion of Fascist art from

3.6 Laibach, *Sympathy for the Devil*, 1988.

the mainstream of art-historical narrative, and questions the argument that the presence of Fascist ideology automatically negates any possible aesthetic value in a work. In the same volume, Hewitt[62] dates a shift in the attitude to artistic totalitarianism to the so-called crisis of the avant-garde in the 1960s. He claims that the supposedly automatic link between political and aesthetic progressiveness ended at this time: "It was now possible to think of an artist as politically 'reactionary' and at the same time aesthetically 'progressive,' or vice-versa."[63]

Despite a wider acceptance of what had previously seemed a paradoxical situation, and the concomitant creation of a theoretical space in which more complex and ambiguous judgments of totalitarian art are possible, the impulse to make literal and categorical political artistic judgments of such material remains. This approach, which cannot accept that political and aesthetic reaction are nonidentical, was used by NSK as a device with which to challenge assumptions, and test the social "defence mechanisms" of society. Rather than attempt to infiltrate the media and society by using less explicitly disturbing examples of Nazi art and propaganda, Laibach deliberately selected some of the starkest examples of the form. The sleeve of the group's (1988) version of the Rolling Stones' *Sympathy for the Devil* uses a Nazi image of an ideal Aryan family. The addition of a sinister eagle, and the presence of Laibach's provocative name, combine to produce an image which, because it has been given a contemporary gloss, is arguably more sinister (though to some extent also more absurd) than the original.

Through using such images, Laibach differentiates itself from the vast majority of artistic and musical groups, and establishes a clear "point of fascination." Laibach's discourse is structured to accommodate the acceptance or rejection of such

images, and also serves as an anticipatory commentary on the absence of a response. If they are rejected, this indicates that the progressive/reactionary discontinuity to which Hewitt refers is not accepted. The fact that this image was accepted as the cover of a record, however, indicates both the possibility that some people may be able to differentiate between political and artistic reaction, and the fact that these taboo images remain attractive—not simply because of their "forbidden" status, but in their own right.

In this way, Laibach expose the continuing persistence of Fascistic tendencies while simultaneously commenting on and manipulating them (a similar mechanism informed the NK design that sparked the Poster Affair). NSK's harsh and totalitarian images are frequently used to label the groups (most often as Fascists or totalitarians, but also as anarchists and "spiritual terrorists").[64] However, in juxtaposition with often diametrically opposed images, such as Slovene or futurist and socialist realist images, these images combine in a new form, which acts as the substance of but does not determine the nature of the "body" of NSK. Gržinić was referring to the debate Hewitt addresses when she stressed, in her 1992 NSK Embassy Moscow lecture "Art and Culture in the Eighties: The Slovenian Situation," that:

> Although artistic totality should not be mistaken for totalitarianism, these two phenomena were often and readily confounded, especially in the domain of art and culture (but never in politics). Yet, as NSK taught us and before them also the alternative scene (though in a different way), the "totalitarianism" of art cannot be compared to the totalitarianism of the state and its ideological apparatuses.[65]

Laibach's (re)use of totalitarian motifs, and the "postmodernity" of the group's approach, is also not an innovation or a phenomenon that is out of its time. Laibach argue that the fact of their success proves that they have captured something of the contemporary zeitgeist. Like Nazism, Stalinism, and also contemporary "Fukuyaman" late capitalism, Laibach's discourse contains the performance of a claim to represent the "end of history," the natural and unquestionable culmination of all previous effort. In particular, the group's discourse constantly strives to show that Laibach are always representative of "their" time: "If the 'time' has changed, than LAIBACH will automatically change, because we are 'fused to the grid of time.'"[66]

Laibach's constant stylistic mutations have sometimes alienated earlier generations of fans, but these shifts conceal an underlying consistency, and illustrate the fact that even the totalitarian claim have to have discovered a final solution is itself simply a moment in a mobile and shifting process. NSK attempts to capture the mechanics of the systems it interrogates, while avoiding definitive capture by or identification with these same systems. As events unfold, NSK shifts focus to new regimes, and moves into new styles and genres, but the totalitarian imageries remain at the heart of its impact.

DIE LIEBE IST DIE GRÖSSTE KRAFT (LOVE IS THE GREATEST POWER)

We, Laibach, are the *engineers of human souls.*[67]

Manipulation! manipulation! To manipulate people, nature, living and dead inventory, words, ideas, things and feelings! Here you have the beginning of a new cycle which brings death to the human race. It is not the demon who will choose you— it is you who will choose the demon! God and Satan are innocent, guilty is the one who chooses! [LAIBACH][68]

NSK's use of totalitarian art disturbs and alienates many people, but it also demonstrates the continued fascination exerted by the totalitarian appeal to mass collective emotions and the aestheticization of politics. NSK members have openly presented themselves as "engineers of human souls," or what Groys[69] has described as "designers of the unconscious." Groys argues that the totalitarian impulse was deeply fixed in the avant-garde enterprise. The desire to remake the world was always far more than an aesthetic project, and it aimed for total control. The "totalitarian" engineering and manipulation of the unconscious and desires have not faded, but have been perfected and intensified, and NSK's use of these techniques referred to the allegedly post-totalitarian present as well as to the recent past. Total design and marketing, and the systematic targeting of desire, are structural elements of contemporary life on the Western model, deeply woven into the fabric of existence. In the post-totalitarian era the same techniques are employed in pursuit of a huge range of commercial and cultural agendas, but the underlying ideology remains monolithic. Ideology as represented in corporate advertising and culture may now be more fun, but its presence is arguably even more pervasive. Contemporary corporate culture—and, to a large extent, its opponents—tend to shy away from monumentalism, absolutism, elitism, fascination, and mystique. Ironic, minimal, user-friendly "lower-case" culture is threatened by all the qualities that NSK manipulates.

NSK is threatening and problematic in that, despite being shot through with provocation, militant irony, contradiction, and absurdism, it remains deadly serious. Not only does it refuse to repress the links between power and desire, it represents them in monumental form. By refusing to exclude totalitarian art, NSK refuses to make crude divisions into "good" and "bad" art, illuminating the presence of beauty and desire even in the most extreme contexts and, conversely, the presence of power or ideology in superficially benign and innocuous contexts (as in the case of Irwin's 1990s chocolate-box and teddy-bear motifs). This problematic territory has been mapped out by Deleuze and Guattari:

We should emphasize the fact of these two coexistent states because we cannot say in advance, "This is a bad desire, that is a good desire." Desire is a mixture, a blend, to such a degree that bureaucratic or fascist pieces are still or already caught up in revolutionary agitation. It is only in motion that we can distinguish the "diabolism" of desire and its "immanence," since one lies deep in the other.[70]

Desire and its manipulation builds and destroys states and individual lives, and its capacities for catastrophic destruction or sublime union are deeply interlinked. This connection is the theme of Laibach's *Die Liebe*. Deleuze and Guattari identify an "Eros" (mode of desire) specific to every system—bureaucratic, capitalist, and Fascist, to which could be added feudal or monetarist/late capitalist equivalents.[71] Systems depend on, produce, and repress specific formations of desire. If it is difficult for many to accept this association, how much more difficult is it to accept that desire can be produced by or through the symbols and modes of appeal used even by Nazism and Stalinism, and that these can be associated with either traditional or contemporary notions of beauty. NSK highlights the ambivalent status of desire and beauty as such, and their intimate associations with power and manipulation, seeking beauty in moments of nonbeauty and nonbeauty in moments of beauty.

NSK works appeal to (and highlight the manipulation of) the "Wagnerian" oceanic emotions associated with any total art project. Heroic chords and poses, monumental architectural plans, romantic national landscapes, and mystical verses are all central to the engineering process. While these are often qualified by the use of irony, and the knowing way they are deployed gives them a kitsch status, their power to affect is nevertheless active. Those who can admit to it are genuinely moved and fascinated by the NSK spectacle, particularly at its most monumental, totalitarian moments. If it were "only" conceptual, and did not use such traumatic-fascinating material, it would not have the same power to disturb, confuse, and interrogate. The fact that these works are also the product of alienation and rigid conceptual mechanisms does not "negate" these moments, but sets them in a new context, beyond and against the regimes they represent. A "total" phenomenon on the scale of NSK has to (at least appear to) engineer and to access the deepest levels of the imagination and the spirit. In practice, alienation and transcendence are actually interwoven, each being capable of producing the other. In some circumstances, the sublime can alienate and the alienated can be sublime.

NSK appropriates the modes of desire historically associated with the totalitarian state or contemporary marketing, and sets them in motion against themselves and their systems. Systems and individuals are confronted with their own hidden desires, both utopian and dystopian. Deleuze and Guattari identify two movements active in the work of Kafka that illustrate this process:

> One captures desire within great diabolical assemblages, sweeping along in almost the same movement servants and victims, chiefs and subalterns, and only bringing about a massive deterritorialization of man by also reterritorializing him, whether in an office, a prison, a cemetery (paranoiac law). The other movement makes desire take flight through all the assemblages, rub up against all the segments without settling down in any of them, and carry always farther the innocence of a power of deterritorialization that is the same thing as escape (the schizo-law).[72]

NSK illustrates the engineering of the human soul by engineering it, setting in motion a symbolic proliferation that accumulates power through repetition and

recombination. The momentum gathered and the implications of the interventions continue to proliferate long after their appearance. NSK seems to represent the ultimate "reterritorialization" in or of nation, state, or ideology, but in practice it continues to attempt deterritorialization, escaping systems via their archetypes in order to construct its own (the NSK "State in Time").

"COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM"

The combination of apparent polar opposites in NSK works has various effects and advantages. It generates and manipulates the dissonant energy produced by both alchemical-metaphorical and ideological modes of synthesis. "Coincidentia Oppositorum" is a key alchemical procedure with acute mystical connotations, and it is referred to in the title of a section of Laibach's *Macbeth* soundtrack. Alchemical and ideological processes (both often referred or alluded to by NSK) produce subtle and intangible mystical effects that surround the combination of opposites, as in the case of Orwell's "Blackwhite" concept. This is obviously useful in the production of fascination and (re)production of a sense of mystery—the simultaneous presence of opposites is intended to avoid definitive identification with either. NSK pushes contrasting modes to their extremes, each following its own lines of escape—texts and works contaminate the scientific with the irrational, or the absolute with the ephemeral. Deleuze and Guattari[73] argue that Kafka's work reveals the secret architectures of power—the internal workings of a system. NSK's repeated, intensive combination of "public" opposites reveals "secret" connections: between Nazism and Stalinism, science and mysticism, nationality and postmodernity, popular music and social control, and so on.

These combinations interrogate and undermine the public image and self-image of institutions and ideologies, and refer to deeper, "universal" levels of underlying reality that conflict with contemporary postmodern relativism. They are by their very nature provocative and disturbing, breaking unspoken silences and taboos, revealing and accessing codes and energies that are normally kept concealed. Given the associations both with alchemy and with political provocation, they have an inevitably "taboo" quality, and NSK employs what Bataille claims are the energies produced by taboos:

> Taboo and transgression reflect these contradictory urges. The taboo would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it. Taboos and the divine are opposed to each other in one sense only, for the sacred aspect of the taboo is what draws men towards it and transfigures the original intention. The often intertwined themes of mythology spring from these factors.[74]

This knife-edge proximity between the opposites of prohibition and fascination is the remote and esoteric territory occupied by NSK. The sensual and sacred aspects of transgression compel fascination, and render the most alienating materials (aesthetically) acceptable. The real or suggested violation of taboos always

PLATE 1   Irwin, Red Districts Sower, 1989.
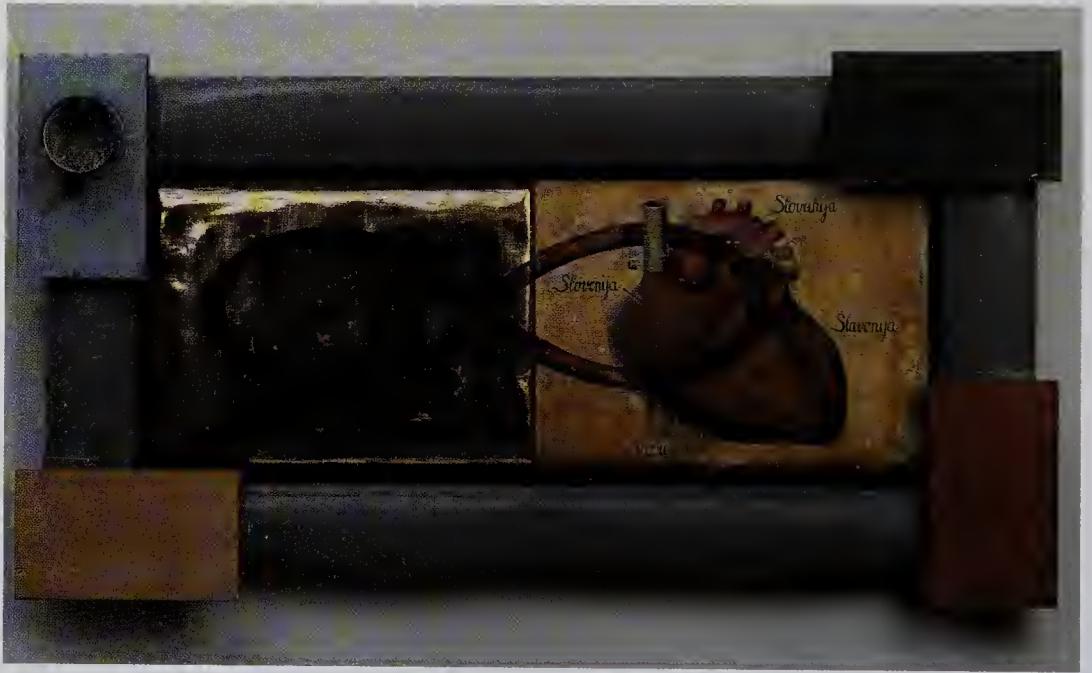
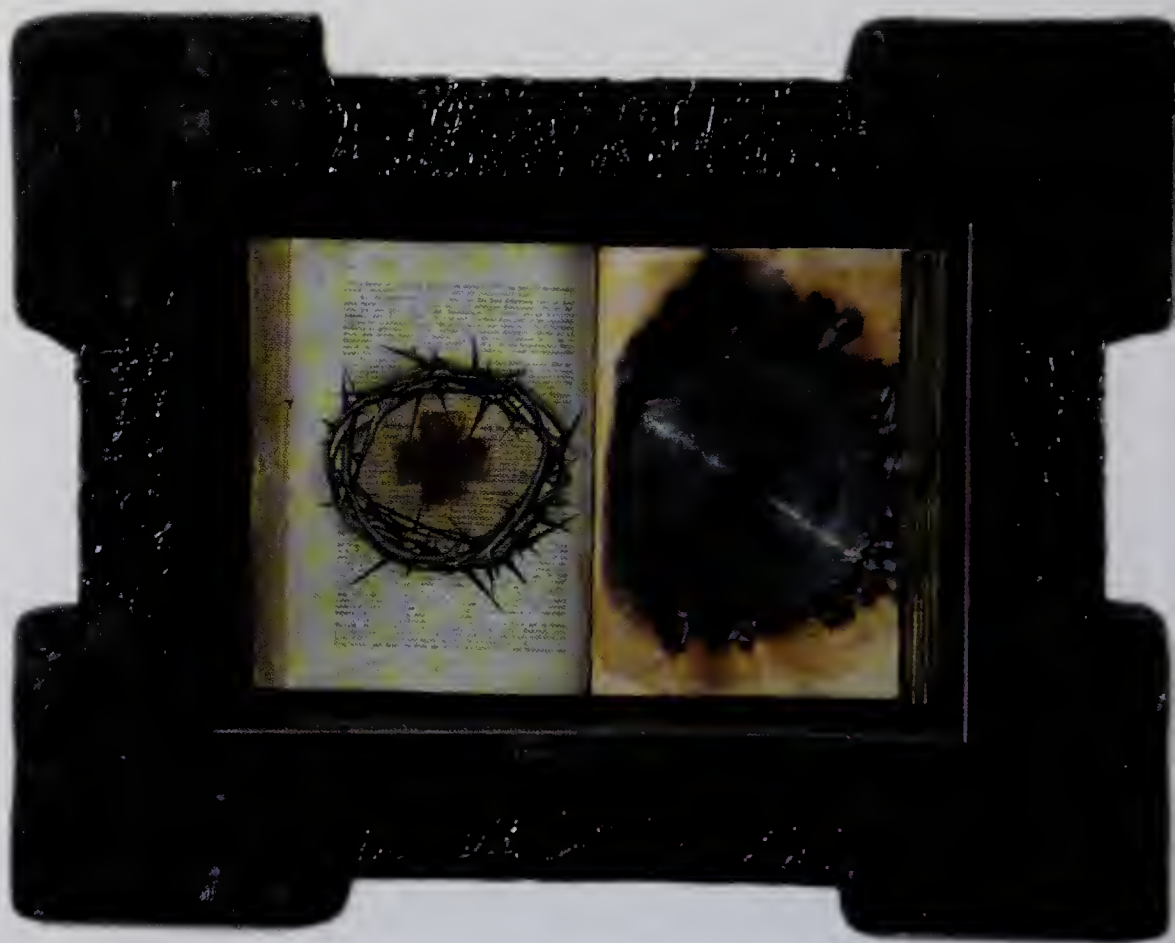**PLATE 2**   Irwin, *Desna strana* (Right Side), 1992.

PLATE 3 Laibach, *The Engima of Revolution*, 1981.

PLATE 4 Irwin, Resurrection of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice, 1986.

PLATE 5 Laibach, Spieltour, 1991–1998.

PLATE 6   Irwin, Smrt za smrt (Death for Death), 1987.

PLATE 7   Irwin, *Freedom Leads the People*, 1987.

PLATE 8   Irwin, *Slovenske Atene*, 1989.

PLATE 9   Irwin, *Heart of Transcentrala*, 1996.

PLATE 10   Theater of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice, *Baptism under Triglav (Krst pod Triglavom)*, 1986.

PLATE 11 Noordung, *Prayer Machine*, 1992.

PLATE 12   Irwin, Communism, 1991.

PLATE 13   Laibach, *Rekapitulacija*, cover of first Western album release, 1985.

PLATE 14 Irwin, Electrification I, 1988.

PLATE 15 Laibach, Let It Be, cover, 1988.

PLATE 16 Irwin, *NSK Panorama*, showing NSK members and Slovene folk dancers, Ljubljana, 1997.
Photo: Michael Schuster.

generates fascination, even if the definition of what is taboo is now constantly shifting according to commercial pressure and political change. The associated energies are the raw material of much marketing and aesthetic production, and also of NSK's performance and illumination of manipulation techniques.

Groys argues that demystification "is itself utopian and mythological."[75] NSK tests this double, contradictory position to its limits. The combination of opposites and the manipulation of taboos are the basis of its mystifying demystifications. These subtle and esoteric levels of production are at the heart of its operations, simultaneously the most intangible and the most powerful level of NSK creative practices.

THE LOCATION OF POWER

The violent incursion of Laibach's dense, cold discourse into the mass-entertainment sector of popular music is transgressive in itself, but its severity heightened its impact, coming as it did at the start of the trend for many socialist systems to attempt to present a more human face to the world. Equally, the stark utopian language of the NSK drama groups was at odds with the prevailing liberal-humanist norms. The entire mode by which NSK communicated *as a collective* during the 1980s was ostensibly against all the dominant sociocultural trends (self-management, *glasnost*, Western liberalism). Its success, however, proved that it was actively connected to the zeitgeist, but specifically to those subterranean, unforeseen elements repressed from mainstream consciousness. NSK interventions repeatedly demasked and recapitulated key points in culture and everyday life at which ideology and power had a generally ignored presence. In practice this often amounted to the symbolic revelation that elements which a system publicly rejects as anathema can often be found at its very heart. These elements have an intimate connection with the way in which a system operates and reproduces itself, functioning as the shadow of an ideology.

For example, NK texts highlighted the continuing links between totalitarian manipulation and the practice of design, while Laibach revealed the persistence of nationalist, militarist, and authoritarian tendencies within the self-management system itself. With the benefit of hindsight, this process can be seen as both mimetic and anticipatory. Self-management and *perestroika* both sought to distance themselves from their totalitarian and revolutionary roots, and present an image of devolved power that actually tried to spread ideology even more pervasively through society than had the unreconstructed totalitarian discourses.[76] Laibach highlighted the totalitarian shadow of the progressive Yugoslav self-image in order to frustrate the regime's attempts to obscure and conceal the authoritarian basis of its power:

> Power, to be total, must not be locatable in society; it must avoid clear-cut shape, it must be indivisible, impersonal and all-pervasive. . . . In actuality Newspeak does not legitimize power: it serves to spread it through society, and so becomes part of

the functioning of the Communist state. Thanks to Newspeak, power, supported by ideology, seeps through the whole of the social body.[77]

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

> People lacked arguments against the system. Maximum participation in politics by the maximum number was the explicit goal; and there were no Leftist arguments against that, only liberal ones—which were taboo. From the point of view of power, anyone who opposed the system was still supporting it, as long as he or she kept participating. Whatever opposition the communists could neither stamp out nor cajole, they could usually pre-empt. It is difficult to confront power that keeps dispersing itself, difficult to attack the monopoly of a system that has already denounced and, apparently, renounced its own monopoly. Likewise, as if mimicking another theological sleight of mind, Kardelj knew it was wiser to tell people that self-management was their right than to instruct them about their duty.[78]

In relation both to the system within which it emerged and to a series of wider regimes such as the music industry or the art market, NSK interventions effect a *re-location of power*, unmasking the focal points at which power is both most intensely and most covertly present. In the woodcut *The Thrower*—also known as *Metalec* (The Metal Worker)—which was one of the first images produced by the group, Laibach render totalitarian power visible in a menacing yet simultaneously heroic form.

The Thrower remains one of Laibach's starkest and most ambiguous images. The colossal worker figure activates memories of Stakhanovism, shock work, and totalitarian industrial discipline, all of which Yugoslavia had formally renounced. After the break with Stalin in 1948, Stalinist and socialist realist imagery was treated with a degree of suspicion in Yugoslavia, and the fact that this image was produced by a group bearing a name many Slovenes equate with the Nazi occupation of the country heightened its alienating power. The figure personifies the alienation of totalitarianism and industrial production, and symbolically alienates power from itself, assigning it a monstrous form that locates terror within contemporary reality. Crucially, the image could not be dismissed out of hand as an alien intrusion, because its use by a group from Trbovlje raised associations with the city's mythologized socialist history. The image is radically ambiguous; to some, the figure's clenched fist is reminiscent of French revolutionary posters from 1968, but it could also be seen to celebrate industrial work rather than industrial protest. Given the ideological saturation of all social institutions and discourse, Laibach— and subsequently NSK as a whole—reasoned that the only praxis likely to be able to escape this process would have fully to embody linguistic and other types of totalitarianism, to confront power with its hidden "source codes" by hacking into them. NSK manipulated the strange conceptual energies of the self-management system's conceptual contradictions and paradoxes—or, in other words, its points

3.7 Laibach, The Thrower, 1980.

of potential deterritorialization. As Mark Thompson notes, the self-management system was expressly structured in order to conceal and diffuse the bases of power. Laibach's appropriation of systemic signifiers such as Tito and the Partisans (see chapter 6 below) and their combination with images of totalitarian terror frustrated the normally concealed ideological reproduction of self-management, compromising the purity of its symbolic fuel. Assuming an ultratotalitarian stance, Laibach felt no obligation to conform to external standards of consistency or logic, or to provide simple explanations of their symbolic deployments. The use of non sequiturs and contradictions within a monumental framework was a necessary part of this stance, but also a means of preserving ambiguity and retaining an unsettling effect that can provoke questioning: "By means of the elusive character of their desire, of the indecidability as to 'where they actually stand,' Laibach compels us to take up our position and decide upon our desire.—Laibach here actually accomplishes the reversal that defines the end of psychoanalytical cure."[79]

Confronted, in an image such as The Thrower, by a return of the ideologically repressed (the traumatic core of socialist state power), the individual is forced to take a stance in relation to the image and to the group as a whole, and the polarization produced by the image makes indifference to the image (and to Laibach) unlikely. The contradictions of Laibach texts are designed in, and are pervaded by auto-mythification, tautology, and black irony. The iron certainty of Laibach's tone sets up the expectation of a coherent, systematic program, yet the opacity of the whole, and the absence of any literal goals, frustrates this. The painfulness of this position for the subject is alluded to in the early work "Apologija Laibach," which includes the line "The explanation is the whip and you bleed."[80]

There are no easy answers, and radical ambiguity is essential to the project; it is vital that doubts should remain about Laibach's "real" intentions. While Laibach locates power elsewhere, the group has always sought to avoid being located in any space but its own. The shifting paradoxes work against any categorical placement of Laibach because of the resulting difficulty of definitively linking them with other trends or movements. In presenting a total form, Laibach incite and necessitate a plurality of positions and responses which themselves add to the works' recapitulative quality, even when they are negative. According to Žižek:

> The first reaction of the enlightened Leftist critics [in Slovenia] was to conceive of Laibach as the ironic imitation of totalitarian rituals; however, their support of Laibach was always accompanied by an uneasy feeling: "What if they really mean it? What if they truly identify with the totalitarian ritual?"—or, a more cunning version of it, transferring one's doubt onto the other: "What if Laibach overestimates their public? What if the public takes seriously what Laibach mockingly imitates, so that Laibach actually strengthens what it purports to undermine?"[81]

In fact Žižek sees such doubts as the result of a misreading, as Laibach actually "'frustrates' the system (the ruling ideology) precisely insofar as it is not its ironic

imitation, but over-identification with it—by bringing to light the obscene super-ego underside of this system, over-identification suspends its efficiency."[82]

If overidentification is to be effective, it has to (appear) total. Overidentification transcends and symbolically reactivates the terror of the social field (as structured by the regimes that shape it). The spectral menace of totality gives the phenomenon sufficient "credibility" to sow doubt and disquiet (as well as fascination). Sufficient "evidence" has to be present to activate social and ideological defense mechanisms. On the track *Perspektive*, Laibach calmly and dispassionately list the elements of manipulation: Nazi-Kunst, Taylorism, and disco among others. In contrast, when the contemporary far right seeks political (rather than subcultural) power, it attempts to distance itself as far as possible from its totalitarian core, and "soften" its image. Effective overidentification requires that suspicious evidence is not suppressed, but highlighted. Thus, presented with "the eternal question"— "Are you Fascists or not?"—Laibach responded: "Isn't it evident?"[83]

Laibach statements emphasize the "consumer's" responsibility to decipher their signals and undertake the potentially painful process of integrating them into some type of interpretative framework. Laibach occupy the position of interrogators, not dictators, "justifying" their stance through the appropriation of totalitarian fiat. Epstein's description of Soviet thought applies equally to Laibach's repetition of totalitarian hubris: "For many decades, Soviet civilization assumed the right to judge and not be judged, as it described itself in a language of evaluations without objective concepts, which it denigrated as 'ideologically harmful and alien.'"[84]

NSK's assumption of the totalitarian stance and reprocessing of state and other regime icons were carried out at points where the underlying mythologies of the system had condensed into volatile compounds. The location process identifies the archetypes and taboos of the system under interrogation, and the ways in which these support control strategies, illuminating internal laws and mechanisms. NK's 1987 Day of Youth poster (the ultimate NSK scandal) similarly located an acute point of the system with explosive results, undermining the dominant mythology's concealment of what Barthes terms the underlying madness of the world.

CHAPTER 4

NSK

NSK is a collective of groups working within and between several media. Its image as an artistic collective both reflects and defies the spirit of its times. Its deperson-alized facelessness reflects the contemporary corporate world, but is in contrast to the contemporary cults of individuality. As a collective, the groups and their works are at their most powerful and their most spectral, triggering a range of responses and projections. If we are to understand these, both the component groups and the mechanics of their cooperation as NSK must be analyzed.

IRWIN

The Role of "National" Artists—Collectivity—"Eastern" Artistic Identity

> Western modernism rests on the code of permanent revolution, utilizing the prin-
> ciples of negation, irony and implicit tragedy, whereas IRWIN goes beyond the his-
> torical experience of modernism and dialectically provides it with a superstructure
> by asserting the national culture, the triumph of the collective spirit and by glorify-
> ing the continuity of the Slovene past as the only future horizon. Consequently, art
> represents a ritual of the past in the assertion of death as a dynamic element within
> life. The ultimate purpose of IRWIN's activities is to reassert Slovene culture in a
> monumental and spectacular way.[1]

Irwin is a collective of five painters, whose works were, until 2003, attributed only to the collective. Their primary "products" are paintings, but they also produce in-stallations, objects, and autotheoretical texts that attempt to define the works. The five members, born between 1954 and 1961, are from Ljubljana (Andrej Savski, Dušan Mandič), Kranj (Borut Vogelnik), Novo Mesto (Miran Mohar), and Trbovlje (Roman Uranjek).[2] Before the formation of Irwin in 1983, all five were involved with Ljubljana's alternative scene (particularly Mandič and Uranjek) through per-sonal connections and joint projects. In some ways, their position was the reverse of Laibach's—they came from a fine-arts background, but were involved in and working with mass-cultural forms; whereas Laibach set out from mass culture and (rapidly) became involved in traditional artistic forms.

The overlap between the two is reflected in Irwin's early works of the *Was ist Kunst?* (What Is Art?) series, which are inscribed "Irwin: Laibach," and are based on motifs first used by Laibach.[3] Irwin are the primary producers of paintings in NSK, but it should be borne in mind that Laibach-Kunst has also produced many paintings, some of which are the sources of Irwin works. Irwin's initial function was the documentation and repetition of the motifs and activities of Laibach-Kunst. The material consisted not only of specific paintings and images, but of posters and even the likenesses of group members. The primary link between the two groups was the conceptual denial of originality, and acceptance of what Irwin term "the dictation of the motif." Irwin have executed the most intensive and sys-tematic repetition of NSK motifs and imageries, a process further intensified in the work of NK.[4] Images of sowers, stags, and suprematist motifs have all appeared
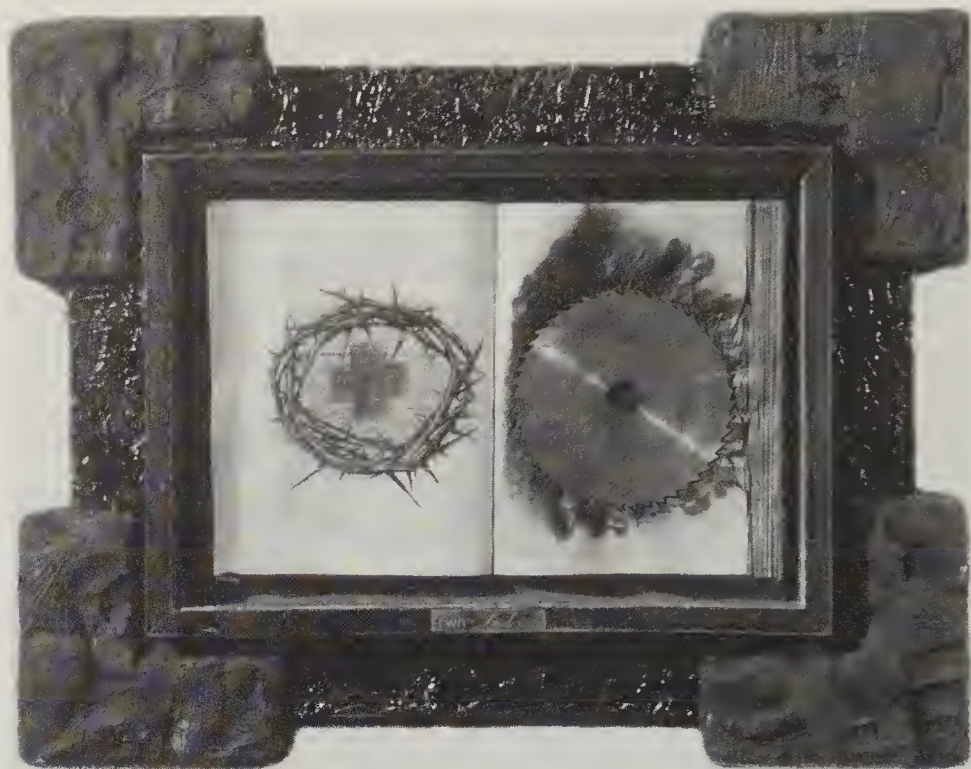
4.1 Irwin, *Smrt za smrt* (Death for Death), 1987.

countless times, and these are collective NSK signifiers. The "line of flight" of these motifs in Irwin's work represents their dispersal and proliferation beyond the media in which they originated.

Irwin's method of recycling Laibach motifs can be seen in the work *Freedom Leads the People*. The work combines an image by the nineteenth-century painter Delacroix of Marianne, symbol of the French Revolution. Below the figure is a scene from a Nazi rally, and in the foreground is the shadow of Malevich's black cross, signifier of Laibach's presence.

Many of Irwin's works are presented in monumental sculpted frames, based partly on the work of the Slovene sculptor Stojan Batič, who has produced several monuments based on World War II atrocities or socialist themes. The framing, and the rich oil-based tones, bestow on the works an iconic quality, and the paintings in the *Was ist Kunst?* series are explicitly theorized as "icons." Irwin built on the techniques foregrounded in early Laibach-Kunst paintings, such as the recycling of motifs and the ideological juxtaposition of contradictory images. Irwin's interventions on Laibach images amplify and supplement their effects. Similarly, during the 1980s Irwin's discourse complemented Laibach's, albeit in a slightly less severe form: "In painting we associate a demagogic, popular presentation of themes which constitute LAIBACH as a politically entertaining institution, and existential and ritual relations of an individual in relation to the myth, which are developed by the theaters."[5]

4.2 Laibach, *Die Freiheit führt das Volk* (Freedom Leads the People), 1985.

Another common factor was the deployment of what Irwin then described as an "elitist attitude towards art and society,"[6] which in Laibach's case meant stressing traditional and monumental qualities juxtaposed with elements of contemporary art and mass culture. Irwin's recycling of Laibach images opened them to a far wider critical and artistic audience, beyond the alternative scene. The close cooperation between the groups in the 1980s was mutually reinforcing. Music audiences not normally exposed to art were led on to Irwin's images, and artistic audiences encountering Irwin might subsequently discover Laibach.

Irwin theorized their basic approach as "emphatic eclecticism." "Emphatic" echoes Laibach's stridency, distancing Irwin from more playful and frivolous variants of artistic eclecticism. Irwin claim that the concept represents a Slovene development of an "unconscious, unformulated" process within the artistic teleology developed by the American cubist Joseph Schillinger in the 1920s.[7] "EMPHATIC ECLECTICISM draws on the historical experience, in particular the Slovene fine arts, insisting on permanent permutation of the methods of viewing, reinterpreting and re-creating the past and the contemporary pictorial methods."[8]

As with Laibach, not only the works but the accompanying discourse are based on the retroactive assimilation of a diverse range of contentious or obscure ideological and theoretical references. The diverse sources of Irwin's actual images include (among others) the works of Beuys, Kiefer, and Malevich, various constructivist, Stalinist, Nazi, impressionist, romantic, Renaissance, and medieval images, Catholic popular iconography, pop art, and industrial design and packaging,

4.3 Irwin, *Freedom Leads the People*, 1987.

most of which are also used by Laibach and NK. The dense totality of these images create what Finley and Watten refer to as Irwin's "statehood":

> Icons originally designed to make statehood seem eternal and omnipotent are defined in Irwin's work as a series of moments rather than as a total and ongoing condition. The work of IRWIN borrows, it does not appropriate. Images of the past are reused, not to deconstruct them but to reinvest them with their own meaning, which is strengthened when confronted with motifs of contrasting ideologies or imagery from the heartland of the Slovenian countryside.[9]

Irwin gradually expanded the scope of their sources, materials, and iconography, sometimes introducing motifs, such as *Kapital*, that then recurred in the work of Laibach or the other groups. This is a type of reverse synergy whereby the various NSK groups rework and recapitulate the works of the other groups in their own media. Irwin exhibitions were often held in coordination with Laibach concerts or theatrical performances, and the synergy helped to establish a wide reputation for Irwin, who maintain a busy international exhibition schedule.

Besides the *Red Districts* series, Irwin have created various monumental works and installations. In 1987 they created a series of five "monumental" paintings entitled

The Athens of Slovenia, each measuring 340 by 160 centimeters. Each painting is an idealistic-archaic representation of the Slovene environment—*Sea, The Fields, Karst, The Forest,* and *The Alps.* Besides the frames and the use of religious motifs in the top section of each image, the common factor linking the images is the spectral sower figure present in each painting. The sower motif occurs frequently throughout European and Slovene art, and is one of the most common citations by Laibach and Irwin.

These works represented the most spectacular form of Irwin's assertion of Slovene identity and symbolisms, a goal the group stated at the outset. This aspect also found expression in NSK projects such as *Krst.* Irwin's treatments of these themes were apparently more romantic and less ambivalent than those of Laibach, yet they were still underlaid by complex conceptual frameworks that included serious analysis of national identity per se, and particularly of the problems faced by artists from smaller nations in a global art market.[10]

Irwin's monumentalism culminated in the *Heart of Transcentrala* (1996), an enclosed wooden viewing platform displaying dozens of Irwin works. Each of the four walls is mirrored, and the works on the opposite walls are cross-reflected on each. Since the reflections also spill upward onto the ceilings, there is very little neutral visual space within what is effectively a gallery within a gallery. The power of the images is redoubled by the dense visual field created by the lighting and spatial arrangement. While the light-toned wood creates some visual relief, and the exit is always visible, the environment is highly regulated. The works create a "fantasy space" akin to that created within a hall by a Laibach concert in which the NSK "thing" can range at will, interacting with its spectators.

Irwin's provocative and confrontational combinations of images in monumental forms run in parallel to the tactics used by Laibach and the NSK theatrical groups. The motives for Irwin's use of spectacle and forceful images have been most succinctly summarized by the Slovene art historian Tomaž Brejc, who taught several NSK members: "They have equated the cross with a hunting trophy, high art with kitsch, the avant-garde with Biedermeier. . . . The IRWIN, however, are totally committed to the functional reality of the total. Spectacle is their style, for they are aware that there is no need to believe in it because it convinces the viewer by force."[11]

During the 1990s Irwin's work was marked by further diversification of source material, moves into other media, and a marked trend toward theoretical self-conceptualization. This latter trend has been apparent since at least *NSK Embassy Moscow.* Irwin are increasingly blurring the lines between curators and artists, attempting to define the specific conceptual space inhabited by themselves and allied Russian and East European artists.

This aspect has been apparent in Irwin's participation in projects such as the controversial *Interpol* exhibition (Sweden, 1996) and the *Transcentrala Project* (1996), which saw Irwin and other collaborators journey across America, meeting artists and curators for a series of debates. Through the *Monumental Retro-Avantgarde* installation of 2000, and related actions, Irwin have also sought to relate their work to

4.4 Irwin, *Slovenske Atene*, 1989.

4.5 Irwin, *Heart of Transcentrala*, 1996.

similar artistic tendencies, and also to establish their version of NSK's history and influences.

Visually, Irwin's work has moved into overtly kitsch territory, often using domestic and commercial elements in place of the monumental national and political themes of the 1980s. The paintings of the 1990s tend to be far less aggressive and more obviously user-friendly. Signifiers such as the black cross remain, but they are juxtaposed with softer elements, including retro chocolate-box imagery.

A jointly produced Irwin/NK teddy bear design (which was sold for charity in Ljubljana toy shops in 1995) demonstrated this new, more overtly playful strategy. The symbol of childhood innocence was problematized by a black-cross armband. The bear, *Ursula Noordung*, recurred in various works and installations, and was one of the more recognizable symbols of this phase of Irwin's work.

Irwin also expanded further into performance and installation work in this period, often in connection with the NSK State. Traces of the militancy that has largely disappeared from other aspects of their work is still apparent in, for instance, the series of *NSK Garda* actions that have taken place in Warsaw, Prague, Zagreb, Thessaloniki, and elsewhere. These feature uniformed soldiers of the respective national armies pictured wearing black-cross armbands. Another explicit trace of the "statist" aspect of NSK symbolism is apparent in Irwin's active role in the promotion of the NSK State and its frequent passport-issuing actions, both at collective NSK events and at Irwin exhibitions such as the *Transnacionala* series, which included self-referential installations documenting these actions. This
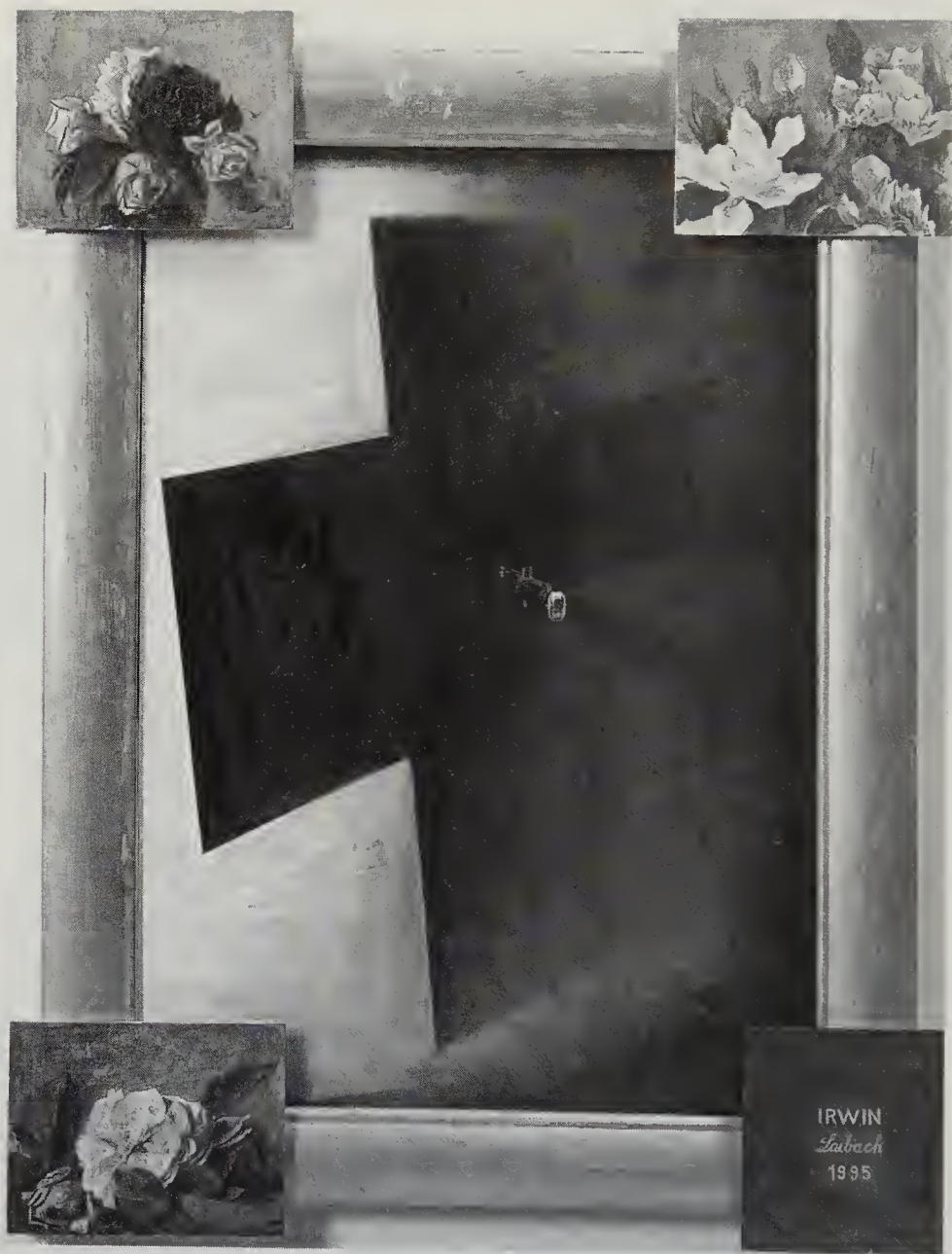
4.6 Irwin, *Left–Right, In Front Of–Behind, Above–Below*, 1995.

self-referential element has become increasingly pronounced, particularly in the *Irwin Live* actions (Atlanta, Istanbul, Warsaw, Ljubljana).[12] At the premieres of these exhibitions, Irwin members were suspended from gallery ceilings on which their works were mounted. After the openings they were replaced by life-size wax replicas, contemplating their own images. Irwin are simultaneously recontextualizing and renarrating their history within NSK, and continuing to develop their existing symbolisms in new forms and contexts, driven by the accumulated momentum of the NSK project onto their own increasingly distinctive trajectory.

Ritual—Mystery—Myth—Technology

> It is precisely the avant-garde and leftist politics that are mythological, since by cast-
> ing the artist, the proletariat, the party, the leader in the role of demiurge, they pro-
> vide for their natural integration into world mythology.[13]

The monumentalism, mystification, and severity in the works of Laibach and
Irwin are all present in theatrical form. The work of the three (successive) NSK
theatrical groups—-Scipion Nasice, Red Pilot, and Noordung—represents the
application of retrogardist techniques to the stage. NSK's theatrical operations
build on postwar experimental Slovene drama (such as the group Oder 57, created
in 1957 and suppressed in 1964)[14] and a series of historical figures made iconic via
their incorporation into the productions, particularly Russian ones—the theatri-
cal groups are the most actively Russophile sector of NSK.

Scipion Nasice was founded on October 13, 1983, with a set lifespan of four
years. It took its name from a Roman consul who banned drama during his term
of office. Drawing on individuals from NSK circles and those involved in Slovene
drama, its key members were Dragan Živadinov, Eda Čufer, and Miran Mohar (Ir-
win). The first two Scipion Nasice productions were originally performed in pri-
vate residences in Ljubljana, creating an "underground" atmosphere similar to that
of some illegal Laibach performances of the same period. The group's ambitions,
however, were always far greater, and by 1984 it had already issued a proclamation
·calling for the unification of all Slovene theatrical institutions.[15] The first event took
place at an apartment on Ljubljana's main street in January 1984. Thirty-seven spec-
tators were guided there by actors in the provocative guises of priest, army officer,
and nun. The *Retrogarde Event Hinkemann* was set in "the temple of Scipion Sisters." The
religious and mythical elements that have marked NSK's engagement with drama
were set from the start. The *Resurrection* event (October 23–24, 1984)[16] was a sym-
bolic and hubristic appropriation of all Slovene theatrical institutions, an act that
signified the utopian scale of the group's objectives.

A key similarity between the work of Laibach and that of the drama groups is
the severity of their treatment of the audience. The audience at the second Scipion
Nasice performance, *Marija Nablocka,* watched via holes in the stage through which
their heads protruded. When this was taken to the Edinburgh Festival, it was al-
most immediately shut down on safety grounds. Foretić argues that the theatrical
praxis of Dragan Živadinov (the director of all NSK theatrical activity) is based on
the totalitarian state, and that in Živadinov's works, state violence is replaced by
aesthetic violence.[17] Živadinov also seems to play out the role of totalitarian demi-
urge—the mythical transformer of society and universe spoken of by Groys.[18] As
with Laibach, the audience is the target of this violence. Audiences are either sub-
jugated or captivated (physically through the restriction of movement, or at the

sensual level by the scale of the spectacle). This brutality is combined with an explicit sense of mysticism and utopianism, and an attempt to insist on drama as a heroic form.

After the clandestine period from 1983 to 1985, the group found a venue to match the scale of its objectives. Scipion Nasice's third production, Krst (Baptism), was performed at Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana's prestigious congress and cultural center, very heavily dependent on state funds. Seventy actors were involved, and the production is the largest Slovene theatrical performance to have taken place, as well as the most monumental NSK act. The presentation took the form of an abstract-monumental dramatization of the roots of Slovene identity. The production is loosely based on works by France Prešeren and Dominik Smole, two of the best-known Slovene writers. It remains the largest (if not the most expensive)[19] single NSK production to date. All the then NSK groups were involved in this fusion of retrogarde movement, sound (Laibach), and scenography (Irwin).

The setting was the Christianization of the Slovenes by the Germans in the ninth century, represented by 62 monumental "paintings" or scenes based on pagan, ideological, and avant-garde motifs including a reconstruction of Tatlin's proposed monument to the Third International. The original story focuses on the fate of the mythical figures of the Slovene prince Črtomir and his lover Bogomila, a pagan priestess. Črtomir is the sole survivor of a last stand against the German warlord Waldung (Valjhun in Slovene). Fleeing, Črtomir meets Bogomila, who announces that she has been converted, and persuades him to do likewise, which he accepts in order to be with her. However, she announces after his conversion that she is betrothed to Christ, and he is instructed to work as a wandering preacher and never see her again.[20]

As well as a monumental meditation on Slovene national mythologies, Krst is also a discourse on the history of art in Slovenia and Europe, particularly the avant-garde, "and artists are its protagonists."[21] The design and the music include implicit or explicit references to all of NSK's principal aesthetic sources. Besides Tatlin, Irwin's scenography was also informed by Kandinsky and largely forgotten figures of the Slovene avant-garde, such as Avgust Černigoj. Krst reconfigures drama as a national stage for an attempted exorcism of national-historical wounds, such as the subjugation of the pagan Slovenes and the suppression of the historical avant-garde. Kršić has characterized Krst as a depiction of a heroic national mythology paradoxically expressed in the language of abstraction and the international avant-garde.[22] The production subsequently played in Belgrade, and was filmed (though not broadcast) by the BBC; it had a major influence on the development of the NSK aesthetic and Slovene drama.[23] Foretić contends that Krst represents the pinnacle of NSK's collective aesthetic,[24] and although it contains no specific references to the state, it remains the most intensive manifestation of NSK as total(itarian) Gesamtkunstwerk.

4.7 Theater of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice, *Baptism under Triglav* (*Krst pod Triglavom*), 1986.

The final Scipion Nasice project before its preplanned self-abolition in 1987 was its proposal for an artistic event to celebrate the Yugoslav Youth Day festival. This was intended to complement the scandal-causing NK poster design for the event. Tatlin's monument was again to feature in the scenography of this monumental ritual, along with Slovene architect Jože Plečnik's unbuilt design for a Slovene Parliament, a key NSK motif. A reconstruction of this, surmounted by a red star, was to be placed on an artificial island in Lake Bohinj, a historically resonant Slovene location. The design was rejected as unsuitable and functioned as a provocation as much as a serious proposal, although an attempt would certainly have been made to execute it if approval had been given.[25]

Scipion Nasice was succeeded by Cosmokinetic Theater Red Pilot, which is named after a Slovene futurist magazine from 1922. Red Pilot produced the "Drama Observatories"—FIAT and Zenit (Zenith)—and two dance-based "Ballet Observatories" of the same titles. Its final work was the *Opera Observatory Record*, which introduces and mysticizes the historical figure of Herman Potočnik Noordung, the pioneering 1920s Slovene astrophysicist.[26] The *Zenit Ballet Observatory* is based on the role of the hero, and set against the backdrop of twentieth-century science.[27] The scripts and accompanying texts are highly reminiscent of the utopian heroicism and mystification of some Laibach texts, with a similar blend of scientific and mystical language. This can be seen clearly in the text of *Zenit Drama Observatory*, the best-known Red Pilot production:

4.8 Red Pilot, Zenit, 1988 (poster for 1991 Noordung revival).

> We rose
> In the Zenith of human epochs our steel complexity
> was being modified
> and it showed us a PROJECTION
> not allowing us to forget about the UNATTAINED.
> We were not eagles.
> We had but eagle eyes and heart.
> We had the courage of crusaders,
> we had the courage of guardsmen.
> Martyrdom had to become art,
> because after repudiating the next world
> whose face was then hidden,
> our power only enthroned it as a hologram reality.[28]

The first performances took place at Ljubljana station in 1988, in a rail freight carriage converted into a retro-futurist silver rocket.[29] The audience proceeded one by one into a totally darkened rear section of the carriage. At the door they were "blessed" by Živadinov before being left for a time closely packed in darkness. Without warning, voices bark "*Schnell!*" (Quick!) in German, and the audience are roughly pushed forward into the performance area. They watch the performance from a narrow gallery, with room for no more than two abreast, through which Živadinov prowls, at times bearing a naked flame. The action takes place on a raised platform to the left side of the gallery. The roof and walls are covered with an Alpine landscape, and the scenography incorporates other NSK motifs, particularly fal-

4.9 Noordung, *Prayer Machine*, 1992.

cons,[30] the exorcistic phrase *vade retra*, previously used by Laibach and Irwin, plus the ubiquitous black cross. The theme of the production is explicitly religious, and most of the characters are either priests or nuns; it continues *Krst*'s examination of the Slovenes' historical relationship to Christian ideology.

A similar arrangement to the one in *Marija Nablacka* dominated the scenography of Noordung's 1992 production *Prayer Machine*. The audience put their heads through a wooden grid (designed by the Russian artist Vadim Fishkin), while the actors moved among them in an imitation of the communion ritual. Spectators were rigidly spaced, and had little freedom of movement. Although it continued the religious themes, *Prayer Machine*'s elegant design, futuristic costumes, and the new Noordung cosmonautical themes place it in contrast to the archaic aura of previous performances.[31]

In 1994 there was a performance for children (1: 10,000,000), in which the young participants donned spacesuits to take part in a choreographed mystical scientific drama complete with brutal electronic soundtrack and NSK symbolism. Adults were forced to watch the action lying prone peering down through a wooden cupola high above the stage. In 1995 came the premiere of *Ena proti ena* (One versus One). This Shakespeare-themed play by Vladimir Stojsavljević has the theme of love and the state. It will be repeated in 2005, and thereafter each decade until 2045. As the actors die, they will be replaced by symbols, and in 2045 Živadinov, the last living member of the company (although he is older than any of the other actors), is to be launched into space from Russia, and will complete the

performance in zero gravity. The play is a strange hybrid between conventional theatrical discourse and space imagery, and it caused some confusion, but the final concept is as hubristic as anything the NSK groups have done previously. In September 1999, however, a new performance, *Gravitacija nič Noordung* (Gravitation Zero Noordung), took place, which follows the scenario of the projected 2045 performance fairly closely. It is set in weightless conditions above Russia, aboard a special training plane for cosmonauts, and is Živadinov's most ambitious (and expensive) development to date of the Noordung motif. Noordung are now developing an increasingly personal and distinctive course, leaving behind the collectivist aesthetic of NSK for personal vision and romanticism. Živadinov's work is marked by a fanatical disregard for limitations and a love of scientific-utopian imagery, which has given it a unique place on the international contemporary drama scene, and led to wider recognition for Slovene drama in general.

PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC

God—Pleasure—The Absolute

In 1986, NSK produced an "organigram," purportedly showing its organizational structure, featuring 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 organigram represented the sections' individual texts and statements, and collaborative NSK texts not ascribed to a particular group. 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 and editor Peter Mlakar, during Laibach's residency at Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, when the group performed in a production of *Macbeth*. Mlakar found a natural affinity between NSK and his own elemental neo-Hegelian discourse, and had already been aware of and on good terms with NSK for some time. Among his influences he lists Hegel and Heidegger, and the atmosphere of his hometown, Škofja Loka, a thousand-year-old castle town northwest of Ljubljana.[32] He had contributed a theoretical piece to the anthology *Punk pod Slovenci* (Punk under the Slovenes)[33] 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. Initially he collaborated most closely with Laibach, giving speeches as a prologue to concerts in Germany, Austria, and Yugoslavia. These speeches are always relevant to their location, or 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 can itself be seen as a provocation, regardless of the content. The most highly charged speech 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 soon assumed the role of "master of ceremonies," providing

addresses and texts for formal NSK occasions from internal events to gallery open-
ings and record launches.

As well as these addresses,[34] several longer texts have been issued, many con-
cerning themes such as God, the devil, and eroticism, as well as several dealing
with national questions with very Hegelian associations, laden with references to
"God," "spirit," and "essence." Their essentialist and theatrical tone have much in
common with some Laibach texts,[35] 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 con-
sciously explore and stress NSK's interest both in totalitarianism and in spiritual is-
sues, and firmly implant an absolute, all-encompassing—albeit apersonal—deity
within the NSK *Weltanschauung*.[36] "God is Spirit. Spirit is a Being eternally experi-
encing its own being, creating from nothing. It is a self-applying perfection, infi-
nite and limitless, existing in itself and for itself."[37]

In 1992, Mlakar staged a performance together with the Laibach subgroup
300,000 V.K. in Villach/Beljak, Carinthia, whence the philosopher Paracelsus
came. This grew into the album *Peter Paracelsus*, which combined recitations of texts
by Mlakar with a self-defined style of "Satanic Techno." The Department's work can
be seen as a natural extension of the NSK discourse into an obvious sphere that the
other groups interact with, but do not make their "primary" subject. The texts are
a rich combination of aesthetic effect, theory, and personal belief, and are as much
literary aesthetic or conceptual works as academic philosophical treatises. Al-
though some of Mlakar's recent projects—such as a collection of erotic short
stories—are not official NSK products as such, they retain traces of an NSK prove-
nance. Mlakar's most significant speeches in the 1990s took place in Sarajevo (1995)
and Belgrade (1997); here the Bosnians were asked to conquer evil by forgiving
their enemies, and the Serbs were asked to admit their guilt, and to be open to the
possibility of forgiveness. These speeches echo the Department's most unambigu-
ous mission statement: "Our mission is to make evil lose its nerves."[38]

New Collectivism

Propaganda—Communication—Provocation

"New Collectivism" is NSK's in-house design studio, commonly referred to by its
Slovene initials, NK. Active since 1983, it is headed by a professional designer,
Darko Pokorn, editor of the NSK monograph (1991), and also includes one mem-
ber each from Laibach and Noordung, plus two members of Irwin. It coordinates
all NSK designs, ranging from posters to press events, exhibition catalogues, album
sleeves, and NSK merchandise. Its work has been exhibited several times, both in-
dependently and in conjunction with Irwin or NSK collective exhibitions. In ad-
dition to NSK work, it constantly undertakes external commissions, particularly
drama and opera posters, but also projects such as the logos for Slovene Television

children's broadcasts.[39] A press résumé of its work from 1987 listed commissions including the design of record covers, book sleeves, and the design of several theatrical, youth, and cultural festivals in Slovenia and Croatia.[40] In 1994 its designs for Laibach merchandise won first prize at BIO, the Ljubljana Biennale of Industrial Design.

NK studio has also overseen the design construction of the NSK State. It produced and designed the passports, stamps, and other insignia. It has partial responsibility for the operation of the NSK information center set up in 1992, and production and supervision of merchandising operations. Its NSK designs and many of its other commissions make free play with an eclectic and provocative range of sources, from the insignia of the wartime Slovene Liberation Front (which it appropriated for its own insignia, simply substituting the initials "NK" for "OF")[41] to Heartfield motifs to classicism. NK established a visual vocabulary of the "retro" look to complement the visual rhetoric of Laibach and Irwin. Often the sources of the designs are comparatively innocent and nonpolitical, yet the designs frequently have a subtly sinister look based on the typographic and visual styles of the 1930s and 1940s. NK has produced several of the most provocative *Mladina* front covers, featuring controversial Laibach and NSK images.

NK is best known for creating one of the greatest scandals in the lead-up to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In 1987 it was commissioned by ZSMS to produce a design for that year's "Youth Day" festival (May 25, Tito's official birthday). The ZSMS selectors were fully aware of the character of NK work, having previously published several designs and supported NSK publicly. The decision to commission NK has been seen partly as a protest against being forced to host an event that many in Slovenia believed was now anachronistic. According to Tomc,[42] ZSMS wanted to maintain a countercultural mystique in a period of increasing liberalization. Provocations of this type created points of radical distinction from the mainstream. Scipion Nasice's grandiose mass rally proposal was rejected, ostensibly due to its expense, but NK's poster won the prize as best design, and was adopted on an all-Yugoslav level. Shortly after its adoption, however, a retired engineer living in Belgrade discovered[43] that it was based on a 1936 painting by Richard Klein entitled *A Heroic Allegory of the Third Reich*.

The Nazi banner in the original was replaced by the Yugoslav one, and the eagle by a dove. Almost as provocatively (although this was not the main issue of controversy), the blazing torch carried by the Nazi figure was replaced by the cone of Plečnik's unbuilt 1947 design for a Slovene parliament.[44] The resulting media storm dominated Yugoslav headlines for some time, and NSK press archives contain over a hundred articles on the affair, which was even reported in the *Economist*.[45] The issue was also discussed extensively on TV and radio, particularly RŠ, which held a round-table debate on its implications. During 1987, coverage of NSK as a whole reached a peak both at home and abroad, and numerous in-depth features

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

and commentaries were published. The coverage generated by the scandal merged into NSK's general media offensive. NK issued two statements explaining its position and methodology. The first compares the replacement of Nazi symbols with Yugoslav symbols to night actions by Partisans to deface Nazi and collaborationist posters. It stresses the democratizing effects of dealing with past trauma, and concludes with the slogan "Long Live the Day of Youth—Free Artistic Creativity."

The affair was acutely embarrassing for the Yugoslav youth organization, which, by choosing the design, revealed its latent sympathies for propagandist imagery, and the fact that it was as instinctively attracted to right- as to left-wing imagery. NK was surprised at the severity of the reaction; members were officially summoned for questioning by the police, and subject to surveillance for a time. However, no charges were pressed, partly because it would have been hard to know precisely what to charge them with (Article 133 of the Yugoslav penal code, dealing with "verbal offense," was already a controversial issue in Slovenia, and use of it might have made martyrs of NK). A trial would also have drawn even more attention to the fact that this image was chosen by Party representatives as the most appropriate representation of socialist youth. Further discussion of this would have highlighted the alleged similarities between Nazism and socialism which NK's critics accused it of fabricating.[46] The prosecution of artists went against the instincts of the Slovene republican leadership, who had no wish to alienate potential allies among liberal members of the youth leadership and intelligentsia, and the fiercest demands for action came from elsewhere in Yugoslavia. The Slovene prosecutor resisted calls for a trial that would have represented a damaging federal incursion into Slovene sovereignty.[47] The clearest result of this affair was the demise of the entire Youth Day festival, the details and design of which had to be hastily reorganized; it was not held again after 1987.[48] Despite the furore, NK used the image again to promote its exhibitions in Holland, Britain, and elsewhere during the year, and produced an equally provocative front cover for the Mladina issue of May 27, 1988, in ironic reference to the previous year's scandal.

At the time of this affair, and as part of its attempt at self-justification, NK produced its most explicit formulation of the retro principle; this is applicable to the working methods and basic principles of all NSK sections:

> The retrogardist is an artist guided by the desire and ability to analyze with an unerring eye the relations of the beautiful, the raw, the exalted, the holy and the terrible in current events throughout the world. The retrogardist combats using design and all the means at his disposal. He applies the method of the retro principle, the way an automobile designer assembles the parts of a car—wheels, steering wheel, engine. . . . The creative processes of reversed perspective, metaphors, hyperboles, time and space warp, unite and link everything that mankind has squeezed from its veins until now. Content and form are only tools which combine themes and symbols into dynamics, tension, excitement and drama.[49]

4.11 New Collectivism, *Mladina* front cover, May 25, 1988.

NK intervened more consciously in the political sphere in June 1991, when Slovenia declared independence and came under attack from Yugoslav forces. NK was the only NSK group to respond directly to these events. Three posters were produced and displayed across Ljubljana. The first, *Buy Victory*, was posted on June 28. It takes its title and slogan ("In the strength of great hope we must shoulder our common load") from an earlier Laibach poster.[50] The figure wears the familiar Laibach headdress, and its torso is formed from the distinctive black cross.

The second image, *Krvava gruda, plodna zemlja* (Bloody Ground, Fertile Soil), shares the name of the 1986 Laibach track, and the black cross is again visible in the background. The image exemplifies the way in which NK's designs incorporate motifs and concepts from other NSK works. The figure in the NK image wears a winged Mercury helmet of the type Laibach would use in their *Kapital*-era imagery.

The image's original source is a German recruitment poster for the Reichswehr.[51] While the posters do represent the group's artistic response to the attack on their country, which they naturally hoped would be defeated,[52] they are not unambiguously patriotic, and in fact the mechanisms they contain are as complex as those in other NK/NSK images. Although the posters did not produce a scandal akin to the one caused by the Youth Day poster, they remained provocative. Their militaristic imagery was completely at odds with the democratic image Slovenia

"In the strength of great hope
we must shoulder our common load."

Petek, 28. junija 1991

BUY VICTORY

4.12 New Collectivism, *Buy Victory*, 1991.

was attempting to present to the world to justify its claims to independence, and the presence of the Laibach figure would have been offensive to Slovene national- ists and others who had criticized Laibach during the previous decade. The am- biguous and disturbing aura surrounding the images distances them from many Slovenes, and is an expression of NSK's commitment to radical ambiguity even in moments of great political and national tension. They also comment upon the fact that no nation (including Slovenia) is immune from the tendencies the images rep- resent—the work of NK, a group formally committed to the reestablishment of Slovene culture, cannot be dismissed as "foreign." More positively (if still ambig- uously), the images reflect upon Slovenia as a country sophisticated enough not to

4.13 New Collectivism, *Krvava gruda, plodna zemlja* (Bloody Ground, Fertile Soil), 1991.

suppress potentially provocative images even in emergency conditions, with an artistic sector capable of producing politically acute and challenging work.

Another pointing figure (the original source of which is a famous British re-cruitment poster from 1916) appears in the final poster with the Croatian title *Ja se hoču boriti za novu Europu!* (I Want to Fight for the New Europe), posted on Novem-ber 29.

This image is the most ambivalent of the series. The cross in the background bears a chessboard pattern similar to the one in Croatia's new flag, based on the flag of the wartime Ustaše regime. The figure is Nikola Tesla,[53] shown with a severely distorted face in the style of Heartfield's anti-Fascist montages. The overall visual tone of these posters, augmented here by the presence of a zeppelin in the

4.14 New Collectivism, *Ja se hoču boriti za novu Europu!*, 1991.

background, clearly evokes the propaganda of the 1930s and 1940s, and thus alien-
ates the slogan "I want to fight for the *new* Europe" (emphasis added), suggesting
that the "new" Europe is in fact the old Europe of war and terror. In line with NSK's
constant repetition of its own motifs, the powerful image of the pointing figure
was later repeated in the Laibach posters *Tesla* (which is almost identical to *Ja se hoču
boriti za novu Europu*) and *Become a Citizen*.[54] The series of NK designs is a commentary
on both national mobilization in time of war, and the return to former Yugoslavia
and Europe of phenomena not experienced since the defeat of Fascism in 1945.

Despite these actions, and the number of its commissions, NK is perhaps the
least known of all the NSK groups, although it is probably the most prolific. This

is due to the fact that the scandal was not widely reported outside Yugoslavia, and contemporary Western articles about Laibach, Irwin, or Red Pilot from the same year made no reference to the affair. As a result, only those who take a more serious interest in NSK as a whole are really aware of NK and the scope of its activities. The other factor working against a higher profile for NK is the fact that much of its output (it is the most consistently productive section) consists of external commissions, where there is no obvious indication of any NSK connection, and few will notice the NK design credit, although when examples of such commissions are compared,[55] it is possible, as NK claim, to (retrospectively) "discern a consistency and purpose in the message of each poster, book design and overall image."[56]

This is principally visible through details such as typescript, the inclusion of classical or totalitarian (type) motifs, and the general retro aura. In terms of low profile, NK and the other nonfounding NSK groups are actually closer to the abstract NSK paradigm of depersonalization, collective authorship, and anonymity than Laibach, Irwin, or Noordung. While texts by the three principal groups are always attributed to "Laibach" or "Irwin," members of these groups, and of Noordung, are frequently named, especially in the case of Laibach, who have been unable to escape the demands of a "rock" audience for information about members (to fulfill the audience's needs for identification as much as information), so that Laibach's spokesman is usually named in interviews, even though he is speaking for Laibach as a whole, meaning that the rule (or aspiration) of anonymity is often ignored in practice. Beyond the Slovene and Yugoslav press,[57] however, the names of the individual members of NK are rarely referred to, although their identities are no secret. In the 1987 interview quoted above, NK recapitulates the classic Laibach/NSK collective credo suggesting that it takes full advantage of the lower profile design work affords to try to remain true both to the collective spirit and to NSK's public stance: "New Collectivism is a group, composed of individuals. Each individual is subordinated to the whole, which is a synthesis of the forces and desires of all members."[58]

NSK: Structure and Substance

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

program. Nevertheless, we are united by the same thoughts, laws and principles of action.[59]

The three founding NSK units were Laibach (music), the ideological unit or "foundation";[60] Irwin (art), "which has the function of NSK biographers recording NSK archetypes on canvas and in history";[61] and Scipion Nasice, which explored the religious and ritualistic aspects of NSK. After these three, NSK is subdivided into several more subunits and departments. Although they work within different media, there is significant overlap between NSK groups' actions and styles, and particularly in the 1980s there was a high level of coordination between them. Several common motifs and themes recur in the works of the main NSK groups, achieving a cumulative, mutually reinforcing effect across their various media. The *Fiat* motif, for instance, is present in the Laibach track *FIAT*,[62] the Red Pilot performance of the same year and title, and a 1989 Irwin piece. Other common themes include *Kapital* (a Laibach album and Irwin exhibition/catalogue) and *Noordung*. Until the mid-1990s, the works of all the groups displayed a recognizable "NSK" quality across their media, and comparison of their works generally reveals the presence of similarities in the use of text or typography, and the general "retro" attitude. From the outset, NSK was marked by constant interreferentiality and the mutual reworking of motifs, a characteristic which strengthened the impression of NSK as an emergent *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

All three groups, especially Laibach, were known domestically, but were aware that a collective structure could generate a greater impression of momentum, and would be harder to ignore than individual groups known only within their respective "scenes." One advantage of the collective was that each NSK section was also constantly cross-publicizing the activities of the others, and of the whole, in a mutually reinforcing cycle. The "critical mass" this created was particularly important in achieving recognition beyond Yugoslavia, an objective held by the groups from a very early stage. Working across media, NSK was large enough to carve out a space for itself as a category or movement in its own right. The fascinating and disturbing power of its source material and the (apparent) size of the organization made it difficult to ignore, and the structure also offered shelter and mutual support to its members.

Despite the impression of a tightly collectivist structure (seen in everything from members' public manner to the motifs, and even the names, of NSK groups), and the suspicions their work can evoke, NSK is not a "movement" but a core group of twelve permanent members, plus a much wider group of various collaborators, which actually operates more like a cottage industry or medieval community of artisans (an image NSK has alluded to) than the totalitarian combine or multinational corporation its image suggests. On paper, it is a highly regulated and formal body. Documents from the *Internal Book of Laws*, for example, are an intrinsic part of NSK's collective(ist) discourse. The "Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties

of NSK Members" is deliberately reminiscent of the charters of medieval guilds and fraternities, and also evokes totalitarian depersonalization. These codes structure members' creative lives symbolically, and at the pragmatic level of group loyalty, but there is no formal supervision of personal actions. Since membership implies common perspectives and attitudes, there is no real necessity to abandon personal religious, aesthetic, and political preferences, as the regulations state—if a member held any that were truly incompatible, it would (have) be(en) pointless to apply for membership. Members voluntarily make a formal submission to the whole in awareness of the requirements of membership, many of which—such as fraternal respect, hard work and comradeship—are not so arduous for a group of enthusiastic and like-minded individuals. At some formal occasions, members greet each other ritualistically, but this, too, is an aspect of the collective performance. The entire NSK organizational discourse also represents a (paradoxical) exploration of and commentary upon the possibilities of working as a collective, both under self-management and under late capitalism.

One of the first collective NSK productions was a special edition (number 6) of the independent critical and cultural review *Problemi* (Problems) in 1985. The entire issue was dedicated to and produced by NSK, and coordinated by the newly established NK. *Problemi*'s editorial board included some of the most influential critical thinkers and poets (Aleš Debeljak) as well as Peter Mlakar. Other figures associated with *Problemi* would later write articles for or about NSK (Žižek, Močnik, Mastnak), and Dušan Mandič of Irwin was also involved. *Problemi* received a state cultural subsidy (including this issue), and was published by ZSMS. The issue reprinted several pages of selections from Laibach interviews as well as early lyrics, poetry, and graphics not published elsewhere since. Some of the first Irwin works are reproduced here, as well as early texts, manifestos, and the announcement of Scipion Nasice's *Resurrection* action. The work was produced to catalogue standards in an edition of 1,400 copies. It is important for the amount of early material it contains, and as NSK's first totally designed and coordinated collective product. It also shows how, as part of a professional and theoretically adept grouping (NSK), Laibach gained a respectable and efficient medium[63] for some of its most disturbing messages via a high-cultural channel. Moreover, this took place when autonomous punk fanzines were still being censored, and positive statements about Laibach were extremely unusual beyond the alternative media (RŠ and *Mladina*).

At the *NSK Embassy Moscow*, Miran Mohar of Irwin summarized NSK operations:

The headquarters of NSK is in Ljubljana, which means that all its members live and work in Ljubljana. As for our relations with the outside world, I can say the following: NSK has twelve regular members, but many of our projects are carried out in co-operation with various artists or experts. Each group is economically independent, i.e., it raises money for its projects by itself, from various sources (state,[64] sponsors, etc.) NSK has no joint financial fund. Ideologically and politically we define ourselves as artists.[65]

The emphasis on the economic independence of the groups has parallels with the self-managing units of the late Yugoslav political system. In the case of joint projects such as 1993's *NSK Staat Berlin* event (a three-day manifestation by all NSK groups), the groups do pool funds according to the extent of each group's involvement. Mohar's explanation of NSK activity simply shows the extent of the individual groups' "sovereignty" within the wider structure, and the fact that the groups are not interchangeable, and do not cross-subsidize each other's activities.

ORGANIGRAM

> But we must declare as well that an assemblage has points of deterritorialization; or that it always has a line of escape by which it escapes itself and makes its enunciations or its expressions take flight and disarticulate, no less than its contents that deform or metamorphose; or that the assemblage extends over or penetrates *an unlimited field of immanence* that makes the segments melt and that liberates desire from all its concretizations and abstractions, or at the very least, fights actively against them in order to dissolve them.[66]

NSK's interrogative rematerialization of ideology in the field of the visual assumes spectacular form in the 1986 "organigram" (NSK organizational diagram). In 1987, Laibach described it as follows:

> The NSK *organigram* (organizational diagram showing principles of organization and activities), which has been made public several times on several occasions, clearly shows the hierarchical structure of the *Body*. In the head of NSK we cooperate on equal footing with Irwin and Cosmokinetic Theater Red Pilot in a tripartite council led by the ICS (*Immanent Consistent Spirit*). The collective leadership is rotational, the members are interchangeable. The inner structure of the *Body* functions according to the principle of command and symbolizes the relationship between ideology and an individual. Inside the *Body* there is equality. It is absolute and indisputable, and is never questioned by the *Body*. The head is the head, the hand is the hand, and the differences between them are not painful.[67]

The organigram reflects trends toward self-institutionalization within the Ljubljana alternative scene of the period.[68] 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 au-

PRINCIPLE OF ORGANIZATION AND ACTION

THE CONIC PRINCIPLE

(IMMANENT, CONSISTENT SPIRIT)

LAIBACH KUNST — IRWIN — SCIPION NASICE 1983–1987 RED PILOT

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 KRAWALLE

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 (WITHOUTH THE AUTHORITY OF DECISION) — EXECUTIVE ORGAN (TECHNICAL BASIS) — EXTERNAL FACTOR

4.15 NSK organigram, 1986.

tonomous cultural alliance represented the culmination of trends toward self-institutionalization.

The organigram 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 Yugoslav 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 Yugoslav school textbooks which seek to explain the country's bafflingly complex system of political representation."[69]

The organigram appears to symbolize the traumatic return of an inhuman, mass-organized totalitarian state. However, its significance did not end with the collapse of the Yugoslav 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).[70] NSK, too, may have detected the corporate future as much as exposed the present, recapitulating the stimulation of audience responses to produce "brand loyalty."

NSK: Content and "Spirit"

NSK functions as a loose hierarchy, with permanent members of the core groups supervising collaborators and others who may be involved in NSK activities. Early NSK statements always stressed the hierarchical aspect to heighten NSK's authoritarian corporate persona, a key component of the *paradigm of impossible authority* with which Laibach and NSK confronted state and society.

Of the units shown on the organigram some are actual, some cover occasional activities, some are virtual: abstract codifications of creative or conceptual functions, designed to increase the aura of mystery surrounding the bureaucratic facade. Others are more expressions of intent, covering areas into which NSK might (wish to) extend its operations, fleshing out these empty institutional categories at will. All the groups from the "Ideological Council" downward, with the exception of the "Convent/General Council," are not actual bodies but schematic codifications designed to present a (very opaque and abstract) illustration of various NSK procedures (the "Strategy and Spiritual Department," for instance). The three "assemblies" shown (technology, economy, projecting) are integral to the creation of a spectral state-image, intended to suggest that NSK is a mass technocratic-hierarchical formation.[71] Some, such as the "Archives and Bibliographic Department,"[72] simply codify activities carried out jointly and individually by the actual NSK groups. Items such as "Sava Club" are mystifying devices intended to deepen the illusions generated by the spectral structure—different NSK members will alternately explain or dismiss them as empty categories, or hint at some obscure function they carry out.

The most important of these abstractions is the "Immanent, Consistent Spirit" (ICS), a quasi-Hegelian term signifying NSK's *esprit de corps*, or *Geist*, which was described as pivotal, the central (moral) strength holding the whole together—the collective spirit and raison d'être essential to the vitality of any state. It symbolizes the attitudes and sympathies underlying NSK, and describes and produces the "NSK-ness" in the groups' work. Point 8 of the document, "Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK members,"[73] describes the ICS as: "the supreme substance . . . occupying the uppermost position in the hierarchy of NSK."

Similarly, Laibach described the group as "not the consequence of some kind of intellectual process. It is a fact of the same mechanism (*immanent, consistent spirit*), which forces it to create and to live as it lives; it is a state-action where intuition,

as a magical act in the rhythm of people and things, decides the direction, without offering or looking for explanations."[74]

Formal coordination is carried out through the NSK general council, which is presented as the supreme manifestation of the "ICS." The council is now composed of the permanent members of NSK and Laibach, Irwin, Noordung, NK, and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy. Meetings of the council have sometimes had a degree of ritual attached to them, and been held in castles and other symbolic locations. In practice they are not as formal as the image (deliberately) suggests—the council is an expression of NSK's "corporate" yet informal work ethic. At these meetings the activities of the various groups are presented, discussed, and coordinated. Argument is seen as productive and useful; for joint projects, however, final consensus is essential, and apparently some projects that did not stand up to collective scrutiny have been revised and resubmitted.[75] This coordination produced the mutually reinforcing (re)use of the same motifs by the individual groups in their different media.

NSK principles are codified in the *Internal Book of Laws*. The only parts of this "book" to have been publicly issued are the "Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members," along with the briefer "Five Principles of Friendship."[76] Its style is very similar to Soviet avant-garde manifestos, particularly the manifesto of the First Working Organization of Artists: "Through our practical and cultural activity we are organizing our psychology in accordance with the basic principles of our organization."[77]

This corresponds closely to the type of self-alignment with the organization that the NSK member is formally required to make. Point 11 of the *Internal Book of Laws* states: "Once a novice has given his pledge of allegiance, he is required to adopt the principle of conscious renunciation regarding his personal tastes, judgment, 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."

STATE COMMISSIONS AND NSK'S NATIONAL VOCATION

> To avant-gardists, reality itself is material for artistic construction, and they therefore naturally demand the same absolute right to dispose of this real material as in the use of materials to realize their artistic intent in a painting, sculpture, or poem. Since the world itself is regarded as material, the demand underlying the modern conception of art for power over the materials implicitly contains the demand for power over the world. This power does not recognize any limitations and cannot be challenged by any other, nonartistic authority, since humanity and all human thought, science, traditions, institutions, and so on are declared to be subconsciously (or to put it differently, materially) determined and therefore subject to restructuring according to a unitary artistic plan. By its own internal logic, the artistic project becomes aestheto-political.[78]

The raw material of many NSK works is the nation and its history, and the Slovene/Yugoslav national contexts were the stage on which some of NSK's most grandiose designs were played out; this is explicitly referred to by Irwin:

> Each nation is created to produce culture. We want to make a new Athens on our soil, a cultural space where art will be integrated with the social and spiritual order. In this project we want to work together with Slovene politics and for its benefit. However, our field is art; therefore we have no specific political intentions.[79]

> We are artists and not politicians. When the Slovene question is resolved once and for all we want to finish our lives as artists.[80]

ZSMS was one of NSK's key institutional patrons during the 1980s, and commissioned NK designs several times from 1985 onward (a poster for Youth Work Brigades). Both NSK and ZSMS found something valuable in their informal partnership. The new designs were a major factor in ZSMS's reinvention of its image and its identification with alternative culture, and the opening up of a generational and cultural conflict in Slovenia. In designing for ZSMS and other public bodies such as the National Theater, NSK received an "official" seal of approval that implicitly extended to its ideological agenda (NSK imagery is so entirely suffused by its ideology that approval of an NSK image symbolically entails acceptance of NSK as a whole, or at least of its controversial aesthetics). State commissions also enhanced the NSK self-image as a nascent state in equal partnership with the actual one—a key point of difference between NSK and the wider alternative scene.

Under socialism, a commission from a state body carried far more significance—and either kudos or discredit—than in capitalist systems. The question of what alternative activities were financed, and how, was the subject of much debate in Slovenia. On March 16, 1987, the paper *Ljubljanski Dnevnik* published the details of parliamentary discussions on cultural financing by state cultural institutions.[81] The report stated that none of the NSK groups was a member of ZKOS, the Slovene Federation of Cultural Organizations, and that Laibach received no funding for its work either in Slovenia or abroad. NK operated on a commercial basis, although it received many official commissions. There were no specific grants to either *Nova revija* or *Scipion Nasice*; both, however, had received funds from general cultural budgets, notably for the production of *Krst pod Triglavom* via Cankarjev dom.

The support shown to NK, and thus to NSK, by ZSMS and various other arms of the (self-managing) state was highly significant. NSK and Laibach in particular could no longer be so straightforwardly demonized as they were gradually incorporated into the cultural mainstream. Theater and political posters, and the high-profile *Krst* production, could not be ignored or dismissed as marginal provocations when they were commissioned by state bodies and performed at subsidized national venues. The symbolic-performative *vocation* of NSK personnel, expressed in a desire for a role on the "national" stage (which they had first reconstituted), was

also acknowledged. The creation of a national stage upon which to satisfy this vocation and provide its recognition was effected by Scipion Nasice, which acted as a self-appointed national theater, providing a metaphorical stage upon which the most elemental forces of the national psyche could be unleashed (culminating in Krst). The first "Letter" of the Sisters in 1983 declared: "Theater is a *State*"[82]—that is, a theater of or for both the future NSK State and the nation(al state). In 1984, Scipion Nasice staged the "retrograde event" *Resurrection:* "With this action the Scipion Nasice Sisters summon all Slovene theater institutions to a collective renewal of the dramatic arts."[83]

Part of the action was a proposal to unite all Slovene drama institutions, including the *actual* Slovene National Theater, "into a unified national theater," stressing that Scipion Nasice's membership includes all those who are active within the named Slovene theatrical institutions, and asking for their participation in the manifestations of Laibach and Irwin, an ideal realized in *Krst*. So convincing was this that it has sometimes been taken at face value abroad, and it was later even reported that the NSK body had been made the national theater of Yugoslavia—a misunderstanding that would have been deeply satisfying to NSK, apparently justifying their claims to a vital role in the cultural affairs of the nation. Such tactics, and the collaboration of semi-official organs, enabled NSK to make a gradual transition from a marginal to a central (albeit controversial) role in Slovene cultural life without artistic compromise.

Much of the NSK mystique derives from the fact that it has neither been finally condemned nor wholly rehabilitated, so multiple interpretations of its position proliferate, enhancing the sense of ambiguity from which NSK derives so much of its power. Within Slovenia it moved from damnation to fear to grudging acceptance. While state patronage, even in the most indirect form, would be considered a mortal blow by many nonmainstream cultural groups, for NSK it was an inevitable recognition of its status, and a significant impetus to its work. Consequent accusations of collusion and pro-regime manipulation complemented its aims and imagery. In public at least, NSK will not concede that any accusation can cause significant damage, and in the majority of cases denunciation suits its purpose very well, highlighting the contradictions of its accusers' position.

VACUUM AND CONTENT: NSK AS PROJECTIVE APPARATUS

The organigram illustrates how NSK uses ambiguity as an infinitely pliant and recyclable material with which to flesh out concepts and incorporate its "substance." The structure deliberately heightens the onlooker's sense of mystification—she or he is both mystified by and potentially aware of the (performance of the) process of mystification. NSK was consciously designed as an ambiguous and highly flexible container of the literal and psychic investments and projections of its audience

and members. It deliberately includes gray areas and bodies without precisely defined functions, enabling a multiplicity of interpretations while decreasing the chances that any of them will decisively penetrate it. The organigram is a "fantasy structure."[84] Even the maximum membership of NSK could never hope to staff all the departments shown on the organigram, let alone carry out wider political tasks. However, the vehemence with which NSK's image has been transmitted has been powerful enough to mislead fans, critics, and some within the Slovene and Yugoslav governments into believing they were faced with a literal structure. From NSK's perspective, these onlookers have been led into projecting their unconscious fantasies or fears onto a partly hollow structure that has far more subtle designs than its appearance suggests.

The apparent idealization and aestheticization of the state in NSK works evokes both traditional Russian political philosophy and its reading of Hegel's views on the state, and also a historical Slovene tendency toward conformism. The thoroughness with which NSK played its role also relates to historical incarnations of Slovene fanaticism and overidentification with authority. By setting a paradigm of impossible authority which no existing Slovene state, Stalinist or Catholic, could match, NSK may even have paradoxically (or symbolically) forestalled the creation of a state embodying any total doctrine within the Slovene space. NSK's paradigm of absolute authority opens ground behind or *above* which fantasies of an absolute state emanate. This inevitably disoriented the actual state, since it could never be (even if it wished to be) as absolute as NSK appeared to be during the 1980s.

Questioning or parodying the bases of authority *over* the nation is bound to raise neglected questions about actual as well as symbolic power structures. In terms of political science, the works of NSK might be seen as a dramatization or early diagnosis of a "legitimation crisis."[85] The appropriation of state attributes by a cultural body fashioned to resemble a state is a clear symptom of such a crisis. Laibach's claim to symbolic authority represented an attempt to posit a new paradigm of power distinct from both the existing regime in Yugoslavia *and* market-based Western democracy, a process culminating in the creation of the NSK State.

This policy of confronting the state with its own desires via a hyperauthoritarian paradigm was also relevant in the West. France and Britain (even postdevolution) are more centralized than post-1974 Yugoslavia, and it is interesting to speculate how the British authorities might have responded to an equally extreme phenomenon. NSK's *étatisme* has the potential to touch the same raw nerves, both East and West.[86] Challenging state authority is one of the most subversive of acts. The NSK example, however, suggests that when such a challenge is apparently based upon a more stringent ethos than that of the state itself, authority is nonplussed.

Once NSK operations are considered in detail, the gap between the way its members actually work and the expectations set up by a literal reading of the organigram become apparent. It is into this gap between structure and reality that the

audience are able to project their reactions. No texts refer directly to or fully explain the significance or functions of what is shown in the organigram, and the fact that many of its constituent elements are little more than ciphers leaves ample space to absorb the responses of those confronted by it. It does not support a utopian or dystopian organization, but the fantasies of audiences that need to imagine that such possibilities still exist.[87] If the individual NSK groups can be taken as analogues of Althusser's "ideological state apparatuses,"[88] carrying out interpellation in their respective media, the structure represents the totality of this work.

In his work on the avant-garde, Groys identified what he termed

> the colossal potential of desire and the unconscious that was inherent in the Russian avant-garde but was insufficiently recognized because it was encoded in a rationalistic, geometric, technical, constructive form. The machines of the avant-garde, however, were in reality machines of desire—they were meant to process the artist's and viewer's unconscious in order to harmonize and save them through union with the cosmic unconscious.[89]

The processes generated by the NSK structure depend on the type of mystification or mythification identified by Groys, who postulates an inherent will to total power already operative within the avant-garde. The structure is not intended simply to increase the aura of fascination, but it recapitulates the mystifying practices on which totalitarianism depends. It (ab)uses totalitarian methods to heighten the impenetrable, unquestionable aura surrounding the spectral state. The fluent transmission of paradox and other mystifying elements confronts logic, making it ever more difficult to formulate a critique in rational terms, as these can have only a limited or even irrelevant effect upon sometimes openly irrational phenomena that are not dependent for their power on appeals to reason.[90] Under totalitarian systems, incomprehensibility can assist faith, since an act of faith is required to accept the paradoxes and contradictions of the ruling ideology. Alternatively, it can awe subjects into confusion, resignation, or apathy, as Hannah Arendt describes.[91] Of course, tactics of deliberate mystification as an integral part of image-building are not exclusive to totalitarianism. The construction of mythic personality cults and the corporate imageries of rock groups, as well as the nationalist reinvention of national histories, employ many of the same techniques.

Apart from certain texts[92] oriented against Western cultural dominance, NSK discourse contains no antagonistic other, no named, demonized "enemy" upon whom to project negative emotions. Therefore, the strong emotions produced in reaction to the works are denied the usual totalitarian outlet of militant action on behalf of the ideology.[93] In its absence, audience reaction can flow in two directions: either toward the structure, creating loyalty or aversion to it, or back onto the audience member, for whom the position of neutral observer is made extremely problematic. To project either (reluctant or otherwise) fascination or disgust onto the structure, either of which amplifies its presence, is easier and

apparently more constructive than to remain in the ambiguous state of having had certain emotions aroused, but with no clear outlet.

Aesthetic Functions

> We believe that our [NSK] structure is a twin of the state, a revised repetition of the state.[94]

The organigram clearly fits the pattern of those Laibach and NSK works that recapitulate elements of state authority. In this category are Laibach's spectral totalitarianism, the monumentality of some Irwin pieces, and the oppressiveness of some NSK texts. NSK projects tend to hint at some ultimate source of authority lying behind and directing their work. The earliest Laibach texts suggested a degree of de-individualization and subordination so total and absolute as to make even the North Korean system seem lax and individualistic.[95] Although it contains subtle decoders, such as open talk of tautology and discussion of brutalizing techniques, Laibach's uncompromising extremity added depth to a paradigm only Laibach could plausibly inhabit. Pre-annexing all the most extreme options in the fields of (aesthetic) repression and propaganda techniques, Laibach denied this ground to others by creating and defining the limits of an extreme paradigm only they could embody. Laibach set the norms, determining the intensity of the image required to occupy this space and create its own paradigm.

Discussing the interrelationship between terror and propaganda in the Third Reich, Bramstedt laid great emphasis upon "the importance of the display of power as an intermediate link between propaganda and pressure through fear,"[96] and spoke of "a direct propaganda appeal based on fear of the might of the regime, hidden behind eulogies of its power and splendour, its present grandeur and its eternal glory."[97] Discussing the Nazi theory of control, which held that the mere possession of power was insufficient, he quotes from a 1933 book by E. Hadamovsky:

> All the power one has, *even more than one has*, has to be displayed and demonstrated. One hundred speeches, five hundred newspaper articles, radio talks, films and plays are unable to produce the same effect as a procession of gigantic masses of people taking place with discipline and active participation or as a demonstration of the means of power and weapons of the state as embodied in its military, its police and its political cadres.[98]

What Laibach did to produce such an effect was precisely to demonstrate (or suggest that they possessed) more power than they had (or wished to have), demonstrating that the state lacked but still coveted such power. Similarly, the Nazi SA (Stormtroopers) or the Bolsheviks had to embody more power than they yet (legally) possessed, acting as if they were already in possession of full state author-

ity in order to present the actual government as illegitimate. Laibach have described their performances as "a ritualized demonstration of political force,"[99] and the NSK State structure represents the ultimate (abstract) embodiment of NSK's symbolic power display (Laibach's "systematic ideological offensive").

The "fantasy structure" of the organigram adds essential *depth* to the illusion created by the structure and its contents. The Immanent, Consistent Spirit symbolizes the confidence necessary to play the role NSK members assumed. Backed by a strong, complex theoretical framework, this militant confidence was taken so far that NSK architecture section Graditelji spoke semi-seriously of building cities in the Alps, and Laibach claimed: "Only God can subdue LAIBACH. People and things never can."[100]

This confidence made NSK's decision to launch itself as a global, nonterritorial state plausible rather than risible, and it has achieved greater impact than other similar projects. The structure provided a framework covering all fields of activity necessary to give a sense of completeness and self-sufficiency to the organization and the groups within it. Covering all foreseeable areas of cultural activity, and inscribing in its facade some of the trappings of an actual state, it predated by several years NSK's moves into areas such as passports, currency, and stamps. Symbolically, the organigram was as important in lending an impression of depth and weight to NSK as prestigious exhibitions, or discussion of it in academic and critical contexts. It announced the definitive establishment of the institution, and provided a framework for future activities.

The organigram symbolizes political, military, and corporate hierarchies as such, representing an interaction at both the specific (the hyperbureaucratic self-management regime) and the general levels. The spectral command structure is one of the most literal expressions of NSK's use of the state as raw material in its works and in the construction of the collective facade.[101] The organigram employs a dated typeface and a strict modernistic linearity. The sections are not precisely symmetrical but are arranged along a rigid grid, lending coherence to what would otherwise look like a very awkward structure. Rather than a simplification of a complex structure, this is closer to a "complexification" of a relatively simple, albeit highly ambiguous, structure. The wooden language used—"Projecting Assembly (Plan Principle)," or "Operative Bureau (On the Principle of Conjuncture) (The Organ of Coordination and Organization)," mimics the awkward and alienating institutional nomenclature of Yugoslav federal units, enhancing the structure's retro mystique.

RETROCONSTRUCTION

The Lacanian answer to the question: From where does the repressed return? is, therefore, paradoxically: From the future. . . . As soon as we enter the symbolic

order, the past is always present in the form of historical tradition and the meaning of these traces is not given; it changes continually with the transformations of the signifier's network. Every historical rupture, every advent of a new master-signifier, changes retroactively the meaning of all tradition, restructures the narration of the past, makes it readable in another, new way.[102]

If it is now clearer what NSK is, it is not yet clear *when* it is. That is: NSK's use and manipulation of historical consciousness, both in general and in relation to the NSK structure, needs to be explored. NSK statements allude to the way the non-closedness of the organigram manifests itself temporally: "The retro principle supports constant alteration of language and shifting from one pictorial expression to another. . . . It makes use of various already existing language models, modifies itself through the past on the formal level, but remains intact on the conceptual one."[103]

The retro principle is central to NSK, built into its abstract structure. By the time the "organigram" was circulated, NSK had existed for two years. The design retrospectively gave NSK bodily representation. Given this temporal lapse, it would be tempting to view the organigram as equivalent to a Lacanian "mirror stage" in the development of NSK's (bodily) self-consciousness, a first (representation of) its initial self-recognition.[104] While it is metaphorically useful, this would again overlook the temporal element since, as an entity structured by the retro principle, models of linear development are of limited use in describing NSK, which, in Irwin's words, "modifies itself through the past on the formal level but remains intact on the conceptual level."[105]

NSK itself is built from constant alteration or retroconstruction. Moreover, because of the gap NSK maintains between itself and its discourse, even the original concepts presented at the time of its formation have inevitably been mediated by their transmission from the members to the public through the mesh of the new structure. The initial (nonpublic) founding acts of NSK were mediated by transmission, while everything produced since then is open to temporal alteration, and their temporal location is the potential subject of constant negotiation. Even when the NSK issue of *Problemi* (1985) appeared, there were two temporal gaps in the (re)presentation of the structure: between NSK's private foundation and its public debut, and between the creators and their audience—here, ambiguities could develop. These gaps could easily be closed, but instead they are left open. The gap between formation and debut could easily be overcome by some deft temporal retroengineering of the type the retro principle facilitates. NSK could easily have postponed formally instituting itself until the organigram was prepared, or have retrospectively falsified the date of this to coincide with its appearance. While this would have been feasible (and symbolically appropriate as a recapitulation of totalitarian practice), NSK did not (feel any need to) do so because of the potent manipulability of such a gap in the structure, which provides a constantly revisable

space for re- (or de-) invention and the (re)production of alternative mythologies or genealogies.

Besides being *post facto*, the organigram is also partly *ante factum*, in that it covered areas in which activities were intended to or might take place, not only those in which they had taken or were taking place. Paradoxically, what is fashioned to resemble a highly formal bureaucratic regulative system actually serves as an open framework for future development rather than a confining regulatory mechanism. In seeming to inscribe upon what Laibach refer to as the "body" of NSK[106] a regime that seemed (physically) restrictive, and (appeared) to limit its freedom of (conceptual) movement, NSK simultaneously opened up the scope to transcend such a regime through subsequent (and previous) developments. This is possible not just because of the depth of the illusion created, but because—in Laibach's terms—the "head" (hierarchy) remains in control. "The retrospective character of man's spiritual sight is particularly indicative of such periods as ours, i.e., the age of utter confusion. And the disintegrated *sub-object*[107] who, in the chaos of modern times, can neither find nor give support, turns his eyes back into the past, where, so he believes, the solution to the riddle lies hidden."[108]

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

> At the very beginning of our activities we shook off all illusions about free artistic activities: we drafted a program for several years ahead and carried it out with maximum effort and discipline. We established a method of work and stuck to it, without being rigidly bound to it. It did provide, however, a solid foundation for a structure with enough breathing space to allow for all paradoxes and inventions in thinking.[109]

NSK successfully (retro)projects itself as something eternal, or at least timeless, despite the fact that it did not arrive on the scene as a fully formed entity, but was retroactively structured from its inception. When the organigram was produced, many of the sections shown were empty categories which, from NSK's ideal-theoretical position as planner of its own history, had already been retroactively

filled out at some (unknown) future date; the same is true of the structure as a whole, which is retrospectively given the meaning(s) it had always (immanently) possessed by the anticipated (retro)projections of its audience.

Since only a small number of people have followed NSK since its inception, and perhaps not even the members themselves can detect every temporal inconsistency in later accounts of its history, it would hardly be impossible to doctor that history. This is especially true in the West, where information about NSK filtered through slowly via numerous—frequently misinformed—sources. There is no shortage of information concerning NSK. Since 1991 there have been several NSK publications containing increasingly accessible texts, as well as an immense quantity of foreign and domestic press material. Yet these are only now being synthesized into coherent chronological accounts, and this situation has enabled parallel (yet scarcely connected) accounts to survive, mutate, and proliferate. Therefore, NSK has little need for falsification, since these parallel and sometimes contradictory information streams, plus NSK's own mystifying pronouncements, maintain a space in which constant self-modification and alteration can always be synchronized with the facade, as in mutational totalitarian historiographies. Due to the plausibility of NSK's corporate facade, and the fact that it is not particularly concerned if anyone is perceptive enough to detect discontinuities, actual falsification (as opposed to dissimulation and concealment) is largely irrelevant.

NSK has constructed itself so that it appears to embody the authority necessary to manipulate or alter its history at will. It can also plausibly dismiss any exposure of such a practice as irrelevant, since its "authority" (and its success) is founded not on any pretence of rationality or veracity, but on paradox and ambiguity. This recapitulates the (possibility of) the absolute arbitrariness with which totalitarian regimes manipulate history. The dangers associated with even the possibility of the use of such techniques recalls Gottlieb's comment: "the proper exercise of historical consciousness is our antidote to the threat of totalitarian ideologies."[110]

On one level, the fact that NSK makes little attempt to demystify itself, or dispel misinformation (except occasionally of the most extreme kind), can be seen as an attempt to frustrate the (proper) exercise of historical consciousness. Yet NSK simultaneously encourages the application of historical consciousness in relation to the historical figures and motifs that are the bases of its "retroquotations." NSK's temporal manipulations also demonstrate that without constant vigilance it is possible for any authority, legitimate or otherwise, to pervert or suppress historical consciousness. While NSK is passively secretive in deliberately keeping its own history relatively obscure, or at least never providing a full account of it, it simultaneously forces a new historical consciousness, both of its previously neglected sources and, implicitly, of the possibility that contemporary regimes (both local and foreign) might employ tactics of the type summarized by Gottlieb in her description of 1984: "In the long run, what the Party insists on is the demonization of historical time so that it can create a sense of its own timelessness."[111]

NSK has consciously used a dictatorial approach to time as a malleable entity in establishing the structure as a vessel for the authority that would retrospectively be vested in it. Through the very precise symbolism of the NSK logo, and the systematic nature of its joint manifestations, it was able to present itself as a fully formed body even at the start of its development. From the perspective of those not aware of NSK from the outset, it might seem that it did arrive as a preformed or "ready-made" entity; the structure was expressly designed to create this impression. The foundation of NSK was very much anticipatory in character in that it could only retrospectively gain the "authority" (prestige, influence, and a following) which it persuasively embodied from the outset. It is in this light that comments about the production of time,[112] and the stress on the temporal character of the NSK State ("in Time"), should be read. This aspect of NSK activity also refers back to the megalomaniac claims of Russian avant-garde figures such as Khlebnikov, who claimed to have discovered the laws of time and space that "would grant the avant-garde power over time and allow it to subject the entire world to this power."[113]

Retroactivity has been a constant NSK theme, particularly in the works and texts of Irwin. Generally it is present in the background, alluded to or brought into works or texts.[114] Sometimes, however, it features more explicitly in works such as Irwin's Communism (1991), which has at its heart a cross bearing the inscription "Back to the Future."[115]

Above all, though, it is the NSK structure itself which embodies and is the result of retroactivity. One of Irwin's stated aims is the creation or construction of time. This can be interpreted as reflective of a (purely symbolic) discursive attempt to (re-)create and exploit time. As Gottlieb argues, control over both past and future (which, under totalitarian conditions, can largely be achieved) acts as a de facto abolition of the present by removing the subject's freedom autonomously to remember and reconstruct the past.

The hermetic, retroconstructed NSK structure obstructs (and implicitly questions the need for) independent chronologies, owing both to these built-in paradoxes and to the sheer mass of uncollated (even by NSK) source material. The effort required to overcome the self-mystification, hearsay, and dispersal of information is a real deterrent to such attempts. In fact, as Irwin's previously quoted description of the retro principle[116] suggests, to seek a definitive answer or a definitive, unambiguous historical account is to fall into the trap NSK sets by manipulating temporal perception. The "production of time," however, has another more positive aspect in its challenge to the postmodern dominance of spatial logic diagnosed by Fredric Jameson: "The crisis in historicity now dictates a return, in a new way, to the question of temporal organization in general in the postmodern force field, and indeed, to the problem of the form that time, temporality and the syntagmatic will be able to take in a culture increasingly dominated by space and spatial logic."[117]

4.16 Irwin, Communism, 1991.

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

CHAPTER 5

(TRANS-) NATIONAL DYNAMICS IN NSK

A small nation's memory is not smaller than the memory of a large one and so can digest the existing material more thoroughly.[1]

New Slovene Art

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

The groups LAIBACH, the SCIPION NASICE SISTERS THEATER (now called COSMOKINETIC THEATER RED PILOT) and IRWIN united in the same fashion in 1984, to work and reflect on the characteristics and possible paths of developing Slovene culture. By using the German language in the name NSK we do away with the debts that both the languages carry.[2]

This Irwin statement draws an explicit parallel between NSK and the OF, presenting NSK as an alliance with ambitions on a similar (albeit symbolic) scale. By stressing the different ideological attitudes of the constituent groups of the early OF, and inviting comparison with NSK, Irwin stress that NSK is not dominated by any one of its groups, and that the groups voluntarily collaborate in a common cause: the definition, exploration, and development of a Slovene cultural perspective, and the transcending of the "smallness" of the Slovene space[3] through exporting this perspective. The comparison with the OF exemplifies "emphatic eclecticism." One of the chief materials of this approach is Slovene history, and since the OF was the most sacred element of postwar official history, it was an obvious source. The narratives of the Partisan period remained unquestioned up until the late 1980s, and to challenge them was a taboo as strong as the one that prohibited the use of the German name for Ljubljana. Irwin's comparison is aesthetic as much as literal, a symbolic engagement with a defining moment when Slovenes took up arms in the face of foreign occupation. NSK again increased its "weight" by comparing itself with a popular movement. Both were alliances concerned, in different ways, to protect and assert Slovene identity in the face of external pressure.

Although it was less provocative than the appropriation of the OF, the name "New Slovene Art" was also subtly transgressive. Reemphasizing the Slovene over the Yugoslav element ran against official policy.[4] During the 1980s, such semantic issues became highly charged, partly because of a tendency among the intelligentsia of all the republics to stress such points of difference. Although it was almost never translated into Slovene, NSK's title represented a shift of real significance, expressing Irwin's intention "to reassert Slovene culture in a monumental and spectacular way."[5]

Yet this is an ambivalent artistic process, and Slovene nationalists have been among NSK's fiercest critics. NSK explores the possibilities and determining influences of the Slovene cultural space, attempting to find an authentic and productive means of expression that does not conceal but attempts to transcend the various artistic and political regimes that have shaped Slovene culture.[6] This approach does not represent an uncritical import or imposition of Western aesthetic norms, yet it is not a xenophobic celebration of nationalist mythologies either. It is important to bear in mind the particularities of the Slovene context when faced by apparently nationalist NSK statements.[7]

If a contemporary Croatian or Serb artist speaks of the national renewal of art, or attacks the cultural monopoly of the West, it is a fairly certain indicator of a nationalist viewpoint. However, for Slovenes—frequent victims of neighboring nationalism—to speak in such terms represents a historical break as much as an apparent political regression. Since it was only under Tito that the Slovenes acquired more or less full rights to cultural self-expression and freedom from external persecution, seeking to establish their culture on the European level is simply an attempt to overcome its historical marginalization and suppression, preserving (elements of) it through wider exposure. NSK's emphasis on (re)awakening national consciousness via cultural construction was in line with the Slovenist tradition of Slovene self-expression. Its approach, however, broke with the peaceful, even docile, tradition of Slovene culture, which had been deferential rather than militant.

The materials of NSK's manipulation were the uncanny, traumatic spectral roots of national identity per se, and their exposure and remanifestation in an increasingly globalized contemporary context. Visually, a "Slovenist" (culturally assertive) element was apparent from an early stage in Laibach and NSK projects, and long predated (or (un)consciously anticipated) the more general reawakening of Slovene national sentiment in the late 1980s.[8] Irwin has stated: "The idea of reviving Slovene national culture is essentially an artistic initiative designed to reinstill art with its historical identity and the artist with his cultural mission."[9]

NSK was aware that a "purely" Slovene ethnic art would have little chance of attracting anything other than condescending attention in the West, and fully cognizant of the theoretical and aesthetic limitations of a self-consciously nationalist art that could never integrate some NSK elements, such as pop art or constructivism. NSK concluded that the only way to escape the "problem" of belonging to an obscure culture was deliberately to appropriate the strident and violent means by which external influences were imposed upon the Slovene space. The use of German in the name "NSK" confronted and directly acknowledged the decisive yet highly ambivalent influence of Germanic culture, consciously manipulating the sinister aura still attached to the language, while simultaneously adapting to Europe's single largest market, to which some Slovenes still feel closest politically and culturally. By using the language of their colonial overlords, many formerly subju-

gated peoples, above all the Irish, have had an influence upon English literature that is out of all proportion to their numbers. Such people use the language of the colonial "master" to force consciousness of the colonized "servant's" suppressed identity. NSK exposes the working of a similar Hegelian master-slave dialectic,[10] acting with the very aggression employed by dominant colonizing cultures.[11]

NSK transcended the limitations of the Slovene context by forcing awareness of a new assertive identity onto the wider market, aided by more universal signifiers such as totalitarian art. This, however, was as much pragmatic as idealistic, since if it was to avoid a marginal role as either a producer of shallow national motifs with little external appeal or a Western copyist, it had little choice but to proceed as it did. Item six of Laibach's "Ten Items of the Covenant" states: "The principle of work is totally constructed and the compositional process is a dictated 'ready-made.'"[12]

Several other early NSK texts state that the choice of motifs was somehow dictated[13]—that the combination of the situation described above and the application of NSK's aesthetic logic left little choice but to explore those particular themes. Laibach felt compelled to use the defining found objects or "ready-mades" of their environment. Their necessary engagement with the national context and its assertion should be seen as the logical consequences of their particular position and their means of dealing with it, not as an example of a nationalist "will to power" (rather than a "recapitulation"). Such assertion is far less violent than the active or passive aggressions of local assimilation and Western indifference that have shaped Slovene culture. To gain a presence in the West, NSK had to adopt the blitzkrieg tactics of a propagandist "systematic ideological offensive," symbolically conquering territories in order to gain recognition and equality, particularly in the case of former imperial powers such as Germany and Britain. It is important that a degree of ambiguity and paradox remains attached to the NSK structure, and that the NSK project can be read *as if* it were unambiguously nationalistic. Yet such a reading would also have to integrate the internationalist and cosmopolitan elements of NSK, as well as its use of irony and absurdity, all of which contradict the typical structures of nationalist ideologies.

EXHUMING THE PAST

The official image of Slovenia as a cultured, peaceful nation[14] provides few clues to Laibach's extremism, and this seems to support the accusation from some of Laibach's opponents that the group was an alien or foreign contaminant of the national cultural space.[15] Nationalist arguments are often selective, overemphasizing aspects that are seen as most positive and most likely to appeal both to the domestic population and to potential foreign supporters. What is overlooked is the extent to which the authoritarianism, violence, and ideological conflict associated with the various occupiers of Slovene territory had domestic counterparts. Laibach was

alienating precisely because even the name reintegrated phenomena such as fanatical Germanophilia, ideological extremism, and violence into Slovene identity, while simultaneously using the positive folkloric qualities claimed by nationalists.

In 1988 there was a debate in the Slovene media between the sociologist Tomaž Mastnak and journalist Miha Kovač about the extent to which the Slovene national mobilization of the period was actually democratic. Kovač stated that a Slovene democratic nationalism that presented postwar history as repeated attempts by Belgrade to suppress the Slovenes' natural democratic tendencies was misleading, because it would "be blind to the deeply undemocratic character of postwar Slovene history and to the rich contribution of Slovene national ideology to the formation of the existing Yugoslav socio-political system."[16]

Mastnak sought to portray contemporary Slovene nationalism as democratic in contrast to other, "totalitarian" nationalisms. Kovač's stance echoed the NSK approach in drawing attention to authoritarianism in Slovene society. The ambivalent perspective of Kovač and NSK was a counterweight to the views of both nationalists and civil society, who ignored the problematic aspects of national history and identity, or argued that the Slovenes enjoyed immunity from the authoritarianism and nationalism "elsewhere" in Yugoslavia. If Slovenia was less nationalist, it was not always less authoritarian than other republics.

Laibach's very existence challenges the image of the Slovenes as wholly innocent victims of external aggression, and—in the language used to justify the ban on Laibach performances—"unearths disturbing memories" of collaboration and self-assimilation as much as external aggression. Laibach frustrate the wish to externalize violence and antidemocratic sentiment, and—when their presence among the Slovenes was acknowledged—to present them as the aberrant result of foreign oppression or influence. Laibach reanimated the threat of militantly antidemocratic forces and collaboration.[17]

To be reminded of this period in this way was offensive enough, but Laibach's Germanicism contained another perhaps even more unacceptable claim—that there is a necessary organic relationship between Slovene identity and the Germanism that repeatedly attempted to eradicate it, and that neither identity is complete without its antagonistic other. This interrelatedness made collaboration with Nazism and self-assimilation viable for many Slovenes, and NSK's use of Germanic symbolism and language refers back to this. Yet, associated as it is with a project asserting Slovene culture, NSK's use of Germanic imagery also implies a radical break in the traditional pattern of Slovene-German interaction.

NSK and Contemporary Slovene Nationalism

As we have seen, from 1945 until the second half of the 1980s, the Yugoslav system did not threaten Slovene culture or identity as such, only those elements that directly contradicted the Yugoslav status quo. Until the mid-1980s, romantic

"Slovenist" nationalism was confined to a few artists and academics and to anti-Communist exiles. Nationalist arguments constantly sought to attribute the Slovenes' real or imagined lack of national progress to Belgrade. The exiles and some of the intellectuals associated with the periodical *Nova revijo* made constant claims about alleged threats to Slovene culture, but it was only in the late 1980s, when the federal authorities attempted to prevent further Slovenization (the use of Slovene in the army), and threatened existing Slovene cultural rights (proposing a standard education curriculum with a heavy Serbo-Croatian emphasis), that a genuine threat to national culture was again perceived.[18] The neocentralism of Milošević stimulated mass national protest, uniting ideological nationalists with advocates of civil society and the alternative.

NSK statements both address national (cultural) assertion and acknowledge the real national advances made possible by Communism (intentionally or otherwise):

> Extraordinary historical circumstances have shaped our generation, instilling in us the awareness that the youth of a physically small nation such as ours must muster up greater creative energy than the youth of larger nations, that the post-revolution youth must be the most creative generation in the history of Slovenia; *previous generations were too concerned with the elementory historical requirements of a small nation; the struggle for liberty, indiscriminate oppression and ensloving, the fight to preserve its own languoge, which was not given its homeland rights, the fight for a geographically unified stote, and finolly, the fight for basic human and politicol rights. We ore oware that we belong to that generotion of Slovenes which does not have to waste precious energy on the struggles for the bosic rights of our notion, but that we can entirely devote our time first and foremost to ortistic production. We also know that nothing was bestowed upon us with the intention thot it be forgotten, but thot it be preserved and nurtured—for the eternal proclamation of the independence of Slovenia at home and obroad. Thus, a precondition for every creative action is organized consciousness ond the knowledge of history.*[19]

While it was determined to transcend Slovene reticence, and create an assertively Slovene cultural form, NSK also exploited the fact that it was faced with a regime that was concerned only to ensure that a distinct Slovene identity was not overemphasized at the expense of Yugoslav consciousness, rather than trying to eliminate it. NSK explains its focus on political activity through artistic production in the light of its claim that its generation must preserve their identity in the face of relegation by *Western* cultural hegemony, rather than the regional and domestic regimes that had previously attempted this. Laibach's emphasis on the hegemonic potential of Western popular culture directly contradicted the nationalist claim that threats to Slovene culture came exclusively from "the south," from Belgrade. The fact that NSK was able to function and achieve success within Yugoslavia suggested that Belgrade's power was weaker and less monolithic than the nationalists maintained, and references to Western cultural hegemony were a warning that a total shift of orientation from Belgrade to the West also contained threats to Slovene cultural autonomy (a theme adopted by contemporary Slovene antiglobalization theorists).

The presence in the collective memory of historically recent violence against Slovene culture makes the shift from culturally "respectable" to militantly assertive Slovenism of the type NSK seemed to represent appear far less radical. It could be argued that NSK's disturbing introduction of force and militancy into the Slovenist tradition stems directly from the violence employed against a primarily passive[20] Slovene culture during the war. Much of the shock associated with Laibach's emergence into Slovene cultural space derived not just from its almost unprecedented militancy but from the juxtaposition of Slovene national archetypes with images of the Fascist ideology that had so recently tried to extinguish Slovene identity. Despite its ambivalent inclusion of Fascist, Communist, and avant-garde/internationalist iconographies, NSK remains the most aggressive expression of Slovene identity to date. The outrage provoked by Laibach's engagement with Slovene national archetypes exposed the degree of (necessary) self-censorship and embarrassment surrounding explicit national symbolism. "Politically correct" thinking in Yugoslavia and the West was suspicious of direct assertive engagement with national archetypes (as opposed to folklorist activity). Moreover, while the economy remained stable, and affection for Tito was strong, there was less popular "need" for national symbolism. Modernist aspects of socialism—such as internationalism, brotherhood, and unity—were ideals many found it easy to accept, albeit only in return for stability and prosperity. While state repression was always a background threat (of which young people tended to have more experience), the degree of passive acceptance of or acquiescence to the system meant that assertive Slovenism was seen to some extent as distasteful or even primitive, especially by more committed supporters of the status quo. The Slovenes' economic status and modern image within Yugoslavia was at odds with archaic national symbolism. As a result, when Slovenia's quaint folk heritage (of almost no intrinsic significance outside Slovenia) reappeared, it was in an extreme form that explicitly manifested the ever-present demonic aspects of any (national) psyche, which can be so catastrophic when they are unleashed. The violence of Laibach's intrusion into Slovene culture suggests that whether conscious or unconscious, involuntary or voluntary, the discarding of national imageries was premature. Laibach and NSK made it obvious that national archetypes retained a strong charge.[21]

NSK worked in the sphere of cultural nationalism, approaching processes of state construction (and deconstruction) through culture in the traditional Slovene way. However, its militancy and concern to spread as far beyond Slovene borders as possible break with this tradition, and may seem to relate it to hegemonic nationalism. Yet, despite its aggressiveness, it is a pragmatic, theorized response to external and internal cultural pressures faced by those searching for a Slovene mode of expression under both socialism and the market. The transcendent qualities of the works should not be overlooked: they represent a transcendence of the nation and its inherent limitations through the national. Unlike nationalists, who generally have little interest in the assertion of Slovene culture abroad, NSK texts

suggest that the national stage is too small and limiting for the assertion of Slovene culture, and must be transcended. An assertive national art produced purely for the domestic audience would be vulnerable both to appropriation by political nationalism and to marginalization abroad. The concern to create a Slovene mode of addressing international audiences runs against the tendencies of political nationalism in Slovenia. Similarly, the mode of assertion in relation to the foreign audience represents a pragmatic cultural response to the pressures faced by a small Slav culture. Neither the internal nor the external assertiveness of NSK is based on "enemies" or demonization. The forces which NSK opposes are those it sees as limiting Slovenia's cultural space and creative potential, rather than named individuals, groups, or nations.

NSK did contribute to a nationalist atmosphere in which Slovene self-identity underwent renegotiation and reassessment, even if the appearance of nationalism was itself a part of its performance. The complexity and extreme ambiguity of NSK discourse, however, made it a more distanced conceptual engagement with overtly nationalist trends.[22] NSK works (many of which are not directly related to Slovene national concerns) often refer simultaneously to the two most intense poles of Slovene identity: Germanic self-assimilation and "Slovenist" self-assertion.

The simultaneity of the Slovene and Germanic imageries had embarrassing implications. NSK's Slovenicism cannot be discussed in isolation from its Germanicism. So, despite the monumentality of the Slovene images, any interpretation of NSK as a force even for cultural nationalism is problematic. NSK works such as *Krst* and *Slovenska akropola* make explicit the wounds and paradoxes of Slovene identity. Yet despite the ambiguities of NSK's position within Slovenia, its monumental reworkings of Slovene motifs were seen by many Yugoslav critics as a Fascistic vanguard of Slovene nationalism, particularly during the Poster Affair. Even in 1987, however, Slovene nationalism was far less cohesive and aggressive than the Yugoslav media claimed.

NATIONAL REPROCESSING

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

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

—Irwin, 1988[23]

Laibach and NSK appropriated key "unspent" national symbols and reprocessed them. In the early 1980s such symbols seemed distant and quaint, and their unexpected reemergence had a spectral, uncanny quality. Even a folk symbol apparently

as innocuous as the *kozolec*[24] (Slovene hayrack) was "made strange" by Laibach's intervention. The presence of the Laibach symbol (with its industrial, Germanic and other disturbing associations) on the *Rekapitulacija* album cover disturbs the national-pastoral idyll of the scene (originally by the Slovene artist Božidar Jakac), questioning the mode of enjoyment behind such folk symbolism, exposing the persistent continuity between folklorism and totalitarianism. By including these idyllic signifiers in a presentation that also contains much that is disturbing and ir-rational (spectral Fascistic mobilization, noise, mysticism), Laibach deny the pos-sibility of a national mobilization based "purely" on positive elements. Along with other representatives of Yugoslavia's "apocalypse culture," Laibach foresaw a vio-lent return to the fanatical consumption of national symbolisms. Laibach symbol-ically paramilitarized the claims to nationally based moral authority made by poets, folklorists, and intellectuals across nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe. The group also anticipated the nationalist paramilitarization of Yugoslav politics in the late 1980s. Laibach's performance of fanatical mobilization repre-sented a suppressed desire immanent within the Yugoslav system and its ruling elites. NSK performed a direct *national* appeal to the more atavistic national-spiritual constituency which the system was unable to address, and which right-wing opin-ion accused them of eroding. The smoothness with which so many politicians switched from socialist to nationalist orientations suggests a frustrated political desire to address Slovenes (primarily, though not necessarily exclusively) as Slovenes rather than as Slovene Yugoslavs. Laibach hit such a raw nerve because they addressed an emotionally (if not historically) authentic constituency. They saw that in fact there was no inherent connection between romantic nationalism, and democracy or social justice.[25]

While Laibach's opponents accuse them of being a contaminating element within the national space, they make no apology for claiming a central place within it. *Država* (The State) recapitulates the role of the totalitarian state, but its conclud-ing line, "Oblast je pri naš ljudska" (Our authority is that of the people), also refers to Laibach's "right" to manipulate national symbols. Like actual totalitarians, Lai-bach claim that their right to appropriate the artworks of Jakac, the architecture of Plečnik, or the poetry of Prešeren actually derives *from the people*. Rhetorically, Lai-bach base this claim to authority over audiences on strong but suppressed desires in the national audience: "the people" whose authority they claim to embody.

NSK anticipated the ending of the historical antagonism between authority and nation in Slovenia. Its "holistic," postromantic approach to national imagery, and its refusal to accept dissident status, distinguish it from romantic nationalism, which traditionally took a (formally) dissenting stance—not only in relation to "foreign" regimes, but also toward the passive, conservative majority of the population.

While Laibach were associated with alternative society and culture, they vehe-mently deny comparisons with paradigms of dissidence based on a binary dis-

LAIBACH

REKAPITULACIJA 1980–84

PREŠLA BO SODBA VEKA
IN NAŠIH DNI STREMLJENJE,
IN NAROD VSTAL BO SLAVEN
V MOGOČNO POMLAJENJE!

WALTER ULBRICHT SCHALLFOLIEN

5.1 Laibach, *Rekapitulacija*, cover of first Western album release, 1985. The verse reads:

> The Judgment of the Age
> And the Aspirations of Our Days Are Drawing Near
> And a Great Nation Will Arise
> In Powerful Rejuvenation!

tinction between regime and opposition. The group occupies an indeterminate space between the two camps, and its overidentification with symbols and notions of state power cannot adequately be described as "dissidence."[26] Anarchist paradigms might be more appropriate than those of dissidence, yet although demasking and recapitulation has an obvious anarchic potential to confront regimes, NSK's paradoxical, ambivalent discourse contains comments counter to the spirit of anarchism as such: "The substance of totalitarian equality stimulates the will to bestow well-being on everybody without exception. Woe to those who don't respect its real essence. They will be happy if they end only in anarchy and nihilism!"[27]

It could be argued that this is actually anarchism in the guise of its opposite (totalitarianism), but again this is too simple and convenient to explain the full ambiguity of the phenomenon. Laibach's position of radical ambiguity casts the Mastnak-Kovač polemic in a different light. Mastnak wrote frequent commentaries on Laibach for *Mladina*, and was one of the alternative theorists closely associated with NSK, yet Laibach's links to the alternative actually reinforce Kovač's point. The civic mode of national democratic mobilization theorized by Mastnak could not be separated from the antidemocratic undercurrents of Slovene society and romantic

nationalism, so dramatically present in Laibach. Laibach remained unassimilable, tainting all elements of the Slovene political spectrum—those who identified with the state, the nation, and even the alternative.

As a group, Laibach has always attempted to distance itself from avant-garde, revolutionary or hedonistic-nihilistic positions in relation to authority. In this way it stresses the dishonesty of oppositional trends that claim to be unaffected by the ideology and history that have already structurally contaminated them. In agreement with Kovač, Laibach imply that any stance claiming to be situated outside and diametrically opposed to the regime is committing the same kind of unhealthy falsification practiced by the regime it formally opposes. The structural impossibility of creating any sort of autonomous "pure" political space in such a small socio-political context as Slovenia makes such a stance all the more dishonest, although populist politicians still attempt it. This pretence is easier than acknowledging that in the Slovene environment an ideologically detached or pure stance is structurally impossible, and the only healthy way to deal with the structural impossibility of real autonomy is to acknowledge it and use it. The NSK statement "only art which speaks the language of political manipulation can escape such manipulation"[28] refers to the position of any (Slovene) political subject, as well as the mechanisms of the political assimilation of culture. In Laibach's words: "Politics is the highest and all embracing-form of art, and we who create contemporary Slovene art *consider ourselves politicians.*"[29] In such statements, Laibach sampled the Nazi aestheticization of politics.

> The mission of the politician, more dangerously still, was similar to that of the artist. Hitler saw himself as the architect of the Third Reich, who "creates according to the laws of beauty," and Goebbels had Hitler in mind and was paraphrasing him only slightly when he said: "The true politician stands in the same relationship to his nation as the sculptor does to his marble." Walter Benjamin referred to this synthesis as Hitler's aestheticizing of politics.[30]

Laibach's aestheticization of politics and force differs from actual totalitarianism in that it is not in the service of a political formation or national cause. Laibach employ the same symbolism as their Slovenist predecessors, yet work under an entirely authoritarian national paradigm, based on the state, at odds with civil models of national reconstruction. They demask and recapitulate the totalitarian potential of both state and opposition. The timing of Laibach's first interventions at the start of the 1980s placed it among the first (and certainly most visible) symptoms of an accelerating process of de-Yugoslavization/re-Slovenization of culture and politics after Tito's death. NSK both contributed to and contradicted these processes (in the use of Germanic and even industrial signifiers which were experienced as being anti-Slovene). If anything, the Yugoslav imageries (Tito, the Partisans, industry) were more provocative to nationalist sentiment than the Germanic ones, even though the use of these was highly ambiguous, and also read as

anti-Yugoslav. By the late 1980s, interrepublican politics in Yugoslavia was so po-
larized that increasing numbers of Slovenes saw anything remotely similar to
(Yugo)Slavophilia as almost as inimical to the Slovene cultural survival as the older
Germanophilias. The opposition this produced overlooked Laibach's simultaneous
retransmission of Slovene and Germanic national archetypes.[31] "Emphatic eclecti-
cism," which holds that all the artistic and political influences on Slovenia are of
equal creative potential in the development of Slovene culture, is anathema to those
who argue that Communist, Yugoslav, industrial, and Germanic influences are in-
imical to Slovene culture. Only by reprocessing all the political and artistic strands
that have shaped Slovene culture, and by not concealing the antagonisms these gen-
erate, could NSK recapitulate the radical inconsistencies of totalitarian and nation-
alist projects, while continuing to provoke uncertainty and questioning across the
political spectrum as to where they "really" stood.

GERMANIC ELEMENTS OF SLOVENE IDENTITY

It could be argued that the relationship with the Germans has been the predomi-
nant influence on Slovene history. This dynamic affects all Slovene attempts at self-
imaging, and the force of Laibach's Germanism demonstrates its continued
influence. In 1913 the celebrated Slovene writer Ivan Cankar stressed the extent to
which Slovenes were in the Germanic sphere, despite their ties with the other
Yugoslav peoples: "By blood we are brothers; by language cousins; but by culture,
which is the fruit of the separate upbringing of several centuries—there we are less
familiar to one another than one of our Upper Carniolan peasants to a Tiroler."[32]
    This echoes Ramet's summary of a 1972 survey of ethnic stereotyping in
Yugoslavia:

> The Slovenes' self-image contains some feelings of superiority (love of order, effi-
> ciency at work, and cleanliness) and of inferiority (principally in connection with
> their lack of a historical tradition of independent statehood). The Slovenes also have
> a tendency to look down on other Yugoslavs for their inefficiency and alleged irra-
> tional use of resources. The Slovenes themselves are viewed by other Yugoslavs as
> unsociable, unfriendly, "Germans."[33]

Laibach manipulated this stereotype of Slovenes as Germanic, performing the
Slovene role as the "Germans" of Yugoslavia plus the role of self-assimilatory
Slovenes who chose to adopt German ethnicity (the so-called nemškutarji). Yet Lai-
bach problematized the "Slovenes as Germans" paradigm even while using it. Any
Slovene inferiority complex was purged from Laibach's militant (though paradox-
ical) presentation of Sloveneness (Slovenstvo). Although it could be argued that the
militant confidence of Laibach and NSK was itself a distorted expression of Slovene
feelings of inferiority, the need to present a totalitarian image demanded such
confidence, shattering the stereotype of the Slovenes as unassertive provincials.

Laibach's ultra-Germanic role was combined with an equally intense enactment of Slovene national archetypes that would be inimical to those actually engaged in or advocating Germanization—a point that is not conceded by those who accused Laibach of this. This apparent paradox actually reflects the complex nature of Slovene identity, lying as it does somewhere between mutually antagonistic Slav and Germanic poles, and embodying the connections between the two identities, which are denied by both Slovene and pan-German nationalists. Discussing the role of the Reformation in Slovene cultural development, Barker identifies a dialectical relationship between the Slovene and German cultures: "There is, however, a certain irony in the German influence upon the Slovenes. By transmitting intellectual fuel and stimulating the development of a national language and literature, Germany helped to anchor their national existence more firmly. It was, moreover, not the last time that a German thesis would invoke a Slovene antithesis."[34]

The vast majority of Laibach's work up until 1994 (the release of *NATO*) expressed this tension. The Germanic aspect of Laibach's work illustrated the extent to which Slovene cultural and national assertion depended to a dramatic extent on the legacy of German culture. Since the Reformation, the framework for the development of Slovene identity has been (the negation of) a Germanic one. Yet Barker's analysis can be extended not just to NSK's manipulation of Germanic archetypes, but to the *nemškutarji* who responded to the Slovene nationalist thesis by collaborating with the German nationalist antithesis.

SELF-NEGATING GERMANIZATION IN SLOVENIA

LAIBACH and NSK analyzed nationalism through the aesthetic dimension. By placing "national and subnational" symbols alongside each other, we demonstrated their "universality." That is, in the very process of one nation defining its difference against the other, it frequently uses the same, or almost the same, kind of symbols and rhetoric as the other. In short, nations are not very original at all when it comes to defining their own originality—their "raison d'être"—against each other. Indeed, they often use exactly the same arguments and symbols (compare, for instance, the use of the eagle symbol by the Germans, Americans, Albanians, Austrians, Poles, etc.). Paradoxically, then, nationalistic conflicts between nations are usually not the result of differences, but because the differences are too small (for instance, only a few English people know that they're essentially an English-speaking Germanic tribe). Such nationalism is based on "the narcissism of small differences." It is the most popular, most European and most fatal.[35]

Germanization was an active cultural and political force among the Slovenes until the creation of the first Yugoslavia, and again during the German occupation (1941–45), when collaborationist propaganda stressed the Slovenes' place in the Germanic sphere. In the Slovene-speaking areas of Austrian-controlled Carinthia, self-Germanization still occurs, as does Italianization among the Slovenes on Italian territory. Many Slovenes (as opposed to those who had no real choice but to

submit) Germanized themselves for pragmatic rather than idealistic motives, principally the greater possibilities of socioeconomic advancement. The assimilationist rationale was that trade connections with Austria maintained through language were more useful than connections with the still partially civilized Slavic south, whose peoples still pursued blood feuds.[36] Some claimed that they did not want to renounce their Slovene heritage, yet treasured German culture and wished their children to learn both languages (an argument against monolingual Slovene schooling). Reviled by most Slovene opinion, and used as an argument for Germanization by others, such arguments echo Barker's observation that Slovene cultural life has been largely shaped by German influences. An argument for the inseparability of the two cultures is central to NSK works, in which the Slovene is transmitted via the Germanic. However, NSK's militant assertion of Slovene culture directly contradicts even the mildest forms of self-assimilatory ideology.

Once the self-assimilation decision is made, the process has to be carried out zealously. This expressed itself in a desire to assimilate so thoroughly as naturally to embody Germanicism, and to negate the assimilant's non-Germanic lineage. Laibach's Germanicism refers to this, but also to the equally unbalanced postwar de-Germanization of Slovene identity. Laibach represents the distortion operative at both the pro- and anti-German poles of Slovene identity. Laibach's vehemence and excessive amplification of certain elements reflects real historical processes in the constitution and negation of Slovene identity. In late nineteenth-century Ljubljana, Slovene nationalist meetings were broken up and violently disrupted primarily by zealous pro-German Slovenes rather than the authorities.[37] Here, Irwin's statement about slaves "more eager than the master himself"[38] is again relevant. Laibach's spectral zeal for archetypes of state and nation, and manipulation of the Slovene zeal for self-assimilation, disturbed both socialists and nationalists. The ferocity of Slovene self-assimilation and NSK Germanicism (one of the most spectacular, scandalous elements in NSK's presentation) can be explained with reference to Žižek's notion of an element which "out-embodies" another element. He describes "an (actual) element which, although it is not a member of the genus X, is 'more X than X itself.' This dialectic is often referred in everyday expressions, as when we say of a resolute woman that she is 'more man than men themselves,' or of a religious convert that he is 'more Catholic than the Pope,' or of the legal plundering via stock exchange transactions that it 'outcrimes crime itself.'"[39]

Within the culturally and historically grounded Laibach project, "the Slovene" manifests itself as a quality that is "more Germanic than the Germanic itself." The "more X than X" formula implies an excessive, fanatical quality representing the overfulfillment of a notion, and contains the implication that the original, imitated "X" is a weaker version of itself than the imitative, overcompensatory one. The *nemškutarji* had to be "more X than the German X" to conceal the fact that they have consciously *adopted* a Germanic identity. Laibach enact an archetype of Germanicist triumphalism and, in the process, subvert it entirely, transforming it into something

apparently completely contradictory; a Germanically coded assertion of Slovene culture, even more disturbing to German nationalism than a straightforward assertion of Slovene identity. Laibach (as the "X" which is more German than the German itself) taunt notions of German supremacy, and claim that only unapologetic Slovenes have the capacity to occupy such a thoroughly Germanic (and long since proscribed) role: "We have already stated that the contemporary Germans are an inferior sort of Slovenes, so it doesn't surprise us if they took us for their own."[40]

CARINTHIA: MOST/LEAST GERMAN, MOST/LEAST SLOVENE

> The closer one gets to either the Eastern or Southern fringe of the German-speaking world—the closer one gets, in other words, to the threatening and more numerous Slavs—the more insecure and dangerous German nationalism becomes. On the German world's Eastern frontier, Pomeranian and Silesian Germans question the legitimacy of the Polish border. To the south, in Austria, where blood from the Slavic world actually flows in "German" veins, denial of this elemental fact takes the form of unreconstructed, pan-Germanic paranoia.[41]

All the tensions between the two cultures reprocessed by NSK are present in their most intense form in Carinthia, the mixed Slovene-German province of southern Austria. Many of the most notorious Nazi ideologues and war criminals come from this area, and its current governor is Jörg Haider. In the attempted Nazi putsch of 1934, and at the time of the Anschluss, Carinthia was the most pro-Nazi part of Austria.[42] Yet Carinthia ("the watchman of the Reich") was also the ancient heart of Slovenedom, the independent Slovene kingdom of Karantanija,[43] prior to assimilation and contraction. In much the same way, Kosovo, once the Serbian heartland, became peripheral due to military defeats and population movements. There is no lost-heartland ideology concerning Carinthia, as there is with Kosovo, but it is perceived as retaining some quintessential Slovene quality, and some still mourn its loss. Although the proportion of Slovenes within Carinthia is approaching that of Serbs remaining in Kosovo, many Carinthian Slovenes' acceptance of assimilation means that Slovenes have to restrict their ambitions regarding this historic heartland.

Carinthia is the territory on which German culture has made its most intense efforts to Germanize Slovenes—in order to ensure ethnic homogeneity, but also to produce the ideological justification for ethnoterritorial expansion (fears manipulated by Laibach). The President of the Slovene Parliament referred to such pressure on December 26, 1990, after the announcement of the results of the Slovene independence plebiscite:

> We have often been denied these opportunities in the past, also by some larger neighboring nations. They have tried to prove that we, the Slovenes, are not a historical nation, and that we therefore do not have the right to live an independent national life in an independent state. Some people have even tried to prove this

in quasi-scientific ways, and pointed to us with contempt, saying we were unable to live shoulder to shoulder with other culturally and economically developed nations.[44]

Such attitudes are manifest in the fantastical notion of a "Windisch" people. Owing to the insubstantiality of the Wendic identity, those Slovenes who adopted this role, through which they might justify their self-Germanization (some never adopted the intermediate Windisch identity, and directly adopted a German identity), had to demonstrate this publicly. Some of the most aggressively pro-German individuals with the strongest contempt for all things Slovene came from only recently assimilated Slovene families. Nemškutarji organized pro-Austrian demonstrations, and in 1914 they blocked a pilgrimage to the Ducal Chair; symbol of the ancient Slovene proto-democracy at Gosposvetske polje, outside Klagenfurt/Celovec.[45] The fanatical extent of such individuals' Germanophilia was necessarily even more intense than that of the actual Austrians.[46] Those designated as Windisch who were recalcitrant enough to persist in speaking Slovene were seen as in need of the harshest treatment.[47]

Nemškutarji and Austrian nationalists were the most hysterically insistent on their own Germanism, and on the historically German nature of the area and most of Slovenia itself. However, their vehemence was in inverse proportion to the deeply Slovene historical character of the area,[48] and this accounts for the ideological attractiveness of Nazism in Carinthia. Caught in the polarized struggle between this camp and the Slovene nationalist factions lay a relatively passive group still attached to their Slovene identity but too fearful to assert it, or actively to resist Germanization.

When the plebiscite to determine if Carinthia should join Yugoslavia or the new Austrian state was held in 1920, pro-Austrian propaganda reconstituted the Windisch as an ancient people, historic pro-Austrian allies of the Germans against "Balkan" ambitions (Serb troops fought Austrian forces in Carinthia immediately after the First World War). The loss of Carinthia to Austria in the plebiscite of October 1920, reconfirmed after the Second World War, was a blow that still rankles. Many Slovenes were alienated from both Yugoslavias by their perceived failure adequately or competently to press Slovene claims to Carinthia, or to ensure stronger protection for the minority. It is not certain, however, whether the conservative Carinthian Slovenes would have voted for reunion at either plebiscite, even without the Austrian pressures placed upon them and their fears of Communism or Serb dominance, plus the more or less open Italian threat of military action in the event of a pro-Yugoslav vote.[49] The most difficult thing for many in Slovenia proper to accept was that many Carinthians were already too far alienated from their culture and fellow Slovenes to choose ethnocultural security over economic and political security. Only in the south of Carinthia, nearest to Slovenia, did

more than 50 percent vote for Yugoslavia in 1920. To most Slovenes this choice was perverse, but the devoutly Catholic, largely rural Slovene Carinthians preferred the certainty of dealing with Austrian rather than Yugoslav authority.[50]

It is possible that with the disappearance of the ideological frontier, and Slovenia's membership in the European Union, borders will become less relevant, and there will be less "need" for Austrians to assimilate Slovenes and marginalize their culture—but the strength of the FPO in Carinthia suggests otherwise.

Laibach allude to events in Carinthia only obliquely, as in the poster Trst-Ljubljana-Celovec. Set among burning buildings, the Slovene Ducal Chair, one of the key Slovene national symbols, is branded with Laibach's insignia. The image resembles the woodcuts of wartime atrocities projected by Laibach during their concerts, and the names of the three locations symbolize atrocities committed by Italian and German forces in these places, and the loss of Trieste and Klagenfurt. The ambivalence of the image also reflects unresolved tensions between Slovenes and Germans in Carinthia. More provocative (yet ambiguous) was the title of the "United Slovenia" video of a Laibach concert staged at the Slovene Grammar School in Klagenfurt/Celovec in 1988. This was preceded by an address from the NSK Philosophy Department on the subject of the problematic but productive Slovene-German dynamic:

> Therefore, we can say that the German and Slovene nations are related, precisely because of this dependence on the will of the Supreme One, the arbitrator of their joy or pain through blood. They are related in blood and their linguistic differences are only an element showing how their transcendental foundation in Good develops into a mutually dependent, complementary regime.
>
> Only that nation which places its true value in the surpassing of its special essence may attain the grace of the Supreme One. This is how the deathbound pose of a nation, claiming to be the chosen one, is overcome. Namely, the transnational principle is the constituent principle of existence of a particular nation. That is to say that the transnational as a form of the universal dimension of blood is the foundation and safeguard of sovereignty and freedom of a particular nation.
>
> Long live the German-Slovene covenant![51]

Austrian nationalists would support this statement's assertion of the relatedness of the German and Slovene[52] nations, yet do not accept that there is a distinct Slovene nationality within Carinthia, and would be bound ideologically to resist a concept such as a "German-Slovene covenant." The implication that the two nations are of equal, mutually dependent status is anathema, an affront to notions of Germanic superiority. While the emphasis on the relatedness of the nations, and much else in NSK discourse, appeared to some people in Slovenia to collaborate with or even advocate Germanization, German nationalists were unable to use it as an argument for the assimilation of Carinthian Slovenes. NSK advocated neither the denial of a Germanic element in Slovene identity nor Slovene submission. Its Ger-
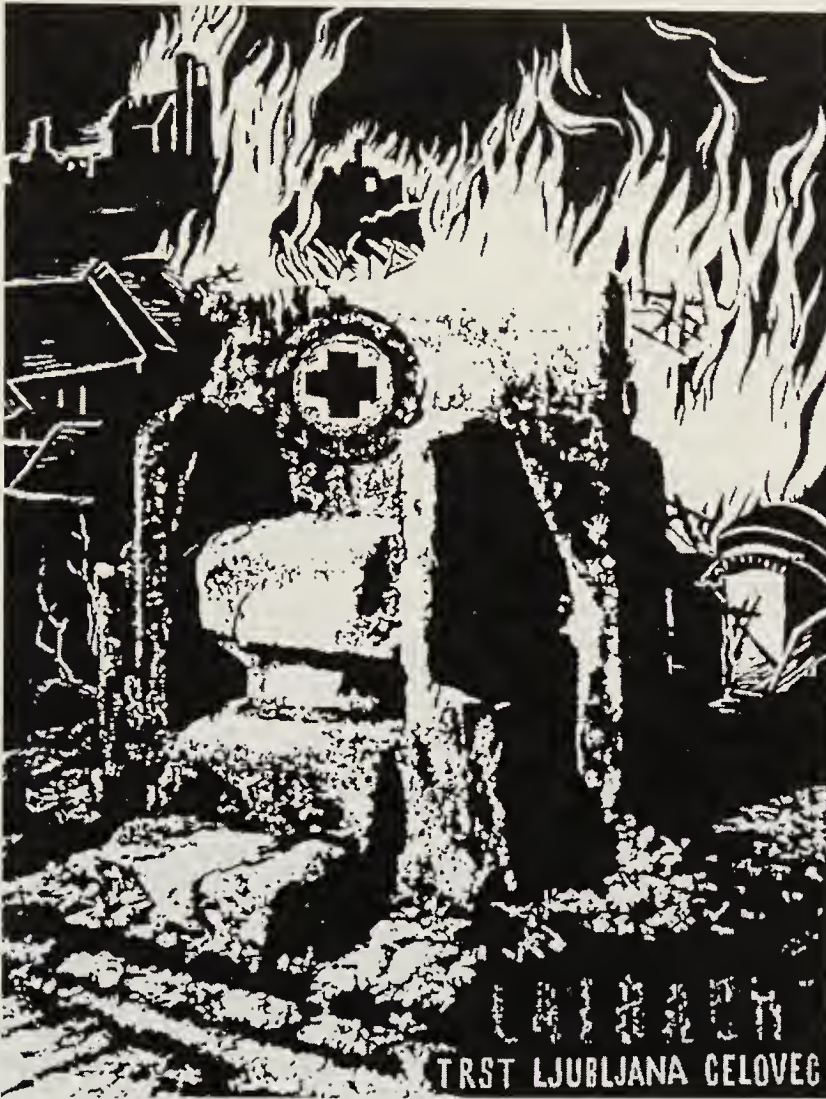
5.2 Laibach, *Trst-Ljubljana-Celovec* (Trieste-Ljubljana-Klagenfurt), 1987.

manic mode of presentation was a means of smuggling in statements that allowed it to assert Slovene claims to recognition as an autonomous (though partly Germanic) culture in a more aggressive fashion than is safe for Carinthian Slovenes themselves to undertake.

GERMANIA: SPECTRAL GERMANOPHILIA IN NSK WORKS

The widespread use of the German language and terminology in the works of NSK is based on the specific evocative quality of the language which, to non-German speakers, sounds decisive, curt, domineering and frightening, and automatically activates traumas buried deep in the subconscious and history. The activation of the Germanic trauma in turn activates the undifferentiated, unidentified, passive, nightmare-filled Slavic dream.[53]

A key precedent for NSK's use of the Germanic was the work of German film-maker Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, best known for his monumental meditation on German identity and aesthetics, *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (1977). In Part IV: "We, the Children of Hell," a young intellectual sits at a table rebuking a Hitler puppet for the damage he has caused to Germany, while in the background the German national anthem plays softly:

> Let me speak of the lost life . . . you've made kitsch of the old Germany with your simplified crafts and peasant pictures . . . you've occupied everything else and contaminated it with your touch . . . everything . . . honour, loyalty, country life, zest for work, films, dignity, fatherland, pride, belief. . . .
> The words "magic," "myth" and "serve" and "rule," "leader," "authority" are finished and done, banned for ever and we are extinguished.[54] Nothing will grow after us. A whole people has ceased to exist in the sphere of the spirit and the elite. The new men were designed, developed, the New Man is here, the plague of materialism has conquered East and West.[55]

This lament mourns many of the Germanic (and thus also Slovene) characteristics in Laibach's work. Laibach explicitly or implicitly make strong—if ambivalent—references to the qualities mourned above, most of which are taboo in the postwar context. The Wagnerian[56] and other archetypal Germanic aesthetics explored in Syberberg's film also feature in the works of Anselm Kiefer[57] and Kraftwerk, among the first German artists to reintroduce retrotechnological images tainted by Nazism (the Autobahn system, mass radio), and create a contemporary German sound.[58] These recirculated Germanisms have found their most intense expression in the works of Laibach and NSK. Laibach stress the connections between the two cultures:

> What we are bringing back to Germany is its substantive essence that has been banished from its territory for a certain time. In Slovenia, we have discovered a firm, unchangeable basis that allows us the joy of life, pride and welfare. Therefore, we essentially maintain that both countries share a common ground binding them in a joyful union of rich and mutually dependent existence. For that reason, our appearances in Germany and Slovenia are identical.[59]

This "substantive essence" consisted of the same aesthetically encoded Germanic signifiers whose loss Syberberg mourned. Laibach made these available for mass consumption yet did not free them of their guilt, accentuating both their seductive and alienating characteristics. The totalitarian recapitulation of which they formed part questioned the relationship of individuals to such imageries even as they broke the absolute taboo on their aesthetic use. It could be argued that Laibach's use of these signifiers damned them again, but their thought-provoking potential, and the use of such imagery in the construction of a universal supernational state, illustrate the possibility that, used carefully, they can have positive effects. Laibach's *Durcharbeiten* (working through) of these images demonstrated that it was as

unnatural for Germans to abstain from any reference to entire emotional and aes-
thetic categories as for Slovenes to deny the Germanic component of their identity.
Laibach did not provide answers to these dilemmas, but unfroze the historical pro-
cess of examining these questions in the two countries.

After 1945, the Germanic and Catholic orientations that had made collaboration
a natural option for many were almost entirely obliterated from Slovene public ex-
pression, as was the guilt of collaboration. The anti-Fascist credentials provided by
Communist victory enabled NSK, as Slovene artists, access to Germanicisms that
were still taboo for all but openly Fascistic Germans: "The Slovenes, as former Ger-
man farm hands, adhered to a victorious coalition in World War II and were conse-
quently free of the frustrations of guilt and defeat."[60]

As Syberberg suggests, some Germans are frustrated by the continuing con-
tamination of, and impossibility of pleasure in, certain historic cultural signifi-
ers. A "return of the repressed" in both countries was inevitable, and NSK's praxis
represents a simultaneous attempt to examine and to channel such potentially
Fascistic forces. Laibach demonstrated that history has made such repressed Ger-
manicisms just as much "Slovenicisms," giving Slovenes the right to explore their
potential and the knowledge to perform them fluently.[61] Yet even as they appear to
be rehabilitating such value systems (with the obvious danger that these would in-
filtrate mainstream politics), Laibach problematize them. After Laibach's interven-
tion, these Germanic signifiers are, to those who have been exposed to the group's
work, indelibly associated with the underground, taboo nature of Laibach, so it
could be argued that Laibach's use of them takes these signifiers *away* from the
boundaries of acceptability. The association of compromised Germanic imageries
with totalitarianism by Laibach (and Syberberg) also contains an implied warning:
if a safe cultural mode of relating to and critically engaging with these archetypes
cannot be found, they will reemerge in literal form as hegemonic political forces.
NSK predicts and analyzes as much as it contributes to tendencies toward nation-
alist extremism in Germany and elsewhere. Laibach's comment about Germans as
an inferior type of Slovenes could then be read as a reference to what seems to be
the greater sense of shame attached to the explicit use of nationalist imagery in
Slovenia. The fact that Laibach's greatest success has been in Germany appears to
support the theory that the Germans remain far more susceptible to extreme im-
agery than the Slovenes, and that in this respect Germans are "inferior" to Slovenes.

The fact that such imagery was recirculated by a group simultaneously assert-
ing Slovene culture and adopting a patronizing tone toward German audiences
further complicates the picture. Laibach's manipulation of Slovene national arche-
types may have influenced the lack of overt nationalist extremism in Slovenia pre-
cisely through the association of such imagery with a group as contentious and
paradoxical as Laibach. In Germany, the success of NSK might be taken as sympto-
matic of the still abundant potential for extremism, but also of the need for audi-
ences to find a cultural mode of relating to this imagery without translating it into

political action. German audiences are permitted by NSK to indulge in this pro-scribed mode of enjoyment, but only at the price of accepting the simultaneous presence of militantly assertive Slovene symbolism, and tolerating Laibach's adop-tion of a forcefully superior stance in relation to the Germans. This found its most extreme expression in the title of Laibach's 1985 German tour, "Die erste Bombar-dierung über dem Deutschland" (The First Bombing over Germany).[62]

In this image, Laibach stand implacable against a backdrop of a sky filled with bombers, adopting a threatening stance, deliberately evoking painful memories of the Allied bombing of Germany. Laibach not only made no concessions to German sensibilities but actively confronted them, achieving great success in the process.

The most optimistic interpretation would be to see this approach as an at-tempted warning or inoculation against what it appears to endorse. NSK certainly successfully sensitized the general population in Slovenia to the real and imagined threat of Germanization, forcing public discussion. The issue of Laibach's name and right to perform in public, and the international success of NSK, provoked two rounds of heated correspondence among the readers of the main Slovene news-paper, Delo, in 1986 and 1987. The threat of militant Germanism was no less disturb-ing in Germany, since it appeared to negate the postwar effort to soften German identity, and its popularity raised concerns about the sophistication or otherwise of the audience.[63] Some Germans were no less alarmed by NSK than the Slovenes and other Yugoslavs. The traumas brought into visibility by the Germanicism of NSK activated the "demasking and recapitulation" mechanism in relation to both nations.[64] The hurt and fear they aroused stem not simply from their historical as-sociations but also from the problematic, semi-proscribed status of Germanophilia as such in the postwar context. Primeval Germanic archetypes offend contempo-rary notions of political and cultural taste, and their continued popularity chal-lenges liberal/multicultural narratives. The reason for the unease and distaste is that Germanophilia in itself represents a sort of violence because of the Germanic's strong associations with force and fanaticism. In NSK's case, the (sensory and con-ceptual) violence of its transmission amplifies this. The violent extremes of attrac-tion and repulsion aroused by the Germanic make it one of the most powerful elements in the NSK presentation.[65]

The ultra-Germanic representation of the most contentious aesthetic symbols may seem initially to suggest that NSK is expressing a sincere and largely uncritical Germanophilia. It was conceptually important that NSK should appear to represent Germanophilia, yet the term is insufficient to describe NSK's multidimensional approach. In the Slovene context, (apparent) Germanophilia raised the threat of cul-tural and linguistic self-assimilation. Like the Trbovlje exhibition in 1980, and Lai-bach's controversial 1983 TV interview, NSK's apparent Germanophilia could be read as another attempt to probe the ideological vigilance and historical conscious-ness of Slovene society.[66] Besides the complexities involved, however, there are other

5.3 Laibach, *Die erste Bombardierung über dem Deutschland*, 1985.

factors in NSK's use of the Germanic that problematize its classification as unreconstructed Germanophilia. The Germanic references reflect historical authoritarian-Germanophile tendencies within Slovene society, but cannot be equated with the self-negating aspect of Slovene Germanophilia which was the ethnic expression of both pragmatic self-assimilation and political reaction. NSK monumentally asserts a full range of Slovene identity, its Slav as well as Germanic components. This assertion was by means of, and simultaneous with, the Germanic.

It could be argued that Slovenophilia does not preclude Germanophilia, but in the case of Laibach in particular the engagement with the Germanic is both more dispassionate and more ironic than the term "Germanophilia" implies. Affectionately or otherwise, Laibach parody Germanicism while manipulating (though not advocating) it. Some of the scenes of Laibach's travels in Germany in Gajić's documentary *Pobeda nad suncem* (Victory under the Sun) play with the ludicrous elements of Germanic identity.[67] There are also clues in the musical arrangements of some of Laibach's more Germanic tracks, particularly the traditional German hunting song *Auf der Lüneburger Heide und was gleicht wohl auf der Erde* (On Lüneburg Heath and Can Anything on Earth Compare?).[68] While it begins with martial drums and a *Bierkeller* atmosphere, it gradually becomes more frenzied but also subtly ironic as the tempo races slightly ahead of itself, and the brass samples are stretched into wild squeals. The dispassionate relation to the Germanic manifests itself not only in the irony but also in the strange archaic style of German used by Laibach and the Philosophy Department, which even native speakers sometimes find difficult. The language itself is "made strange" by NSK, opening up a certain distance at apparent moments of closest engagement with the Germanic. A Germanophile use of the language and musical archetypes would be more respectful and fluent, unable to conceal its unqualified passion.

For these reasons, the name of one of Laibach's subgroups, "Germania," best represents this process. The image of the Germanic as a manic phenomenon that has to be severely restrained still alarms many people across Europe and beyond. "Germania" (German mania) has a further association in that it was the name Berlin was to have adopted had the Third Reich been victorious in the Second World War, an association of which Laibach were certainly aware. A similar reference was made in 1990 by the German industrial band Die Krupps with the single *Germaniac*. The lyrics take the opposite approach to Syberberg, warning against a continued desire for world domination and the problematic characteristics of the Germanic (precision, force, zeal).[69] Despite the zeal that some works seem to imply, the "-mania" should be kept in context, and read as a controlled, conceptually foregrounded deployment of the Germanic rather than an unbridled "lust" for it.[70]

NSK's Shift in the Slovene-German Relationship

Epstein writes that in certain circumstances, "culture becomes a nation's answer through self-development to the challenge of other civilizations."[71] Laibach responded to the threats of assimilation and marginalization by taking the fight to the enemy heartland. Historically inimical Germanic imagery is used to facilitate the construction of an unassimilable and undeniable assertion of *Slovenstvo*. NSK's Germania prevents its relegation within the Germanic space. The same "Trojan horse" tactics[72] Laibach would apply to political power and the music industry created a situation whereby to reject Laibach was also to reject the Germanic.

This could be seen as a pragmatic concession to the largest cultural market in Europe. The key motivation, however, was a radical ambition to transcend the conflicts of Slovene identity via a reversal of the traditionally subordinate Slovene-German relationship. Both those Slovenes who wish to repress the Germanic and those Austrians and Germans who wish to assert Slovene inferiority are frustrated by NSK's Germania. It implies that the Slovene is incomplete without the Germanic and, even more radically, that the Germanic is incomplete without the Slovene. The Philosophy Department concert speeches go further, asserting not merely equality (itself a radical claim in the Germanic context) but the superiority of the Slovene as a mode of the Germanic, even implying that the Germanic is a subset of the Slovene.

These speeches have a strong subordination theme, particularly in relation to the Austrians, and represent a violent symbolic reversal of what could previously have been seen as an iron historical law—that Slovenes always defer to Germans, almost to the point of self-effacement. The speech in Vienna in 1988 started with the provocative statement: "Austrians, you are Germans," and this in itself caused a strong reaction,[73] challenging as it did the postwar Austrian narrative that seeks to distance the country from the "German" phenomenon of Nazism. Having placed Austrians in the category of a Germanic subset (the implication of which is that the Austrians bear equal guilt with the Germans "proper"), the speech attempts to reverse the historical Slovene-German subordination complex, and to place NSK, as Slovenes, in the dominant position:

> The Germans gave you well-being; whereas we, the elite, gave you the Spirit. . . . We have heard rumors that you are afraid. That is the way it should be. Yet, although we have violated your graves, we have no territorial claims. For what is yours is also ours. The Reich, which belonged to you, now belongs to us. . . . We know you have faith. But your attitude toward it is paved in self-interest. That is why the leniency of the Supreme One appoints us to be your chastisers. And if we say you are Germans, then we, Slovenes, are chosen to be the beaters in your forests.[74]

The German edition of the Department's speeches is entitled *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (Speeches to the German Nation)[75] and the majority of speeches to Germanophone audiences have been delivered in Germany itself. In Austria, NSK addresses the specific Austrian mode of the Germanic that has shaped the Slovenes, whereas in Germany it confronts the universal form of the Germanic. However, the tone of the German speeches is no less powerful. The 1989 Düsseldorf concert speech[76] again assigns the Slovenes superior spiritual status to the Germans. This absurd and fantastic expression of alienation from and fascination with both identities effectively represented not just the symbolic reversal of historical roles but a cultural analogue of the rebalancing of interstate relations necessitated by Slovene independence and Slovenia's accession to the European Union. NSK's superior stance foreshadowed the upgrading of Slovene-German relations to relations

between two nation-states, and the possibility of an enhanced, less deferential status for Slovenia. Forced recognition of cultural equality preceded recognition of political equality.

NSK, Historical Revisionism, and Nationalist Extremism

The Yugoslav political trends of the late 1980s, and NSK's combinations of national and socialist symbolisms, show that there was no fundamental incompatibility between (Yugoslav) republican socialism and nationalism. Not only did Communism fail to eliminate nationalism within society, but the republican structure eventually facilitated nationalism within the Party. With the onset of crisis, internationalism was one of the first values to be discarded. Events betrayed the presence of latent nationalist agendas within the political elites.

Laibach exposed the repressed nationalist dynamics in the Yugoslav system, diverting them into cultural form through an exorcistic performance of total (itarian) nationalistic mobilization that set socialist signifiers alongside national ones. In their aesthetic reconciliation of national and Partisan-Titoist imagery, and their monumentalization of state authority, NSK illustrated the schizoid proximity between socialism and nationalism, dramatizing and anticipating the fusion of nationalist ideology and socialist power structures instituted by Slobodan Milošević in 1987, which spread across Yugoslavia and many ex-Communist states.

NSK also prefigured the process of nationalist historical revisionism that preceded war in Yugoslavia. It is historically revisionist in demasking and recapitulating official history, but it is not trying to supplant one monodimensional narrative with another, or to ignore the most problematic elements of Slovene history. Actual revisionists sought to externalize social antagonism and attribute it to socialism, just as socialism attributed it to class enemies or foreign intrigue. Both promised the elimination of antagonism through the solution of either the class or the national question, and could not (consciously) incorporate the possibility of continued antagonism into their project, any more than they could admit the paradoxes of their stance.

For similar reasons, Slovene revisionism had the same (comparatively) moderate tone as its nationalism. In 1987, issue 57 of *Nova revija*, "Contributions Toward a Slovene National Programme," was published.[77] It articulated a series of nationalist grievances, citing what it argued was the Slovenes' lack of consent to many postwar political developments, and painting a predominantly negative picture of the period. By the time of its publication (in the same period as the Poster Affair and the release of Laibach's *Slovenska akropola*), many of the unresolved political tensions surrounding Slovene identity had already infiltrated the public sphere via NSK references. Despite its less overtly confrontational mode, *Nova revija* attracted almost as much condemnation as NSK, and the two were often jointly condemned as examples of the same Slovene nationalist threat. However, NSK's recurrent acknowledgments of the posi-

tive Yugoslav influence on postwar Slovenia, and its conflicts with Slovene national-
ists, place it at odds with the far less ambivalent stance of *Nova revija*.

Serbian nationalist mobilization also began with academic revisionism, sym-
bolized by the highly controversial Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts
and Sciences issued in September 1986.[78] The motive for revisionism was prima-
rily nationalist rather than concern for objectivity—these new narratives were no
more holistic than the official socialist historiography; they simply had a different
ideological agenda. While Slovene and Serbian revisionism had definite similari-
ties, the character of the subsequent mobilizations differed. Slovene mobilization
was largely reactive and defensive[79] rather than expansionist and hegemonic, and
was ostensibly based around the protection of human and cultural rights. In-
dependence came onto the agenda only from 1989 onward, as relations between
Serbia and its allies and the rest of the Federation became more polarized. In Slove-
nia, NSMs were actively involved in the new politics, while in Serbia such groups
were victimized by the nationalist regime. Open xenophobia and nationalist mys-
ticism played little part in the Slovene drive to independence. "Balkan" and "South-
ern" have become pejorative terms in postindependence Slovenia, and more subtle
racism is certainly present. However, the influence of civil society, and a desire to
live up to international human and minority rights standards, have helped to check
any overtly authoritarian or aggressively nationalist policies.

In 1994, Markotich dismissed fears of mass nationalism based on the (limited)
degree of nationalist electoral success:

> It is certainly not obvious that a well-organized, ideologically charged skinhead
> movement promoting the interests of a nationalist party was the key to the SNS's
> (Slovene National Party) winning twelve seats. Given Slovenia's history and its tra-
> ditions, it is unlikely that any such extremist movement will overtake political in-
> stitutions or play a major role in society. In 1992, during tough economic and social
> times, Slovenia's electorate responded by voting for political moderates. There are
> no clear signs at present indicating that it will not continue to do so in the future.[80]

Even if so inclined, Slovenes are aware of the strategic inadvisability of aggressive
nationalism,[81] and have an intense desire not to be labeled "Balkan" by the West.
Laibach have revealed that impulses toward hegemony are inherent to national
character and mass psychology. Rather than externalize or deny these impulses,
Laibach transcend them through their spectral redeployment. Slovenes are not im-
mune to this, and the lessons of Slovene history are as important as a strong demo-
cratic culture in containing them.

Laibach may also have contributed to the weakness of right-wing extremism in
Slovenia. The "paradigm of impossible authority" created by Laibach in the 1980s
was severe enough to make any future political extremism appear to be a pale imi-
tation in comparison—Laibach annexed the sites and modes of potential paramil-
itarist mobilization that took place elsewhere in Yugoslavia. Laibach is associated

(albeit ambiguously) with a cosmopolitan art scene that is anathema to Fascist populism, and the small number of Slovene skinheads who follow Laibach are vastly outnumbered at concerts. In Slovenia, paramilitarist absolutism has remained almost entirely spectral and abstracted. Even if Laibach's work was not an actual inoculation against such phenomena, it may have diverted and channeled them away from the field of concrete political action. Laibach and NSK prefigured the (cultural) possibility of a Slovene state (subsequently transcended with the creation of the NSK "State in Time"), and had a preemptive impact on the symbolic political content and mode of political-cultural mobilization in the new Slovene state.

THE ANNEXATION OF THE "NATIONAL THING"

Žižek[82] argues that national identity is structured around an inherently contradictory relationship to "the Nation qua Thing" or "Nation-Thing." This is based on the belief that "it" is accessible only to members of the nation, yet simultaneously constantly at risk from "others," a category of which Laibach are perceived as part. The demonization of the group by veterans' organizations and elements of the media gave Laibach the status of internal (Slovene) outsiders. Although Laibach could not plausibly be presented as actually foreign (rather than in cooperation with foreign interests), the group's extremism put it beyond "beyond the pale" in relation to state and nation. Laibach was perceived, and could be presented as, an (implicit) threat to the Nation-Thing itself, despite using some of its most spectacular characteristics and symbolism.

NSK's discourse symbolically claims control of the national Thing. The implication is that those who wish to be associated with the Slovene cause have no alternative but to abandon their opposition to NSK. Before 1987, the dominant ideology did not permit explicit engagement with, or reference to, the national Thing, and such a stance was taboo. Laibach arrived at—or returned to—the national Thing first, and so tainted it in advance. This annexation assumed the ideological role that had previously been played by the disintegrating "Brotherhood and Unity" ideology (the attempted foreclosure of the national Thing). The result (intentional or otherwise) of NSK's preemptive reintroduction of national archetypes was to effect a limited rehabilitation of them, and simultaneously to place them beyond the pale politically. When the national Thing was invoked politically during the Slovene independence process, it was (necessarily) in a comparatively kitsch and nonthreatening form[83] compared to the spectacular manipulation of national imagery by NSK and by paramilitarist nationalism elsewhere in Yugoslavia.[84]

Laibach preempted the paramilitarist deployment of national imagery through its spectral presentation plus what its domestic critics experience as a type of parasitic attachment to the national Thing. After NSK's interventions, the national Thing was always-already tainted, as would be any politician promising direct un-

mediated access to it in the way Laibach suggested. Žižek argues that the status of nationalism "is ultimately that of the transcendental illusion, the illusion of a direct access to the Thing; as such, it epitomizes the principle of fanaticism in politics."[85] The uncanny spectral power of Laibach's total performance derives from such an illusion. The national Thing is present in symbols such as the *kozolec*, or references to mythical figures such as Črtomir, and appears directly accessible. Direct enjoyment of these, however, is frustrated by the use of tautology, paradox, and contradiction, which function as a type of aversion therapy toward—even as they manipulate the desire for access to—the national Thing.

Moreover, the antithetical German national Thing (and the threat of aggressive Germanism) is also present, together with signifiers of the "foreign" Yugoslav system. This is the price to be paid for direct access—the national imagery is so bound up with the other paradoxical elements that it cannot be enjoyed in isolation. An actual Slovene nationalist who wishes to draw inspiration from Laibach has to repress awareness of the contradictory, parasitic elements attached to the national Thing(s), and this repression introduces a distortion (if only subconscious) into the enjoyment of the imagery. Contemporary nationalism promises not just direct access but a hedonistic enjoyment of the national Thing, and this is blocked by the traumatic conceptual density of Laibach's spectral representation. In the most "national" NSK works, direct national enjoyment is simultaneously promised and problematized, if not forestalled. At the very moment when Laibach appears to offer this access, it is diverted to the paradoxically ambivalent core of the group. What the observer has direct access to is the spectral form of the group itself, the central void around which its identity is structured.[86] The "Laibach Thing" is as harsh as it is transcendent, and its contents are partly projected by the observer. Neither is access to it climactic or final, only transitory (since its content is primarily projective, it can only be moved through rather than inhabited). Just as the national Thing cannot free itself of antagonism and discontinuity, nor can the "Laibach Thing," which reflects the spectral status of the national Thing itself.

The title of the anniversary concert, "Ten Years of Laibach, Ten Years of Slovene Independence," is one of the most explicit examples of the group's parasitic attachment to the national Thing. The concert took place at the end of 1990, six months before actual Slovene independence, and its title associated Laibach with a process of national development. In this respect, Laibach's constant retroactive claim to shape events was also operative in the title. The implication is not only that Laibach is absolutely inseparable from the notion of Slovene independence, but that "Slovene independence" *dates only from the creation of Laibach*—that Laibach precedes all contemporary manifestations of Slovene independence. In one interview, Laibach even implied that without them there is no nation as such: "The end of Laibach? The end of Slovene nationhood."[87]

Laibach's national(ist) performance is reminiscent of the controversial terminology of Friedrich Meinecke.[88] Through such statements, Laibach and NSK seek

to present themselves as being in the vanguard of the final transition of Slovenes from a *Kulturnation* (nation based [only] upon culture) to a *Staatsnation* (state-based nation). Yet NSK's association with this process only provokes nationalist critics further. The shock and unease caused by the extreme mode of NSK's manipulation of the national Thing mean that their parent society still retains a degree of antipathy toward Laibach in particular, and this is not confined solely to the older generation. Asked on their return from the first "Occupied Europe Tour" why they returned to Ljubljana despite their unpopularity, Laibach replied:

> Romantic aesthetic nationalism is the mania of the cultural servitude to progressiveness. LAIBACH is organically connected to its home; it jealously nurtures the link with the people and its history, and it is aware of its role within the Slovene cultural-political range. . . . Every opposition to our appearance in public does not threaten LAIBACH itself but *acts against Slovene culture itself.* History will accept this kind of hesitation as an authentic document of the times and situate it in the broad chapter of Slovene nonconsciousness.[89]

Laibach claimed that to oppose it was to oppose Slovene culture as such, and that opposition, rather than harming the group, manifests "Slovene nonconsciousness," in the form of populist philistinism and national self-repression. Laibach equates itself to Slovene culture, nationhood, and self-consciousness, claiming to be "more Slovene than the Slovene itself" because of, not despite, its inclusion of Germanic and other non-Slovene elements. Laibach (with all its associations) claims to be the ultimate horizon of Sloveneness. This marks off a point beyond which it is not possible to go, meaning that any future cultural or political project that attempts (even the performance of) such a direct engagement with the national Thing will be unable to escape comparison with the intensity of Laibach. As with their recapitulation of the totalitarian state, Laibach reveal the traumatic core of the national Thing, and the paradoxical and potentially catastrophic effect of the total realization of notions of state and nation, whose irrational, uncanny qualities they highlight. The hurt and unease Laibach provoked derived from the unbridled intensity of the simultaneous presentation of national archetypes, and of forces seen as hostile to these archetypes.

It is generally recognized that for many foreign observers, an awareness of Slovenia (as distinct from Yugoslavia) was shaped entirely by exposure to Laibach/NSK. As the most internationally successful Slovene group of artists, NSK features even in mainstream Slovene tourist literature. This further antagonizes some Slovenes who resent not only the fact that such a controversial presentation of the Slovene Thing has been so successful abroad, but the fact that previously obscure, closely held folk secrets constituting Slovene identity have been widely broadcast. The difficulty of the language (seen as being at the heart of Slovene identity) had, until the advent of NSK, protected much of Slovene identity from nonacademic

foreign scrutiny. The mere fact of its wider exposure in popular music was an un-precedented innovation, but not one for which NSK and Laibach receive much gratitude. Even if Laibach's opponents approved of the transmission of Slovene lan-guage and culture, their dissemination by a group some found too disturbing to refer to by its name was unacceptable. Slovene reactions to Laibach project the doubts and insecurities about national identity. Slovene language and folk culture are constantly evoked as sources of national strength, yet Laibach's militant re-transmission of these caused many to fear that irreparable damage would be done to them.

> The creative ability of the artist identifies with the national spirit. Every artist carries within him certain (ethnic) characteristics, which are the result of a common ori-gin and kindred lifestyle of a group of people over a longer historical period. These characteristics are reflected in his work. It is impossible to imagine Leonardo or Cer-vantes as Russians, Voltaire and Verdi as Germans, Dostoyevsky and Wagner as Ital-ians or LAIBACH as Yugoslavs.[90] Every artist comes from the depths of his nation, from the dark, subterranean workshop of the national psyche, and through its crea-tion illuminates its basic, typical features, the essence of spirit and character.[91]

Laibach claimed that every Slovene artist illuminates the Slovene "essence of spirit and character," and placed itself at the level of pantheonic national figures such as Wagner. This audacious and extremely arrogant claim was made when the major-ity opinion of Laibach was that the group was a politically sinister underground formation with no possible connection with the great figures of either Slovene or world art.

This aspect of Laibach's discourse echoes statements by nationalist and totali-tarian artists and theorists in Nazi Germany, the USSR, and elsewhere. In his study of the nineteenth-century roots of totalitarian culture, Golomstock[92] quotes the comments of the preeminent socialist realist critic Belinskii on the nineteenth-century realists whose work was cited by socialist realist theorists to lend weight to the artistic ideology of Stalinism. Belinskii wrote that every artist or writer "ex-presses the consciousness of the people, which stems from the *Weltanschauung* of the people."[93] As Golomstock points out,[94] statements in praise of the *Volk* or the pro-gressive socialist masses were often practically interchangeable, and postwar Soviet artistic doctrine was almost as patriotic and anti-internationalist as that of the Reich. Laibach's use of such language epitomizes its fluent recapitulation of total-itarian discourse and its nineteenth-century precursors. NSK statements are not always based on specific totalitarian sources, but are such uncannily accurate simu-lations that they can seem "more totalitarian than the totalitarians themselves."

This skill at retrospectively appropriating statements and works to validate pres-ent practice prophetically is a fundamental totalitarian technique that constantly recurs in the work of NSK. Laibach's recapitulation of such nationalist-essentialist

discourse effectively monopolized it in advance, (so far) rendering it beyond the pale within subsequent Slovene cultural and political practice. As yet, national signifiers have not manifested in such intense and implicitly threatening forms as in the works of Laibach, or as in Croatia and Serbia. Laibach and NSK may have carried out such a thorough *Durcharbeiten* of the most dangerous aspects of the national Thing that it is unlikely to manifest itself in such intense form again. The creation of the NSK State in Time is a further means of evacuating such material from the national political and cultural space into a more abstracted formation too diffuse for concrete political forces to mobilize around. What is certain is that NSK's controversial—and by some still-resented—attachment to the Slovene national Thing will not easily be dissolved.[95]

CHAPTER 6

LAIBACHIZATION

A name signifies the reification of the Idea on the level of an enigmatic cognitive symbol. The name LAIBACH first appeared in 1144 as the original name of Ljubljana, the city "by the stream" (Bach) and "the moor" (Laibach). It appears again during the reign of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, this time as an alternative to the already existing Slovene version. "LAIBACH" again appears in 1943, after the capitulation of Italy in the Second World War, when the Germans took control of the city. This was the period when the Nazis and Belogardisti (White Guard) arrested, tortured and murdered those citizens of Ljubljana who did not believe in the victory of the Third Reich. In 1980, with the emergence of a youth culture group, the name LAIBACH appeared for the fourth time, suggesting specific possibilities for the formation of a politicized—systematically ideological—art, as a consequence of the influence of politics and ideology. In this sense, the name summarizes the horror of the communion between totalitarianism and alienation generated by production in the form of slavery.[1]

The reemergence of the name "Laibach" in 1980 was the first sign of the group's existence, symbolically anticipating many aspects of its work. From 1982 to 1987 it was a subject of acute controversy in Slovenia, and was the justification for the ban on Laibach performing under its own name from 1983 to 1987. The debate over the issue became part of the wider struggle between the new social and cultural movements and defenders of the ideological status quo. The symbolic "Laibachization"[2] of Ljubljana, and the entire controversy, reflects the geopolitical and ideological shifts the city has undergone since 1980.

ALIENATION AND NOMINALIZATION

Jameson summarized Russian formalist Viktor Shklovskii's "making strange" (*ostranenie*) concept as "a way of restoring conscious experience, of breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct . . . and allowing us to be reborn to the world in its existential freshness and horror."[3]

A name can be seen as the first crystallization of the raw material provided by ideologized language and social material, and the first site at which the aesthetic of "making strange" (or, in Laibach terms, "demasking and recapitulating") becomes visible. "Laibach" exemplifies the power of a disturbing name. Some names are inherently, tonally, aggressive: they *sound* and are experienced as disturbing, quite apart from their specific associations. The name reappeared at a time when, apart from Kraftwerk, very few groups aiming for an international audience bore non-English names. German names are especially sensitive, because non-German-speakers often experience the language as harsh and alienating for both historical and phonetic reasons. For Yugoslavs, and especially for Slovenes with very recent memories of what the name symbolized, it activated a highly disturbing set of associations.

6.1 Poster advertising "anonymous" Laibach concert, December 1984.

Like the names of other NSK groups, and the name Neue Slowenische Kunst itself, the name both represents some aspect of the object (Laibach's disturbing Germanic associations) and functions as a kind of signifying blueprint determining future developments. Similarly, the name of Kraftwerk (Power Station), whose impersonal image Laibach used as a template, anticipated and symbolized one of the key aspects of their work, the influence of industrial-technological processes. "New Collectivism" evokes the collective anonymity of NK and embodies both the threat and the promise of collectivism. The appropriation of the name of Scipion Nasice by the first NSK theatrical unit was intended to evoke the historically troubled interaction between drama and authority. As with Laibach, the name (though far less provocative) was an active agent even before the character of the group's work became apparent, challenging the ostensibly liberal humanist norms of its medium. The names of NSK units activated their disruptive, alienating power.

"Laibach" as Historical Signifier of Germanization

Laibach caused alarm across Yugoslavia, yet while other republics also had experience of occupation and forcible name changes, it was only in Slovenia that condemnation centered on the group's name. In the other republics Laibach was attacked for using Germanic, Fascistic, or totalitarian elements and reviving memories of the war, none of which was a uniquely Slovene trauma. "Laibach" sym-

bolized Germanization in a way that other Yugoslavs could understand, but this was most acutely resonant in Slovenia.

As a result, organized popular opposition to Laibach in Slovenia focused on the local issue, inadvertently confirming the growing impression of Slovene self-absorption elsewhere in Yugoslavia. Even the letters featured in an organized letter-writing campaign by Slovene ex-Partisan groups were preoccupied with issues of "Sloveneness" and "Slovene consciousness" rather than the insults to the system and the memory of the war remarked on outside Slovenia:[4] "Germanized names within our history have . . . been symbols of the oppression of Slovene national consciousness and are judged among genocidal events, against which the fighters of the liberation struggle fought in order that Sloveneness would survive on our territory."[5]

Germanization remained a much more painful and ambiguous subject for Slovenes than for other (ex-) Yugoslavs. The Slovene areas occupied by the Nazis were the only Slav-inhabited areas to be directly incorporated into the Reich proper, and the Slovenes the only people the Nazis systematically attempted to assimilate rather than merely subordinate. In the minds of the wartime generation, the threat of Germanization remained extremely insidious. The emergence of a Germanized counterculture challenged the postwar de-Germanized/Yugoslavized Slovene identity.

The tensions around the Laibach/Ljubljana dualism are echoed in the names Gdansk/Danzig, Königsberg/Kaliningrad, and across Central and Eastern Europe. These names are still used by German exile groups and nationalists who refuse to recognize the legitimacy of postwar territorial changes, and are therefore perceived as threats, even without appropriation by a group as extreme as Laibach.[6]

The imposition of the name "Laibach" by German forces in 1943 was not simply the brutal innovation of a new group of occupiers, but a scarcely unprecedented return to a name used as recently as 1918 and dating back more than eight hundred years.[7] In the late Habsburg era, many assimilated or non-nationalist Slovenes saw Laibach as the "proper" name for their city, and its reimposition was less innovative than its interwar replacement. What was particularly disturbing about the return of the name in 1943, and again in 1980, was the context of Nazism and collaboration. The Nazis erased the nomenclature of the 1918–41 period as an unnatural aberration, which could literally be wiped off the face of the map[8] before the "new" name (Ljubljana) had become fully established.

THE REEMERGENCE OF "LAIBACH" AS TRAUMATIC TEMPORAL DISPLACEMENT

> *Purpose:* to provoke maximum collective emotions and release the automatic response of [the] masses.
> —Laibach[9]

For many older Slovenes, public use of the name "Laibach" represented a return to centuries of German attempts to relegate or even liquidate Slovene identity, and inevitably provoked "maximum collective emotions." Many of the protest letters express resentment simply at being reminded of the occupation period, and of collaboration. Renewed use of "Laibach" seems to imply: it is as if . . . Ljubljana is still "Laibach," and as if, under the veneer of normality, "they" (the Nazi and collaborationist forces) had won[10]—as if the city remained occupied (if only by its unresolved history), and the forty years since the war had never existed. The theme of an alternative temporal domain in which its creators enjoy full sovereignty recurs throughout the work of Laibach and NSK, commencing with Laibach's choice of name and culminating in the NSK State. "Making strange" is also a process of refamiliarization—denaturalizing accepted forms to return them to visibility—and Laibach's alienation of Ljubljana from itself exemplifies this.

Until the group reintroduced it into wide public circulation, the name-signifier "Laibach" was a de facto taboo word mentioned only in ritualized accounts of German oppression and wartime resistance. While it was never actually prohibited, such a prohibition would have been superfluous until 1980. Use by German nationalists or anti-Communist émigrés could easily be dismissed, but the actual form in which the name reappeared was unforeseeable (particularly so soon after Tito's death), as was the extent to which "it" would penetrate national and international consciousness. It was not until 1983 that the legal status of the term "Laibach" was defined, and this definition was based retrospectively upon an obscure local ordinance passed by Ljubljana City Council as recently as 1981. The lack of clearer provisions concerning Laibach's use was almost certainly due to its improbability, if not unthinkability.[11]

Numerous articles from the Slovene press discussed the issue, so the previously unspeakable name was in constant circulation. Through its ever-higher profile (and the resultant hostility), Laibach initiated some of the first serious postwar discussions of Germanization and collaboration, predating the wider historical reassessments of the post-Tito period.[12] Many letters and articles from 1986 to 1987 go into some historical detail about the history of the name and what it evoked. Laibach gave complex, didactic accounts of the name's history, and its full implications were exhaustively—almost compulsively—explored by commentators and opponents in anguished discussions.[13] The selection and promotion of its name was the group's ideological "Original Sin," and the harshest domestic criticism it received focused on this point, almost to the exclusion of other factors.

THE SHAME OF THE "HERO CITY"

Besides the associations with the occupation, there was another formal sense in which "Laibach" violated Yugoslav political sensitivities, making it more than a purely Slovene issue. After the war, Ljubljana was named Yugoslavia's first "hero

city," in recognition of the local resistance efforts.[14] In this light, reactivation of the occupation-era name looked even more disrespectful. Yet although the Yugoslav media were increasingly full of lurid scare stories about the revival of Fascism in Slovenia[15] ("Fascism" included the alternative scene generally, as well as certain academic and nationalist tendencies), no Yugoslav articles seem to have raised the issue. It was mentioned by two of the first Slovene correspondents to write anti-Laibach letters, but not stressed by later correspondents. The only official pronouncement to refer to it directly was the statement issued by the Ljubljana municipal secretariat on July 30, 1983, affirming the city executive decision of June 29 to ban public appearances by the group while it retained its name. After stating that it was "greatly saddened" by Laibach's TV appearance, it added: "This group has taken the name of our city, which also has the title 'hero city' and which we call Ljubljana. This is an abuse of the name."[16]

Apart from these examples, public condemnation centered exclusively on the offence caused to Slovenes and Slovene identity. This, perhaps, indicated a certain embarrassment at the defilement of the city's hero status, but also at the fact that because Ljubljana had been the seat of General Rupnik's collaborationist regime from 1943 to 1945, its "hero city" status was vulnerable to historical scrutiny. For Laibach's opponents it would have been a logical ideological step to make it a wider Yugoslav issue, perhaps in the hope that the federal authorities would pronounce upon it in the absence of decisive action at republican level. The fact that this theme was not taken up outside Slovenia suggests a certain shame over the increasingly embarrassing provocations of the Slovene alternative, and a desire not to draw too much Yugoslav attention to a phenomenon that showed Slovenia in a bad light.

One letter[17] states explicitly that some veterans felt ashamed that Laibach could exist in Slovenia while Slovene minorities struggled for their rights in Austria and Italy. However, there was no similar reference to feeling ashamed in relation to the rest of Yugoslavia. This absence reveals the difficulty in admitting this intimate Slovene weakness in front of fellow Yugoslavs, but also the fact that the challenge of Laibach's name was far greater for Slovenes (although the idea of a Germanized name for a Yugoslav city was hardly unprovocative). The reframing of the debate in all-Yugoslav terms could have made it more accessible to non-Slovenes, and even ritual references to the (Yugoslav) political order (which seem conspicuous by their absence) would have helped to present this intensely inward Slovene debate more positively. Legally, the matter was an internal Slovene one (and in fact it was dealt with primarily by the Ljubljana municipal authorities). Yet if there had been clear constitutional means for the federal authorities to suppress Laibach and other alternative phenomena in Slovenia, they would probably already have acted by the time the JNA felt compelled to contemplate military intervention against "counter-revolutionary" phenomena in Slovenia in 1988.

ATTEMPTS TO SUPPRESS THE ALTERNATIVE

Tomaž Mastnak[18] argues that in the early 1980s the Slovene authorities manipulated the repressive tendencies of the nonintellectually or culturally active "quiet majority" of the same civil society later seen as the principal site of democratic—*and therefore inherently progressive*—mobilization. Officially encouraged "civic" outrage, and complaints by local communes and residents about noise, dirt, and unruliness, provided a popular excuse for suppressing alternative activities. Meeting-places and clubs were regularly shut down and activities severely disrupted as a result of media scare campaigns. Mastnak claims that the ultimate goal was to eradicate any alternative presence in Ljubljana. Although by the mid-1980s the alternative became too visible to suppress, and repression slowly abated, this period is significant as a symbolic struggle for the ownership of the soul of the capital.

Ultimately, these tactics led to the alternative movements finding a more secure niche in the social spectrum, prompting ZSMS to adopt the role of defender of the alternative. The attempted repression was not seen as abnormal; this supports Kovač's argument about what he claims is the inherently undemocratic nature of Slovene society.[19] A tendency toward self-repression might be taken as the default state of Slovene society and the democratic mobilization of the "Slovene Spring" (1988) as an exception, even if events since independence suggest that this mobilization may have represented a break in the pattern, and that the default state is now more democratic.[20]

Mastnak characterizes the attempt to repress the alternative as civil society turning on its own potential, and describes the phenomenon as "totalitarianism from below."[21] This was the most acute phase of a still tense struggle between NSMs and the conservative national superego, embodied in Church and Party. Despite its aesthetic authoritarianism, NSK was associated with the alternative stand against conservatism. Although it never explicitly took sides, and maintained some ambivalence, there was no doubt which side it was primarily opposed by. Reactions to Laibach's artistic repressiveness highlighted general social self-repressiveness. For the authorities, an open alliance with Slovene conservatism was obviously impossible because of the ideological discontinuity between officially tolerant, culturally progressive socialist ideals and populist, anticosmopolitan sentiment. Yet conservative sentiment, manipulated from a distance, was useful in a double game played by the Slovene leadership: curbing the alternative's worst excesses, while simultaneously keeping lines of communication open and making use of the alternative to press for wider change in Yugoslavia.

Laibach both suffered and benefited from the demonization of the alternative, most notably in the June 1983 "TV tednik" live interview with Jure Pengov,[22] who played a role of willing provocateur similar to that of Bill Grundy in the infamous Sex Pistols interview of 1976. Laibach appeared in full uniform and armbands, with Laibach posters in the background, and recited "Documents of Oppression." Pengov upbraided the group for their use of German language and imagery at a time

6.2 Scene from Laibach TV action *XY-Unsolved*, June 1983.

when the Slovene minority in Carinthia "have to fight for each word and sign"[23]—
a reference to Austrian nationalist groups' resistance to public bilingualism, even
in majority Slovene areas of Carinthia.[24] Although it later emerged that the inter-
view was a case of mutual exploitation, Pengov nevertheless played the role of
mouthpiece of civic repression, denouncing Laibach as "enemies of the people,"
and appealing to citizens to stop and destroy the group. His concluding remarks
were an explicit—albeit slightly theatrical—appeal to the forces of civic repres-
sion: "If I got it right, you use television to challenge us. Fine, so do we. Maybe,
maybe now somebody will act and repress these horrifying ideas and declarations
here in the middle of Ljubljana."[25]

DOCUMENTS OF OPPRESSION: THE OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO LAIBACH

Concerted official action against Laibach came only in response to the TV incident.
In the immediate aftermath, the Ljubljana council decided that the use of the Ger-
manized name was "without legal basis," and banned any future appearances in

the city by the group under that name.[26] During this period the name functioned as an absent signifier through its visual expression in the unnamed—effectively unnameable—black cross, which appeared on posters advertising Laibach concerts, and on the "anonymous" 1985 album.

Despite the ban, constant discussion of the issue gave it an ever-stronger presence in public consciousness, even while Laibach were abroad. On June 21, 1984, *Mladina* published three key documents, together with a commentary with the English title "Documents of Oppression" (the title of the first Laibach video project [1982]). It reproduced in full the "Standpoint of the Presidency of MK SZDL[27] on Public Manifestations of the Group Laibach" issued on June 29, 1983 as the official policy response to the TV provocation and the controversy over the name. Using a phrase that would frequently recur in anti-Laibach letters, the first paragraph refers to "the group Laibach, who for some time have alarmed the wider public with their name and destructive activities." It adds that it wishes to indulge in a free dialogue that does not restrict artistic and cultural creativity, but is opposed to "all provocations that are reminiscent of the period of Nazi-Fascist occupation."[28]

By denouncing Laibach's interventions as "provocations," Party representatives and Laibach's other opponents attempted to exclude the group from the space of progressive socialist morality, while still paying (seemingly obligatory) lip service to formal principles of democratic dialogue and free artistic creation. By avoiding overt "Stalinist" modes of repression, they hoped to justify policies which, according to the NSMs, were inimical to what they claimed was the spirit of self-management. The document also states that in "our self-managing socialist society," criticism of "negative social phenomena must be sharp, strong and uncompromising"; however, such criticism should avoid "anarchoid hopelessness and depersonalization." Such qualities "must not be characteristic of our self-managing society," and so, by implication, they have no place within its cultural life.[29] The document condemns the "insufficient politico-cultural sensitivity" of the program council of ŠKUC and, with Laibach's academic and media defenders in mind, warns "against interpretations which attempt to give legitimacy to this phenomenon." However, it goes no further than warning against such interpretations; it does not assume the right to suppress or denigrate them, and positive coverage of Laibach continued in the alternative media. The document then stresses the "special role" of educational and cultural-educational institutions and groups in the development of creativity and perspectives *consistent with* (emphasis added) the development of socialist, self-managing democracy,[30] not in its denial, which strengthens all "antihumanitarian" and "antisocialist" tendencies. The tone shows a desire to appear reasonable and not to alienate young people, and the document speaks of giving more attention to their needs and demands. The conclusion attributes the affirmation of "anticultural and ideological manipulation" to the present organizational structures of cultural institutions, and the "contents" of their cultural programs.[31] This was a hint that all possible influence might soon be exerted

over the financing and organization of cultural programs. However, the (advance) threat of financial restrictions on marginal cultural activities was hardly totalitarian and—as the contemporary controversies over federal arts funding in the United States, and echoes in Britain, demonstrate—certainly not exclusive to state socialist systems.[32]

The second document reproduced (in full) by *Mladina* ("Subject: Application for a Public Performance")[33] exposed the actual mechanics of the ban and the surprising openness with which the affair was discussed. The full formality of bureaucratic courtesy and formality was employed, even (perhaps especially) in interaction with alternative institutions. The letter was the Ljubljana Secretariat for Internal Affairs' response to a request by ŠKUC to mount a Laibach performance on June 8, 1984. The letter notes the "defectiveness" of the preface to ŠKUC's application and the signatures included on it. More significantly, it observes that the proposal was not labeled "in the Slovene language"—that is to say, it contained German. In its attempts to avoid banning Laibach for straightforward "public order" reasons which would both draw attention to the seriousness of their challenge and compromise the authorities' progressive self-image, the municipal authorities had to resort to ever more absurd logical contortions to justify the ban. As with what turned out to be an unenforceable ban on the use of the geographical expression "Laibach," the objection to the nonuse of Slovene had absurd implications. Such a policy had obvious chauvinistic overtones that were at odds with Yugoslav "brotherhood and unity," and was patently unenforceable. If it was applied beyond Laibach it would, in theory, have affected Slovene bands performing under, for instance, Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian, English, or Russian names. The failure to apply this implied policy to other groups signified an exceptional measure aimed specifically at Laibach, an inference of which the readers of *Mladina* would have been aware. In declining the request for a performance, the letter recapitulates the formalist-ritualistic nature of the anti-Laibach stance, invoking the phrases used the previous year to justify the imposition of the ban. It employs the now routine phrases about Laibach "alarming the wider public," and use of "the corrupted German name [for Ljubljana]" without appropriate permission. Here, too, the standpoint of June 29, 1983 is cited, particularly the criticism of ŠKUC's lack of "culturo-political sensitivity." The document concludes by stating that the sociopolitical and cultural content of the Laibach-Kunst[34] proposal further illustrates the "unsuitability" of a performance by the group.

The third "Document of Oppression" ("Subject: Use of the Name of the City of Ljubljana")[35] is a response on the issue received by *Mladina* from the municipal secretary intended to acquaint the magazine with the standpoints reached and some of the questions asked at the 14th session of the Ljubljana sociopolitical assembly on June 30, 1983. The letter quotes a delegate whose intervention demonstrated the generic tone of the municipal anti-Laibach discourse and its "spontaneous" presence in the expression of "personal" outrage. The delegate spoke as "a fighter

and a Slovene,"[36] "deeply affected" by [reports of] the TV incident. At the June 29 session, an investigation into the legality of the use of the name had been launched, and its conclusions (announced on July 20) are cited in the letter to *Mladina*: the use of the city's name requires the permission of the council, and no such permission had been granted. Members of Laibach are aware that permission for the use of the name has not been granted, and that they use it "without legal basis." The letter concludes with the formal Yugoslav salutation "Tovariški pozdrav!" (Comradely greetings).

Both in these official strictures and in the protest letters, the general level of official condemnation was surprisingly low and restrained, considering the extremism of Laibach and the fact that even in Yugoslavia much harsher action was sometimes taken against problematic artists and intellectuals. In these debates, the authorities were never allowed to "rest on their laurels" by the "progressive" forces; under their rule, Slovenia may have been the most open part of Yugoslavia, and of state socialist Europe in general, but the NSMs pushed for full or "total" pluralism. By the 1980s the Yugoslav "third way," which had previously inspired much idealism in Yugoslavia and beyond, was no more seen as culturally progressive or tolerant than as economically efficient by culturally and politically active Slovenian youth. Laibach and the NSMs polarized the cultural climate of the time as much as the authorities. Under these conditions, the comparatively mild administrative restrictions, and the outraged protests of partisan groups and others, could be presented as oppressive actions as extreme as those of Laibach. This was possible because in this respect Laibach occupied a "progressive" role (artists challenging politics and enforcing debate). The authorities were forced by default to occupy the far less attractive role of politicians meddling in artistic affairs and seeking to restrict debate. Although it is hard to identify a consistent government policy in relation to Laibach, there was a preference for civic-bureaucratic measures and public criticism as opposed to police-style tactics. Yet even had a decision been taken to use repressive methods (which in fact the authorities seem to have been keen to avoid), there would have been a problem over what specific charges might be brought without creating martyrs. As Chris Bohn's text for *Bravo* asks: "Could they hang a man for shaving his head? For quoting Tito, Heartfield, or Malevich?"[37]

DELAYED REACTIONS TO LAIBACH

The next major controversy over the name issue erupted in the aftermath of the unanimous decision taken in April 1986 by the 12th ZSMS Congress to demand the immediate recognition and legalization of the name and activities of Laibach,[38] plus the simultaneous award of that year's *Zlata Ptiča* (Golden Bird) cultural prize to NSK. Although both the ZSMS decision and the prize were provocative to veterans, their main grievance remained Laibach's name. Given this focus, it seems surprising that the peak of correspondence on the issue dates from 1986 to 1987.

It might have been expected that the controversy would have peaked far sooner—if not at the time of the name's appearance in 1980, then certainly from 1982 onward.[39] Although it was less widely known, the name would have been more disturbing in 1980 or 1982, because a larger number of people with memories of the war were still alive, and the proximity of Laibach's emergence to Tito's death only added to its offensiveness. The gap can be explained in at least two ways. First, by 1986 Laibach was a far "louder" media presence, receiving a new peak of coverage as its international success, resources, and professionalism grew. Prior to the definitive critical "arrival" of Laibach and NSK in the NSK issue of the periodical *Problemi* in 1985, their works retained the aura of ultra-marginal manifestations of subcultural terrorism. By 1985, the portentous ambitions of Laibach and NSK texts (for instance, talk of building a "new Athens on Slovene soil")[40] seemed more threatening, because NSK was now being given the chance to mount large-scale projects at home, and had sufficient aesthetic authority to break out of the underground and into the mainstream.

The renewal of the name controversy in 1986–87 betrays its opponents' recognition of Laibach's new status (or threat). Yet, rather than criticizing Laibach's current actions, they returned to the question of the name, the use of which could repeatedly be condemned. Its critics considered that the name negated and invalidated Laibach's recognition in the "respectable" spheres of literary journals and, indirectly, state-subsidized institutions and venues.[41] The time lapse between Laibach's emergence and the most intense condemnation can also be attributed to the type of shock expressed in the protest letters. The questions the correspondents wanted answered were, for instance, how was it possible that a group of young Slovenes dared to blacken the name of Ljubljana, first "hero city" of Yugoslavia, insulting previous generations of Slovenes; and, perhaps more importantly, how was it possible that such activities could be supported by public institutions, and not be dealt with "appropriately" by the proper authorities? The shock caused by the violent shattering of the postwar taboo—not just on the name, but on open discussion of Slovene collaboration—could explain an initial period of silence, but the authorities' "failure" to silence the phenomenon at the outset before it became a public issue may well have been more shocking to some correspondents. The protests were "a last resort," undertaken when it became clear that beyond the tenuous administrative ban on the use of the group's name, no stronger action would be taken, and that governmental attitudes toward the alternative in general were becoming far more indulgent. Some of the outrage seems to have stemmed from the fact that it was necessary to enter a public debate at all. "Laibach" forced these Party members and Partisan veterans into an open public debate which revealed that their views were now merely subjective, and no longer part of ideological "common sense"; the very fact that they had to articulate their arguments publicly, and even pay lip service to the right to cultural expression, showed that the old orthodoxies were already open to question in a fundamental way.

What is perhaps more interesting is not the delayed reaction to Laibach, but the fact that the Partisans did not publicly react to a series of even greater provocations. Just as the Partisan protests reached a peak, so did Laibach's general and specific use of Partisan imageries and motifs. As part of their manipulation of Western ignorance about Slovenia and Yugoslavia, Laibach even told interviewers that their "uniforms," which by now included Tyrolean-style Loden jackets and breeches, were based on those of the Slovene Partisans.[42] Whether any of Laibach's opponents ever heard about this is unknown, but the symbolism of Laibach claiming to wear Partisan uniforms would have been almost intolerable to those for whom Laibach (as an embodiment of Germanization, if not Nazism) represented all that the Partisans had fought against. Among the most blatant of the specific Partisan references was Laibach's manipulation of two Partisan songs in the tracks *Vojna poema* (War Poem) and *Jezero* (Lake). *Vojna poema* features a song describing the hardships of war, supposedly taped from a radio broadcast. The bleak piano tones and baritone voice chime well with Laibach's "militant classicist" style, and those with no knowledge of the original would assume that the song was actually "by" Laibach. The original is both deconstructed and appropriated, and subtly comic audio effects ("samples" of atonal pianos and car horns) slowly undermine the gravitas of the original. *Jezero* appropriates one of the most sentimental Partisan songs, *Počiva jezero v tihoti* (A Lake Resting in Calmness). A soprano sings mournfully, backed softly by a male chorus typical of the Partisan song genre. Yet here the song is in constant danger of being drowned out by a sinister orchestral theme taken from a work by Liszt. This piece, and numerous other national themes, featured in the mainstream context of the *Krst* production.

Laibach still use animated film of black-and-white woodcuts depicting German atrocities and Partisan resistance as a stage backdrop.[43] The Partisan veterans were actually dealing with something even more serious than what they saw as the Germanization of their culture. In the "hero city," a group named "Laibach" were appropriating some of the most "sacred" images of the Partisan struggle, while simultaneously claiming to represent the essence of the Slovene nation. Unable or unwilling to refer to these most provocative actions, the veterans and other Laibach opponents could only concentrate on the issue of the group's name. Laibach's appropriation of Titoist and Partisan iconography was an even more serious political heresy than the name, but apparently too embarrassing or painful to mention. It seems unlikely that none of those opposed to Laibach was aware of these appropriations,[44] yet none of the protest letters refers to these or to any specific Laibach work or theme. The name issue stood in for the numerous other possible criticisms of Laibach. These were more fully developed by non-Slovene critics less bewitched by the name.

Yet despite the provocativeness of this aspect of Laibach's work, and the fact that the veterans were their fiercest critics, the situation was not as clear-cut as it seems. The Partisan legacy was a much-mythologized aspect of the ideological status quo.

6.3 Laibach, 1987.

However, it was built on genuine achievements, and the way in which Laibach interrogated the myth (one of the most potent in Slovene history) was not purely an expression of simplistic punk-style contempt. Although it was painful, the appropriation of Partisan imagery was to some extent a recognition of its importance, and perhaps even of respect. Certainly Laibach and NSK statements do recognize the historical role of the OF, and the interrogation of the myth and its degeneration into ideological stasis does not preclude this awareness.

"Partisans and Fascists"

The activity of LAIBACH and NSK maintains productive ties with the history of the past, the present and the future; it is rooted in a *fanatic violation of the mass and energy preservation law* and relies heavily on the Slovene program for spiritual, cultural and political independence. That is why we strongly reject all the accumulated controversy concerning our name and appearance leveled at us from some quarters of the Slovene public, although these arguments may be interpreted as a creative misunderstanding, which will be satisfactorily resolved in the future. Our name may be dirty, but we are clean.[45]

Yugoslav veterans of the Partisan struggle were a highly organized sociopolitical body and enjoyed special benefits and privileges. Their special ideological status derived from their fight for both socialism and liberation from foreign occupation. This "credit" gave veterans' groups the confidence to pronounce on a wide range

of social and political issues. They expected their views to be heard with respect, and to be able to influence public and official opinion. As the veterans saw it, Laibach's provocation was so severe that they had to intervene, even at the risk of alienating elements of youth opinion. A Partisan dimension to the Laibach debate first materialized in October 1982 in a letter in *Ljubljanski Dnevnik*.[46] After citing several examples of Laibach's "unintelligible" language, the correspondent notes that the Partisan organizations also have a voice, and looks forward to such a response to his letter, urging veterans to take a stand on the issue. The first letter from a veterans' group came only in July 1983, in the aftermath of Laibach's TV interview. It demanded ("as a veterans' organization that strives for the preservation of the ideals and historical essence of the liberation struggle") that measures be taken against all those responsible for the broadcast.[47] On October 20, a letter from the "veterans and citizens" of Domžale followed. Further debate did not ensue, and it was only in response to the 1986 ZSMS congress decision that a wider debate broke out between the veterans and Laibach supporters (beyond statements of the type quoted above, Laibach never involved themselves directly in the polemics). The first letter appeared in April under the heading "Carinthian Partisans Protest."[48] This letter was provoked at least as much by the ZSMS decision as by Laibach. The Partisans realized that the decision was a significant step toward Laibach becoming an accepted part of the Slovene cultural scene, with no restrictions placed on its activities, and so long as the group bore its controversial name, they were determined to oppose this. The fact that Laibach were being admitted into the mainstream under the patronage of ZSMS, a state institution, was also deeply troubling.

One of the most persistent themes in the letters is Laibach as a menacing agent of Germanization, rather than just a provocative alternative group.[49] The first letter states: "With this name they allow Germanization of our [Slovene] places elsewhere (who can guarantee they won't establish a new name, e.g. Assling, Trifail, Cilli[50] . . . and try to put into effect [the use of] the German language in the Slovene homeland?)"[51] The attempt to reactivate fears of Germanization (the letter also contains ritual references to the struggle of the Slovene minority in Carinthia for survival) was based on the veterans' experience of historically recent de-Slovenization attempts by Axis forces. For these correspondents, the threat of Germanization and the invocation of the plight of Slovene minorities were bound to be influential, and were a plausible site for the mobilization of opposition to Laibach.

The well-organized letter campaigns can best be characterized in Laibach's own terms as a "systematic ideological offensive" of the type the Slovene authorities themselves no longer showed any inclination to pursue.[52] After the initial letter, supporting letters from individual veterans were published, yet apart from the odd personal comment or memory, they were similar in format and style. Many used extremely generic language that had an almost mantric quality, constantly repeating close variations on the same denunciatory phrases, and echoing Laibach's own recapitulation of generic official discourse. They are a significant illustration of the contours of the anguished debate the name provoked.

When it became apparent, in 1987, that the ban on Laibach appearances was no longer to be enforced,[53] the campaign intensified. On February 21, in the wake of Laibach's first legal Ljubljana concert on February 19, SKPS (The Union of Carinthian Partisans of Slovenia) sent a letter to *Delo* under the title "(The) Germanized name is genocide."[54] What the Partisans had feared (the de facto acceptance of Laibach) had now taken place, and their sense of grievance intensified. The same letter subsequently appeared in *Ljubljanski Dnevnik* on February 25, entitled "Germanized Name at the Heart of Slovenia,"[55] and in the Party journal *Komunist* on February 27, entitled "Protests without Response."[56] This final title reflected another of the campaign's major concerns: despite gaining a response to their concerns from other veterans, and some cultural workers, there had been no response whatsoever from responsible sociopolitical groups and associations, and this silence was eloquent. The only official response was the Ljubljana authorities' repetition of their viewpoint that the name was unsuitable, and its refusal to register Laibach as a cultural group, even though Laibach performances were now tolerated. The letter applauds this, but the earlier complaint about the lack of an adequate institutional response conceals an appeal to the authorities to take action, and explains the necessity for the letter campaign. In the absence of even a coordinated propaganda offensive against Laibach, the Partisan groups were forced to assume what their opponents presented as a hegemonic and authoritarian role, executing the traditional state function of systematic propaganda against dissent. During this process, uncanny similarities to Laibach's operational methods became apparent. Both shared a belief in the power of repetition, and did nothing to conceal the rigidity and formality of their discourses. The state ideological and repressive functions the Partisans attempted to carry out were precisely those usurped by Laibach. The increasingly liberal Slovene authorities played the role of embarrassed but compromised bystander, unable or unwilling to side more strongly with its "natural" allies among the Partisans.[57]

Without further state intervention, the struggle was uneven. Laibach had the luxury of being able to employ uncompromising rhetoric based on the absolute dictatorial freedoms of an intense (spectral) totalitarianism now relinquished by the state. Their opponents were forced to dilute their anger and compromise by observing the ideological norms of self-management pluralism. The first 1987 letter strove to avoid a censorious tone so as not to alienate artistic and youth opinion: "We stress we are not attempting to evaluate the musical or theatrical value of Neue Slowensiche Kunst or Laibach. Our remarks concern exclusively the German name and Nazi symbols."[58]

The partisan protest letter of the previous year took a similar tone:

We [the Slovene public] have let the five protagonists of Laibach blackmail us with their international influence. We are not meddling in the artistic and aesthetic efforts of the group Laibach. On these experts will pass judgment. However, the Carinthian Partisans have decided to resist registration of the group under this name, because

of our sacrifices for a free Slovene nation, in order that we can develop our own and the nation's identity, [and] independent cultural and spiritual life.[59]

CALL WITHOUT RESPONSE: FAILED INTERPELLATION BY THE PARTISANS

The failure to influence the postwar generations into actively opposing Laibach represented an ideological "transmission failure." While young people and alternative cultural leaders were aware of the wartime struggle and the continuing difficulties of Slovenes in Austria and Italy, they refused to allow these factors to dictate cultural preferences or cultural policy in present-day Slovenia. A non-Germanized Slovene cultural process was only as old as the second Yugoslavia; by 1985, however, the new generation of cultural activists and their older supporters were able to present the Germanized aesthetic of Laibach/NSK not as an inherent threat to Slovene identity but as a source of creative regeneration. The cultural security provided by Yugoslavia allowed Slovene culture to reabsorb the supposedly alien Germanicism which had remained forbidden since the war.[60] This was the stance taken by Jože Osterman—although Laibach might contain distasteful elements, the group had achieved a degree of international success rare for Slovene artists, and presented no threat to Slovene culture or identity.[61] "The Germanic" was recoded by young people in the 1980s from an automatic signifier of threat and assimilation into simply another historical mode available for postmodern assimilation (and, crucially, one that was far less alien to the Slovene context than other aspects of global culture). The argument about the plight of the Slovene minorities was not seen as particularly relevant, but it might have been more influential had it not been expressed so formalistically.[62] Young people saw the language used as an integral element of a restrictive ideological and cultural status quo. In contrast, Laibach was able to respond from the site of absolute magisterial judgment it had appropriated, free to be as arbitrary, incomprehensible, and imperious as the situated demanded.

The new situation in which the NSMs and alternative media enjoyed not just tolerance but ever-increasing influence compelled the veterans to qualify their ideological demands. Just as Laibach initially committed the destructive act of appropriating the state structure as a site of terror, their counterparts among the NSMs and independent theorists appropriated the implied pluralism of self-management, and compelled the older generation to pay respect to its libertarian potential. Generationally, the conflict was between pre- and post-self-management generations. The young people of the 1980s were now sufficiently distant from the early 1970s and the enforced political (as opposed to economic) orthodoxy prevalent after the limited purging of that generation's student movements. For the Partisan generation, the innovations of self-management marked out the progressiveness of their society in relation to the more Stalinist states to the east, but were

primarily tools of economic development that would strengthen the state through limited shop-floor democratization. The alternative, literal reading of "self-management" provided a "ready-made" discursive/legitimating framework for the development of an emancipating praxis, just as Laibach used the paradigms of state power as "ready-mades." Statements incorporating concepts such as "democratization" and "autonomy" were key features of late Yugoslav socialism. The NSMs became subversive when they moved from using self-management rhetoric to defend the alternative to arguing for the replacement of the system to incorporate Western liberal concepts.

The official discourse of self-management is strongly reminiscent of the language with which the youth of Slovenia staked its claims for the recognition and protection of cultural otherness, of which Laibach was the preeminent example. In 1972, UNESCO issued a monograph on "Cultural Policy in Yugoslavia," part of a series in which states presented their cultural policies and objectives. The document presents a highly liberal view of Yugoslav culture:

> Development in all spheres, including the cultural one, is directly antithetical to Statism. . . . The socialization of culture, which is the general objective of this [Yugoslav cultural] policy, calls for the change of both the external and internal relations which formerly existed in the administrative budgetary system. It denotes a comprehensive program of "deStatization" of all spheres of public activity and the gradual democratization of relations between cultural institutions and society as well as the democratization of relations within the institution itself. . . . It further implies the creation and development of a democratic cultural climate which will make a free competition of creative forces possible, ensure the enforcement of the principle of selectivity, the emancipation of evaluation from bureaucratic subjectivism and restrictions, while concurrently heightening the sense of responsibility for cultural and social development of the community as a whole.[63]

This was at odds both with the experience of the more radical Yugoslav artists and with the instincts of the Partisan generation, but the latter were forced into verbal contortions in order not to violate the ostensible ideals of the system from which they demanded action. Their expressions of outrage were compromised by the imperative not to appear to threaten the level of cultural freedom the system formally permitted. Even when they were confronted by a phenomenon as disturbing as Laibach, it was still necessary for the writers of the Partisan protest letters[64] to stress that they were not attempting to interfere in Laibach's creative efforts, or to pass judgment on them. To do so would have exemplified the "subjectivism" and "restrictiveness" criticized by Majstorović, which Yugoslav cultural policy had formally forsworn. For the veterans collectively to pass a public aesthetic judgment could be seen as regressive interference that would further alienate the alternative sector and polarize the struggle. However genuine their commitment to the ideals of self-management, the Partisans made every effort not to appear repressive. By issuing reassurances that they were not attempting to interfere in the cultural field

per se (but only in relation to the specific issue of Laibach's name and use of Nazi imagery), the Partisans attempted to preserve a space within which their concerns might appear reasonable and nonthreatening. From the perspective of the Slovene alternative media, however, even the restrained tone of the letters represented a gross intrusion upon cultural autonomy and pluralism.

POLARIZATION AND THE SOCIAL DISPLACEMENT OF THE PARTISANS

Laibach's responses referred to their opponents' stance only as evidence of their own rectitude. Laibach appropriated the very role of defenders of Sloveneness the partisans claimed for themselves. One of the paradoxes of Laibach's intervention was that their opponents' references to the struggle of the Slovene nation came to sound like diluted parodies of their own discourse. Unlike punk, which aimed merely to provoke condemnation, Laibach's linguistic operations went further, appropriating the codes of censorious authority so totally as to be able to turn them against their opponents. The group's performance at the September 1982 Novi Rock festival in Ljubljana was introduced by a sneering female announcer reading the text of an anti-Laibach protest letter: "Is it possible? Is it possible that someone permitted in Ljubljana, first Hero City of Yugoslavia, [that] a youth group can have a name which unearths memories of . . . Laibach!"[65]

This "sampling" of anti-Laibach discourse at a Laibach concert illustrates how Laibach went beyond provocation and into actual recapitulation of the discourse directed against them, providing an amplified demonstration of the ideological repressiveness their work seemed to some people to advocate. What made the situation more complex (and difficult for anti-Laibach opinion) was the awareness of the group, and others in the alternative sector, of the tactical superiority of an ambivalent or contradictory stance. To some extent, regimes are structured by the opposition they generate, and taking an overt "dissident" stance can sometimes reinforce the status quo. Laibach understood the limited or even contradictory impact of such a binary stance.

Condemnation of Laibach by the Slovene authorities never went much beyond criticizing the disturbance of the public, the revival of unpleasant memories, and the presence of "anarchoid hopelessness" in their work.[66] Sparked by what the correspondents viewed as ZSMS's deviational decision to associate itself with and press for the recognition of Laibach, the letters were also a critique of the lack of more robust public measures to deal with such phenomena. Protests always instinctively returned to Laibach's name as the basis for a general critique not just of the group's aesthetic (of which there was little concrete knowledge) but of the wider context of alternative culture, "the other Slovenia" (druga Slovenija) after which Tomc named his account of twentieth-century Slovene youth cultures.[67]

Laibach received support from the alternative and youth institutions primarily for their usefulness in establishing an extreme frontier of tolerance behind which

(slightly) less extreme democratic and cultural activities could shelter. From an early stage, alternative policymakers realized that the repressive fury focused on Laibach might otherwise be turned on them. The wider alternative scene knew that "they could be next," and this increased their determination to concede nothing in their demands for absolute tolerance of political and cultural otherness, whether that meant fighting for Laibach's right to its name or gay rights.[68] Erjavec and Gržinić claim: "LAIBACH introduced into Slovene culture a method that could be labeled the de-naturalization of already 'natural' cultural values and rituals. In its radical sameness-otherness the Slovene public was polarized into either acceptance or rejection of LAIBACH. Their very response indicated the level of pluralism in Slovene society."[69]

On June 21, 1986, Pavle Gantar, president of the council of ŠKUC-Forum, responded to the Partisan protest letters published in *Delo* in April and May. Far from evading the argument about the continuing struggle for Slovene identity, he approached it directly, and used it to defend free cultural expression within Slovenia. He stated that arguments based upon some correspondents' characterization of Laibach's activity as an insult to the national struggle for identity were invalid unless those who took this view wished to argue that there had been no progress in resolving the problem of national consciousness within the last century or more. This seems to imply that it was only prior to the national cultural revival of the second half of the nineteenth century that Slovene culture was as endangered as some were now claiming, and that Slovene national and cultural identity was now mature enough to be able to deal with phenomena such as Laibach. Gantar acknowledged the problems faced by Carinthian Slovenes, but argued that it would be really tragic if their struggle were used to justify the suppression of the rights to alterity and difference in Slovenia itself. He added that ŠKUC-Forum asked only that institutions and the public recognize the right to difference, even if they disapproved, and that they had no wish to politicize the issue into a struggle between young and old (as, by implication, their critics did). He concluded by saying there was no reason not to recognize Laibach's name in the light of its de facto semilegal participation in other public projects such as *Krst*: "Thus we also call on the democratic consciousness, above all of those who think differently from us, to recognize the group's right to its name, which is part of its identity. . . . As history teaches us, a name may be given, but not taken away."[70]

The final sentence is particularly striking, as it echoes the type of appeals still used by Slovenes in Austria and Italy against de-Slovenization.[71] Gantar and others arguing for the recognition of Laibach stressed the centrality of its name as a symbol of its right not just to perform, but to its (aesthetic) existence per se, and the more general rights of provocative alternative practices to a place within Slovene society. Laibach's opponents attempted to make their demands seem that much less absolute and more pragmatic by framing them in terms of a positive-sum game. They claimed not to be interfering in Laibach's right to creative self-expression,

provided it did not go beyond certain limits. Laibach's supporters, however, closed this avenue down by polarizing the issue into a zero-sum game, just as nationalists would do later in the decade in relation to their demands.

IDEOLOGICAL DISCONTINUITY

The Partisan protests demonstrate the role of Laibach's name as an agency in itself, distinct from the group's actual aesthetic interventions and provoking a specific set of responses. The protests are a concrete example of how Laibach's presence in so-cial debate helped to delegitimize dominant socio-ideological bodies such as the veterans' groups. As one of the component bodies of the LCY structure (along with the youth organizations), the veterans had a constitutionally recognized socio-political role. During Tito's rule, their status and power were both unquestioned and rarely exercised. However, it was only in the face of what seemed to be the ir-responsibility, if not subversiveness, of the youth organization and its allies, and the silence or passivity of the Party and other institutions, that they attempted to exercise their influence in a concrete political intervention. Yet by the time their intervention became necessary, their postwar legitimacy had already faded, and no longer supported their pronouncements, especially on issues of concern to young people. According to Pilkington,[72] any generational conflict in a state socialist sys-tem is inherently destabilizing. Whereas in market-oriented societies such conflicts may be exaggerated or exacerbated in order to create distinct markets and facilitate the sale of new products, in the socialist world such a differentiation is highly dam-aging to the state itself, and not simply to society:

> The "continuity of generations" in a non-antagonistic society replaced the struggle between classes as the motor of history. This meant that the drive for ideological "purity" amongst youth was greater than amongst the adult population, since dis-sidence could either be tolerated or physically alienated, whereas a generation gap would wreck the very means of the development of socialist into communist soci-ety; it would disrupt the laws of history themselves.

The rapid escalation of the Laibach issue into a generational dispute as acute as those seen in older Western generations' reactions to punk was symptomatic of a wide ideological cleavage. The historical continuity of ideological transmission was broken, and the legitimation mechanisms of the system were already break-ing down, even before the political crises of the following years finally destroyed it.

Mastnak[73] argued at the time that the Partisans' intervention was likely to destroy any authority they still possessed to pronounce on anything but their own concerns (such as pensions). He took a confrontational approach to the Partisans, and fore-saw the futility of their struggle. Referring to that year's veterans' congress, at which a delegate had complained that it was left to the veterans alone to perpetuate the glory of "Partisan-ness" (in other words, that other institutions were not assisting in the retransmission of Partisan values), Mastnak agreed with this analysis but ar-

gued that this was the fault of the Partisans themselves. Taking what he conde-scendingly referred to as "only the most recent episode"—Partisan attacks on the 12th ZSMS Congress and its decisions concerning Laibach—Mastnak characterized their approach as authoritarian, intolerant, and demagogic, based on the use of in-sults and imputations. This was in a climate in which any slight criticism of any Party official was taken as an attack upon the system per se. Officials were aggressively de-fensive even in the face of infinitely milder criticism than the Partisans directed at Laibach. He suggested that perhaps the Partisans might be unaware of how deep a gulf they were creating between themselves and the younger generations, and how they were establishing "Partisan-ness" as something opposed in a very concrete way to the life interests and needs of young people: "all they will achieve is this, that youth can experience Partisan-ness only as something really hostile to them." In conclusion, he explicitly characterized the Partisans as a repressive agency, observ-ing that those who possess authority and strength frequently have only one thought: that others should not have their own opinions. Mastnak's piece illustrates both the repressive space the veterans were perceived to occupy within the sociopolitical en-vironment and the way in which, through attempting to exert their influence in a concrete form, they delegitimated themselves in the eyes of young people. Al-though they attempted to moderate their reaction, the spur of Laibach's name compelled the veterans to "demask and recapitulate" their repressive potential. Although the fear and outrage expressed in the Partisan letters were understandable, Laibach's supporters in the media and ZSMS polarized the debate to such an extent that there was no space left in which the Partisans might present their case calmly. By 1988, their political status was "normalized" as a result of their unsuccessful in-tervention, and the new political climate, and they were relegated to being simply one of a plurality of interest groups.

The veterans were the last institutional bastion of resistance to the normaliza-tion of the status and activities of Laibach and NSK within Slovenia. By spring 1987 Laibach had again performed in Ljubljana, and NK was caught in the "Youth Day" scandal. This event marked a shift from a cleavage within Slovene society over Lai-bach and other alternative phenomena to a cleavage between Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia.[74] It also normalized the conditions in which controversial cultural phenomena such as Laibach would in future be discussed in the Slovene public sphere. Laibach remained controversial, but was condemned in a less ideological manner more reminiscent of the "democratic" type of cultural criticism by indi-viduals and commentators leveled at controversial Western artists.

EFFECTS

The Laibach controversy has long faded, but Ljubljana's conflation with "Laibach," in both its historic wartime and artistic forms, is now indelible. An increasing number of visitors come to Ljubljana primarily or entirely as a result of the Laibach connection. Laibach postcards have been sold from a stall by the statue of Slovenia's

idolized national poet, Prešeren, which in turn is overlooked by the same castle in-corporated by NSK architects Graditelji into their designs for a monumental industrial city called "Laibach."[75] For those Slovenes who are still disturbed by Laibach and what they represent, these continued reminders of the city's temporal and aesthetic displacement from itself are hardly welcome. A lasting symbolic consequence of Laibach's notoriety is that although Ljubljana is not better known as Laibach, it is certainly now much better known because of (its shadow) Laibach.

The continued symbolic appropriation (or "Laibachization") of Yugoslavia's first "hero city" and capital of the new republic reveals not only the continued sym-bolic-political impact of Laibach but also the shift in ideological and geopolitical alignment the city has undergone. The transition from Yugoslav republican capital to "Laibachized" heart of the European "retrogarde" to post-Yugoslav national capital (and "home" of the NSK State) was a geopolitical shift foreshadowed by Laibach in the 1980s. The re(tro)-activation of the city's previous name anticipated the rejection of Balkan-oriented "brotherhood and unity" for the traditional (though from a Slavophile perspective unnatural) "Central European" (largely Germanic) paradigms by which Slovenia was structured until 1918. Laibach effected an an-ticipatory recapitulation of attempts by intellectual and political nationalists to discard Ljubljana's previous Yugoslavness as abruptly as its Central European/Germanness had been deemphasized after 1945. Yet if the cultural conflicts of the 1980s prefigured the cultural and geopolitical shifts of the 1990s, it should not be inferred that the Slovene shift back to Central Europe was a specific political Lai-bach objective. No Laibach action is free of paradox, and it is significant that to-gether with the other NSK groups, it maintains active links with former Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe. If in the 1980s elements of Slovene society wished to forget or deny the Germanic elements of Slovene culture and identity, in the 1990s there was a similar tendency to downplay or dismiss Slovenia's Yugoslav connections. In both decades, Laibach's interventions have run counter to these attempts to create a "shadowless" national image.

CHAPTER 7

RETROGARDE EVENTS

Laibach and NSK address several different audiences besides those who actively fol-low or consume their works: the media, critics, academics, and the abstract "au-diences" constituted by politics and society. Yet only those who attend concerts, plays, passport actions, lectures, or speeches are (willingly) exposed to the full force of NSK. Laibach's concerts are the most extreme NSK manifestations, but all the major groups have executed large-scale, monumental actions and installations.

From the mid-1980s, manifestations by Irwin and the theatrical groups grew steadily in scope, but the most ambitious NSK actions date from the creation of the NSK State. In May 1992 Irwin, together with members from NK and Noordung, es-tablished the *NSK Embassy Moscow* in a private apartment. Works by Irwin and Laibach posters were displayed as well as videos, and a series of discussions took place in what was Russia's first physical exposure to NSK, and the first NSK Embassy event. The most spectacular element of the event was entitled *Black Square on Red Square*. On June 6, Irwin members and others spread out a large square of black fabric in Red Square[1] in a symbolic re-creation of Malevich's black square. The action brought contemporary Russians face to face with the long-suppressed work of Malevich and the Russian avant-garde, and the rediscovery of this work by Slovene artists.

As the State developed, NSK explicitly claimed to be appropriating the terri-tories on which the embassies and other collective actions were located. In both Berlin (1993) and Sarajevo (1995), NSK State events took over their host venues, declaring them NSK State territories. Admission was possible only via an NSK pass-port (issued at the events) or temporary "visas." Similarly, when the NSK Philos-ophy Department and Irwin carried out a ceremonial action on a former East German Army training ground, the event was entitled *NSK Territory Suhl*. The pres-ence of Laibach, the stark ideological symbolism of NSK iconography, and the sub-versive (albeit temporary) territorial claims made these multifaceted events more spectacular and controversial than most other art events or installations, creating spaces in which the NSK *Gesamtkunstwerk* assumed tangible and provocative form.

Laibach performances have revealed the most fundamental elements of tech-niques and effects that are present in varying degrees of intensity across the spec-trum of NSK work. If Laibach are the self-described "founding fathers" of the NSK State[2] and the severest manifestation of the NSK *Geist*, or "Immanent Consistent Spirit," it is their audience (simultaneously the most loyal and the most brutalized) who form the critical mass(es) of the State, and from whom the majority of NSK citizens are drawn.

YOU WHO CHALLENGE . . .

Several concerts in politically and culturally sensitive locations and at crucial periods stand out as particularly momentous and significant. These include Novi Rock 1982, Zagreb Biennale 1983, the "secret" December 1984 show in Ljubljana, Hamburg 1985, the Ljubljana "homecoming" concerts in 1987, Trbovlje 1990

(tenth-anniversary concert), Belgrade 1989, the first Moscow concerts in 1995, Sarajevo 1995, and Belgrade 1997.

Since Laibach compare their shows to political rallies, it seems relevant to view their evolution in terms of the evolution of totalitarian movements. The earliest stormy Laibach shows in small venues could be compared to the underground, insurrectionary phases of Nazism or Bolshevism: violent and chaotic demonstrations of what was still unfamiliar or unacceptable. In this phase Laibach presented a confrontational, ultra-experimental, "bruitist" spectacle, using primitive electronic instrumentation, noise, and even smoke bombs. Like Laibach's other actions, these were intended as a test of social and ideological tolerance, and produced extreme responses and violence even from "radical" audiences. Laibach followed punk tradition, building notoriety through extreme performances that quickly acquired mythical status, the first of these being the September 1982 Novi Rock appearance.[3] Even in the West, Laibach produced strong reactions, but within a state socialist context the concerts were infinitely more provocative. Over time and with greater resources the concerts evolved into a more highly choreographed technical spectacle.

One of the most infamous performances took place in April 1983 as part of the Zagreb Biennale of New Music. Concerts such as this are now highly mythologized, making it difficult to reconstruct them reliably. Police halted the show, and Laibach were ejected after pornographic images and Tito's face were juxtaposed on screen, in addition to the usual brutal noise and imagery. The event created a minor scandal in the Slovene and Croatian media, and on May 12 Mladina published a letter from Laibach explaining its intentions in the concert; Laibach claimed that the organizers were fully aware of its content. The letter is one of Laibach's most open and detailed explanations of its methods (although the language retains the tautological and intimidating qualities of all Laibach statements). Laibach openly states that it is exploring "mass-psychology and the logic of manipulation through information,"[4] which would seem to confirm the worst fears of the group's critics (that for some obscure political purpose, or—perhaps worse—for the sake of pure provocation, Laibach practices mass manipulation). Laibach complicates this picture, however, through reference to the range of artists, schools, and ideologies that inform its "provocative interdisciplinary action"—for instance, Fluxus art and bruitism.[5] Besides totalitarian and national/folk art, Laibach cited among others the work of Nam June Paik, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Joseph Beuys, claiming that such techniques applied to ideological and historical trauma encourage "critical awareness" in those exposed to it.[6] These references to Western avant-garde artists are balanced by citations elsewhere of Stalin and Hitler.[7]

The concerts of this period were nightmarish and utterly extreme combinations of alienation, infernal noise, and brutal visual imagery. The contradictions within an artistic practice incorporating both John Cage and Nazi-Kunst qualify its "totalitarianism," and provide clues that indicate the presence of more subtle processes in the work. In fact, these "clues" are present in the concerts as well as the texts, if

7.1 Laibach, "Occupied Europe" tour poster, 1983.

the spectator can preserve sufficient autonomy to perceive the contradictions be-
tween the diverse motifs and styles that constitute the event. The extreme force of
the performances and the statements seems to leave no space for audience auton-
omy, yet while Laibach are highly successful in dominating an audience, at no
point do they issue anything resembling "orders," and there is no coherent "plan"
to be followed. The "duty" Laibach impose on those confronted by the spectacle
is to interpret its unresolved contradictions and, perhaps, to realize its implica-
tions. It is in this respect that, despite all appearances, Laibach encourage "critical
awareness" of the contradictory elements in their work, and their interconnec-
tions. Laibach concerts can be seen as the application of both propaganda tech-
niques and highly sophisticated conceptual art practices to a series of covert and
overt "regimes" that are manifested in the event.

Laibach concerts have repeatedly scandalized the media and the public in vari-
ous countries. After being banned from performing in Ljubljana, Laibach embarked

on the "Occupied Europe" tour,[8] taking in both halves of Cold War Europe and running intermittently until 1985. This period was one of totalitarian transition from clandestine meetings to ever-larger rallies. Besides Britain, Germany, Holland, and Yugoslavia, Laibach played in Budapest, Wrocław, Warsaw, and Krakow. They were denied entry to Czechoslovakia by nervous authorities.[9] For a Yugoslav band, particularly such a provocative one, to tour on this scale was unprecedented, and the fact that it was able to perform in Poland at this time is particularly striking. Recordings of these shows are among Laibach's most extreme.[10] Laibach carried out a colossal and systematic sensory bombardment of audiences. The group's sound was augmented by samples of classical works and soundtracks, plus the hunting horns and brass instrumentation that formed the basis of its "militant classicism." These elements created an even more reactionary and feudal/militaristic impression in unresolved tension with the continued use of avant-garde and conceptual techniques. Laibach tested the audience's tolerances and responses, presenting the same program across both halves of Europe, largely ignoring ideological borders and attempting to break through the ideological and cultural overcoding of the "New Cold War" period, dramatizing the military-cultural colonization of Europe. Laibach's transmission of specific Slovene national imagery across Europe represented a kind of cultural nonalignment, independent of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Laibach's aggression seemed to be an example of violent cultural colonization thrown back in the face of larger and more powerful nations. The group reactivated the "Occupied Europe" concept for its "NATO" tour in 1994–95, and its larger-scale concerts and collective NSK actions can be seen as occupations, marking out their own "territories" and simultaneously re- and deterritorializing those of the hosts.

By the time of the 1987 "United States of Europe" tour to promote the *Opus Dei* album, the Laibach "regime" had come to power (gained international success and recognition, and conquered "their" section of the market), but was still gaining momentum. In February 1987 they were able to stage a legal victory/homecoming show in Ljubljana for the first time in four years, and from this point they began to tour even more extensively, both at home and abroad. There is a clear contrast between Laibach's early shows, in front of less seasoned audiences not previously exposed to any comparable spectacle, and the ever more tightly choreographed concerts from the mid-1980s onward, performed to more knowledgable and less easily shocked audiences. With increasing media exposure and greater resources, Laibach were able to play larger venues and mount increasingly elaborate shows that shadowed and recapitulated the increasingly bombastic stadium rock shows of the period. By the time of their tenth-anniversary Trbovlje concert[11] in 1990, Laibach had reached the "Nuremberg" phase: a regime at the height of its power able to create an epic and systematic mass event. This was the most "monumental" phase of Laibach's development.

Technically, the "Kapital" tour of 1992–93 was Laibach's most ambitious, using elaborate film and video material, and complex sound sources. Since the mid-

7.2 Laibach, "United States of Europe" tour poster, 1987.

1990s the shows have gradually been scaled down, and the number of visual elements has decreased. The choreographed techno-disco militarism of the "NATO" phase worked most successfully in club spaces such as Ljubljana's DC-3 Dakota. By the time of the "Jesus Christ Superstars" tour, Laibach had shifted to a heavy metal/choral style, and their performances had a "back to basics" feel, far closer to conventional rock'n'roll than avant-garde experimentation. For the 2003 "WAT" tour, Laibach replaced the "classic" totalitarian drummers positioned to the side of the vocalist with young female drummers wearing paramilitary uniforms. This reintroduced some of the coldly fanatical totalitarian choreography reminiscent of Laibach's classic phase.

The Concert as Totalitarian Spectacle

> LAIBACH in itself is not a danger; the true danger resides in people, it is implanted in human beings like the age-old fear of punishment, and from it the earthly seed of evil springs. Our evil is its projection, so we are a danger to those who in themselves are dangerous.[12]

> [Laibach] . . . cannot be offended and it need not defend itself; practicing control is not an item of our stand.[13]

Laibach's discourse is one of absolute certainty, and the stage performances are examples of absolutist totalitarian-style militancy. It is above all on stage that Laibach create a paradigm of impossible authority, driven by the iron logic of their concepts, manipulating audiences' desires to submit to overpowering spectacle even while challenging them.

Describing Laibach's tenth-anniversary concert, one writer gave a clear summary of the elements of their live concerts:

> Laibach's approach is to prepare an acid bath for their audience with pile-driver percussion, metal cutter electric guitar, sirens, horns and harsh guttural incantatory vocals. . . . With apparently fascistic banners and 1940s clothes, the whole effect is of a ritual or rally. It is highly unpleasant and can be genuinely disturbing, and also for those who can relate to it, very beautiful.[14]

The "rally effect" described is deliberate—Laibach concerts are structured to resemble mass meetings, revealing mass-psychological processes.[15] Laibach evoke the regimentation of a totalitarian rally through what they have described as "sound/force in the form of a systematic (psychophysical) terror as therapy and as principle of social organization."[16]

The ferocious but martial and heroic music and instrumentation is simultaneously seductive and overwhelming. The presence of original socialist propaganda imagery and Nazi-style visual elements only heightens the rally effect. Laibach audiences are often more static than a typical "rock" crowd, visually more reminiscent of a hall of supporters watching a leader's speech. The monumentalism and quasi-totalitarian aesthetics were simply an intensification of the stadium rock of Queen and similar bands, with Laibach's singer in the dictator/*Übermensch* role with which Freddie Mercury flirted.[17] Laibach performances reproduced the subjection of the individual in relation to the totalitarian regime and were, as intended, read by some critics as an actual totalitarian attempt at mass mobilization.

Laibach's concerts recapitulate the rock concert as a totalitarian ritual. This link had previously been alluded to in Pink Floyd's *The Wall* (1979), a monumentally ironic presentation of the Fascistic potential of the type of epic rock spectacle produced by such groups. Laibach's fusion of the dynamics of the totalitarian rally and a rock concert suggests that totalitarianism is a contemporary force rather than a
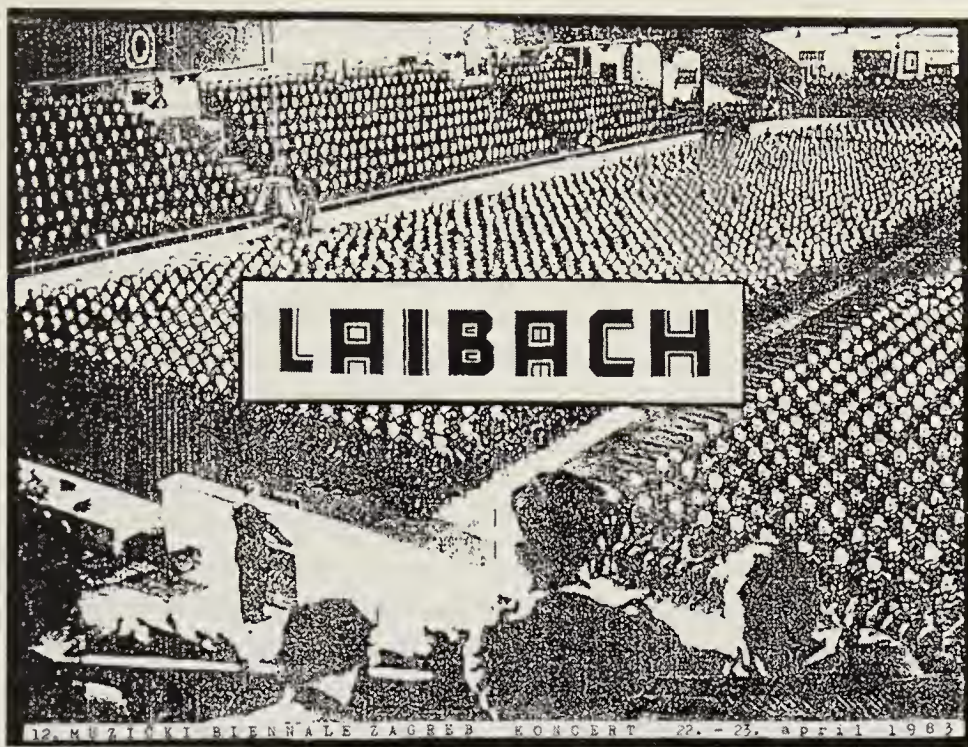
7.3 Laibach Zagreb Biennale poster, 1983.

historical phenomenon, and that popular music has an inherent totalitarian potential that various regimes use for their own ends. The potential "beauty" that Honderich perceives in a Laibach concert lies in its transcendence of the (spectacle of) ideological fanaticism and oppression. The performances are structured by an aesthetic that allows for the play of elemental political and psychological forces that are normally suppressed. It also points to the continuing power of and need for mass/ritualistic experience even within hyperindividualized societies. "Oceanic" de-individualization is sought in numerous ways, particularly in raves, and Laibach dramatize this tendency. The concerts play around the poles of terror and attraction, and the ambivalent fascination produced by the suggestion of catastrophic and relentless force. Nietzsche identified a link between self-destruction and mythical union, and the force of Laibach's most extreme performances manipulates this relationship between the forces of attraction and destruction—Eros and Thanatos.

It would be wrong to assume that the full implications of the concerts can be felt only by audiences with direct experience of totalitarianism. This overlooks the fact that totalitarianism is equally menacing to those who have not lived under it, and that Laibach make a globally valid link between the concert (and popular music in general) and totalitarianism, both literally and metaphorically. By locating terror and domination in the entertainment sphere, Laibach reveal the persistence of these qualities in contemporary life, whether in the raw forms of ethnic cleansing or the more refined oppressions of market-driven mass culture. Popular music is

one of the last mass forms able to override postmodern fragmentation, achieving homogenization or regimentation on a totalitarian scale inaccessible to contemporary European politicians. Laibach view Freddie Mercury as a highly successful politician able to command mass audiences. By exposing this totalitarian aspect, Laibach effect a postmodernizing archaicization of rock. The concerts demask and recapitulate a widespread penchant for or susceptibility to brutality, the persistence of (the desire for) Fascistic modes of identification and the decadent "state of the art" (commodification and personality cults). Yet inevitably Laibach's work is partly determined by the conventions of the form it works within and against, and it underlines the implausibility not merely of the rock industry as a socioeconomic institution but of Laibach itself as institution within this arena.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ROCK

Laibach concerts both critique and participate in the institution of the live rock industry. A Laibach show amounts to a forensic presentation of the bloated—and, to some, decadent—apparatus of live music, including aggressive merchandising and audience depersonalization. This level of simulation, however, is necessary for practical as well as conceptual reasons. Laibach may seem to represent the institutional antithesis of the typical rock group, but since it operates within the (alternative) rock arena, all the usual promotional paraphernalia are functionally as well as conceptually essential. Since 1992, Laibach audiences have been confronted by a merchandising stall. Transactions carried out here form an important symbolic aspect of the show. Laibach use audiences to produce their own effects. Audiences consume ideological-physical objects, subsidizing the operation and recapitulating the mechanics of the fan exploitation at the heart of rock. Laibach/NSK items such as stamps, ceramics, shoe-shine kits, NSK passport application documents, and literature are available as well as the more predictable T-shirts and posters. Profits from tour merchandising can far exceed those from record sales, and when these are produced by in-house designers the potential profits are even greater; however, since Laibach insist on expensive lighting and video techniques, merchandising serves only to subsidize tour expenses.[18]

The recapitulation of merchandising is an important aspect of the general critique of rock in Laibach's work. The extent of contemporary music merchandising approaches the territory of complete lifestyle design and "total lifestyle coordination," ultimately extending into branded furniture and even cars.[19] Laibach fans at least participate in a wider process by buying such items, recapitulating their own actions and the industry, but helping to spread Laibach/NSK symbolism. At one level, of course, all these items are mere products, yet the conceptual depth behind them makes them harder to dismiss as mere lifestyle accessories.

Since even at political conferences merchandise (T-shirts, badges) is available of exactly the same type as at rock concerts, and most artists' design philosophies re-

flect some sort of corporate band ideology or *Weltanschauung*, the selling of explicitly ideological artifacts in the context of a rock concert does not seem as bizarre as it might otherwise. What makes it possible is the common thread of fanaticism and the will to identification displayed by musical and political "fans"; Laibach finally erase the false distance between these categories.

Merchandising is a useful mode of symbolic display. Through wearing the items, a section of the audience visually homogenizes itself, further distributing the symbolism seen on stage. Laibach's equation of mass rock and totalitarian spectacles is validated by the willing, if generally uncritical, collaboration of the audience. An army of generic Queen fans filling a stadium, largely dressed in the band's own designs, is consumer society's visual analogue of a stadium full of identical brown-shirted political "fans." T-shirts enable the display of both allegiances and diverse, fragmented social and cultural identities beyond concerts. Even nonpolitical bands use stark imagery on T-shirts, often for added provocativeness, and these designs, at least since the punk era, reproduce some of the effects previously associated with political posters. Laibach again manifest what is already immanent, using explicit totalitarian-type symbolisms in their merchandise. Laibach shirts bear many images from or similar to the posters they are sold with, and the posters in turn directly refer to and incorporate actual totalitarian motifs. Laibach show how even political designs can become positively desirable commodities, albeit commodities that still retain some of their alienating power. The designs' sinister overtones can actually be a consciously perceived aspect of the items' desirability. The disintegration of previously rigid social sartorial codes to bare minima has made necessary the penchant for more uniform-like items as a kind of "return of the repressed," as the popularity of combat clothing and national symbolism on clothing suggests. The voluntary adoption of uniform could be seen as a plausible and honest form of the uniformity instinct, which now finds expression in the "uniform" of Western leisure wear, a type of "dictatorship of denim" whereby consumers freely insist on their own visual subjectivization through a now hegemonic type of casual clothing which has become anything but. Clothing also illustrates (tribal) allegiances to groups, and their associated mythologies or ideologies. The choice of Laibach/NSK items is (intended to be) much more starkly expressive of lifestyle preferences than in the case of generic clothing, especially when the music is labeled as alternative or somehow oppositional. Such allegiance signifiers have a direct continuity with the medieval practice of wearing insignia to demonstrate feudal (political) allegiances. Laibach shirts bear the generic Malevich-cog or NATO insignia, so that— exactly as at totalitarian rallies—(a section of) the audience are "in uniform," producing a visual counterpart to Laibach's performance of ideological *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) setting the scene for the event itself, and this is perhaps the most important—or at least dramatic—function of the merchandise, physically differentiating the most committed section of the audience from the rest.

As with any other band (or other institution that imprints its image onto a garment), these items continue to serve a promotional or consciousness-raising

purpose through their jarring high profile in a dissimilarly dressed crowd. In allowing the fans the option of transmitting Laibach symbolism in all sorts of unpredictable and bizarrely inappropriate contexts, they launch unguided semiotic devices into the general visual community, serving both promotional and symbolic purposes (the recapitulation of the very act of wearing such a garment).

Laibach audiences are a mixture of the preconverted plus sensation-seekers, artists, intellectuals, and more "political" individuals. A hard core of the audience are visibly or identifiably Laibach-oriented. Since the informal etiquette of the industrial genre demands that both bands and fans sport close-cropped hair with utilitarian or quasi-paramilitary clothing, the Laibach "look" partly reflects (the expectations of) its core audience. Like any other band, Laibach attract imitators. This is both inevitable and necessary for a detailed recapitulation of the whole rock industry. These fans are distinct in their imitation of Laibach's various visual styles. The zenith of the group's notoriety and success was during their most visually Germanic-totalitarian phase (roughly 1987–90), and the impression this made is revealed by the fact that even in the mid-1990s this style was imitated by audiences generally unaware of, or unconcerned by, the eclectic and contradictory sources of Laibach's image.

This hard core of the audience fall into two camps, both of which contain frivolous and deadly earnest members. To put it crudely, these are the ideological and the aesthetic. The latter are drawn by the image and the music, or their provocative and brutal qualities. The former—principally, but not exclusively, (preexistent) quasi-Nazis—are convinced that Laibach validate or approve of their beliefs. Both sets of fans share the conviction that their interpretation of and connection with the band or its work is both most valid and most intense. At Laibach's London concert in May 1992, there was an intense and potentially violent discussion between a group of left- and right-oriented Laibach fans which lasted for the duration of the show. The sowing of confusion and discord among the audience is indicative of the effects of Laibach's ideological and conceptual ambivalence—its apparent certainty creating doubt and multiple interpretations in the spectators.

ILLUMINATION: SETTING THE SCENE

Before Laibach take the stage, some form of introductory effect is used to build an atmosphere—for instance, the playing of some German *Schlager* songs or Strauss waltzes. In earlier times, however, far more elaborate and conceptual effects were used to prepare the audience for Laibach. One particularly alarming method was to play tapes of barking dogs or loud noise. The turning of powerful lights on the audience (a technique pioneered by Throbbing Gristle)[20] and the sounds created a threatening, interrogatory atmosphere intended to destabilize and excite the audience, instilling anticipation and a sense of approaching menace. At other shows Laibach were preceded by a uniformed figure chopping wood on stage. This had

archaic-*völkisch* associations, and perpetuated the NSK axe motif (from Heartfield and the NSK logo).[21]

From 1987 onward, many Slovene, German, and Austrian shows, as well as an infamous appearance in Belgrade in 1989, were preceded by a speech from the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy.[22] Frequently these referred specifically to relevant points of German or Slovene history, or to abstract concepts of state and deity.[23] They provide a conceptual context for the specific show, and are often tailored to the venue's specific history. This discourse (which echoes Laibach statements) may be over the heads of many, but the speeches have a disciplining as well as symbolic function, consciously confronting limited attention spans and testing patience, in contrast to the usual hedonistic "surrender to the beat." These oppressively relentless, paradox-laden speeches are themselves a type of sensory assault analogous to Laibach's, even without their provocative content. A typical example of the weight of this discourse comes from the speech given before the concert at the Slovene grammar school in Klagenfurt in March 1988:

> Slovene and German Youth!
> Blood is the drink of the usual Spirit in which we are all brothers. It is this universality of blood that reveals the all-encompassing presence of the ethical, which is the embrace of the Supreme One. He extirpates self-will from the blood and appoints it the shepherd of mutual surrender. The moral code is a guardian sent by the Supreme One to protect man's existence, and prevent it from sliding into the abyss of his hatred. This is what determines nations in their universal being.[24]

Just as Hitler or Stalin was preceded by warm-up speeches from trusted lieutenants, so Laibach were preceded by the Department, heightening still further the association between a Laibach concert and a totalitarian rally. Laibach's orchestration of the masses proceeds from the realization that contemporary music and its allied visual forms (video) are now the most effective agents of mass communication and sensory overload. The success of primarily speech-based demagoguery such as that of Milošević suggests, however, that even if its contemporary forms are assisted by music, video, and choreography, the supposedly diminished attention spans of what Laibach have termed the "first TV generation" are still highly susceptible to old-style declamation. Since Laibach have never shrunk from intensity, it makes all the more sense to employ older forms of persuasion and indoctrination to complement more technological methods of sensory assault.

Besides the Laibach speeches, Mlakar has staged several spectacular actions in collaboration with Irwin or independently, all sharing and extending to other contexts the bombastic characteristics of Laibach performances. Besides the *NSK Territory Suhl*, these include Mlakar's performance at the 1997 "Virtual World Orchestra" event in Glasgow, at which he made a speech on the defeat of evil from the top of an industrial lift platform after taking confessions from the public.

THE STAGE

At their most ambitious, Laibach concerts represent a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, monumental spectacle on a totalitarian scale. The stage is usually flanked by two black floor-to-ceiling banners bearing Laibach's cog symbol.[25] Visuals are displayed on screen to the rear of the stage. The Laibach/Heartfield axe-swastika was often already projected onto the screen before the show began, focusing attention on a central point through the starkest possible image.

A pair of antlers was often placed in front of the vocalist's microphone. Antlers as a stage decoration can look absurd, but also highly menacing. As an archetypal signifier, they heighten the sense of ritual and irrationality surrounding the performance. Antlers are traditional symbols of fertility and fecundity, and equally of supernatural power.[26] In a 1987 interview, Laibach stated: "They personify the striving for purity, sublimity, and ennoblement, uniting eternity with power, dignity with courage, and love with death."[27] In this context, antlers are potent mythical elements of great symbolic power, and their archaic, primeval status also suggests the archetypal roots of totalitarian rallies and rock. Antlers are a symbolic focus for the primal responses produced by Laibach's performance: terror, fascination, and attraction. Besides their pagan/archetypal associations, their role as hunting trophies symbolizes Laibach's (ab)use of reactionary, feudal symbolisms traditionally associated with ancestral order and continuity rather than artistic and political provocation.

Through such tactics Laibach render the contemporary archaic or the archetypal contemporary. This archaicizing strategy undermines rock's public image of modernity. The deliberate introduction of archetypal elements was actually a symptomatic parallel of the state of the art. The generic repetition of all the conventions of what was originally (presented as) a rebellious form of entertainment has acquired the status of fetishistic ritual that affirms rather than undermines order. The ceremonial atmosphere of Laibach's shows reveals the already archaic status of rock cliché and its underlying barbarism, illustrating direct continuity with both political and traditional ritual.

ROCK AUTOMATA

> It's not a difficult thing to jump up and down on stage, or give yourself a cut, or jump in the audience. It may be harder, as we do, just to stand still.[28]

Laibach's movements on stage are mostly cold, robotic, and relatively slow. The static remorselessness of the music and performers seems to fossilize rock conventions. The vocalist generally remains static and physically impassive. Normally the vocalist is a band's most mobile and animated performer, yet Laibach's makes only relatively slow, exaggeratedly theatrical gestures, such as a paternal sweep of the

arm or a clenched fist. These gestures resemble the quasi-dictatorial gestures of
Freddie Mercury. This solemnity contrasts with the frenzied movements of dema-
gogues such as Hitler, and is closer to the movements of Kraftwerk, Gilbert and
George, and Joy Division's Ian Curtis. The vocalist rarely reacts either to the vio-
lence of the music or to the audience, short-circuiting the feedback of audience-
band response. He seems to defy anyone to display more emotion than he does
himself, while at the same time he is the focal point of a performance that delib-
erately whips up the audience. At his most severe he could be seen as embodying
prohibition, or even as an overdramatized manifestation of a collective superego.
In instrumental passages he simply stands motionless, looking straight ahead, in-
different even to the other performers, violently challenging all preconceptions of
a rock performance, stripped of all expressiveness. The entire "classic" mode of
rock performance is subjected to demonic parody. Rather than a charismatic "rock
God" onto whom to project their fantasies, audiences are confronted by a cold In-
quisitor figure embodying calm at the eye of a storm.

The two drummers to either side act as depersonalized automata. Their dead-
pan robotic actions suggest lobotomized Nazi recruits rather than rock drummers
thrashing under the weight of their own egos. The male drummers were often
bare-chested, wearing traditional breeches and boots.[29] Whether "playing" (the
sounds are often openly mimed) trumpets or hunting horns or beating military
drums, they stare straight ahead at all times with rigid posture and (fanatically)
emotionless expressions, absolutely indifferent to the audience. Their actions are
absolutely mechanical and synchronized, suggesting highly drilled military drum-
mers apparently incapable of independent thought or gesture. The relentless, rep-
etitious movements create a fascinating militant spectacle, combining with the
force of the sound and the other elements to create an atmosphere of intimidation
and dynamic energy. Sometimes strobe lights are used to produce a distorted vi-
sual effect, accentuating the violence of the drummers' actions.[30]

The pretence, absurdism, and militant impassivity displayed by these rock au-
tomata combine choreographed totalitarian euphoria with the hedonistic frenzy
of a rock audience, each as the "hidden reverse" of the other. At a Nuremberg-type
rally, the only hysteria was displayed by the speaker, especially Hitler; the audi-
ence's euphoria was strictly regimented. At a Laibach show, such (limited) hyste-
ria as there is belongs to the audience; Laibach's impassivity deflects the audience's
enthusiasm back onto them. The audience are symbolically disciplined—simulta-
neously repressed and agitated.

THE SHOW

Our appearance has a *purifying* (EXORCISM!) and *regenerative* (HONEY AND GOLD)[31]
function. With a mystical erotic audiovisual constitution of the ambivalence of
fear and fascination (which acts on the consciousness in a primeval way), with a rit-
ualized demonstration of political force, and with other manipulative approaches,

> LAIBACH practices sound/force in the form of a systematic (psychophysical) terror as therapy and as principle of social organization.[32]

Sensory assault, primarily in the form of terrifying noise or audiovisual disorientation, is the primary feature of Laibach concerts, and of several NSK drama productions. However, the assault operates on many levels, and its brutality does not preclude but is heightened by its subtlety. Given the law of diminishing returns, audiences are now accustomed to and have even come to expect effects such as strobes, especially with industrial or techno music. Used aggressively, however, these retain an irreducibly brutal essence, for which no amount of exposure can wholly prepare an audience.

From the outset of a Laibach show, a complex and perplexing series of visuals unfolds on the central screen. While they contain thematic correlations with the music, they are also deliberately ambiguous, at least for Western audiences unfamiliar with the original propaganda films or national images. The obscurity of some images, and the sheer exertion required to make any sense of the sequence, splits the viewers into two factions. One will simply accept and enjoy: a Western (but non-German) audience treating Slovene Partisan images of atrocities, or film of Aryan-looking gymnasts, as simply so much Eastern/totalitarian exotica. Others scramble to identify or make sense of each image, hoping to discover some logical coherence. Either reaction is predictable, and both heighten the atmosphere. Both types are likely to want further exposure to the images, either for pleasure or for deciphering, captivated either by their fascination or by their enjoyment. The juxtapositions produced by images of the Slovene Alps combined with political rallies (opposing the natural to the political) help to overwhelm the senses. In the early 1980s Laibach gained access to the then neglected Slovene film archive, and were able to borrow many obscure wartime images, including a sequence of animated black-and-white woodcuts of wartime atrocities and Partisan footage. They show scenes including a Partisan ambush, a sinister caricature of a priest, and German atrocities and torture. They are crude and violent propaganda images of the type the state used to strengthen the mythology surrounding the resistance. At early Yugoslav shows such as the Zagreb Biennale, 70mm propaganda films were projected onto the stage, sometimes provocatively combined with porn clips. The stark black-and-white tones and the size of the images added an impressive "touch of evil,"[33] creating a fascinating monumental spectacle from limited resources.

While it might be shocking to see them in such a provocative context, Yugoslav audiences were reared on a diet of such images, and would read a deeper set of meanings into them than Western audiences. For the majority of foreign audiences, who could only speculate about their meaning, these images are simply another aspect of the brutalization process, and might be perceived as a glorification of brutality. In presenting such material to German and Austrian audiences, Lai-

7.4 Laibach concert, 1990.

bach exposed a whole new dynamic. The symbolic implications of a Slovene band with a taboo German name presenting images of Nazi atrocities as part of a highly Germanic and imperious performance using many totalitarian elements are vast. While they appear to be examples—if not advocates—of Germanic totalitarianism, they present graphic examples of Slovene suffering at the hands of such forces. The dynamic of a Slovene group touring Germany confronting audiences with such images, and using the type of arrogance postwar Germans were conditioned out of, is one of the most significant of any revealed through Laibach's work, indicating the complexity of their operations and the contextual subtlety behind what at first sight could seem like a gratuitous celebration of force and ritual.

The shows are not simply amplified repetitions of Laibach's music and images in a live context. Laibach's recordings are already inherently theatrical (melodramatic and bombastic), but the group adds specific new elements for the shows. All the inherent characteristics of the offstage work (brutality, euphoria, fear, devotion, mystery, etc.) are combined with specific live features to produce a distinct form that is not merely supplementary, but an integral element of Laibach's work. Live Laibach recordings can reveal significant differences in the arrangements of pieces compared to studio versions, which is not always the case with electronic/industrial bands. Some live recordings have a much rawer, "rock-and-roll" feel than the originals. A live rhythm section provides clichéd "rock-and-roll" elements such as guitar and bass solos, in contrast to the rigidly controlled basis of the sound. Although they are limited, these variations are a source of partial

disorientation that works against their easy assimilation even by those who are already familiar with the originals. Probably the most complex performances were those of the "Kapital" tour. The album exists in three versions, with different mixes and tracks, and these differences were accentuated, producing a fourth, live, version of the album. This represented a temporary return to the more avant-garde, experimental performances of the early to mid-1980s. It would have been very easy, after the success of *Opus Dei* and *Let It Be*, to play safe, and simply present a "greatest hits" package. Even on more recent tours, however, Laibach have tried to retain an element of the unexpected, even if the differences are less spectacular than they once were. Challenging even the core fan base reduces the audience's conceptual autonomy to the minimum—those who cannot or will not unquestioningly submit to the whole partly ludicrous spectacle have to occupy the painful position of accepting unresolved paradoxes, and either reconcile these with their appreciation or lose their enjoyment by rejecting the show per se.

VIOLENCE IS A BRUTAL NECESSITY TO WHICH WE HAVE SUBMITTED . . .

In Yugoslavia, only force and discipline could forge a Laibach audience; elsewhere, it was sometimes force itself that persuaded people voluntarily to discipline themselves sufficiently to accept what they were presented with. The Yugoslav shows and those abroad had the same content, but the content could be more acceptable to foreign audiences unfamiliar with the specific resonances of the material. The preexisting popularity of punk and other extreme music abroad showed that if Yugoslav audiences had to be disciplined in order not to reject the signals, much of the Western core audience needed to be exposed to a disciplining performance in order to win their aesthetic respect.

Particularly in the West—but also in Eastern bloc industrial areas such as Budapest[34] and Bratislava—there was a preformed constituency for the industrially derived provocations of Laibach. Audiences that already had a taste for extremity responded *because of* the force applied. For these audiences, the more extreme Laibach were, the better, and it would have been easy for the group to continue to operate in this mode. In fact, however, Laibach's work includes a continued interrogation and provocation even of the audiences it has already won over. Converts and doubters are both challenged at Laibach concerts, and the responses of both are integral to the overall effect. When Laibach emerged, the use of extreme volume and electronic noise was still shocking. However, massive amplification of live performances is now expected and demanded, even in the field of classical music. The massive force of the music itself is Laibach's primary weapon, and their volume and music are no longer the most extreme. Laibach practice sensory assault, but they are not actually interested in reducing an audience to blind panic or complete witlessness; they aim for an ambivalent but still conscious mixture of fear and fascination. Laibach's brutalization rhetoric is (slightly) more extreme than the

live reality. Audiences were not to be so brutalized as to be unable to consider even the starkest primary symbolism. For all their adeptness at psychological manipulation, it is likely that Laibach would not be able to achieve such a state in an audience and remain unaffected. Laibach's brutalization techniques were bound to yield diminishing returns, since as well as being its recapitulation, their sensory assaults were a part of this same contemporary process of desensitization whereby ever more brutal audiovisual effects are required not merely to dominate an audience but for them to derive any enjoyment at all. Early recordings by Laibach, or contemporaries such as Throbbing Gristle or Einstürzende Neubauten, sound no less brutal than they originally were; they have since been far surpassed in their brutality, however, by some of the effects used in techno, industrial, and noise music. As tastes follow and spur these developments, the sonic oppressor has to devise ever more "cruel and unusual punishments" to satisfy consumer demand. What is recapitulated in Laibach's shows is not merely what they characterize as the decadent state of the rock genre, but the social states which drive this institution.

The conservative Croatian-American sociologist Stjepan Meštrović has argued that "the hyper-visual postmodern human tolerates an incredible amount of noise, and thereby betrays his or her latent barbarism."[35] The use of noise in Laibach's work reflects generalized social and cultural violence inflicted by the mass media and music industries. Laibach manipulate and perform such systemic violence or "regime noise" against audiences and regimes alike, with a ferocity approaching the intensity of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT):

> LAIBACH practices sound/force in the form of a systematic (psychophysical) terror as therapy and as the principle of social organization.
> Purpose: to provoke maximum collective emotions and release the automatic response of masses;
> Consequence: the effective disciplining of the revolted and alienated audience; awakening the feeling of total belonging and commitment to the Higher Order;
> Result: by obscuring his intellect, the consumer is reduced to a state of humble remorse, which is a state of *collective aphasia*, which is in turn the principle of social organization.[36]

This statement encapsulates all the basic techniques and effects Laibach utilize: a disciplining-transfixing sensory assault. The presence of this conceptualization of violence is apparent in all aspects of the show. The "classical" totalitarian phase of Laibach's work laid especial emphasis upon relentlessness, brutality, and noncommunicativity, yet (albeit to a lesser extent) simultaneously stressed the positive side of these (quasi-) scientific terror tactics, which the group always distanced from what they termed more nihilistic approaches.

Laibach's shows were perceived as especially violent because of the inherent brutality of the music and imagery rather than excessive volume in itself, which is a much easier option. Yet many more conventional groups treat their fans in a far

more brutal fashion (in both sensory and ethical terms), through the amplification of weak music to painful levels, or through extortionate exploitation of their gullibility where merchandise is concerned. Laibach escape the ever-increasing spiraling of consumers' "appetite for destruction" by taking great pains to ensure that they disorient or brutalize their public in undesired or unexpected ways, never relying solely on predictable sensory-assault tactics and incongruous or even ridiculous disorienting elements. This seems designed to prevent unproblematic enjoyment even for "hardcore" fans, perhaps in the same way that a sadist has to keep a masochist in anticipation of unexpected torments to truly satisfy him. These unexpected alienating devices are then combined with more familiar ones to produce the particular type of alienation known to Laibach audiences. If we look at performance rather than the accompanying devices, the "function" of the Laibach audience becomes apparent.

The combination of martial rhythms, harsh lighting effects, and provocative imagery is intended to homogenize and depersonalize audiences, illustrating and using processes of physical and conceptual manipulation. Just as Laibach make no attempt to conceal the mimed elements of the performance, there is no attempt to deny or conceal the methods of manipulation. At early shows Laibach even played taped applause to heighten the atmosphere.

Even at moments that rely on slick, contemporary techniques (digital sound effects, video graphics, etc.), the show retains archaic-ritualistic traces that (deliberately) suggest some exotic *völkisch* ritual, especially to Western audiences unfamiliar with national symbolism. While it is seemingly incongruous, this very archaicism is another similarity between Laibach and the rest of the "rock world." Laibach suggest that if it was not always-already so (in its manipulation of primal instincts and tribal rhythms), rock (as a genre) is now unquestionably archaic. Some groups, such as U2, now attempt to transcend the form's perceived limitations by using the latest video technology and employing dance-music producers to give their music a more contemporary feel, but this is rarely wholly convincing. Stadium rock began to seem dated or even degenerate as early as the mid-1970s, when it became one of punk's main targets. While rock remains successful, to outsiders it can appear extremely "retro" and strictly formulaic. The massively increased popularity of dance music since 1988 has completely alienated (or symbolizes a preexisting alienation of) many people from rock, or even the song per se. Yet even as they dramatize this, Laibach are, as ever, celebrating as well as criticizing.

ABSURDITY AND PROVOCATION

> Laibach manage to be both oppressive and hilarious at the same time. The obligatory fascist contingent (sic) are *sieg heiling* away in the audience. They can still take their pathetic actions seriously when Laibach don Viking helmets, complete with stick-on long blond hair.[37]

Laibach's authority over its audience persists not despite but because of the almost ludicrous elements. The militant performance and the audience's predictable desire or need for it to be "for real" ideologically as well as aesthetically obscures the vein of absurdism in Laibach. Like violence, this quality is most strongly (albeit less visibly) present live. Deliberately absurd or incongruous elements help to disorient or perplex even the most devoted audience, but they can also be used as decoders. Awareness of these elements allows observers to process and follow their consequences and possible meanings. They prevent too literal a materialization of violence and fanaticism, lightening the oppressive weight of the spectacle, providing the possibility of an understanding beyond the show, suggesting the deceptiveness of appearances, even at moments when there appears to be no possible room for doubt.

Laibach make a spectacle of themselves by appearing to exercise quasi-military discipline. This impassive self-control, maintained even in the face of audience violence or derision, supports, together with sensory assault, the crowd control necessary for acceptance of the spectacle. Laibach's use of absurd elements is also a test of its own power and a demonstration of the possibility of preempting and controlling thoughts that could cause loss of "faith" in the spectacle. If the illusion can be maintained even when it is tested *ad absurdum*, its grip is strong. Laibach's forbidding stance, plus the ludicrous elements, are a simultaneous incitement to and deterrent of laughter as a demonstration of "crowd control" techniques. As Adorno pointed out, Fascist rallies contain a structurally ludicrous element, and NSK actions operate on a similar basis, on the verge of collapsing into their own contradictions. "It is probably the suspicion of the fictitiousness of their own 'group psychology' which makes Fascist crowds so merciless and unapproachable. *If they would stop to reason for a second, the whole performance would go to pieces and they would be left to panic.*"[38]

To prevent any reasoning which might emerge and seem to expose the preposterousness of the spectacle in contemporary audiences (theoretically) more sceptical than Nazi- or Stalinist-era crowds, sensory assault is necessary, but as I have said, the assault is partly designed not to enslave but to satisfy the audience's expectations, and to win or maintain their affection. Laibach communicate an air of unspecified threat, yet they constantly push their audiences' respect thresholds to the limit. They deliberately undermine their own gravitas, yet defy anyone to take them any the less seriously, even at the heights of preposterousness. Again, the motive for this apparently destructive but actually consolidating tactic has totalitarian antecedents. In the most advanced totalitarian stages of Stalinism, or in Orwell's 1984, the regime displays a perverse desire to undermine its own credibility in order to enhance its subjects' respect. The casting in iron as official dogma concepts as artificial as Lysenko's bizarre biological theories, or "Blackwhite" in 1984, actually only undermines the credibility of a regime or its dogma in the eyes of outsiders (non-initiates) or an already (immanently) alienated minority. However, the

vast majority of existing converts-subjects will probably have their faith deepened by these effects, because of a perverse tendency to respect institutions or individuals who are sufficiently self-assured to ignore contradiction, and able vehemently to claim the ludicrous as the height of rationality. Powers that are able to manipulate such paradoxes and turn them to their advantage produce a sense of awe strong enough to further disempower their subjects by perpetuating the impression that they would be helpless without the regime to take care of such complexities. This is not a flawless technique, since even when it is assisted by comprehensive terror or sensory assault, there always comes a point when the subjects can no longer deceive themselves, or reality intervenes: the stage at which Orwell described the necessity of Doublethink. Yet while it works, the additional respect it generates only adds to the monumental "front" of self-confidence necessary to carry off such (il)logical sleights of hand. This can also be read as a perverse display of the obscene enjoyment of a power so absolute that it is able to redefine rationality, and celebrate its own preposterousness as proof of its plausibility. Laibach's deliberate testing of their audience can be seen as a similar display of power based on totalitarian techniques, and as evidence of their confidence in an audience's capacity for voluntary self-repression.

FACE TO FACE

> Our Authority is that of the People
> —Laibach, *Država*

> Queen show how the concert is really a political event. The band controls a large number of people and has them behaving according to their vision.[39]

Laibach's solemn rigidity on stage is in violent contrast to the frenzy of their music. This contrast initially disorients and then beguiles audiences who are used to excessively theatrical performances, whether from Queen or Einstürzende Neubauten. Audiences are forced to compensate for this lack of animation, and respond with hostility, confusion, nervous laughter, or increased enthusiasm. The audience's compensatory response suggests that Laibach's impassivity is somehow an implicit rebuke, as well as a stimulus for the audience to display greater animation. The infamous picture of first Laibach vocalist Tomaž Hostnik's brutally impassive face framed by his uniform cap, with blood running from a fresh wound, embodies Laibach's militant coldness in relation to its audience. Only on the 2003 "WAT" tour was this stance slightly relaxed. Audience members who seek to identify with what they believe to be the message, typically by saluting, themselves become part of the recapitulation of mass-control techniques, and the popular desire to submerge individuality within a organized crowd. Laibach argue that even overtly Fascistic displays by an audience (typically saluting) add symbolic weight to the performance. Adorno's comments about Fascist crowds suggests the way in

which the audience are forced by default to "perform their own enthusiasm," heightening the similarities between concert and rally: "They do not really identify themselves with him [the leader], but act their identification, perform their own enthusiasm, and thus participate in their leader's performance. It is through this performance that they strike a balance between their continuously mobilized instinctual urges and the historical stage of enlightenment they have reached, and which cannot be revoked arbitrarily."[40]

As Laibach have argued, a real effort of self-control is necessary if one is not to "surrender to the beat," and indulge in gestures that approximate the fury of the music. Laibach's fixedness represents a kind of inversion of the mythical episode of Odysseus and the Sirens. The Sirens (Laibach) "sing" in a repulsive (yet equally seductive) manner, yet it seems as if they are the ones who have been bound, to ensure that they do not make the fatal approach to the source of the sound, while the audience are seduced by the sound's very repulsiveness. The audience retain total freedom of movement, but are therefore far more tightly bound than the Sirens, since while they believe that they choose to remain, the sound has actually compelled them to make this "choice." While all the visible enjoyment seems to belong to the audience, it is possible that their reactions represent transference of the obscene enjoyment Laibach may be deriving behind their impassive mask, so that it is an open question whose role is the more difficult.

> The Laibach audience is any audience which accepts the extreme position of contemporary (post)-industrial production. Identification with our position is possible by means of the intellect or the intuition in a schizophrenic subject, who is, in the process of degeneration, totally alienated from society (mobilization of unstable individuals).
> The audience can *add to our demonstration the everyday practice of politicizing*, the desire for knowledge and the dimension of satisfaction.[41]

Laibach's positive description of the response they received from an audience largely composed of skinheads in eastern Germany in 1993[42] suggests that while they would not appreciate "stage diving" or similar audience antics, neither do they want them to stand back coolly. Laibach can appreciate the value of a response that mirrors their own performance—frenetic yet absolutely controlled or, especially in the case of the skinheads, drilled. German Fascist groups have attempted to interpellate Laibach as one of their own, but have also attacked the group. Laibach's appreciation was a comment on the skinheads' unconscious demonstrative effect. As Adorno suggests, even the most unreflective skinheads ("unstable individuals") live at a level of enlightenment sufficient to suggest to them that there may be something ridiculous about identifying with a man singing trashy pop songs as if they were masterpieces of Wagnerian opera, while wearing gold face paint and surrounded by antlers. The same suspicion may be generated by the spectacle as a whole, although this is not to suggest that it is ludicrous per se, or that

these elements predominate, simply to reiterate that intentionally ludicrous effects help to structure and regulate the entire recapitulative performance. This suspicion is driven out through performative overcompensation; if Laibach will not act out euphoric enthusiasm in performing their own music, the audience will (have to) do it for them or otherwise take the other option, also predicted and engineered, of consciously trying to decode the spectacle on a rational basis, or simply standing in nervous or shocked bemusement. Those who decide on this do so not only for the reasons Adorno states, but in order to avoid the sneaking feeling that in their own performance response they themselves are being manipulated in that they are acting exactly according to plan. The talent Fascist crowds have for "performing their own enthusiasm" is what makes them so appropriate to Laibach's demonstration of the factors linking the uncritical mass enthusiasm of political and rock audiences.

The enthusiasm generated is empty in that it whips up the crowd to fever pitch only in order to demonstrate the potential: Laibach seek applause and recognition not as ends in themselves, but as an intrinsic aspect of their "demonstration." The closest to a cause that is provided for an audience to identify with is the NSK State; this, however, is so abstracted and paradox-laden that its literal substance is determined primarily by each individual's subjective projections, or investments in it. This ambiguity prevents any homogenization or unification of the audience around a cause, since no clear "Party line" is provided, and after the show the audience again disperse into more or less isolated individuals or small groups. Adorno claims that the very atomized or fragmented nature of contemporary individuals renders them ideal candidates for ersatz unification by Fascistic (or totalitarian) manipulation, and his description of "de-individualized social atoms"[43] as the ideal raw material of Fascistic mobilization is perhaps even truer of fragmented postmodern conditions, so that even where there is no clear agenda, people may now be more susceptible to bogus group identification.

The dispersal of the audience before and after the show, and the (demonstration of) the attempt at the inhibition of critical thinking via sensory assault, prevent the audience forming any common interpretation that could conflict with Laibach's own (lack of) exposition. For all the brutality of the spectacle, it may be that this withholding is actually the final brutality inflicted on the audience. Noise, light, and aggression are part of what (the) people actually want, so that in themselves these are never entirely unpleasant, at least for a section of the audience. However, the fact that this "mobilization" of the will and the senses is not consummated by any climactic disclosure or explanation is actually the most brutal psychic effect, in that it frustrates the desire for identification (union), having deliberately overinflamed it. So the provision of all the paraphernalia of identification—posters, badges, and clothing—can also be seen as a necessary compensation and preparation for the shock caused by the realization of identification with a spectral entity. Laibach's *WAT* declares: "We shall give you nothing, and in return

we'll take even less, but when our beat stops, and the lights go out, and when we leave this place, you will be left here all alone, with a static scream locked on your face."

If it is possible for a vacuum to be personified, Laibach's vocalist achieves this, since as the focal point of audience emotions, and the only apparent charismatic presence, it is upon him that questions and projections are placed. However, his impassive but severe surveillance of the audience deflects the desires of those constantly searching for a leader/star who is absent, replaced by a vacuum instead of a new certainty. His gestures are appropriately leaderly and certainly convincing, but although almost certainly some of those present are itching to obey whatever orders he might choose to give, the only purpose of the establishment of what might seem like "his" regime over the audience is to prepare them for the realization that he is a cipher, a symbolic authority figure who can therefore never be placated even by obedience. The audience are at once incited to act and shown that there is no correct action beyond cooperation with the incitement itself, and no conduct that could bring reward or remission.

Instead, there is only a demonstration of Orwellian power for power's sake, and of how easily supposedly rational or cosmopolitan individuals can be resubordinated by the activation of archaic drives. Ultimately, all that can be identified with are the aesthetic elements (in the same way that someone "identifies with" [apparently] nonideological music), or the process of identification itself. Paradoxically, the gaping, abyssal ambiguity at the heart of the spectacle often serves only to increase the need for blind identification, so that the subject searches all the harder and identifies more fervently with the fantasized ultimate meaning (s)he has constructed, since surely all this effort on the part of both band and audience cannot be ideologically "in vain." An act of conscious resubmission to the "empty" spectacle is perhaps less painful than the admission that one has been emptily— if pleasurably—mobilized. The most brutal truth revealed—though also obscured—by Laibach is that if the effort has been directed solely toward identification, then it has been an empty exercise, devoid of the ultimate ideological purpose it strives so hard to suggest—or, as Žižek summed it up: "Laibach itself *does not function as an answer but as a question.*"[44]

APOLOGIJA LAIBACH

> Make people believe. The entire history of tonal music, like that of classical politi-
> cal economy, amounts to an attempt to make people believe in a consensual repre-
> sentation of the world. . . . In order to stamp upon the spectators the image of the
> ultimate social cohesion, achieved through commercial exchange and the progress
> of rational knowledge.[1]

Many commentators, even music critics, have failed to discuss the importance of
Laibach's work in music, preferring to concentrate on its historical, visual, and ide-
ological aspects, and overlooking the fact that Laibach's techniques and effects are
most intensely present in the music. Laibach remains much more than a music
group, and the processes visible elsewhere in its work (the attempt to transcend a
series of regimes via their "demasking and recapitulation") are audible in the use
of arrangements, lyrics, and instrumentation. Laibach have produced ideological
tone pictures of a series of regimes, rendering audible the presence of the state in
the sphere of music and vice versa, denying in advance the possibility of politically
neutral music (of any genre).

Laibach's approach to popular music parallels Jacques Attali's work, which pre-
sents music as prophetic of changes in political orders and a reflection of political
systems. Attali and Laibach share the same basic thesis: that music (as a reflection
of political power) can function as a regime in itself. Laibach "sample" Attali's book
Noise, as they do so many other theorists and politicians. Besides being a theoreti-
cal influence on Laibach's stance, Attali's sono-ideological paradigms are also very
useful in assessing Laibach's work in sound. Both identify pop culture as a site of
micro- and macro-political struggle, and seek to illuminate hidden links between
music and power.

Laibach constitute a conceptual unit working in various media rather than
simply a "group," but they emphasize music as the most powerful medium through
which to communicate their responses to a series of political, historical, and aes-
thetic ideologies. Laibach's music conjures up and renders audible a series of power
mechanisms that (as Attali argues) find expression in music. Music, as an abstract
force, is particularly well suited to the materialization or unmaking of pervasive but
nonlocalizable ideologies. Laibach attempt to transcend these by materializing them
in sonic form, confronting them with their own systemic "noise" (contradictions
and discontinuities). Laibach's music can be decoded as the "noise" of returning
history, and has manifested and predicted political change since 1980.

Western theoretical works were widely available in Yugoslavia, both in the orig-
inal and (surprisingly quickly) in translation, so Attali's presence is not surprising.
What is less immediately clear is why a group so influenced by his work emerged
from Yugoslavia, and why it was so resonant there. Its relevance becomes clear
when the role of popular music in Yugoslavia is examined.

ROCK IN YUGOSLAVIA

The Yugoslav music scene was as distinctive as the political system that tolerated and sponsored it. As Ramet has argued, both Laibach and the context from which it emerged challenge Western preconceptions about the status of popular music under socialism.[2] Journalistic accounts of phenomena such as Czechoslovakia's "Velvet Revolution" and the role played by figures such as Frank Zappa have created the popular image of a zero-sum game in which the state was the source of all oppression, and rock music a "pure" expression of the desire for freedom. However, the situation in Yugoslavia (and, to a lesser extent, Hungary and even East Germany) was a positive-sum game in which all but the most extreme music was tolerated, and to some extent assimilated by the system.[3] Besides oppositional rock and commercial music, Slovenia produced the so-called "state rock" genre,[4] in which Laibach and punk groups such as O! Kult incorporated state imagery into their work. As a product of the Yugoslav context, and in terms of its tactics for working within the music industry, Laibach challenge binary narratives that claim popular music as the site of a simple struggle for the victory and implementation of Western modes of freedom.

The Yugoslav authorities were tolerant of popular music[5] partly in order to differentiate the "progressive" Yugoslav regime from the overt cultural Stalinism of its Eastern neighbors. There was heavy policing of controversial concerts in Yugoslavia, and "difficult" groups sometimes found it hard (though rarely impossible) to gain contracts. However, not only was there no sustained ideological *Kulturkampf* against rock as such (only its "unacceptable" variants), it even came to be seen as a useful transmitter of Yugoslav ideology.

Attali argues that "Music, the quintessential mass activity, like the crowd is simultaneously a threat and a necessary source of legitimacy; trying to channel it is a risk that every system of power must run."[6] At an early stage, Tito and his ideologist Kardelj decided not to treat rock as a dissident form, and there was far less overt censorship[7] of popular music in Yugoslavia than in the Eastern bloc. Ramet highlights a sycophantic pro-state trend within the music scene, a "rash of panegyric rock ballads"[8] praising Tito and self-management, particularly in the late 1960s.[9] Ramet explains this as gratitude for official tolerance. The policy of the system itself set a precedent that fused popular music and state ideology, a practice Laibach adopted to examine the system and pop culture generally. Punk's critique of popular music as a generator of conformity had a particularly disruptive impact in Slovenia (and to a lesser extent elsewhere in Yugoslavia), because of the extent to which popular music acquiesced in or supported the status quo.

Unlike the increasingly apocalyptic political and economic situation in Britain,[10] the surface stability of late-1970s Slovenia was a less obvious breeding ground for punk. Yet relative stability and prosperity was experienced as oppressively safe and dull by the younger generation. In 1972–73 there was a purge of liberal elements in culture, the media, academia, and the Party. Superficial economic

prosperity was coupled with pervasive cultural caution and self-censorship, plus the continued threat of repression.[11] Ominous systemic and political tensions surfaced whenever musicians departed from mainstream pop and rock formulas, and began to ask wider questions.

According to Tomc, the status of popular music in 1970s Slovenia was ambiguous. On the one hand, domestic labels such as Jugoton profited through licensing popular Western albums for domestic release, and the number of new discos was increasing. The neoconservative period after the purges, however, also saw the imposition of draconian restrictions on all but the most mainstream domestic rock groups. Police dogs, alcohol bans, plain-clothes officers, and strict curfews became regular features of concerts by local bands.[12] Laibach later reproduced this oppressive atmosphere in their live performances. The severe treatment of Laibach audiences was reminiscent as much of police actions as of avant-garde shock tactics. Glaring spotlights trained on the crowd, and the taped sound of barking dogs, evoked the semi-criminalization of Slovene rock in the 1970s, preempting and recapitulating repressive action against Laibach performances. Another factor in Laibach's totalitarian role is clear from the comments of their manager, Igor Vidmar, who observed in June 1987: "In every situation where there are new ideas coming forward, the regime tries to associate them with fascism—which is a totally psychotic reaction. It is the response of dinosaurs."[13]

Since any new domestic rock product that went beyond the bounds of sociomusical convention ran the risk of being labeled "Fascist," an extreme group such as Laibach had nothing to lose: "All art is subject to political manipulation, except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation."[14]

Through a "voluntary acceptance of the role of ideology,"[15] Laibach manipulated and provoked the mentality that equated innovation with Fascism by including Fascist elements that seemed to "prove" that the group *really was* Fascist, while also manipulating Slovene folk and socialist symbolism.

Perversely, the demonization and semicriminalization of nonmainstream domestic groups was accompanied by an increasing penetration of the Slovene public sphere by mainstream Western rock culture. Mainstream Western rock remained within the (repressive) tolerance zone, giving it even greater dominance in relation to domestic product. This superficially tolerant policy created a radical imbalance that worked against the production of autonomous local forms of popular culture. Since the initial, relatively short-lived, postwar efforts by the youth leadership to mount an ideological critique of jazz (then the dominant Western popular form) there had been no serious theoretical challenge to the dominance and increasingly uncritical reception of mainstream Western popular music. After Yugoslavia's break with Stalin, there was an active official suspicion of Soviet bloc cultural imports, combined with an increasing openness to Western popular culture.[16] There were limited polemics against rock,[17] but these were largely ignored, particularly by the increasingly adventurous ZSMS leadership. Serious attempts to restrict the form were directed against local groups singing in Slovene, not against

imports. Such groups were treated as being more threatening than all but the most extreme forms of Western rock. Mainstream Western music was useful in maintaining a tolerant image, and legitimizing what amounted to a "bread and circuses" policy by the Yugoslav leadership, which bought acquiescence through (controlled) consumerism and mass entertainment. Local alternatives to this policy were inevitably disruptive and unwelcome. The advent of punk would prove that close identification between the mainstream consumerist consensus and the system provokes political as well as stylistic challenges. What also became apparent was that the only Slovene bands likely to make a serious impact (even within the home market) would be those either innovative or forceful enough to shatter the consensus.

PUNK POD SLOVENCI (PUNK UNDER THE SLOVENES)

By the time news of punk began to spread across Europe from Britain, the Yugoslav borders had already been open for twelve years. Travel and trade across the Italian and Austrian borders was straightforward, and direct access to Western European media and products was no novelty. Given Slovenia's location, and the oppressive atmosphere experienced by some of its musicians, it is not surprising that it was in Slovenia that punk first penetrated noncapitalist Europe. With the established alternative music infrastructure of Radio Študent in place, and little difficulty in importing music, there was a ready-made means of transmitting these new musical viruses, and a small but highly visible youth/student audience predisposed toward and familiar with radical musical and cultural innovation.[18]

The oppressive calm of everyday life in the pre-punk period interacted with a relative freedom of cultural information to produce a radical break in the established norms of cultural politics and youth culture.[19] It could be argued that punk in Slovenia had even more concrete political effects than the movement in Britain. According to Erjavec and Gržinić: "Punk, modified according to Slovenia's socialist context, played an exceptionally important role. It can be understood as a reaction to the culture of relative prosperity of the preceding decade, to alienated politics, to the catchwords of self-management, to political manipulation."[20]

Punk's impact in Slovenia was as much ideological as musical. Those to whom punk appealed saw the mode of consumerism encouraged in Yugoslavia in the 1970s, and the accompanying dominance of frivolous, conformist music, as decadent and supportive of the status quo. The spontaneity and immediacy of punk, which valued spontaneous expression over musical proficiency, also proved highly relevant as a means of escaping the ideologically compromised stasis of the Yugoslav music scene.

The first wave of Slovene punk bands were already emerging in 1977, less than a year after punk became a mass-media issue in Britain. Following the first band, Pankrti (Bastards), came others such as Ljubljanski Psi (Ljubljana Dogs) and Berlin-

ski Žid (Berlin Wall). By 1979, Slovenia's first punk festival had taken place in the Ljubljana suburbs. Vidmar places Laibach at the start of a third wave of punk groups also including O! Kult, and Otroci Socializma (Children of Socialism).²¹ Creating an authentic version of punk required a degree of politicization, and the new bands rapidly incorporated local political issues into their work.

From its opening in 1978, ŠKUC became an axis of the new subculture, issuing recordings and other punk material, and organizing concerts by Slovene and foreign groups. Its decision to issue recordings was crucial to the growth of the scene, giving a voice to dozens of artists, including Laibach, whose work would not otherwise have found an outlet at that time.²² Even more than the new British independent record labels of the punk and post-punk eras, ŠKUC defined the scenes it supported. The support of ŠKUC and ZSMS was crucial in turning what might have been a passing fad into the most high-profile and socially influential youth subculture yet seen in either Slovenia or Yugoslavia. The covert or open support of various philosophers and sociologists plus progressive elements in the media, university, and government structures was also crucial, although it was not sufficient to shield the scene fully from official harassment and public hostility.

Punk was subject not only to renewed media disinformation campaigns of a type last seen in the early 1960s,²³ but to the restrictions already placed on pre-punk groups such as Buldožer. Elements in the media attempted to link the scene to Nazism and other antisocial phenomena. Various forms of civic repression were employed against the scene and its participants, but with the institutional support of Radio Študent, ŠKUC, and the theorists associated with them, the scene gained enough "weight" to make overt suppression of it problematic, and so a de facto policy of repressive tolerance was adopted whereby punk was either ignored or, when it became too visible, ghettoized and harassed (albeit to a lesser extent than elsewhere in Yugoslavia). Shuker argues that "In terms of cultural politics, rock is a site of struggle, with constant attempts to establish dominance, exploit contradictions, and negotiate hegemony,"²⁴ and punk in Slovenia can certainly be read in this light. What developed after 1977 was a constant guerrilla struggle between the advocates and opponents of punk, carried out in the mainstream and alternative media and in public and private spaces. However, unlike in Britain, where the class-conscious anti-intellectualism of most punk militated against complex theoretical stances, the Slovene debate over punk was marked by the extreme articulacy of punk's protagonists, the curiously formal terms in which the scene was sometimes defended, and its meticulous documentation.²⁵

PUNK, "STATE ROCK," AND LAIBACH

In their early phase (1980–82), Laibach were generally perceived by those outside the scene as part of the punk movement. Their shock tactics supported this perception, yet it was a paradoxical one. While Laibach were in some ways anarchic,

they were anarchic in a strictly controlled manner which would have far more corrosive effects than the unambiguous anarchism of other punk groups. In terms of their refinement and (ab)use of the punk inheritance on which they built, and the political context within which they operated, Laibach were simultaneously postpunk and postsocialist. Their controversial early-1980s poster actions in Trbovlje and Ljubljana, for example, were sequels to the first outbreak of punk graffiti.[26] In terms of media technique, Laibach's work represented a refinement of punk. Rather than causing outrage for its own sake, Laibach reproduced or represented it, incorporating authoritarian social and political codes into its own work. The point was to interrogate specific regimes and discourses, rather than simply to repulse them as an end in itself, as was often the case with punk. There were definite points of similarity between Laibach and punk; ultimately, however, the scope of Laibach's operations was far wider than that of their contemporaries, and these differences became real points of contention for some.

Like the industrial bands such as Throbbing Gristle that influenced the group, Laibach shared some factors with punk (confrontation, extremism, aggression), but it had wider musical and conceptual ambitions than the majority of punk bands. From the time Laibach's music first gained a Western release (1984), it was classified as "industrial"—those who were unaware of the Slovene context saw no obvious link between Laibach and punk. In terms of tempo and instrumentation, even early Laibach cannot really be described as punk. There were similarities with post-punk groups such as Joy Division, but Laibach's sound was almost immediately augmented by more atonal, avant-garde elements. The use of improvised real-time "samples" of classical music and film soundtracks, plus industrial sound effects from oscillators, tape-recorders, turntables, and other devices, was another distinctive feature.

Laibach's recapitulation of state discourse, however, did typify a wider tendency within the Slovene punk scene, which its chief ideologist Igor Vidmar (ironically) termed "state rock."[27] Besides Laibach, Vidmar cited other "third-wave" Slovene punk bands confronting bureaucracy, étatisme, and alienation. These groups raised political questions, and some ironically paraphrased official rhetoric. Apart from Laibach, Pankrti (Bastards) were the most confrontational group. The planned title of their 1982 album was *The Bastards in Collaboration with the State*. The sleeve image was to have featured a band member kissing a Partisan memorial. Under record-company pressure, this plan was abandoned. As Ramet explains, however, the finished product was almost as provocative.[28] The title was changed to *Državnih ljubimcih* (Lovers of the State), and the sleeve now showed a World War I memorial. In between the tracks of the album were "sampled" excerpts from a speech by Stalin.[29]

It was due to these and other similarities that Laibach was grouped with punk (in the context of the period, any nonmainstream band could only be seen as punk, since there were no other classifications within the Yugo-rock field). From the start, however, Laibach was already post-punk and, in terms of its (archaic) in-

dustrialism, postindustrial, presenting a poeticized sound picture of industry as decrepit, brutal, and archaic. A key factor distinguishing Laibach was its radical ambiguity. Rather than simply reflect oppression, or incorporate it in order to critique it, Laibach deliberately appeared to advocate it, refusing the role of dissidents and extending punk's critique of commercial rock into a paradoxical and militantly ironic rejection of rock per se. Laibach constructed a "paradigm of impossible authority" via a sustained theoretical assault on popular music. Rather than rock 'n'roll outlaws, Laibach created the image of a totalitarian unit of fanatical automata that acknowledged no distinction between ideology and music.

Under socialism, the state (embodying the people's will) was a "natural," structural presence in music and art, and vice versa. In the West, the state is ostensibly an alien, intrusive presence in music, and vice versa. In fact, both situations are "fictional" ideal states. Young Slovenes experienced the state as an alien, intrusive presence in the music sphere, and sought to exorcize it by bringing it into audibility. The absence of a such an overt state presence in most Western music scenes only masks the pervasive presence of market-state ideologies that are far more diffuse and less easily dislodged than "Eastern" totalitarian ideologies. Ideology was both the background and foreground music (both regulating score and systemic din/noise) of the old socialist states, whereas in both the successor states and the West, music (as a symbol of commodity hedonism) is the soundtrack to neoliberal market ideology. Both conspire against autonomous thought and taste formation, albeit to varying degrees and in different ways. Laibach reflected a situation (throughout Europe) in which there was no consensus about the correct roles of the state and musicians in each other's spheres.

IDEOLOGICAL REPROCESSING

By integrating Fascist symbolism, Laibach trapped the authorities, seeming to fulfill official warnings about the continued need to be vigilant against Fascism, and apparently embodying the Fascistic tendencies against which ideological watchdogs constantly warned. Laibach could not but be condemned as Fascist, since even leftist punk groups had been so defined, yet this trapped Laibach's accusers in a paradox which it was fatal to acknowledge. Besides Fascistic symbolism, Laibach simultaneously deployed the heroic socialist realist iconography of the "Red Districts" (Trbovlje, Zagorje, and Hrastnik), and the image and words of Tito. In Žižek's terms, Laibach presented a "totally inconsistent mixture," and to fix upon and condemn (or, alternatively, celebrate) any one (shifting) ideological point within it was fatal, since the real "mistake is to suppose that the fascists are fascists, that they behave like fascists."[30] If we look at the denim-clad figure of Jörg Haider, it can also be said that actual (post-)Fascists with access to power and influence generally go to great lengths to avoid looking like Fascists—the complete opposite of Laibach's approach.

Laibach annexed the space the state had abdicated to Western culture, assuming and recapitulating a traditional state role of ideological supervision. This reconfigured the state's apparent tolerance as an instrument of control. The state wanted to create the impression that it was rarely and only reluctantly involved in the limitation of youth culture, and that cultural Stalinism was alien to it. Measures against alternative culture in the early 1980s were generally bureaucratic and local rather than openly repressive.

Punk and other experimental groups tested the reality of official tolerance, and Laibach in particular forced the authorities into new levels of public repression. Laibach polarized the situation, revealing an authoritarian tendency to treat domestic groups as "the enemy within," and illuminated the neototalitarianism latent within the system.

It was Laibach's reprocessing of Yugoslav political culture, and their post-punk blurring of the lines between music and politics, that made them so problematic. Their aesthetic recapitulation of state power mechanisms was a bleakly realist sequel to the pro-Tito songs that strangely anticipated it. Both were natural consequences of the ideological saturation of Yugoslav society. Laibach used "Tito" (the icon of Yugoslav ideology) as another ideological "ready-made." Their best-known use of Tito is the extract from a 1958 speech on the 1985 track *Panorama*.[31] The text was a militant assertion of Yugoslav nonalignment that fitted Laibach's desired stance perfectly: "It should be clear to *everyone* that we cannot be no one's appendages of nobody's politics, that we have our own point of view and that we know the worth of what is right and what is not right."

The coda after the text even attributes it jointly to "Josip Broz TITO–LAIBACH 1958–1985."[32] At their infamous Zagreb performance in April 1983, Laibach used extracts from four different Tito speeches, and the recording of the event groups them together as a single track simply entitled *Tito*.[33] Yet in the very early track *Tito, Tito*,[34] a far more ironic approach is taken. Tito posthumously lends his name to a snatch of highly kitsch dance music played at variable speeds on primitive equipment, perhaps parodying the international image of Tito as a man of leisure, friend of film stars and royalty. Tito, the one remaining all-Yugoslav signifier still commanding popular affection, was a key element in Laibach's interrogation of its politico-symbolic surroundings. The fact that the process began soon after his death implied both a parody of his cult and a recognition of his vivid afterlife as a political symbol.[35]

From Laibach's perspective, force, or at least militancy, appeared necessary to deal both with the ideological saturation of Yugoslav society and also with the ideological dominance of market-driven popular culture in the West (and potentially the East). In an early interview, Laibach explained the necessity for militancy as part of an attempt to adopt the manipulative techniques of mass media in order to transmit a different message about these very systems of (informational) power:

In every society, the spirit of the entire culture is determined by the spirit of the strongest. The technological revolution offers more and more new systems in the development of mass communication, and the masses are increasingly susceptible to influence. The level of mastery of the information system depends on the determination and possibilities of those in power to master the entire social structure. . . . Moreover, the fundamental role of information in the functioning of the social system and culture is thus determined by the ideology of the ruling class. . . . By studying information and the propaganda system of its forceful and planned operation in the formation of social values (public opinion—uniform thought), LAIBACH is constantly discovering new ways and means of psychological influence on the masses, new ways and means of forcing new humanistic ideas upon the alienated consciousness.[36]

Force is presented as necessary in order to achieve exposure within and dominate the mass media. Here again, Laibach techniques can be seen as a post-punk refinement of their contemporaries' media strategies. They went beyond producing outrage as an end in itself, or a means to gain coverage, stripping shock tactics of any spontaneity, and replacing this with the fanatical militancy and precision necessary to transmit their codes. The contrast between the unplanned (albeit socially significant) chaos of the infamous 1976 Sex Pistols' interview with Bill Grundy,[37] and the preprogrammed militancy of Laibach's 1983 TV Slovenia interview, illustrates this progression.

INDUSTRY

Attali identifies three ways in which music is used strategically by power. In the first, music is a means to make people forget generalized systemic and social violence; in the second, it is necessary to make people believe that the world is harmonious and ordered (and therefore legitimate). In the third (contemporary) zone, music serves to silence people "by mass-producing a deafening, syncretic kind of music, and censoring all other human noises."[38]

This silencing music, which Attali relates to the maintenance of power, is intended to drown out the background "regime noise," or power codes, which all systems wish to keep silenced. Laibach's menacing quasi-totalitarian language stood in for the totalitarian "noise" the state needed to externalize and silence. Laibach statements rendered audible a type of discourse which the authorities claimed had no place in a self-managing society: "LAIBACH adopts the organizational system of industrial production and the identification with the ideology as its work method. In accordance with this, each member personally rejects his individuality, thereby expressing the relationship between the particular form of production system and ideology and the individual."[39]

The depersonalized, automatonic language of the early statements heightened Laibach's cold, alienating aura, which, combined with the industrial sounds audible

in their early works, was intended to manifest the repression sustaining industrial production and social order. Just as it was important to silence the totalitarianism latent within the system, it was important that the sounds of industrial alienation should not be heard by anyone who was not employed in heavy industry. For many unacclimatized to industrial noise, its brutality could be experienced as an oppressive "noise regime" that would further dehumanize the image of industry. Laibach's manipulation of the sensory violence and alienation surrounding industry occurred in the aftermath of the emergence in Britain of what came to be known as "industrial music."

Although postwar electro-acoustic experiments sometimes incorporated industrial and mechanical noise, these generally remained static compositional elements. They were not fashioned into rhythms and beats, nor were there many sustained attempts to represent industrial processes in music. Kraftwerk—from Düsseldorf, at the heart of the Ruhr industrial region—were the first successful artists to incorporate representations of industrial sounds into nonacademic electronic music. In their early works (particularly 1975's *Radio-Activity*), Kraftwerk created a type of "industrial sublime," aestheticizing and romanticizing the sounds of transmitters, Geiger counters, oscillators, short-wave radio, railways, Autobahns, and other technological sound sources. However, while these sounds alienated some people,[40] they were still offset by bittersweet, ironic, and even kitschy melodies, and a sense of romantic melancholy.

As the 1970s progressed, a far bleaker and more violent industrial/electronic aesthetic emerged, primarily in Britain. Like Laibach, Cabaret Voltaire[41] were influenced by the cut-up techniques of Burroughs, and Duchampian "ready-mades." Their early concerts were based on cut-ups and tape loops of "found sound," accompanied by provocative video images of power, domination, Fascism, and terrorism which often provoked violence.[42] Like Cabaret Voltaire and Laibach, Throbbing Gristle was a multimedia operation covering a similar range of alienating audio and visual material, but with additional (and even more controversial) sexual and quasi-pagan elements derived from the group's performance-art origins (later condemned by Laibach).[43] Through their label, Industrial Records, Throbbing Gristle named the new genre, laying the conceptual framework for the paramilitarization of music and the transgressive fusion of music and politics. The major respect in which Laibach's interventions differed from those of the British groups was that they took place within an even more developed theoretical framework, and included an even more overtly militaristic aura.[44] Although they were far less ideological, the American duo Suicide also brought to the surface the links between electronic instrumentation and violence. The group's song structures were rock-'n'-roll-based, and far more conventional than those of the British groups, but the songs' raw electronic instrumentation was highly provocative to some audiences, and caused a near-riot in Brussels in 1978.[45]

8.1 Laibach, *Ljubljana-Zagreb-Beograd* cover, 1993.

Early Laibach performances also provoked violence, and one of the most iconic Laibach images (featured as one of NK's NSK State stamps) is of Tomaž Hostnik with a bloody chin caused by a missile thrown from the crowd at a 1982 Ljubljana concert (see fig. 8.1). The other, older precedent for this "new" music was the noise experiments of the Italian futurists. According to Douglas Kahn, the futurists' leader, Marinetti, "argued for a poetics open to the forces exerted by the new technologies of transportation, communication, and information, all of which were thrown, among other purposes, into the conduct of military combat."[46]

The Italian futurists went from aesthetic celebration to active participation to Italian militarism. Their agenda was unambiguous and political. Industrial groups used similar themes, but in a far more ambivalent and sonically brutal way, identifying sonic futurism as the ideal means to transmit normally suppressed extreme imagery and themes. By the time of Laibach's first experiments, electronic or industrial music was clearly established as a site of incitement and provocation. The use of noise and electronic instrumentation was still sufficiently novel to be experienced as a violent challenge to established musical and—at least by implication—sociopolitical orders. The use of extreme, physically threatening noise and

transgressive sexual and political imagery could have been taken as proof of so-
cialist claims about the degeneracy and cultural collapse of the West (and Laibach
themselves recapitulated this attitude in their comments on Throbbing Gristle).
Provocation and alienation in a socialist system were, at least in theory, far more
dangerous than in the West, yet by the mid-1980s sonic elements of the industrial
culture were spreading, and were present not just in the work of Laibach but in the
work of Budapest's B.P. Service, or Serbia's Autopsia (who, like Laibach, later ex-
plored Teutonic, martial themes, albeit in a far more esoteric, quasi-mystical style).

The earliest (1980–84) Laibach recordings and live performances (documented
on the albums *Ljubljana-Zagreb-Beograd*, *Rekapitulacija*, and *M.B. December 12, 1984*) repre-
sented the forging not only of a Slovene but of a local, industrial sound specific to
the "Red Districts" around Trbovlje. In one sense, tracks such as *Red Silence*, *Delo in
disciplina* (Work and Discipline), or *S.T.T.* (Machine Factory Trbovlje) were "ambi-
ent," alluding to the cacophonous rhythms of the area's decrepit industries, which
were also manifest in the titles.[47] Laibach attempted to represent the area's power
stations, mines, conveyors, lathes, and forges using tape loops, percussion, and
primitive electronics. Unlike Kraftwerk's aestheticized industrial tone pictures,
these works present a picture of a brutally dysfunctional industry, even if this can
be recoded by listeners into a dystopic industrial sublime. The harsh screeches and
"funkless" rhythms are sonic archetypes of industrial violence: ideological tone
pictures of their context.

The brittle tempo of *Delo in disciplina* approximates the sound of regular but fal-
tering machinery, and is not particularly threatening. The vocal is the principal
alienating device. The phrase, which resembles an exhortatory Stalinist slogan, is
lifelessly repeated, suggesting a senselessly productive shock worker, stripped of
individuality and initiative. Within the self-management context, this had a par-
ticular resonance. The system was intended, as far as possible, to prevent alienation
(designating workers as "associated socialist producers," for instance), and to
value and consult the workforce. However, the track raises the threat of a forcible
return to Stalinist industrial discipline threatening the ideological fiction of non-
alienating industrial work. The apparently fanatical insistence on discipline could
also be read as a critique of the waste and inefficiency of the economic system. It
relocates industry as a site of linear, hierarchical regimentation and command
rather than an illusory shop-floor democracy. *Red Silence* works by contrast, and has
various connotations. It commences with a sustained, formless "scream" of ma-
chine noise, but from this emerges a fierce sequence of primitive electronic sound
that anticipates hard techno, and suggests a machine accelerating out of control.
This is a tone picture of the "Red Silence" endured by the workers of the region,
and as such it ran contrary to the interests of the dominant ideology. By rendering
audible the "noise" of the system, Laibach suspended the official musical repre-
sentations of "reality" in Yugoslavia. From the perspective of Laibach and the
punks, the ideologically compromised noise of Titoist Yugo-rock, the majority of

Western music and the so-called *zimzelenci* ("evergreens")[48] all conspired to silence individuals by obscuring the actual noise of the system. In reintroducing the regime's own "noise" into the Yugoslav "sonosphere," Laibach suggested that the actual "Red Silence" was that of officially supervised popular music, just as Attali claims that popular music has a silencing effect in the West, attempting to preempt the articulation of oppositional stances.

The first Laibach album released outside Yugoslavia, *Rekapitulacija* (1985), began to move beyond simple "mimetic" industrialism and into more esoteric territory. Rather than simply recapitulating and simulating the sounds and slogans associated with industry, *Rekapitulacija* mysticizes it. The track *Perspektive* (Perspectives) is a dramatized programmatic statement of Laibach's methodology. Set against a sinister instrumental backdrop, the statement is read coldly and without animation, and cites some of Laibach's principal influences:

> Our basic inspiration, ideals which are not ideal in their form, but [which are] the material of Laibach's manipulation remain industrial production, art of the Third Reich, totalitarianism, Taylorism, 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.[49]

The calm fanaticism of the track anticipated Laibach's mode of performance on stage, and was noticeably more focused than the more dramatic modes of some industrial groups. The formalism and precision of the statement are distinctive, and confront the understanding of popular music as a hedonistic form, while its relation of disco to alienating industrial production again echoes Attali's critiques of popular music.[50] While it appears to embody coldly scientific totalitarian terror, however, *Perspektive* also incorporates the more irrational, uncanny aspects of totalitarianism, describing a "mystic, erotic-mythological sound" generating the "constitution of an ambivalence between fear and fascination."

Mi kujemo bodočnost (We Forge the Future) has quasi-mystical lyrics similar to poems by the pre-First World War pro-Yugoslav Preporod (Renaissance) youth group, and has an overtly mystical atmosphere, using archetypal, quasi-alchemical imagery that suggests the presence of recessed, esoteric layers of meaning: "We are the fire, the steel and the smiths; we forge the truth and freedom into this whole. We are rising, rising into freedom And growing youthfully into infinity! We Are Forging the Future!"

Like *Brat moj* (Brother of Mine) and other tracks from the album, this track moves at a funereal tempo, interrupted every so often by a massive percussive impact which, like the *Red Districts* sleeve images, alludes to the presence of heavy industry, and suggests an unending Promethean struggle. Also present, however, is a ghostly keyboard motif that runs throughout the album, and provides a contrast to the oppressive tone. The album manifests a spectral, hallucinatory aura

attached to heavy industry, presenting it as a site of primeval and unworldly struggle. This uncanny quality is what Laibach's "Ten Items of the Covenant" calls "the mystical dimension of alienation, which reveals the magical component of the industrial process."[51] The Irwin works that use industrial motifs captured this quality in visual form. Like many other Irwin works, *Electrification I* is overlaid with coal fragments[52] that almost obscure the factory image, seemingly burying it.

This "making strange" of industry is far more charged within the socialist context than the context within which the British industrial groups operated. Yugoslav heavy industry was still a key site of ideological mobilization, presented as the embodiment of progressive, rational, scientific socialism. The reality in Trbovlje and the "Red Districts," however, was quite different from this vision. Situated in a dark, narrow valley, frequently filled by dust from the nineteenth-century cement works and surrounded by mines, goods yards, and the highest industrial chimney in Europe (designed to disperse pollution as far as possible), Trbovlje had a nightmarish aura even before Laibach's interventions. The forging of a dystopian mysticism from socialist heavy industry represents a return of the industrial realities repressed by socialism's rationalist ideology. The rendering audible of industrial repression, trauma, discipline, and irrationality contradicted official attempts to muffle industry's dark side. Besides introducing a spectral mysticism into the engines of socialism, Laibach's work on *Rekapitulacija* also fatally archaicizes its image. Through association with mysticism and the use of eerie, haunting instrumentation, Laibach present industry as something from a nightmarish archetypal past rather than a gleaming technocratic future. Many of the works of this period have a pervasive aura of terror attached to them. The mystical, uncanny excess present in totalitarian terror is replicated in the terrifying, sublime scale of heavy industry, itself experienced by many as a form of terror, and present in Laibach's music as confrontational (tonal) device as well as an ideological signifier.[53] Rationalized heavy industry was actually the site of socialism's least rational semi-mystical faith—in industrially dominated "socialist construction" leading toward a utopian future (Communism). Like Orwell's "telescreen," ideology can rarely be turned off, and despite its formally utopian elements it was experienced by many in the younger generation in particular as another mode of psychic oppression, if not actual terror. Ideology produces a spectral excess, and Laibach dramatized the fact that "industry" possessed a radical ambiguity, located in the dual meanings of the sublime: elevated experience or colossal scale that almost obliterates the individual.

NOVA AKROPOLA

> *Militant classicism* is a form which unites the mechanics of organic rhythm and the confusion of intuitive sound interventions into the *Harmony of The Beautiful Idea*. We have monopolized the right to chaos so as to underline order.[54]

8.2 Irwin, *Electrification I*, 1988.

The year 1986 saw the release of Laibach's first album on a British label, *Nova akropola* (New Acropolis), followed by the live album *The Occupied Europe Tour 1983–85*, which contained live versions of the *Nova akropola* tracks. While *Rekapitulacija* had a mysterious, spectral atmosphere, *Nova akropola* is a colder and more fanatical work, more focused and dynamic. This was the record on which Laibach's regimented "militant classical" style emerged. In practice, this entailed extensive use of samples from classical music and film soundtracks, along with rigidly militaristic rhythms and fanfares. A review in the British weekly *Sounds* described the sound of the album in these terms, going on to call it "the first dangerous album of the eighties":

> We are corrupted by unrelenting drums, teutonic, orchestral assaults and a commanding, demanding voice of homicidal insistence. . . .
>
> As soon as the music stops and there is actually a chance to think, that's when the first sensation subsides and gives way to something new . . . unease. Unease because this group do not seem to have the petty concerns and ambitions other groups live by. They seem to see themselves as spokesmen for a movement that has absolutely

8.3 Laibach, *Nova akropola* cover, 1986.

Nova akropola includes an "outro" to the *Rekapitulacija* track Ti, ki, izzivaš (You Who
Challenge), based on a sample of the shrieking strings of the shower scene from
Bernard Herrmann's *Psycho* soundtrack. The full version (also included on *The Oc-
cupied Europe Tour*) features massive industrial percussion that resembles the sound of
relentlessly marching troops. As on *Rekapitulacija*'s Boji (Struggles), the vocal is dis-
torted as if spoken through a megaphone, and is harshly commanding. Due to the
(apparent) contrast between its subject matter and its tone, Die Liebe ([The] Love)
is equally nightmarish, and transforms "love," perhaps the key signifier of pop ide-
ology, into a demonic all-conquering totalitarian force. The fanatical delivery of
the lyrics (which translate as "Love, love the greatest strength, love, love the all-
powerful") evokes love's fanatical, totalitarian aspects. The punitive militaristic
percussion, sinister orchestral samples, and hunting horns show love as applied to

notions of nation or state as a blind, merciless source of sublime terror. *Država* (The State) is one of the most emblematic Laibach tracks. The opening orchestral fanfare recalls the bombastic tones of Ron Goodwin's soundtrack to the Alpine war film *Where Eagles Dare*.[56] Its "lyrics" recapitulate state propaganda, casting the state as a benevolent provider under which freedom and progress are advancing. In literal terms, the state is idealized, and takes the place of the traditional love-object in the pop song. However, while the heroic tone of the music and the ambitious tone of the "lyrics" may seem to idealize identification with a totalitarian state, these same elements set a utopian/dystopian standard no actual state could hope to equal. The effect is to draw a contrast between the pragmatism of "actually existing" states and the utopian–dystopian ideal of an absolute state, a space Laibach reserves for itself through its paradigm of impossible authority. *Vade retro* is slower-paced, but even more sinister. The title (meaning "Get Back" in Latin) refers to exorcistic ritual ("Vade retro Satanas"). The rasped, barely intelligible vocal is supplemented by cold percussion effects and atonal string samples. Toward the close of the track the percussion intensifies brutally, and the sound of a braying stag is audible, adding a sinisterly archaic natural presence.

The exorcistic motif recurs frequently throughout Laibach's early work,[57] and the group explicitly described their concerts in these terms "Our appearance has a *purifying* (EXORCISM!) and *regenerative* (HONEY + GOLD) function."[58] The pre-1987 concerts could sometimes be particularly ritualistic, and critics described a demonic aura.[59] The concerts constituted an audiovisual pandemonium within which the same demonic, terrorizing regimes present in spectral form on the recordings (industry, totalitarianism, paganism, noise, and depersonalization) were summoned. Overt mysticism of any sort challenged the socialist faith in scientific progress and atheist humanism. To mount a transcendent or exorcistic performance is also threatening, since it carries the clear implication that there is something in (socialist) reality that needs to be driven out or surpassed. Laibach were transcendent in their militant assertion of the fundamentally irrational or supernatural (demonic) elements of contemporary reality. To suggest that irrationalism is present in any regime is actually as much a critique of human nature as of the particular system it infects, yet the suggestion that self-management was also pervaded by the antagonistic, irrational, and even demonic elements that Laibach claim are endemic to all regimes was as ideologically transgressive as any of Laibach's other provocations. Therefore, it is important not to dismiss the supernatural and demonic ambience of the *Nova akropola* period as simply terror for terror's sake. The use of terror, and its association with industrial production and ideology, was an integral and spectacular element of Laibach's presentation that lent additional force to the demasking and recapitulation of the regime under which Laibach operated, and was central to the group's musical aesthetic. *Nova akropola* demonstrates the association between sublimity and terror, and to this extent it is the most extreme of Laibach's works, both psychically and musically.

Together with the *Krst* score (composed in the same period), *Nova akropola* marks the highpoint of the group's avant-garde militancy immediately prior to its transition to a direct confrontation with (and infiltration of) the global pop regime.

KRST (BAPTISM): THE MUSICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATIONAL TRAUMA

> Music is a credible metaphor of reality. Mozart and Bach both reflect the bourgeois dream of harmony more precisely than all the political theories of the nineteenth century together. Harmony is the true supreme form used by authority to demonstrate its power, satisfaction and its political scenic arrangement. Primitive polyphony, dodecaphony, electro-acoustic music, etc., etc.,—any kind of music is an attribute of authority, its tool and its bond with its people, whatever it may be.[60]

By the time Laibach produced its soundtrack for Scipion Nasice's *Krst pod Triglavom* in 1986, it was leaving industrialism behind, and encoding a national/historical rather than ideological ambience. The four sides of the vinyl album were numbered 1983–1987, 819–822, 1095–1270, and 1961–1982. These respectively coincide with: the lifespan of the Theater of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice; the period in which German forces defeated the pagan Slovenes; the period preceding the Habsburg assumption of sovereignty in the area; and the brief lifespan of Tomaž Hostnik. *Krst* monumentalized the shadowy myths at the root of Slovene identity, but the result was not an autarchic, insular cultural product. Just as the performance incorporated many references to the international avant-garde, the music drew upon a wide variety of European composers. Laibach created a sonic representation of Sloveneness and the paradoxes of Slovene culture, revealing rather than concealing the plurality inherent to Slovene identity, again problematizing nationalist tendencies while seeming to promote them.[61] The wide variety of sources used in the music were summarized by Alenka Barber-Keršovan:

> Laibach interprets, Laibach quotes, Laibach appropriates pieces of existing compositions in the sense of the Duchampian ready-made and puts them into new relations. This group unscrupulously plunders a treasury of the most diverse musical styles, and assembles whatever comes into their hands in their songs, as for instance in "Baptism under Triglav." In this "sampling" opera we can hear folk tunes for zither and "Ohm, Sweet Ohm" by Kraftwerk,[62] [on the track *Hostnik*] pieces of Wagner, Bruckner, Orff, Shostakovitch, Prokofiev, a well-known waltz from the operetta "The Blood of Vienna," and the introductory motif of "Dante's Symphony" by Franc Liszt through which the partisan song "Počiva jezero v tihoti" (A Lake Resting in Calmness) is projected.[63]

The eclectic, composite nature of Slovene identity—which, *Krst* suggests, is a fusion of stronger European traditions with some archetypal pre-Christian remnants—is represented through a series of audio citations and references to pantheonic figures of Slovene and European culture. *Krst* was the most assertively

Slovene presentation yet seen (free of foreign political supervision), yet also an ambiguously paradoxical depiction of national identity. "Sloveneness" was celebrated, but the extent to which the Slovenes have been assimilated and forced to carry out cultural counter-assimilations to ensure cultural survival was highlighted. Hostnik, victim of the Slovene propensity to suicide, is eulogized by his comrades alongside Kraftwerk, Černigoj, Prešeren, Malevich, and other figures the production dubs pantheonic. Myth, legend, and archetype are given full expression, as a constructive reworking of the original Slovene trauma of subjection and victory is located in the celebration of survival and persistence rather than in heroic nationalistic conquest. The music is as mournful as it is heroic, and Laibach's use of sinister orchestral themes and noise effects on tracks such as *Waldung* and *Jägerspiel* (Hunting Game) renders audible the national and cultural regimes by which Slovene identity has been both menaced and shaped, while *Laibach Apologija* returns to the portentous mysticism of *Rekapitulacija*. *Krst* itself is both the most utopian and the most 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. Thematically the album is the most Slovene of all Laibach's works, yet it is based upon the works of European composers assimilated to form a new Slovene sound. By placing the works in such archetypically Slovene contexts, Laibach made questions of originality irrelevant. Without the benefit of sleeve credits, or knowledge of the classical repertoire, the sounds can be perceived as Laibach's own, and Laibach's sounds as something wholly Slovene. When Laibach initiated their campaign of covering rock classics in 1987, this made explicit a process that had already begun: the creative reexporting of Western ideas in the Slovene form of an ambiguously pluralistic assertion of national particularity, and the right to Slovene cultural self-confidence.

"LAIBACH IN THE BELLY OF THE TROJAN HORSE"

Laibach's interventions in the domestic ideological context were matched by an equivalent intervention against Western pop culture. Laibach argued that just as ideology saturated "the East," a consumerist rock ideology permeates "the West." Both were regulative totalizing discourses that could be disrupted by confrontation with their own codes. One of the sharpest differentiating features between Laibach and their punk contemporaries was Laibach's quasi-academic, reproachful attitude to popular music. Laibach problematized the reception and bases of Western popular music, initially in its domestic context and subsequently globally. Laibach took advantage of the stylistic possibilities opened up by punk, but this did not prevent them from mounting a sustained assault not just on mainstream pop/rock but even on other industrial/experimental bands. Asked in 1984 how they would define the difference between the work of Frankie Goes To Hollywood and experimental groups such as Einstürzende Neubauten, Laibach replied:

There is no difference. One type of music deforms the truth by hypertechnical degeneration of the sound image, the other type alienates itself from truth by losing faith in the power of positively establishing their own destiny, and by violently and pretentiously linking their "mission" with extreme forms of popular apocalypticism, spiritualism, neosatanism. . . . If the entire West European society is prepared to unconcernedly accept such empty/loud dialogue through this type of music, it is because it has nothing to say to itself anymore; because it has no meaningful discourse to develop for a good reason, and because the spectacle itself is only another (already surpassed) form of repetition. In this sense, this is music without sense, annihilating music, a prelude to the cold silence of the Western civilization, in which mankind will be exterminated through repetition.[64]

Besides their technical industrialism (in terms of instrumentation and technique), Laibach had extensive professional and personal links with the industrial networks of Britain and Germany, as seen in their participation in the Berlin Atonal Festival of 1985, and their friendship with British counterparts Test Dept. Yet when they were asked for an opinion of Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV, Laibach were equally censorious, even at the risk of alienating potential audiences:

The influence of mysticism, degenerate avant-garde and structural materialism (which inspired groups such as TG and PTV) have incubated confusion. The engagement of these groups in terms of their programs has remained at the level of romantic existentialism. LAIBACH, on the other hand, stands in the midst of life and is pragmatic. Our motto is based in reality, truth and life. From this standpoint, every comparison of LAIBACH with the specified groups is meaningless.[65]

Condemnations such as this should be understood as an essential aspect of Laibach's quasi-conservative critique of rock as a form (which also referred to totalitarianism). They could problematize their position within popular culture only by externalizing themselves and creating the suggestion of objective distance. Laibach carried out an ideological differentiation, defining a "Party line" of socially pessimistic commentary and condemning even some of those with whom they shared approaches. In this respect, as in many others, Laibach's position was structurally and consciously paradoxical. Despite the techno-pop departure of the NATO album, Laibach continue to be marketed primarily through industrial distribution networks and media, and are now pragmatic enough to permit remixes of their work by artists of a type their original rhetoric would have condemned.[66] The critiques of industrial groups might be compared to Laibach's wariness about being connected to traditional antistate paradigms of dissidence. In both cases they drew attention to the fact that overtly oppositional discourses are insufficient to deal with contemporary power structures, and may well strengthen them by providing safe, commodifiable or assimilable outlets for negative attitudes.

Laibach's uncompromising invective echoed not so much (previous) domestic ideological stances as the Soviet tradition of total theoretical opposition to Western

rock, which by the late 1980s was being abandoned even in the USSR.[67] The late-Soviet ideological struggle against rock parallels Laibach's "mission" of demasking and recapitulating the subliminal and encrypted themes of the Western rock regime. Even as the Soviets began to abandon (or at least refine) the ideological *Kulturkampf* against rock, Laibach returned to the archetypal level of such criticism. The severity with which they condemned Western pop culture recapitulated the most hardline Stalinist and fundamentalist discourses. In both Slovenia and the USSR, state authorities had abdicated their traditional role of cultural-ideological criticism, leaving a vacuum filled by Laibach, and individual researchers and journals in the USSR. Laibach's stance was also a prophetic critique of uncritical pro-Western sentiment in Slovenia. While the slightest suggestion from Belgrade of closer educational or cultural links produced anti-assimilation sentiment and action in Slovenia, there have only ever been marginal protests against the far less tangible but more pervasive prospect of Westernization. Only during the period of the first Yugoslav "Petletka" (five-year plan, 1947–51) had anti-Western rhetoric as severe as Laibach's been strongly present in Slovenia. Despite later reactionary phases, this was the only period of true cultural Stalinism, when socialist realism was the only acceptable form, and there was systematic propaganda against "decadent" Western art.[68] In Slovenia, critiques as severe as Laibach's were dying out. Criticism of punk was centered on its subcultural and social aspects more than aesthetic judgments, and writers discussing cultural issues were generally anxious to avoid any possible accusations of "Stalinism" or interference. By pursuing this line, Laibach acted in place of the state, and were therefore more "faithful" to the Stalinist archetypes on which the regime was originally constructed than the state itself wished to (be seen to) be.

With the exception of Kraftwerk, Laibach rarely differentiated between good and bad examples of rock, but attacked entire genres and, if anything, were even more critical of alternative music than of global rock phenomena such as Queen, whose power over audiences they claimed to admire. Laibach were returning to an archetypal mode of centralized totalitarian cultural criticism that had long since become a rarity in Yugoslavia (apart from some populist opinion pieces in the media). In this respect, Laibach's contemporaries were those Soviet researchers who, even under *glasnost*, carried out the struggle against rock, often informed by American critical sociological research. N. Sarkitov's 1987 research, for instance, blamed rock for inducing social (ideological) passivity via gradual stupefaction.[69] As late as 1988, when restrictions on the availability and production of rock in the USSR were vanishing, one article likened the effects of "inherently bourgeois" rock to cocaine, and described it as an agent of Western psychological warfare waged against Soviet youth.

> During the last three-quarters of a century Slovenes have successfully rejected more-or-less concealed attempts to assimilate them into a wider national community. Slovene cultural creators, as the main bearers and maintainers of national consciousness, still remained in the front lines against such attempts.[70]

> Everywhere in Europe—East and West—people have capitulated to Coca-Cola culture. Only inside fortress LAIBACH can art and popular culture look the other way.[71]

The correspondences between Laibach and Soviet criticism are neither surprising nor accidental. Laibach's recapitulation of totalitarianism demanded the (re-) presentation of ideological struggle. The group had to conjure up the menace of cultural Stalinism to reveal its continued presence. However, the fact that it was necessary to adopt such an extreme stance again points to the need for force in order to confront all-pervasive rock culture and its relationship to authority. Laibach sought to problematize and rebalance the simplistic equation of the "totalitarian" East and the "democratic" West, highlighting Western cultural hegemony via music, the most aggressive form of Western dominance. Laibach located in the mechanics of the "culture industry" (of which it became part) a largely unremarked form of Western totalitarianism. Asked at the time of the release of *Kapital* whether the West was more totalitarian than the East, Laibach replied: "The Eastern ideological (communist) totalitarianism occurred exclusively as a reaction to the economic colonialism and totalitarianism of the West; as a political system totalitarianism is a typical phenomenon of West European nihilism, which operates with the power of financial capital."[72]

Laibach's bleak analyses of the music industry recall not just Attali and Adorno but Althusser. Just as NSK's work on state power was informed by the concept of "ideological state apparatuses," their later work has a neo-Althusserian tone, diagnosing the hidden power of the (cultural) market's ideological and repressive apparatuses. This analysis informs some key Laibach statements on the media: "The Western press is the extended hand and dictate of the market economy, which tailors its truth according to the current needs of market logic, and which does not see, does not need or acknowledge competition outside its economic limits. In this perspective, our performances in Western Europe represent a pain-inducing foreign body in the decaying bowels of a voracious animal."[73]

This anti-Western rhetoric[74] was not simply a performance of totalitarian cultural isolationism but a reference to the fears of cultural assimilation felt in small nations such as Slovenia, and in the Slavic cultural sphere generally. For "Eastern" audiences raised on ideological critiques of "Western cultural imperialism," there is nothing unfamiliar in Laibach's treatment of rock as an ideological text, and this familiarity can help to explain Laibach's popularity in former socialist states. In drawing attention to the inroads Western culture was making, and devising an ac-

tive strategy of cultural resistance, Laibach referred back to the Slovene tendency for cultural rather than political figures to play a key role in defending cultural identity. Such reactions, which animate many post-Cold War nationalisms, were felt across Yugoslavia. However, in Slovenia and Croatia—and to a lesser extent in Macedonia and other non-Serb areas—the only genuinely feared assimilation emanated from Belgrade (just as in practice Yugoslavia's military doctrines were primarily oriented toward a threat from the Warsaw Pact rather than NATO). Ramet states: "assimilation of any kind, whether to a Serbian or Yugoslav model, was abhorrent both to culture-conscious elements and to regional politicians who had a stake in federalism."[75]

These attitudes help to explain the de facto tolerance accorded to Laibach and NSK, which were seen by elements of ZSMS, the Party, and the intelligentsia as a dynamic assertion of Slovene culture, of obvious use in the fight against what they saw as a very real threat of Yugoslavization. The fact that only some members of the wartime generation accused Laibach of Germanization implies that even if Germanization was perceived as Laibach's goal, this was seen as more "natural" (or less alien) than Yugoslavization. Laibach did not seek allies, but some of those associated with *Nova revija*, and other intellectuals, saw value in NSK's emphasis on Slovene culture. However, NSK stood more or less alone in Slovenia in its stance against uncriticized cultural Westernization.[76] Laibach's performance of a culturally protectionist role represented a lone attempt to redress the imbalance in Slovenia's emergent cultural policy, which demonized the "Balkan" and the "Eastern" as surely as the West continued to place Slovenia within such categories, often ignoring the country's overidentification with the West. Even the ferocity of Laibach's assault on the Western pop market (into which they are inevitably becoming assimilated) could not hope to rebalance the massive pressures and diverse strategies employed by their adversary.

While an increasingly pro-Western alignment in Slovenia means there is little critical discussion of cultural Westernization, in Serbia this threat acted as a focus for nationalist mobilization. Fears of Western cultural dominance are a persistent feature of Serbian nationalist rhetoric, and Milošević-era cultural policy discriminated against modern art and some other Western forms, and promoted more vernacular and populist styles instead. Even if any Slovene politician had seriously attempted to mobilize on this basis, Laibach had already foreclosed this option, and anyone assuming a similar stance would have seemed ludicrous in comparison. Laibach enacted on the cultural level sentiments enacted in deadly earnest elsewhere on former Yugoslav territory. The responses both of Laibach and of Serbian nationalist strands (as well as Slavophile currents in Russia) can be read as preemptive responses to the spread of cultural globalization in nations struggling to construct a postsocialist sense of self, while being more exposed than ever before to Western cultural influence.

Despite the rhetorical similarities, Laibach's attacks on Western dominance are an example of critical pragmatism rather than Fascistic mobilization, since they take place in the cultural sphere and are not attached to any existing political agenda. Yet there is a formal similarity between the Serbian cultural response to the threat of globalization and Laibach's tactics. Despite the war and the imposition of sanctions, a rave scene developed in Belgrade which, until Serbia's renewed isolation in 1999, was actually larger than its counterparts in Zagreb and Ljubljana, and attracted many international performers. However, there has also been a specifically local response to pop culture, which can be seen as an attempt to devise a resistance strategy via the construction of an indigenous but contemporary popular form that can compete with Western imports in its home market. Such pressures produced the hybrid Serb form known as "Turbofolk": a high-tempo collision of traditional folk (including nationalist songs) and contemporary dance rhythms. It is an explicitly populist form, naturally popular with nationalists who are able to enjoy national symbolism in a (domestically) stylish and contemporary context. It can be read as an attempt to find an authentic but contemporary form produced under the autarkic siege conditions of sanctions, with an explicit mobilizing appeal to national morale. Even Turbofolk, however, is based not on outright negation of the West but on an assimilation of those Western elements that can invigorate the traditional national forms. Yet while Turbo surrenders to pop, Laibach attempt to retain a distance, even while using it as a bearer of its signals.[77] Laibach's assimilation of Western material is far more thorough, but designed primarily to sell such material back to the Western markets with the addition of some Slovene "factor X," rather than to sell back a revamped and paramilitarized form of traditional music to domestic audiences, as in Serbia. Both Laibach and Turbofolk represented a defiant appropriation of Western pleasure for local purposes, and in both cases there was a paramilitary aura around the music—Laibach produced paramilitarized versions of Western pop, and Turbo was a Serbianized version of Western rhythms popular with paramilitaries. This aspect of Yugoslav responses to Western music can be seen in the context of the country's "General People's Defense" doctrine, which entailed constant low-level mobilization of society and the presence of paramilitary training for guerrilla warfare even in schools.

INTERROGATING THE POP REGIME

> Exceptional historical circumstances shaped us into a generation well aware of the fact that the youth of a small-sized nation like ours must develop much greater creative powers than are required of the youth of larger nations, and that we must muster up all available forces into a collective, frontal, and if necessary, militant act.[78]

Laibach's is not simply an emergency response to the siege conditions of postmodern cultural overload, but an ongoing praxis designed to construct a prag-

matic, questioning response to Western popular culture. Laibach and Turbofolk are both expressions of an awareness that within the globalized market of popular culture, straight copies of Western trends are inadequate, since they will rarely be able to progress beyond local markets, and will be seen as inferior copies of more glamorous Western originals, with their "classic" (the Beatles, Queen) or "radical" (techno, punk) selling points. Even to compete in the domestic market requires a degree of hybridization (local elements boosted by Western forms), and to compete internationally requires a real degree of proficiency, plus some (local) selling point that will ensure attention in already crowded markets.

Rather than the corrosive overidentification applied to the paradigms of state power, Laibach used tactics of recapitulative *oversimulation* in relation to the Western rock canon, questioning the imposition and value of "classic" Western rock and pop, and the assumption that West is automatically best. Laibach described their cover versions as "new originals" (rather than hybrid forms or local imitations):

> The essence of music is a miracle of technology, which is based on mechanical principles of the universe. The essence of mechanics is *ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (endless repetition of the same). On this basis we find no superiority in the cover-versions over sampling techniques. Our work, however, which is original, or rather a copy without the original, is superior to the historical material.[79]

Laibach's "new originals" were intended not as Slovenized product for local consumption but as part of a systematic campaign to establish the group and their concepts in the Western market, offering an authentically "Eastern" form in familiar Western packaging. In terms of Western preconceptions, a successful Slav group is almost de facto transgressive. To achieve even limited success and exposure in the West using as obscure a language as Slovene runs contrary to received cultural logic, but for such a group to go on to rework some of the classics of Western pop culture is doubly transgressive. Like the "Third World," "Eastern Europe" is still largely seen not as a source of cultural product but as a passive market for it. These apparently "nonproductive" zones had never been taken seriously until the 1980s (the decade of world music), and were seen as no more than markets in need of further development. The same prejudices that still apply against East European goods in general (seen as either shoddy or hopelessly poor copies of superior Western products) were—and, despite Laibach, remain—obstacles faced by non-Western artists. Laibach's entire oeuvre presents a militant challenge to the representation of Central and East Europeans as passive consumers lacking the discrimination to judge good from bad in the tide of popular culture, and certainly incapable of producing pop forms that can compete globally.[80] In common with the Macedonians, Slovaks, Ukrainians, and other "unhistorical" Slav nations, the Slovenes have had to develop a full range of cultural activities in the vernacular at a far later historical stage than Western nations. While earlier groups from the 1970s were able to establish the notion of distinct, nonimitative Slovene versions

of pop and rock, they were unable to transcend the limitations of the Slovene market, and could achieve little success even in the rest of Yugoslavia speaking Slovene.[81] Laibach's manipulation of popular music represents not just a contribution to the ongoing postwar development of a full Slovene cultural range, but a limited—albeit successful—reversal whereby a form of Slovene popular culture penetrated the Western market.

Whereas in their programmatic statements the group sampled ideological texts, in the pop context Laibach (re)discovered and employed the lyrics of entire songs as "ready-mades" to recapitulate the structure of the pop regime. Power structures within the entertainment industry are obviously far less apparent than those of totalitarian or quasi-totalitarian states, but Laibach were able to apply similar techniques successfully to interrogate the ideological regimes of the East and the culturally legitimated market regimes of the West, moving from an alienating poeticization of ideology to engage even more pervasive power structures via an alienating politicization of rock/pop culture. They reveal even the most disposable artifacts of pop culture as sites of both micro- and macropolitical struggles for representation and control.

The impact of the cover version can be read from the perspective of ideological manipulation. In her analysis of the discursive tactics employed by Soviet "Newspeak," Thom identifies imitation as one of the surest means of undermining an inconvenient fact or contradictory argument: "Communist power has understood that in order to get rid of an undesirable object, it is better to counterfeit it rather than simply to suppress it. For the copy destroys the real object more surely than physical demolition could."[82]

Laibach's cover versions dramatized the extent of audiences' largely unconscious subjection in relation to rock and (particularly on NATO) suggested the danger of a pop-capitalist regime replacing the former Eastern regimes. In the case of Queen, subjects of Laibach's first cover version, *Geburt einer Nation* (originally *One Vision*), much of the work was already done, and almost no alteration of the lyrics beyond their translation into German was necessary to draw out Queen's authoritarian subtext.

In 1984, Queen released the single *Radio GaGa*; the video showed the group in a dystopian setting based on scenes from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Queen stand on stage, stretching and retracting their arms in time to the beat, and a mass drone-like audience responds with the same movement. The gesture crossed over into live performances of the song, and was subsequently repeated en masse by audiences as large as a hundred thousand (at Rio de Janeiro). In 1985, Queen released the *One Vision* single, inspired by the mammoth Live-Aid concerts. Despite the ambivalent sexual persona of Freddie Mercury, Queen were the most successful of all stadium rock groups, and their fans' mass devotion to him exemplified the rock star as *Übermensch*. 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 apoliticality. Laibach are not ascribing any specific hidden agenda to Queen (beyond the conquest of new audiences and territories), but amplifying or "making strange" the structures of unquestioning adulation (and obedience) common to both totalitarian mass 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." This strange retroactive mutation via the introduction of a linguistic virus recalls Deleuze and Guattari's description of Kafka's interventions into the German language and the creation of a "minor literature." The mutating, proliferating effects of these subtle but devastating interventions suggest that Laibach's cover versions could be read as a type of "minor music," subtly corrupting a dominant language and retroactively transforming it into a vehicle of prediction.

OPUS DEI

Pop music is for sheep and we are wolves disguised as shepherds.[83]

Laibach's treatment of pop lyrics as serious ideological texts has a Yugoslav precedent. Ramet[84] notes that rock audiences in Yugoslavia pay far closer attention to lyrics than Western audiences. Laibach used this tendency to read the meaning of a song written in another language almost wholly through the lyrics (even when these are nonsensical or disposable) to deconstruct the originals.

A casual reading of the 1986 summer hit *Life Is Life* by the Austrian group Opus would probably dismiss the possibility of any value or significance in the banal lyrics. Yet Laibach's subtle modifications and militant interpretation transformed it into a paean to *völkisch* belonging: "We all give the power, we all give the best," or "The feeling of the people is the feeling of the land."[85] An additional significance of Laibach's selection of Opus is that two members of Opus are from Carinthia, and of Slovene descent. *Geburt einer Nation* and *Life Is Life / Leben heisst Leben*[86] featured on *Opus Dei*, which inaugurated Laibach's period of greatest success and their tactic of reworking Anglo-Saxon rock "classics." It was criticized for its departure from Laibach's avant-garde/industrial template and its flirtation with pop,[87] yet Laibach never intended to remain underground, and always sought to seduce wider audiences, particularly in the Western "countries of real capitalism."[88]

The album's title contained at least three levels of allusion. First, there was the (ab)use of the Austrian group's name. There was also the implication that Laibach's work was "The Work of God" (the literal Latin translation). Finally, there is a more sinister allusion to the quasi-Masonic Spanish Catholic sect Opus Dei, which has been linked to extreme right-wing activities. Masonic allusions are present in the lyrics of another of the album's tracks, *How the West Was Won*, which dispassionately manipulates the "mystery" surrounding Laibach, and taunts Western audiences into further speculation about the group and its intentions:

> The world is in pain
> Our secrets to gain
> But still let them guess and gaze on;
> They'll never divine
> The word or the sign
> Of free and strong men of the nation . . .
> It's this and it's that
> They cannot tell why
> So many great men of the nation
> Should aprons put on
> To make themselves one
> With the men who have found their salvation.

The track is introduced by a trumpet fanfare, and proceeds at a grinding pace with heavy guitar sounds and industrial percussion. The lyrics are partly based on Slovenia's most famous poem, Prešeren's *Zdravljica* (A Toast). The overall effect is to suggest a secret militant ritual organization active within the music industry, distinct even from the satanic ritualism of black metal, and with far more ambitious designs on the mass market. The album concludes with an ideological "new original." *The Great Seal* is a "cover" of Winston Churchill's famous "We shall fight them on the beaches" speech. Laibach's singer solemnly recites the text, accompanied by an anthemic backing suggestive of the soundtrack to a wartime propaganda film. It recalls a heroic, mobilizational mode of music rarely heard in postwar Europe, and the militant "lyrics" ("We shall go on to the end") enhance the image of resolute action Laibach were attempting to construct.

Although the sound of *Opus Dei* was not (quite) as severe as previous albums and flirted with kitsch, the artwork contains some of the most disturbing Laibach images. The graphics are starkly drawn in black, white, and silver, and resemble the partisan woodcuts used as a backdrop to Laibach performances. Imprinted on the disc and on the rear sleeve are versions of John Heartfield's controversial montage of a swastika composed of axe-heads. The other dominant motif is a monstrously stylized image of Milan Fras wearing the distinctive headdress that has been the subject of as much speculation as any of the other unexplained elements in Laibach's work. The eyes are highlighted in white and, together with the stern expression, seem particularly malevolent and watchful. On the cover of the *Life Is Life* single, the figure is surrounded

8.4 Laibach, *Life Is Life* cover, 1987.

by a woman and three children, heightening the figure's aura of paternal surveillance and almost challenging the potential buyer not to be deterred.

The videos from the album, for *Life Is Life* and *Geburt einer Nation*, were also equally transgressive of the norms of pop imagery. *Life Is Life* reinvents the promotional video as Heimatfilm, set around the Alpine scenery of Lake Bohinj, the Savica Falls (a focal point of Slovene myth), and the wooden chapel commemorating Russian First World War prisoners who died in the area. Similarly, *Geburt einer Nation* makes extensive use of the archaic-pagan scenography of the *Krst* production. Despite— or even because of—their transgressiveness, both these and other Laibach videos received extensive airplay on MTV, an institution Laibach would both benefit from and attack.

LET IT BE: LAIBACH VERSUS THE BEATLES

Laibach use the oppressive familiarity of the songs they cover to smuggle a complex critique into the heart of pop culture. While familiarity with the original is a useful way to hook a listener, the "new originals" are transformed to such an

extent as to retroactively alienate them from their composers. The result of this retroengineering is to make the originals come to seem like poor imitations of the "new originals," particularly to those who may not have heard them. A group from an obscure Slav nation who did not even sing exclusively in English sold back to the West its own supposedly global, borderless product with a distinctive and unapologetic national element. The impact of these reworkings derives not from their similarity but from their *distance* from the accepted norms of the genre. The harsh voice, martial rhythms, and quasi-classical arrangements violate from the outside the stylistic and political norms under which the covered songs were produced. Moreover, this very transgression formed an important aspect of Laibach's "USP" (unique selling point). The "making strange" of pop and rock lyrics extracted the conformist political subtexts of what is ostensibly a rebellious form. The "new originals" serve as demonstrations of the rarely acknowledged mass psychopolitical force of popular music.

After the first attempts on *Opus Dei*, 1988 saw Laibach mount a systematic assault on Western rock heritage: first with seven versions of the Rolling Stones' *Sympathy for the Devil* (which already had a sinister reputation), and then with a surprising cover of the Beatles' *Let It Be*. Laibach explained:

> *Let It Be* (FIAT) is a prophetic title which covers the ill-starred nature of an operation that gave us pop music and its industry. The Beatles record itself stands as a cheapskate epitaph, a cardboard tombstone, a sad and tatty end of an era when it all started. We have enough imagination not to do a cover version; what we are doing is rewriting history, which every now and then has to be corrected and reinterpreted to be useful for the future.[89]

This statement demonstrates clearly that Laibach's interventions are rarely celebrations, except in the most ironic sense. Laibach are clear that most of the originals are worthless save as "base materials" that can be salvaged via a type of alchemical process—*aurum de stercore*, or "gold from shit." The FIAT reference recurs throughout NSK works of this period, and builds on the Godlike role suggested by the *Opus Dei* image, *fiat* in its original meaning being an absolute decree or command.

The choice of *Let It Be* and Laibach's attitude toward it indicated that the Beatles' legacy was experienced by some in Yugoslavia as being as oppressive as the British punks had found it. While elsewhere in the Eastern bloc the Beatles retained an exotic, forbidden aura, in Yugoslavia their work was so much historical debris needing to be cleared and returned to a productive role. By monumentalizing the most abject and unloved Beatles album (Paul McCartney disowned the finished project), Laibach questioned the Beatles' supposedly unchallengeable reputation. Some of the lyrics, such as *Get Back* (to where you once belonged), again seem highly appropriate to Laibach, and the arrangement of *I've Got a Feeling* has a semi-comic, rabble-rousing quality reminiscent of 1970s glam-rockers such as Gary Glitter. As a whole, though, it was the mediocrity and "scrappiness" of the original that fa-

8.5 Laibach, *Let It Be* cover, 1988.

cilitated Laibach's assimilation. No rearrangement of phrases as trivial as *Dig a Pony* could be as preposterous or nonsensical as the original.

Given the poverty of the lyrics, Laibach made instrumentation the primary agent of recapitulation. Rather than produce an openly contemptuous punk-style cover, Laibach monumentalized the weakness of the original through massively excessive orchestration, destroying it through a totalitarian mode of duplication. Classical string arrangements, semi-operatic vocals, hunting horns, and martial drums conspire both to bury and to salvage something from the original.[90] The "new originals" transcend the mediocrity of the original work, imposing an (ironically) epic and heroic tone, both sophisticated and barbaric. In the process, Laibach implicitly appropriated the Beatles' canonical status while claiming that their interpretation of the form is superior. The project displayed an acute awareness of the nuances of the history of pop culture, and was a further challenge to condescending assumptions about artists from "the Other Europe" being unable to produce material as sophisticated as their Western counterparts. In fact, Laibach's ideological problematization of the consumption of pop-cultural history has no obvious Western counterpart.

THE GAZE OF THE OTHER: LAIBACH ON VIDEO

Just as Laibach began their campaign against Western rock-pop culture, Slovene (and Yugoslav) exposure to this culture increased exponentially. The provision of cable TV in large parts of the country made available MTV and German (plus the existing Austrian and Italian) channels. It is typical of Laibach's strictly nonaligned stance in relation to the industry that although MTV has given the group considerable airplay, they are nonetheless scathing about its effects:

> Through the channels of cable and satellite television, rivers of the uninterrupted programs of world television stations flow (like MTV), radically brainwashing millions of young people, altering—in substance and essence—their psychosomatic structures in the direction of monstrous mutations, thus implementing the totality of rock 'n' roll music and the TOTALITARIANISM of its determinants. In this way the psychosomatic structure becomes the outermost extension of the network of rock'n' roll communication, a kind of bottomless box in which its contents are poured, creating and satisfying needs, exhausting and seemingly regenerating its energies. The system of rock 'n' roll moronization by means of TV programs like MTV lowers the intelligence level of its devotees below the indispensable level of sound judgment. To those with more distance MTV is of course nothing but chewing gum for the eyes, and Maiken Wexo[91] stretches it for us with great dexterity.[92]

Despite the need to distance themselves from video as an element of the capitalist entertainment complex, Laibach realized its importance to the penetration of the Western market, and had experimented with the form from an early stage.[93] Video's alleged totalitarian, "brainwashing" nature made it an ideal bearer of Laibach's totalitarian motifs. The Laibach videos produced by the NSK video section Retrovision dramatize the totalitarian potential of the fusion of music and image.[94] In the process of recapitulating Western rock, Laibach simultaneously manipulated Western preconceptions, presenting ritualistic images of primitive "Balkanism" while applying a highly sophisticated retrogarde methodology. This strategy is most apparent in the *Sympathy for the Devil*[95] video, which presents a dual spectacle. In a clichéd mist-wreathed castle (Predjamski Grad, near Postojna) Laibach are seen feasting in a hall decked with hunting trophies. Their traditional costume and the almost feudal decadence of the scene look like an incarnation of the imaginary "obscene enjoyment of the Other" that, Žižek claims, animates nationalism:

> We always impute to the "other" an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life), he and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the "other" is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the "excess" that pertains to this way: the smell of "their" food, "their" noisy songs and dances, "their" strange manners, "their" attitude to work.[96]

In Žižek's account, the cause of hatred is hatred of enjoyment in the Other. In this video, as in much of their symbolism, Laibach present a spectral, ritualized

form of Eastern enjoyment, which others may envy but never fully participate in or comprehend. The luxuriousness of the feast scenes confirms and denies Western stereotypes of impoverished, oppressed East Europeans who can access only premodern forms of enjoyment. To the Western eye, these activities are both highly archaic and strangely fascinating. In the final scenes, Laibach enact one of the key Western beliefs about the East: that archaic rural primitivism of a type long extinct in the West remains widespread. Seminaked children play in a straw-strewn stone courtyard surrounded by ruined buildings, while Laibach's singer plays the role of *paterfamilias*. Intercut between the feast and family scenes are shots of Laibach marching in hunting gear through the spectacular Škocjanske caves, bearing blazing torches. The fact that such specific/alien images are presented as the natural accompaniment to what was once a Rolling Stones song serves to underline the extent of its assimilation. The images play upon the extent of Western ignorance about the East (for all the casual Western viewer might know, such scenes might still be typical of Slovene and Yugoslav social life, rather than just landscape and architecture). The ultimate illusion created by the images is of a primitive premodern lifestyle in which unmediated access to "archaic" forms of enjoyment remains possible.

In manipulating the spectral Eastern primitivism active in the Western imagination, Laibach were staging and making use of the type of popular prejudices about Eastern Europe described by the Bulgarian writer Elka Tschernokoshewa, who warned in 1993 of

> one of the greatest dangers that lead to misunderstandings between Eastern and Western Europe today: the tendency to conclude that daily reality for the people living in a system corresponds to one's own images, ideas and knowledge of this system. That means that the characteristics of the political system are intertwined with the people living there—if the system is brutal, barbaric and totalitarian, then the people living there must also be totalitarian, barbaric and brutal.[97]

KAPITAL: MONUMENTAL CHAOS

> Everywhere we look, the monopolization of the broadcast of messages, the control of noise, and the institutionalization of the silence of others assure the durability of power. Here, this channelization takes on a new, less violent, and more subtle form: laws of the political economy take the place of censorship laws. Music and the musician essentially become either objects of consumption like everything else, recuperators of subversion, or meaningless noise.[98]

Attali was writing in 1977, and his concepts are based on the Western experience of popular music; however, his account of political or moral censorship largely being displaced by the laws of the market is highly applicable to the situation faced by musicians in postsocialist Central and Eastern Europe. At one level, more can now be expressed, but conversely, the pressure to be commercial has intensified

and, with it, the pressure not to test the tolerance of audiences to an extent where the product becomes "uncommercial," a term now as pejorative as, for instance, "antisocial" or "reactionary" used to be. In the early 1990s, the "reactionary realism"[99] of the pop market and pop culture was already the norm for Slovenia, and the old power structures were crumbling. Laibach were clear about the difficulties of the new situation and the role which pop culture played in the generation of pro-system sentiment:

> In socialism the abyss between subject and superstructure was large enough to produce skepticism; in capitalism there is no abyss between the subject and the superstructure, because superstructure and subject are brutally melted together. The superstructure carefully creates sentiments to disguise this brutality. Sentimentality in the victory of Kapital therefore acts as a superstructure covering brutality and eliminates the abyss between subject and itself.[100]

1992's *Kapital* was released in the aftermath of the political upheavals that had taken place since the release of Laibach's last "new" material in 1988.[101] It surprised many with its lack of explicit political references to the recent changes (the use of socialist symbolism in Irwin's 1991 *Kapital* project seemed to comment on them far more directly). *Kapital*'s themes are diverse, multiple, and oblique, taking in economics, astrophysics, and even hip-hop. Many people found it infuriating, obscure, and mystifying, and it was less successful than previous releases. However, it exemplifies the "delayed-action" effect of many NSK works, the true significance of which often unfolds slowly in relation to subsequent cultural and political developments. *Kapital* seems all the more obscure because the sleeve contains only fragments of the lyrics, as well as destabilizing esoteric phrases apparently unconnected to the tracks.[102] Each album format (CD, tape, vinyl) contains a different sequence and alternate mixes of the tracks, heightening the sense of a multilayered, nonlinear "text" in which the playful, mystifying aspects of Laibach predominate over the militant and absolute. The sounds were still monumental, but structured by far greater sonic complexity and ambiguity, and there seemed to be a need to conceal and qualify impressions and moods that had previously predominated. The most "topical" of its tracks was the single *Wirtschaft ist tot* (The Economy Is Dead), which suggested that Western economic concepts might already be failing in the East, and anticipated the European recession of the early to mid-1990s. The track recapitulates and archaicizes the Germanic model of economic progress, combining a sample of a German financial report and mentions of Nomura Securities with 1940s-style string samples and rigid, inflexible beat patterns. The "retro-kitsch" aspect of the work is exemplified by the video, which presents Laibach as silver-faced, android-like pilots of a *Flash Gordon*-type craft. The economic subtexts of the album were only fully developed in the interviews of the period:

> The East collapsed because it blindly believed Western utopian ideas of the freedom of the individual. The West, on the other hand, survived because through its cor-

porate logic it discreetly introduces a system of unconscious, collective non-freedom. The collapse of communism no longer means a permanent triumph of classical capitalism. In its core, capitalism has a tendency towards self-destruction. The fundamental self-destructive substance of capitalism, and its driving force, is greed. It is a characteristic of greed that it only appeases its hunger when it destroys itself.[103]

This statement was also performed in Ljubljana Stadium (site of wartime collaborationist rallies) for *Predictions of Fire*. The way in which *Kapital* was promoted left no doubt that it represented a redoubling of the assault on Western cultural and economic hegemony, but this was more apparent in the album's general sound than in its explicit lyrical stances. *Illumination* was based around a sample of an American commentator discussing the Great Depression, which brought "inflation, famine, and chaos to every corner of the globe; some label it the great depression, others are naming it nemesis."

This is set against throbbing electronic basslines and menacing strings, which, like the rest of the album, seem to evoke the chaos and disorientation of both the early 1990s and the Depression-racked 1930s. The album's opener, *Decade Null*, combines another sound of the 1930s: the ominous drone of a propeller aircraft, followed by clipped electronic pulses, militant string samples, and incongruous percussive interludes. *Kapital*'s instrumental tracks suggest a kind of informational overload, with contemporary elements battling fragments of far older musical forms. The arrangements recapitulate the chaos of postmodern culture, and attempt to transcend it by rematerializing fixed forms from the stylistic chaos of late capitalism (to which Laibach contributes). In contrast to the linear styles of the period, even *Kapital*'s technoid elements are made strange by odd rhythms and incongruous samples. *Young Europa* sounds simultaneously archaic and futuristic. Its grinding, primitive mechanical rhythm was audibly different to contemporary (Western) sounds, especially combined with classical piano samples. Each track transgresses the norms of contemporary music and as a result, listeners' expectations. In this respect, Laibach's work acknowledges Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the predictability of "light" (popular) music.[104] It emphasizes complexity and unpredictability, even in relation to its own stylistic norms. Tempos halt and even reverse upon themselves, and moods are jarringly dispelled by unexpected elements that problematize the reception of the songs even for Laibach's core audience. Rather than simple obscurantism or irony, however, these transgressions also constituted a new and specifically Slovene sound whose very inconsistencies simultaneously distinguish it and frustrate its imitation.

Three of the vocal tracks (*Entartete Welt*, *The Hunter's Funeral Procession*, and *Sponsored by Mars*) are more anthemic, and recall the spirit of earlier work while being disrupted by genre collisions that constitute a distinct (Eastern) sonic form. Laibach's archaic-barbaric manipulation of the German language makes it obscure even to native speakers. This cryptic quality recapitulates and toys with the fan's (and the

researcher's) need to decipher lyrics. Besides this "Laibach Deutsch," *The Hunter's Funeral Procession* includes ritualistic Latin phrases provoking speculation about the secret meaning they "must" contain. The listener's belief that there must be some inherent meaning in the lyrics, and that at least some purpose will become apparent, is manipulated and enflamed. Yet *Kapital's* logic is uneven and fragmented, and the "inconsistent mixture" of the sounds represents the first time Laibach's music becomes totally structured by the paradoxes and contradictions that underlie its discourse, which themselves form a type of private pseudo-logic.

Entartete Welt (The Discovery of the North Pole)'s lyrics echo the dissolution or complexification of previously fixed metanarratives (including Laibach's) accompanying the end of the Cold War, while the melody creates a mood of implicit nostalgia for less complex times:

> World, without dreams, without lust, without words, all is money. Death, lust is dead, death is dead, sorrow, dead, God is dead. . . . God is dead; lust-lust is dead, and sorrow is dead; everything is dead. . . . Where is a space, a sacred space, where my vows will not be disturbed? Where is a home, a national place, Where our sighs will not be heard?[105] Where is my space? my holiness? Where my prayers disturb none? Where is my place? my holy place? Where no one hears our German? . . . That faith of yours in mighty God, Golden age you've gone away, Now we face the judgment day, Golden age for you we mourn, Age of gold, the golden door. . . . Now we face the judgment day.[106]

The Hunter's Funeral Procession suggests proto-Germanic pagan rituals through lyrics referring to "11,000 dancing maidens," and Latin incantations offset by 1970s-style funk percussion combined with hunting horns and filmic strings. Here Laibach transgressed their own sonic archetypes, as well as continuing their deconstruction of Western musical norms, and anticipated the chaotic genre fusions and schisms affecting electronic music in the 1990s. In 1992, such experiments were stylistically transgressive in themselves, but all the more so for being the work of Slavic artists concerned to produce an autonomous sound directly challenging Western preconceptions about the East's inevitable and wholly passive embrace of pop culture. *Kapital* encodes the accelerated post-Cold War collisions of Western pop culture and archaic folk survivals. The "ethnic" elements act as signifiers of local authenticity, so that "völkischness" becomes the music's "unique selling point" in the globalized cultural market. *Kapital* explores the East-West interaction through a unique series of musical hybrids. Captive snatches of hip-hop, jazz, rock, and disco are assimilated into an esoteric contemporary neo-archaic form that encodes the boundaryless consumer-driven chaos of post-Cold War globalization. The closing CD track, *Regime of Coincidence State of Gravity*, is based on extensive samples from THX 1138, George Lucas's dystopic 1973 science-fiction film, in which a character (played by Donald Pleasence) talks about the need for a new unity in the face of the oppressive state machinery. These coexist with hip-hop sounds, operatic vocals, and the omnipresent string samples, creating a highly ambiguous finish to the

album that constantly provokes further questions rather than providing an easy, satisfying closure.[107]

NATO: Pop Militarism

One of the key themes running through all of Laibach's best-known work is an East-West dialectic in musical form. The press release for the *NATO* album in 1994 alluded to this when it described it as "the seventh in a sequence of official Laibach LP releases that have artistically redefined the political map of Europe."[108]

After the multiple contradictions of *Kapital, NATO* was an infinitely more straightforward album, directly expressive of Laibach's East-West theme. Like *Kapital* it had a predictive role, attempting to extrapolate trends not yet fully recognized. Again there are parallels here with Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka*, whose work, they claim, manifested "the diabolical powers of the future."[109] *NATO* combined a heavy and explicitly prophetic theme with a melodic, accessible style. It was the most "commercial" Laibach release, and the disorientation it produced was primarily based on the lyrics and the political context in which they were redeployed, rather than sonic innovation. *NATO*'s pop-techno sound was criticized, but Laibach have always faced such criticisms, and even in the early 1980s they had to defend the inclusion of rhythmic elements:

> The apparent techno-revolution of our music has parallels in the growth and multiplication of machines. We are fascinated by disco aesthetics and the introduction of disco elements in the production of our music is not a novelty. It only affects the purification and apostrophizing of rhythm, which is—as regular repetition (repetition!)—the purest form of militantly organized rhythmics of technicist production and classicist beauty. Disco rhythm stimulates automatist mechanisms and co-forms the industrialization of consciousness according to the model of totalitarianism and industrial production.[110]

The use of "disco" elements on *NATO* and elsewhere had a conceptual, aesthetic, and also political rationale, and seemed well suited to the directness of the album's political message. All the songs have a loosely military theme, and deal (sometimes contrary to the original artists' intentions) with issues of war, cultural colonization, and fears for the future. The most audacious aspect was the appropriation of the imagery and symbolism of the world's most powerful military alliance. The NATO insignia became an element of Laibach iconography on stage sets, merchandise, and videos in both Eastern and Western Europe. This effect was anticipated in the *NATO* press release: "Now Laibach take NATO where NATO itself has refused to go."[111] On the second "Occupied Europe Tour" (1994–95), Laibach brought NATO symbolism to areas where NATO was considering wider intervention (Bosnia), and where it was feared as a potentially hegemonic force (Russia and Serbia).

8.6 Laibach, *NATO* cover, 1994.

Laibach recapitulate NATO as an ideological regime, and link the economic system it represents to pop culture. Laibach's paramilitarist performance is the "noise" that NATO, in its public guise as a defensive institution seeking to "embrace" the states of Central and Eastern Europe, tries to suppress in order to assuage the fears it arouses, particularly in Russia. Laibach hinted at the "obscene underside" of NATO's democratic rhetoric, a side that came to prominence in 1992 with the exposure of its Gladio operations in Italy. This armed covert network was supposedly created to oppose a Warsaw Pact invasion, but in practice it was used by the far right to destabilize Italian politics through terrorism. In 1994, Laibach presented a more aggressive and militaristic image than NATO itself, but suggested through parasitic attachment that NATO wanted to impose the Western system across the Balkans and beyond. In this period, NATO was engaged in a dual process of territorial expansion and the demilitarization of its public image. The type of music covered on *NATO* is the background soundtrack to reality in the NATO states, and the album drew a link between the territorial expansion of NATO as the mili-

tary agency of "real capitalism" and the related territorial expansion of Western popular music. In other words, the advent or increased presence of pop realism predicted the territorial expansion of its parent military-political regime. The real NATO caught up with Laibach's predictions in the 1999 campaign against Yugoslavia.[112]

The first *NATO* single, a reworking of Swedish group Europe's cloying rock-pop hit *Final Countdown*, gained widespread Slovene airplay, and the computer-animated video was both MTV-friendly and a dynamic expression of NSK State symbolism (see chapter 9). The best-known pieces on the album were Edwin Starr's *War* and Bollard & Bollard's *In the Army Now*, previously covered by Status Quo. *War* was also reworked by Frankie Goes To Hollywood. Laibach's version is a strict choral arrangement. In response to the opening question "War—what is it good for?," Laibach substitute their own answer: the names of major corporations, such as IBM, Sony, and CNN associated with the military-industrial-entertainment complex. The song presents a contemporary reality in which there is no distance between pop culture, capitalism, and militarism. Despite the jovial arrangement, Laibach's version of J. D. Loudermilk's *National Reservation* is the most poignant piece. The original is about the dispossession and forcible civilizing of the Native Americans; Laibach's version also refers to the patronized, economically subordinated populations of postsocialist Europe: "the whole Eastern nation," which, as Laibach warned on *Kapital,* is now subject to intensive globalization: "They took the whole Eastern nation, put us in their reservation, took away our ways of life. . . . Took away our native tongue, taught their English to our young . . . all the things we made by hand, are nowadays made in Japan."

The original song *In the Year 2525* foretold an increasingly technological future, and speculated on whether humanity would survive until that date. Laibach's version is still more dystopic, foreseeing a devastating future of continual war. The tempo is slow and mournful and, as elsewhere on the album, a prominent role is played by the choral elements, which, together with the quiet fade of the track, suggest a lament. The album closes with *Mars on the Drina,* a punning rework of the Serbian nationalist tune *Marš na Drini* (March on the River Drina). The martial drums of the main section offset the melancholy introduction, but the song's principal significance (apart from its role as a Balkan signifier on *NATO*) lies in the fact that it has now been performed several times in five of the ex-Yugoslav capitals: Ljubljana, Skopje, Sarajevo, Zagreb, and Belgrade. Despite its traumatic associations for non-Serbs, none of these audiences has questioned Laibach's performance of it. The key phrase "*Mars* (War) on the Drina" highlights the renewed paramilitarism attached to such "national" songs in Serbia and elsewhere,[113] just as the album in general addresses the often light-hearted way in which pop culture treats war themes through songs such as *In the Army Now,* which enjoyed renewed popularity in 1991 with the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia.

> Laibach is not the consequence of some kind of intellectual process. It is a fact of
> that same mechanism (*immanent, consistent spirit*), which forces it to create and to live
> as it lives; it is a state-action where intuition, as a magical act in the rhythm of people
> and things, decides the direction, without offering or looking for explanations.[114]

NATO referred to the state-music interface that has run throughout Laibach's work. Ever since the earliest versions of *Država* in 1982, the state has been a latent and often explicit presence. This connects *Država*'s concern to "raise standards of national health, national working and defense capacity" with the interrogation of rock and the assimilation of NATO into Laibach's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The state has appeared in Laibach's work where it is either oppressively present (in covert or overt forms) or catastrophically absent. Laibach revealed the covert presence of the state and dominant ideologies in the rock industry's role as "ideological state apparatus" of Western market states. Laibach's strict, martial rhythms and hierarchical, rally-like performances encode processes of mobilization and control traditionally associated with the state. This link between musical and political forms of power is alluded to in Laibach's statement "Music is the law of the Institution."[115] Similarly, in his introduction to Attali's *Noise*, Jameson claims that Adorno characterized Schoenberg as replicating "the dynamic of a repressive, bureaucratic and technocratic social order so completely as to offer something like an aesthetic portrait or mirror image of it."[116]

Via aesthetic reprocessing of the state as notion and reality, Laibach and NSK highlighted the repressive qualities of political regimes in both parts of "Occupied Europe." At home, Laibach suggested that its apocalyptic, totalitarian sound was a far more accurate depiction of Yugoslav reality than most people imagined. While the state as totalitarian archetype was less apparent in the self-management system than in the Warsaw Pact states, Laibach drew out (the sound of) its latent repressiveness, and the possibility of a return to its Stalinist roots. Yet as the populist reaction to its name and to the alternative in general showed, Laibach also illuminated repressive and even totalitarian mentalities in the general public,[117] and usurped the traditional state function of cultural protection.

The success or otherwise of Laibach's *musical* confrontations with the ruling ideology in 1980s Slovenia is hard to separate from the group's overall impact. Nevertheless, Laibach's music (as a violently disruptive intervention in mass culture) has certainly intensified its political and cultural impact. At the very least, the group's early works are powerful examples of music as a documentation of the systems under which it is created.

Paradoxically, the use of Slovene and German national symbolism in Laibach's music was one of the key aspects of the group's appeal in the West, offering the novelty of a distinctive national form within popular music. Laibach's totalitarian

discourse and visual signifiers also seemed to offer an "Eastern" authenticity, creating a "unique selling point" in the Western market. Writing about the difficulties surrounding the construction and identification of a specific New Zealand approach to popular music, Shuker[118] argues that the perception of a music as "local" (i.e., more than simply a simulation of the Anglo-American rock-pop norms) depends on three factors: an immediate local association through the band's name and the content of the lyrics; the presence of a local accent audible in the vocal delivery of a song; and local elements in the "general style or idiom" of the song. All these factors mark out Laibach's "Sloveneness" and, along with Kraftwerk, they (and subsequently their German imitators, Rammstein) have been one of the most successful non-Anglo-Saxon groups. Much to the resentment of some younger musicians, foreign awareness of a "Slovene sound" in popular music is indelibly associated with Laibach. The fact that Laibach were already achieving success in 1985–86, at a time when many of their lyrics were still in Slovene, suggests that rather than being an obstacle, a strong "local" or "national" element can create a sense of fascination in the global market. Laibach may prove to have been "the exception that proves the rule,"[119] but they have certainly made Slovene popular music an internationally respected proposition. To this extent, Laibach have undermined what smaller cultures and nations experience as the hegemony of Anglo-American music.

Laibach's paradoxical place "in the belly of the Trojan horse"[120] makes its assumption of a judgmental approach to pop culture problematic. On the other hand, they have successfully infiltrated a sustained critique into the pop media. Laibach's work has rendered audible a series of regimes by and through music and, following in the wake of Attali, exposed the continuities between music and authority, at least temporarily repoliticizing music and identifying it as a site of dominant cultural and ideological power. Laibach's paradoxical place within the industry informs their work, yet it also faces the constant danger of normalization by the regime it sought to infiltrate.

Laibach created and transmitted an identifiably national sound, transcending the limits of their context and producing much innovative work of lasting aesthetic value. Their transgressive approach to stylistic and genre politics has had a wide subcultural influence (with both negative and positive results), and the type of stylistic incursions audible on *Kapital* anticipated the collapse of rigid borders between genres within and beyond electronic music in the decade since. The extent of Laibach's success (in the independent music sector) has also changed the idea of the popular, proving through sales that there is a market even for extreme and complex music that openly challenges and manipulates the underground as well as the mainstream. The fear and antagonism provoked by Laibach's work indicates the successful manifestation of a series of spectral regimes (Laibach have *sounded* as well as looked totalitarian). The question is whether the group have gone beyond the

mere documentation of these regimes, or whether their music has reached an "escape velocity" that enables it to transcend the limitations of its problematic source material.

Whether an aesthetic value can be acknowledged in the music depends on whether the politically compromised aesthetics of force and noise in music first conceptualized by the Italian futurists are accepted. As Hewitt[121] argues, however, it is possible to differentiate between artistic practices considered reactionary and the political attitudes of the artists involved. The use of reactionary elements does not automatically signify politically reactionary objectives, any more than the use of a Che Guevara motif automatically signifies a progressive political objective. The use of reactionary material alone does not negate artistic value, and one implication of Laibach is that there is no uncontaminated musical source; all music has its own relations to and compromises with power.

The majority of bands actively involved in Fascist political activism (rather than subcultural flirtation or provocation) do not play industrial or electronic music, but variants of the guitar-based "Oi!" style, or Germanic/Nordic acoustic folk. Actual (rather than spectral) Fascism is in practice suspicious of—if not hostile to—avant-garde and experimental approaches to music or culture, and Nazi musicology always condemned atonal and avant-garde music.[122] Fascism is also suspicious of ambiguity, contradiction, and paradox, the elements that maintain uncertainty and suspicion around Laibach. Laibach's work suggests that one-dimensional music that really is only what it seems to be is the most sinister, whether this be mind-numbing pop or one-dimensional Nazi industrial.[123] Fascists do attend Laibach concerts, but they have to tolerate Laibach's paradoxical re-capitulation of Fascist imagery and its juxtaposition with Communist and other formally antithetical symbols, and Ramet has argued that Laibach's music is best seen as "a sublimated form of 'pop fascism' enabling aggressive instincts to be channeled innocently."[124]

Laibach's music reconstructs the illusion of a mode of heroic transcendent experience that remains generally absent or forbidden. While this carries the dangers of any exorcistic/therapeutic intervention, it does not manifest forces that would not otherwise be present in music or society—as Laibach say, they do not invent anything. There are groups which uncritically deploy Fascistic symbolism, and some that are overtly neo-Nazi, but this strand had many other precedents besides Laibach—Throbbing Gristle's experiments in the paramilitarization of music, or the ever-growing fascination with the Nazi era in popular culture. Laibach represent an attempt to communicate and to transcend alienation, to make audible normally repressed "noise" as part of an exploration of the art-ideology interface. It could be argued that it is far less violent and oppressive than the continual noise of mass corporate pop culture, and the political ideologies underlying contemporary reality. Laibach's ongoing response to the conditions they encounter at home and abroad is an analytical process that cannot concern itself too closely with conse-

quences without losing the tensions that give it momentum. Laibach state: "In art morality is nonsense; in practice it is immoral; in people it is a sickness."[125]

Laibach make audible the hegemonic potentials latent within all systems, and leave audiences to draw their own conclusions. The systematic nature of their approach and the volatility of their materials mean that Laibach's is a necessarily and structurally ambivalent legacy. What begins as alienating noise can be recontextualized through novelty or repetition as positive experience. The fact that the sounds of alienation can be "enjoyed" is itself disturbing to some, and certainly questions existing evaluative categories within music, just as punk did. Shock tactics necessarily carry with them the "danger" of an audience fetishizing the brutality, but this is outweighed by the countersystemic value of rendering audible "regime noise." Symbolically Laibach acts as a regime that brutally subordinates its audience, but the work is only an amplified recapitulation of the more insidious (but no less brutal) way in which listeners are conscripted into the dominant pop-capitalist ideology. A positive aesthetic recuperation of this process by the listener is transcendent in that it represents a recovery of value in contemporary or historical conflict and distress. The "beauty" of Laibach's early (1980–87) music can be read as a dystopian sublime produced by attempts to transcend industrial, ideological, national, and historical trauma. Ultimately, Laibach's success in transcending—or at least temporarily evading—the regimes their music confronts can be measured by the extent to which they remain musically and politically ambiguous. Ambiguity is often codified by the media as "danger," and when Laibach loses the sinister associations of ambiguity, the group will have lost the transcendent menacing otherness that enables it to confront the regimes it interrogates.

DRŽAVA: Culture as a State

> The State is taking care of the protection, cultivation and exploitation of the forests. The State is taking care of the physical education of the nation, especially the youth, with the aim of improving the nation's health and national, working and defensive capability. Its treatment is becoming more and more indulgent, all freedom is tolerated.
>
> —Laibach, Država

The state is the most dramatic materialization and symbol of the regimes with which NSK interacts (totalitarianism, national and artistic history, spiritual and political authority, "real capitalism," the music industry). Whether in the form of statements, Tito samples, references to heavy industry and propaganda, the NSK State, or Laibach's spectral double of the NATO state machine, the state is one of the dominant NSK paradigms, and the most spectacular and traumatic, utopian/dystopian example of the power mechanisms that structure its work. As such, it recurs constantly. NSK's interventions on the state approach it as a potent "ready-made" object. Used literally or as a more abstract signifier of power, the state provided the conceptual-aesthetic means and material for Laibach's interaction with the cultural and political regimes of East and West. When the NSK State was created, Laibach was retrodesignated as the "state generator."[1] The NSK State extracts the utopian energies of the state to provide a conceptual form of identification for individuals from diverse nationalities. Much NSK material is based on reprocessing the traumatic and transcendent qualities attached to the notion of the twentieth-century industrial state. The NSK State attempts to deal with the surplus produced by NSK's repeated reprocessing of the signifiers and ideals of the state, and to maintain its ambiguity in relation to specific states and systems.

What motivates the compulsive demasking and recapitulation of the state motif is not just its power as a symbol of "regime" but its potential as a transcendent framework through which art attempts to escape the demands of regime. The historical NSK strategy depended on illuminating the joint menace and seductiveness of the regimes with which it dealt. The establishment of the NSK State and the associated concepts represent a reversal of this process, returning to visibility the positive "hidden reverse" of NSK's illumination of hegemonic regimes.

The State was established as a response both to NSK's own activity to date and to post-1989 political events. It designates its own conceptual territory, issues passports and citizenship on its own authority, and develops the statist aesthetic in NSK work. In the 1994 text "Concepts and Relations," Eda Čufer and Irwin retrospectively claim that the creation of NSK already foresaw the establishment of a "state":

> The aim of the association was the constitution of a transnational paradigmatic state, in which Laibach represented the ideological, the theater the religious and Irwin the cultural and historical impulse. The element shared by all three groups is

the scientific factor, a tendency towards a formative, not only verbal, but also physical analysis of concepts on the basis of which states had been constituted or dismantled throughout history. The 1980s were a period when the NSK body was formed, through a selection of concepts and symbols, relationships and structures. The body of the NSK State was built when an equilibrium was established between the syntax of images, musical and theatrical texts in relation to their media with the syntax of the NSK body in relation to the social, historical and state context.[2]

The text presents the NSK State as the necessary outcome of NSK activity, planned from the outset. The State was formalized only in the aftermath of the breakup of Yugoslavia, and has primarily been read as a response to this. Yet, as this passage suggests, it was the outcome of a body of work that was in turn the result of the conditions of its production.

The NSK State symbolizes the institutionalized presence of state symbolisms and artifacts in a cultural context. This deliberate blurring of "state" and "culture" challenges official narratives about the tolerance of state authorities in relation to culture. One of the key ways in which the Yugoslav system legitimated itself was the fiction that the state was increasingly tolerant, and absent from cultural and social life.[3] Artistic provocations staged by NSK and other Yugoslav groups in the 1980s repeatedly forced the state to risk violating its own rhetoric by revealing that in fact it wished to retain a supervisory presence in the cultural sphere. Since the transition to a market system in Slovenia, the need to reveal the continued presence of the state in the cultural sphere has actually grown more acute. No capitalist state wishes to adopt a censorious public stance if it can avoid it, yet the fiction of a free cultural market provides cover for the state's continued repressive potential in this sphere. In the postsocialist context, state-cultural power is far less easily located, but the authorities and the media are as concerned to present an image of cultural tolerance as were the ideologues of self-management. During the *Kapital* period (1992–93), Laibach were particularly concerned to point out the dangers of market censorship, and the continuance and even proliferation of repressive mechanisms in the postsocialist context of largely unchallenged Western hegemony. NSK's decision to carry out an explicit fusion of culture and state represents a symbolic challenge to narratives that deny the possibility of cultural repression by the state under capitalism, and argue that censorship is a purely Stalinist trait.

STATE AS TOTAL PERFORMANCE

One of the key productive forces driving NSK projects has been the collective confidence or esprit de corps that has enabled a small group of individuals to project and realize ventures as large as the creation of a virtual state. Discussing the totalitarian will to ignore or distort scientific fact for ideological motives, Gottlieb describes "the outrageous confidence that the iron logic of ideology transcends the laws of physical reality."[4] NSK used the appearance of such arrogance to establish a

9.1 Laibach, *Become a Citizen* poster, 1994.

retroactively constructed, aterritorial, nonhegemonic state formation. Since its totalitarian performance gives it the confidence to act in this way, there is no reason not to develop NSK statism to its (il)logical conclusion. The project totally ignores the laws of politics in positing a state without permanent territory, appropriating totalitarian arrogance and diverting it into cultural form, away from political forces that might wish to abuse it. This process echoes the "earthing" effect Laibach may have had within the Slovene political space, and is also an expression of political realities felt particularly acutely in Slovenia and Yugoslavia.

NSK members and associates sometimes travel on self-produced diplomatic passports, yet long before the first embassy and consulate events they had appropriated the air of international statesmanship. This was particularly evident in speeches given at actions such as Irwin and the Philosophy Department's 1988 event in Graz, Austria,[5] and Laibach's self-identification as "politicians."[6] The mode of NSK propaganda activities and the structure of the "organigram" invoke the totalitarian state. The appropriation and construction of state apparatuses may seem deluded or arrogant, but it represents a transgressive disruption of political norms. Besides cultural venues and exhibition spaces, NSK has also located temporary "embassies" and "consulates" in private apartments (the NSK Embassy Moscow 1992), hotel rooms (Florence 1993), and most spectacularly (yet also most mundanely) in a gallery owner's family kitchen (Umag 1994). At one level these actions seem to mock the inherent pretentiousness of diplomatic premises, or look like playful attempts to ground the NSK State in mundane realities. However, they are also a serious reference to present and recent realities. The Moscow project directly refers back to the "Apt-Art" tradition of staging art events in private residences to avoid official censorship in the former USSR. The projects also refer to the initial mismatch between the ambitions and resources of many "new" (post-1989) European states that were forced to conduct their diplomacy from just such domestic premises. In the Umag "kitchen consulate," Irwin took this process to its extreme, choosing a location that Marina Gržinić argues is by its nature "scandalous," challenging preconceptions about the "proper" location not just of diplomacy but of culture:

> When the NSK Consulate Umag project was realized, I wrote that IRWIN in their photographs reach into the very core of historic memory, not only the most significant but also the most legitimate means of discussing history and its phantasms, particularly when placed on the East-East axis. On the other hand, those photographs are definitely scandalous, since a private apartment (and of course, the kitchen) should not be part of the hierarchy of cultural space, let alone located in its center.[7]

Besides the "scandal" of an artistic event in a kitchen, there is also the disorderly representation of a high state office on domestic premises. Such an informal relocation helps to balance what might otherwise seem an uncritical veneration of the notion of the state. Using such a location introduces a degree of absurdity, prob-

lematizing any attempt to recapitulate the state project into an agenda for political action, and balancing its more grandiose manifestations. The location also shows that the NSK State is not fixed to any particular location, or to conventional notions of what a "state" implies. It rematerializes and dematerializes at will, and its transient manifestations express the fact that "NSK confers the status of a state not upon territory but upon the mind, whose borders are in a state of flux, in accordance with the movements and changes of its symbolic and physical collective body."[8]

BREAKING THE STATE/TERRITORY LINK (LOCAL CONTEXTS)

NSK retains a capacity to disturb and alienate, and it is clear that many see it as remote from its host society. The creation of the NSK State, based in Ljubljana but conceptually located in time more than space, enhances this effect. Yet the creation of a conceptual post-territorial state actually refers back to specific processes that have structured the relationship between Slovene cultural and political life. Writing in 1932, Josip Vidmar, a subsequent founder of the wartime Slovene resistance, observed that whereas other nations had built themselves upon military prowess and conquest, the Slovenes had been forced to divert these energies into the field of culture, and that rather than constructing a great state, they had constructed their culture.[9] According to this view of history, the establishment of Slovene political statehood in 1991 is the outcome of processes of cultural construction (particularly the preservation and development of the language). If this is correct, then Slovene statehood derives far more from past cultural than from political activity. Similarly, the NSK State has been constructed from "the syntax of images, musical and theatrical texts"[10] that formed the NSK *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which in turn formed the "body" of the new state. The establishment of the NSK State continues and comments on this mode of Slovene cultural construction. NSK works carry the spectral presences of forces that have attempted to assimilate Slovene identity (Germanism) and the products of Slovene cultural construction (the work of Plečnik, Prešeren, and others). The NSK State is formed from the totality of NSK's engagement with these and other forms, and is the ultimate example of a state based entirely on cultural construction. The Slovene base (content) of the NSK State is simultaneously highly specific and highly universal, composed as it is of both local Slovene signifiers and transnational signifiers (totalitarianism, avant-garde art, etc.).

The NSK State also refers to the Slovenes' historically alienated relationship to the various states under which they have lived. In Drago Jančar's analysis of the causes of Slovene exile, the state factor is central: "The state never completely corresponded to a homeland or nation. It was always the state which deprived them of an open, intensive and free economic, political and intellectual life . . . the state they left behind had never been called Slovenia."[11]

This emphasis on the state overlooks the self-repressive and authoritarian tendencies within Slovenia that NSK reprocess. However, many Slovenes did experience an alienating discontinuity between "state" (generally an entity hostile to or dis-

missive of their culture) and "nation." This factor was central to the need to create imaginary spaces (of which the NSK State is the ultimate example), and to preserve identity through cultural construction. Slovene independence in 1991 was an expression of the self-confidence and momentum created by cultural (re)construction after 1945, when there were no longer open restrictions on Slovene culture as such. Slovene independence is presented as a "natural" outcome based on a pragmatic decision that recognizes the greater efficiency and legitimacy of an independent state, and the perceived need to protect Slovene identity from Yugoslav centralism. Culturally, however, the lack of a more pronounced heroic/romantic element to independence also closed off a certain utopian category, the dream of a state based on idealism and spirit rather than late-capitalist pragmatism. With Slovene independence, NSK faced the threat of a moment of nationalist closure in which its difference and ambiguity would evaporate, and be smoothly conscripted into the narratives of the new state. In fact, controversial actions such as NK's ambiguous war posters, plus more recent actions such as Laibach's 1997 Slovene Philharmonic concert, have all helped to maintain a distance between NSK and mainstream Slovene opinion, but the NSK State has been the key differentiation device.

The appearance of the new postsocialist states and the chaotic circumstances of their inception form the political context of the NSK State. The entire mode of state power with which NSK interacted during the 1980s vanished, or at least mutated. Therefore, NSK had to redefine its relations not just with the new state in Slovenia but also with the state as such. Not to have taken such a step might retroactively have implied (given NSK's assertion of Sloveneness) that the creation of the Slovene state was somehow the natural culmination of NSK's activities. Therefore "Concepts and Relations"[12] clearly states: "The territorial borders of the NSK State can by no means be equated with the territorial borders of the actual state in which NSK originated."

Yet the Slovene factor continues to affect the development of the NSK State. The two new states set a new paradigm of interstate relations in 1994, when Slovenia formally offered to recognize the NSK State. Even to host and recognize such an entity would be beyond the tolerance of many states. The Slovene government of the time (which included many veterans of the alternative scene) sought to present itself as prepared to write new rules and explore new possibilities, while NSK received symbolic recognition of its ambitions through the same device it uses to maintain distance from Slovene politics.[13] In establishing their own state and citizenship, and explicitly dissociating it from its geographical/territorial context, the members of NSK reject the limitations of Slovene or any "given" national (territorial) citizenship. Symbolically (if not always in practice), NSK remains to some extent "beyond" the scope of Slovene politics, even without the controversy its actions can still generate.

NSK's decision to move from a simulation to a re-formation of the notion of the state recapitulates the totalitarian/nationalist arrogance that drives the creation of

almost unviable microstates. In conditions where the smallest groups enact their own states and counterstates (e.g., Republika Srpska and the Trans-Dniester micro-state in the Russian areas of Moldova), the peaceful creation of one more new state does not seem especially remarkable. NSK's response to the period of intense frag-mentation and national differentiation that commenced in Yugoslavia in the late 1980s was to reestablish the state as a universal *postnational* category, a utopian frame-work that can transcend the conflicts caused by the desire for ethnically driven border demarcations. The relevance of the NSK State's postterritoriality to these conflicts was suggested in a review of Laibach's 1997 "homecoming" concert in Belgrade:

> *Borders must stay the same* . . . *borders must stay the same* . . . *borders must stay the same.* . . . "A hyp-notic, looped mantra played in total blackout marked the closing of Laibach's last concert in Belgrade in the fall of 1989—just before Yugoslavia fell apart. This prophetic finale contorted itself into a prologue, for two years later it was lights out in the Balkans. War inevitably followed the "Serbian struggle for new borders" and the feverish resistance to their change. Meanwhile, operating out of newly in-dependent Slovenia, Laibach and NSK (the New Slovenian Kunst/arts organization to which they are affiliated) proclaimed themselves the virtual state of NSK. As an extraterritorial entity, NSK still seems like the perfect solution to the Yugoslav problem.[14]

CULTURE AS A STATE

The only truthful aesthetic vision of the State is the vision of an impossible state.[15]

It is only as *an aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified.[16]

NSK has reactivated a series of hidden or repressed aesthetic and political codes. The ambiguity, contradiction, and irony with which the reactivated codes are sur-rounded make the description "rehabilitation" inappropriate. In the case of total-itarian art and Germanic imagery, NSK has forced a reevaluation of certain signifiers and qualities that have been radically compromised by their association with reactionary political forces. The process of relocating conceptual-aesthetic value in the state (the historical site of extremes of idealism and terror) amounts to a revisioning of the state. Here, Walter Benjamin's warnings about the conse-quences of aestheticizing politics seem relevant. However, the NSK State does not represent an aestheticization of the process of party politics within any "actually existing" state. By revisioning the state as an abstract post-territorial aesthetic pro-cess, NSK continues its paradoxical procedure of depoliticizing aesthetics through its apparent politicization, and turning political hegemony back on itself ("All art is subject to political manipulation except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation"). Žižek[17] has repeatedly argued that cynicism in relation to the ruling system is actually a mode of conformism that reinforces the status

quo. The self-management system in Yugoslavia was threatened not by private cynicism but by those who, in the 1980s, began to argue for the literal application of the (theoretically) radical potential of the dominant ideology. In the present context, a cynical vision of (both the notion and the actuality of) the state can play into the hands of the monetarist corporate forces reducing states to subjection to the market. Utopian revisionings of the state are not in the interests of contemporary states, since they might strengthen civic society in relation to the market, increasing demands for democratic participation and setting standards that could not be met without violating the "realekonomik" principles that actually govern states. While in the 1980s Laibach destabilized the system by massively amplifying its latent totalitarianism and irrationalism, in the 1990s the NSK State project destabilized (market-dominated) modes of contemporary authority by recapitulating the idealist, democratic aspects of the notion of the state (which it is in the interest of contemporary power to keep obscured).

From this situation, the ethical-political value of Nietzsche's statement becomes apparent. It is certainly easy to relate his emphasis on justification through aesthetics to the violent Nazi or Stalinist use of aesthetic values to justify totalitarian power. Its importance in the current context, however, is that justifying the world aesthetically (producing a vision of an "ideal state") can work directly against the interests of power. An aesthetic vision frustrates the reproduction of cynical conformism and passivity. This reemergence of the aesthetic within the notion of the state highlights the absence of any vision or any humane aesthetic content within contemporary power, and sets a standard it cannot attain. This does not mean that a literal application of aestheticized politics should be attempted, and NSK does not argue for this. Yet besides the practical impacts of the NSK State (see below), its existence does illustrate that culture (as signifier of a not wholly market-dominated vision) can perhaps play a symbolic role in the rebalancing and questioning of notions of power.

NSK Passports: State-Cultural Documents

NSK's fusion of aesthetics and state forms materializes in the passports, stamps, and insignia that are the artifacts of this new aesthetic. Yet these in turn are repetitions of various iconic NSK images, retroactively assimilated into the narrative of the new State to convey the impression that their development was the only logical outcome, rather than the result of a more complex interaction of cause and effect.

The ultimate example of this is the NSK passport, an authentic simulation of the symbol of an individual's "given" (national) state identity. Responsibility for the use of NSK passports is placed on the bearers; they can be used as actual travel documents or kept as artifacts, but the extent to which they resemble "real" passports serves as an incitement to their use, especially for those who find their given statehoods problematic or inconvenient. The passports, manufactured according to in-

9.2 NSK passports.

ternational specifications, are described as documents "of a subversive nature and unique value."[18] They have several symbolic meanings. They are the final codification of NSK's state aesthetic, and its artistic appropriation of processes normally reserved to state authorities. They also represent a materialization of the essence of all the NSK works that reprocess state motifs, and are both aesthetic artifacts and political documents. Their "subversiveness" lies not just in their symbolic appropriation of state power, but in their potential uses.

The most direct demonstration of their potential came during the 1995 NSK *Država Sarajevo* event. The National Theater in Sarajevo was declared NSK state territory for a two-day event combining two Laibach performances, an exhibition, and speeches. Besides regular passports, a number of diplomatic passports were issued by NSK during the event. These documents, which were then used by several individuals to leave Sarajevo, play on the proliferation of new states in Europe since 1989, a context that provides cover for the appearance of yet another. The passports' authentic appearance and their "diplomatic" status proved a successful deterrent to close scrutiny by officials unfamiliar with the NSK State and its passports.

9.3 *NSK State Sarajevo,* 1995.

The state is explicitly transnational: "The NSK State denies in its fundamental acts the categories of (limited) territory, the principle of national borders, and advocates the law of transnationality."[19] The NSK mode of statehood is extremely appropriate to the Yugoslav context, because of its symbolic transcendence of ethnicities. Citizenship is potentially global, open to anyone who feels able to align with NSK.[20] It also represents an appropriation and abstraction of the utopian energies and aspirations surrounding Communism and self-management. In extracting these energies from their traumatic association with "actually existing" regimes, NSK preserves a utopian political space beyond politics, warning against the dangers of political utopianism while highlighting the absence of transnational idealism within actual politics. In ex-Yugoslavia, an emphasis on transnationality appears utopian per se, yet as Paunović suggests, it also seems like a pragmatic response to the conflicts created by an emphasis on physical and ethnic territory. NSK's holistic representational strategy suggests that both utopian and dystopian energies persist in relation to the state, and that if these are repressed, they can return in catastrophic forms. The use of totalitarian art and imagery of state power highlights both the utopian energy of dystopian imageries in the abstract and the dystopian potential of utopianism in practice. The reprocessing of totalitarian aesthetics and utopian discourse carries obvious dangers, but their repression (a refusal to recognize their aesthetic value, or place in national historical narratives) is equally dangerous. Therefore, NSK State strategy attempts to manage these energies by dramatizing and breaking the link between specific political territorial regimes and conceptual utopias.

At face value, there seems to be a major conceptual contradiction in this process. To understand how it is possible to extract utopian energies from dystopian political forces, it is necessary to revision the concept of "totality" as a paradoxical signifier of pluralism. Questions of totality or nontotality appear to be zero-sum—something is either "total" or "nontotal," with little in between. Yet as Žižek[21] argues—and as NSK's work demonstrates—there is no "automatic" link between philosophical totalism (including artistic totalism) and political totalitarianism. Totalization remains inherent to most human process, even under postmodernism (the antitotalism of which can itself become totalizing). There is nothing inherently democratic in the concept of "The First Global State of the Universe," which could equally describe a universal tyranny. Yet by claiming this role for itself, NSK has symbolically preempted and t(a)inted in advance the notion of a global state, pointing to the dystopian and utopian potential attached to the ideal. The NSK State is one of the most abstract and diffuse of NSK projects, far harder to "capture" descriptively or conceptually than, for instance, some of Laibach's work. This unexpected quality derives from the way in which the project incorporates flux and plurality both conceptually and structurally, *while manipulating the form of the state, the embodiment of political totality.* By monopolizing the utopian potential of the state, NSK dramatizes the links between global utopianism and global hegemony. This is achieved through the retroactive manipulation of the imageries of would-be global hegemonies (Nazism, Stalinism, corporate power). In this way, NSK creates an open paradigm of global statehood, and attempts to occupy the paradoxical space envisioned by Mikhail Epstein in relation to post-Soviet culture in Russia: "Our entire postcommunist culture can become a laboratory in which all previous cultural forms and styles are rediscovered and intermingled into a new *nontotalitarian totality.*"[22]

RE-FORMATION OF THE STATE

> As far as art, according to definition, is subversive in relation to the existing establishment, any art which today wants to be up to the level of its assignment must be a state art in the service of a non-existent country.[23]

NSK overcomes the fissure between culture and state—not via the totalitarian subordination of individual artists to the ideological demands of the state, but via an "ideology" deriving from their voluntary assimilation into a collective structure. Its response to the constant threat of hegemonic totalization (economic, ideological, ethnic, or religious) is to design its own totality as a loose, mobile structure in the guise of defeated totalities. The fact that the NSK project happens to have had such a positive outcome is at one level irrelevant: the consistent application of "demasking and recapitulation," "emphatic eclecticism," and the other methodologies has its own momentum, independent of results. Yet in fact, NSK's work reveals

an inherently positive, and not purely aesthetic, value that can be salvaged from the traumatic legacies of totalitarian states. NSK returns to visibility not just the most threatening but also the most utopian qualities attached to the notion of the state. Its "statehood" is based not on the repression but on the acceptance and productive integration of historical trauma, particularly the trauma caused by reactionary attempts to achieve political totality. Such integration is generally beyond the individual, but NSK offers a facilitating framework based on totality remanifested as a zone of possibility rather than closure (one that embraces inconsistency and ambiguity without loss of structural integrity or collapse into flux). Within the state project, NSK uses the colossal power attached to the notion of the state not to atomize but to secure a conceptual refuge for the individual threatened by the scale of external regimes and ideologies.

> To recognize this contradiction between the individual voice and statehood, and to find an artistic vehicle to navigate within it, is a contemporary imperative especially while the apparatus of totalitarian states seems to be melting, yet the conditions on which these apparatuses are built still seethe around us. This contradiction is of primary concern in the work of all of Neue Slowenische Kunst and is central in the paintings of IRWIN. By finding an expression of what is most deeply personal and specific to their condition, IRWIN has created a work, which expresses the spirit of our time. Rather than evading or denying the safety and security that a political or artistic statehood can provide, IRWIN gives statehood a voice through its own collective activity, through which it defines and determines an individual invective which challenges that very totalitarianism.[24]

In an era characterized by both the neoliberal "end-of-history" ideal and the actual chaotic Eastern experience of "the rebirth of history,"[25] new forms of totality returned as a challenge to discourses based on the death of metanarratives. On the one hand are the totalizing fundamentalisms used to legitimize the aggressive demarcation of microstates. On the other is NSK's countertotalitarian totality, which has emerged from the same Yugoslav/"Eastern" contexts in which the collapse of socialism was hailed as the final victory of monetarist liberalism. The cultural, spiritual, and ideological totality of the NSK State recuperates certain utopianisms, and illustrates the need for an alternative paradigm that acknowledges the potential role of the state and the value of approaches other than Western liberalism. In his essay "Es gibt keinen Staat in Europa" (There Is No State in Europe), Žižek[26] argues that the state has traditionally been the bête noire of the left, seen as "the original source of evil," and that both left- and right-wing utopias were based on its abolition or subordination. In Žižek's view, however, the Bosnian conflict could be linked to the absence of a "unified State authority elevated above ethnic disputes," and the absence of a consensual state framework of some type leads in practice to the dominance of violence. Žižek contrasts this situation with the post-territoriality of the NSK State, which represents a new development in the concepts of state and utopia:

Today the concept of utopia has made an about-face turn—utopian energy is no longer directed towards a stateless community, but towards a state which would no longer be founded on an ethnic community and its territory, therefore simultaneously towards a state without territory, towards a purely artificial structure of principles and authority which will have severed the umbilical cords of ethnic origin, indigenousness and rootedness.[27]

In the same catalogue, point six of Laibach's "Theses for the NSK Pavilion" states:

As long as nations and states will be disintegrating and reorganizing, as long as supra-national corporations will tailor the world's art economy, as long as in ethnically high-strung regions instability and the threat of war will be erupting, we will be confronted with the need to find completely new (political and aesthetic) organizational forms in order to create a dynamic system of matrixes, that is to say "packaging," in order to establish an ostensible "new world order"—a world in which the nation-state will have become a dangerous anachronism, and in which the idea of a dominant globalism is useless to regions with suppressed national identities due to its ideology of forcible universalism. The eruption of a new communication paradigm cannot come into being without the breaking up of old relationships, the breaking up of ossified systems and oscillations in the financial world. That which resembles chaos is actually the great transpositioning of centers of power in accordance with the demands of the new civilization. That is why in this transition NSK is founding its own corpus, its own modus vivendi, its own pavilion and its own state.[28]

The NSK State seems to resemble order, but is actually constituted by harnessing political and creative chaos, forming a constructive cultural container for the tensions of the present. It is also a productive holding area for the repressive traumas of twentieth-century utopianism, where the pragmatic acknowledgment of the state as structural necessity can be reconfigured as an emancipating enabling act. It is perhaps an example of the "nontotalitarian totality" envisaged by Epstein,[29] and its nontotalitarian character is apparent in both its structure and its mode of manifestation. The NSK State temporarily occupies specific physical locations into which it is invited, then moves on again. It needs no "repressive state apparatus"[30] to maintain order, because the only territory it has to defend is conceptual. The NSK State represents the aestheticized spectacle of a total institution providing a safeguard for constantly threatened modes of freedom, particularly the rights to political and cultural ambiguity or nonalignment. In a sense, it also asserts the rights of individuals and cultures to exercise fully autonomous historical consciousness in the face of totalizing narratives (the NSK State is the result of a process based on a holistic nonrepressive examination of history). The paradoxical nature of the freedom the State appears to offer in the form of nonterritorial conceptual citizenship was prefigured in one of the earliest and most dramatic Laibach statements, which has the dual status of threat and promise: "Our freedom is the freedom of those who think alike."[31]

9.4 Irwin, project proposal, *NSK Embassy Beijing*, 1995.

THE STATE OF THINGS TO COME

The NSK State is structured both in order to enhance the security and resources of all the NSK groups, and to provide an outlet which, by virtue of its abstract character, is a relatively healthy recipient of latent impulses and attitudes that are not created by NSK, but made manifest and then channeled by them. The notion of a state contains its own uncanny excess, and Laibach's work and statements in particular dramatize this superrational quality: "The state was created by *passion*. We celebrate its creation with a feast where the tables are weak-legged under the weight of *Fleisch* [meat]. The *Fleisch* is the armour of reason."[32]

In linking passion and the state, Laibach refer both to the violent emotions produced by identification with or mobilization by the state, and to the falseness of contemporary states' claims to be based primarily on pragmatic political and economic reason, or "common sense." Insisting on the irrational roots of state power in the context of either scientific socialism or monetarist market states challenges

claims to a basis in reason, history, or law. The NSK State reveals the emotions associated with the state, and attempts to transcend their hegemonic potential. The existence of a post-territorial state based on culture appears less unprecedented in the light of Mure's discussion of Hegel's ideal of the "organic state." Mure[33] argues that the notion was not based on any actual state, but instead represented "a sort of ideal work of art presenting the perfect pattern." The legacy of this mode of imagining an ideal state, which heavily informed totalitarianism, is a situation in which notions of the state retain an aesthetic as well as a political charge. This did not end with the defeat of Nazism or the collapse of Communism, and it seems to be fundamental to the political process. NSK attempts to negotiate the narrow conceptual space between not repressing the imagining of a more progressive state and preventing this imaginative conceptual energy being manipulated by any particular state formation or ideology.

The logical culmination of NSK's manipulation of the emotions and energies associated with the state was the offering of citizenship. Many NSK passport-holders have remarked that they feel happier with their voluntary status as citizen of a "state in time" than with their "given" national status, which often entails recognition of the dominance of a particular ethnic group or ideology by which the citizen may feel excluded or threatened. The reading of the state project as a healthy outlet for statist impulses toward identification and belonging that might otherwise be directed into nationalist or imperialist projects is not disputed by NSK members. The preference for an abstract rather than a local citizenship evokes what Steve Redhead[34] has characterized as "the refusal of citizenship." Discussing political apathy and disaffection, Redhead observes that growing numbers of people refuse to be "conscripted" into adult society or identification with existing state authorities. A significant minority of young people find identification with (the world-views of) their musical heroes easier and more natural than identification with their "own" national state, particularly if they come from minorities or other marginalized social groupings. It could be argued that the postwar shift from overtly nationalistic to more passive civic patriotisms is not unconnected to the unprecedented degree of popular identification with the stars of the music industry, which has spawned the type of personality cults which, retranslated into the political sphere, could only be described as totalitarian. In the light of Laibach's explicit repoliticization of rock, the distance between—for instance—young Koreans visiting Kim Il Sung's tomb and swearing loyalty to his ideals, and their Western counterparts (still) visiting the tomb of the Doors' Jim Morrison and endlessly poring over his works, is perhaps not so great.

The ostensibly non-(party)-political identification provided by the star system has to be constantly refreshed by new generations of listeners, since with time people often find that unquestioning belief in musical idols becomes inadequate to their evolving needs, or is eroded by artistic or ideological "betrayals" or compromises. The fact that many of the stars of classical music as well as rock have

middle-aged fans no less fanatical than their teenage counterparts suggests that such identification does not simply or automatically fade with age, but tends to seek more "appropriate" or "mature" outlets. The "seriousness" of Laibach, and now the NSK State, bridges this gap, apparently making available a "mature" mode of identification, which can appeal to a far broader audience spectrum, insuring itself against a limited "shelf life" by facilitating a type of appreciation character-ized by depth and durability rather than disposability. The refusal of citizenship is paralleled by Gržinić's[35] comments on the refusal of the Slovene alternative scene to accept dissident status, and its determination to create self-sufficient autono-mous structures. In this respect, the alternative institutions that supported Laibach and NSK in the 1980s anticipated the NSK State. In both cases there was a refusal to accept the physical or conceptual limitations of a particular state (socialist Yugo-slavia and independent Slovenia).

The type of trans- or anational identification enabled by the NSK State reflects an increased contemporary awareness of (though also a greater questioning of) (established) national identities, and is also symptomatic of a contemporary "in-terpellation crisis" whereby needs for identification are actually frustrated by the established ideological and other (market) apparatuses that are meant to facilitate this. Within this context, actual states are recast by NSK's spectral reprocessings as the true appropriators or usurpers of values such as "freedom," "culture," and "na-tion." Specific national states are seen by those alienated from them as inherently threatening, and although the NSK State is partly constructed from the images of such threats, it manifests itself as a promise for those, such as the citizens of wartime Sarajevo, who are in some way trapped by their "given" citizenship. The state (a category currently under far more rigorous interrogation than the nation) has been appropriated by NSK and made into a non-hegemonic, aterritorial, "uni-versal" structure which implicitly undermines established structures, and serves as a channel for identificatory drives which might otherwise go no further than teen euphoria succeeded by apathetic disillusion, or be transferred onto regressive sociopolitical forces presenting themselves as panaceas for the problems caused by alienation from the social, racial, or territorial status quo.[36]

GRAVITATION ZERO: CAN ART ESCAPE REGIME?

The State project and NSK's work as a whole represent a utopian attempt to tran-scend alienation using the codes of alienation itself. The clearest parallel to this is the utopianism of the Russian avant-garde, and its lesser-known Slovene and Yugo-slav counterparts whose works NSK have quoted. The state virtualizes and trans-forms avant-garde desires for total control into the artistic conquest of space and a state in time. The approach of the suprematists, and especially the constructivists, was to attempt a spatial representation of abstract forces, and (subsequently) to re-late these to political action informed by utopianism. The designs of Tatlin, for in-

stance, attempted to model an avant-garde political utopia within which art and politics fought for the same goals. The NSK *Gesamtkunstwerk* explicitly relates itself to avant-garde idealism—not just in its choice of motifs, but in its textual self-representation: "The NSK state in time is an abstract organism, a suprematist body, installed in a real social and political space as a sculpture comprising the concrete body warmth, spirit and work of its members."[37]

The emphasis on the suprematist heritage of the NSK State highlights its attempts to transcend existing notions of statehood and cultural practice. Despite the eventual suppression of avant-garde transcendence by Stalinism, NSK argues that suprematism's idealization of the abstract can still play a role in contemporary culture. Suprematism (one source of the black cross motif) is an integral aspect of the holistic remodeling of the state as aesthetic, spiritual, and conceptual category. The dissonant creative energy that fuels NSK allows the state to be constructed from the ambivalent symbolisms of the avant-garde, victim of and contributor to totalitarianism. This is the key point of difference between the NSK State and the classical nation-state which, in order to constitute itself, has either to suppress or to ignore difference, and is threatened by contradiction and dissonance. The coexistence of artistic styles comprising the NSK State is a symbol of its universalist aspiration: both to retain difference and to transcend the conflicts difference generates.

The State project, which is the outcome of all previous NSK work, is a useful means of measuring the success of NSK attempts to go beyond the limits of the ideological, political, and symbolic systems it interrogates. It could be argued that NSK's visual works in particular do no more than intensify or even fetishize the postmodern practice of repetition. It is true that repetition in itself carries the danger of reification or even glorification of the symbols it manipulates. However, NSK's work transcends "mere" repetition, because it also includes juxtaposition and dissonance. This mode of repetition "makes strange" the subjects of repetition, often alienating them from their original creator's intentions or ideological stances (or those of the regimes that appropriated their works). The tensions and contradictions generated by this approach make it problematic to characterize the political or aesthetic intentions of an NSK work on the basis of any one of its elements (state imagery, Nazi-Kunst, pop art, Yugoslav symbols, etc.). The presence of irony and contradiction, and the difficulty in quantifying these, also insure against political recuperation or any "definitive" external interpretation. NSK's holistic representational strategy is by its very nature incompatible with one-dimensionally partisan political art, since it uses the contradictions of the original sources against the hegemonic potential of the regimes with which it engages. So if NSK does to this extent transcend the limitations of its sources (particularly in the State project), how consistently does it manage to go beyond the limitations of its status as a cultural organization?

There is a case for saying that NSK actions have been successful primarily at the symbolic level, and that the interventions provide no more prospect of "escape"

from the conditioning of contemporary economic and ideological structures than any other technique. This objection, however, is based on a false distinction between symbolic and practical action. In a series of interventions dating back to Laibach's 1980 Trbovlje action, through the 1983 TV interview, to the 1987 Poster Affair and the NSK *Država Sarajevo* project, NSK groups have demonstrated a praxis in which concrete political and social consequences flow from symbolic acts. The NSK State itself has provided the most effective examples of this; taking NSK as far as is possible from the limitations of too close an identification with the Slovene nation-state and the nation-state in general.

The most effective example of this was the use of NSK diplomatic passports by besieged citizens of Sarajevo to escape the danger and suffering that their "given" political identity entailed. The device of art in the guise of the state opened up (albeit briefly) a symbolic space in which it was possible for individuals physically to transcend the increasingly sophisticated control systems that regulate movement across frontiers. It is true that these are only utopian "moments" affecting a few individuals, and that the regimes in question soon redeploy, yet they are utopian precisely to the extent that they are momentary, since in the present conditions at least, practices that are institutionalized cannot by definition remain utopian. In these actions, art has repeatedly leaked into the surrounding reality, generating tangible effects and demonstrating that the symbolic and philosophical implications continue to proliferate. NSK makes no attempt to marshal its citizens into a concrete force, and the state is not supportive of any literal "movement." However, when the implications of the self-bestowal of "diplomatic" status and the evasion of state control systems are considered, they do show that NSK has made breaches in otherwise monolithic regimes, and that its artistic praxis retains a countersystemic potential of a type rarely found in contemporary culture. These interventions suggest that regimes can successfully be confronted with their own hidden codes, disrupting normal functioning and opening up spaces in which it may be possible at least temporarily to resist and frustrate dominant ideologies by reprocessing them. Positions that seek to confine art to "its" sphere, and argue against the possibility of an ideological art of the type NSK represents, in effect argue for the suppression of this potential.

The transcendent drive of the NSK project has found its most utopian resonance in the appropriation of space imagery by NSK. Laibach's 1994 *Final Countdown* video is effectively an advert for the new state, as well as for the *NATO* album. The slogan "Become a Citizen of the First Global State of the Universe" appears in several languages, and a steady stream of passports flows through the interior of the vessel bearing Laibach cyborg figures. The desire to conquer new space is apparent when the video arrives at its final destination: the NSK *Embassy Mars*, which is based on Plečnik's unbuilt design for a Slovene parliament, an image frequently reprocessed by NSK. Like the other symbolic annexations carried out by NSK, this gesture preempts the colonization of a territory or sphere of activity by specific political

forces. NSK, as a culture-based State, claims Mars for art rather than for the specific political and economic forces that might actually reach the planet; to this extent it transcends the ideological compromises associated with specific national and corporate forces.

The work of the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung is marked by a repeated, almost fanatical emphasis on the escape from gravity. The 1999 event *Gravitacija nič Noordung* (Gravitation Zero Noordung) was the most successful attempt to escape planetary gravity, being performed in simulated zero gravity over Russia aboard a Russian training plane for cosmonauts. The same utopian mechanism that motivated Laibach's symbolic appropriation of Mars drives Noordung's "cosmokineticism."[38] Noordung actions embody the concern of all NSK groups to escape the "gravitational" pull of the historical, political, artistic, and economic regimes that structure their environment. While they are highly technical, the pioneering space designs of Herman Potočnik Noordung also have a mythical aura, because of their historical obscurity. In attempting to rescue the historical figure from obscurity, the Noordung projects introduce an uncanny element to the sphere of space exploration (as NSK does to the notion of the state), and propose a ritualistic techno-sacral mode of inner as well as cosmic exploration. The ritual elements of the performances attempt to preserve a sense of utopian idealism in relation to space of the type displayed in Noordung's 1929 plans for space travel,[39] and in the abstraction of the Russian avant-garde. Viewed literally, such works are, of course, wholly "escapist," and seem to suggest a literal flight from engagement with political realities. Yet it is in its very abstraction that the work reveals the possibilities of a new mode of engagement. NSK shares the Russian avant-garde belief in abstraction as a symbol of the possibility of recoding existing reality, and is also aware of abstraction's power to frustrate established methods of dominance.[40] By asserting the rights of spirituality and idealism to a place in space exploration, Noordung works respond to feelings of techno-alienation experienced by artists and nonscientists alike, and imply that a purely scientific ideology that cannot also acknowledge the importance of human values and ideals is distorted.[41] The Noordung works attempt to manage the persistent desire for transcendence, while preserving a space in which this potential is not accessible to political forces. To the extent that in the contemporary postsocialist context utopianism per se is seen as at best escapist, if not perverse, the works can also be read as defending of the right to an "escapist" imagination that critiques reality and refuses to recognize the limitations imposed by all "actually existing" cultural, political, and economic regimes.[42]

CHAPTER 10

DAS ENDE?

Since the core of this book was written, a number of new possibilities, concepts, and approaches have emerged. The original research and the Slovene edition concentrated on the period 1980 to 1995, but there have been many developments since.

For much of the period since 1995, Laibach were silent, though still active. The 1996 release *Jesus Christ Superstars* was very popular on the dark/alternative music scenes, although it alienated some of Laibach's older fans. Opinion was split on how successful its use of heavy metal was, but it had a wide impact. In the interim years there was still a demand for performances of this material, and this continued until early 2003. While releasing only archival material during this time, Laibach toured actively, and occasionally emerged to stage a spectacular such as its controversial May 1997 concert with the Slovene Philharmonic, or the April 2003 Ljubljana shopping action *Einkauf v City Park*.

In 2003, Laibach returned with the album *WAT*, at a moment when many people assumed or hoped that Laibach had finally fallen silent (similar feelings surrounded the group's return in 1992, after another quiet period). In the interim years, what might have seemed like excessively apocalyptic predictions on Laibach's part have been put into a new light by events. The advent of terrorist fundamentalism, neoliberal authoritarianism and interventionism, and "theocon" militarism and totalitarianism have left little ground for complacency. Laibach's "warning songs" seem both more appropriate than ever and in constant danger of being overshadowed by events.

The *WAT* track *Now You Will Pay* dramatizes the West's fear of refugees and a violent wave of revenge sweeping from the East, and is less apocalyptic than many news reports on the subject. *WAT* is more overtly militant in tone than any release since *Kapital*, with a stricter, darker electronic sound. It also demonstrates the way in which Laibach has begun to historicize its own myth, and contains many samples and lyrical references to previous releases. Laibach's warnings and predictions are repeatedly vindicated by events and historical shifts, and it seems likely that *WAT* (which does contain an optimistic undercurrent) will generate new resonances and significances for some time to come.

Over all wavelengths, from x-rays to radiowaves.[1]

During the Cold War, the short-wave frequencies were filled with obscure coded transmissions by the covert agencies of both sides. The end of the Cold War has not seen any reduction in such transmissions, any more than there has been a "peace dividend." Like one of these "numbers stations," Laibach have continued to broadcast both overt and covert codes. The "delayed-action" effect of the group's interventions means that the significance of some of its signals may not become apparent until long after their emergence, and they may activate "sleeper units" already at large in their host cultures. For the present, Laibach continue to scan the

airwaves for faint signals of the future to make into the sound of things to come. Like Kafka's linguistic experiments, Laibach's interventions manifest "the sound of a contiguous future, the murmur [sic] [rumeur] of new assemblages of desire, of machines, and of statements, that insert themselves into the old assemblages and break with them."[2]

Some interpretations claim that Laibach was always primarily oriented against the socialist system, overlooking the complexities and ambiguities of Laibach's interactions with it. These interpretations attempt to "normalize" Laibach and confine the group to history, conveniently excluding or overlooking the awkward questions they continue to raise about contemporary postsocialist realities. Yet several years before the Cold War officially ended, Laibach had already moved on to interrogate Western pop culture. The "pop" elements in their early work were used not "against" pop but to signify the complicity of this culture with authority in both East and West. Laibach's relevance did not cease with the celebrated "end of history" in 1989, and while they have to interact with more insidious and subtle regimes, their work remains relevant to the future as well as the past. Its effects still proliferate, and future events and trends will continue to suffer from comparison with or interrogation by Laibach. Even when Laibach ceases operations, the signals will continue to reverberate—Laibach continues to transmit.

In this late period, Irwin's work has opened up to contemporary media and installation techniques, following a quite different trajectory to Laibach. Irwin's icons have begun to incorporate digital graphics and effects, and the works have become more seductive and less visually overwhelming. Equally significantly, recent catalogues have also begun to attribute paintings to individual members rather than to "Irwin." The group are consciously relaxing the strict collectivism of NSK, while at the same time continuing to promote NSK State symbolism via passport actions and the NSK *Garda* projects. Irwin have also entered into an auto-theorizing/self-historicizing process far more explicitly than Laibach. Theoretical texts appear more frequently, and projects like *East-Art Map*, which attempts to curate "Eastern" art on "Eastern" terms, show the group crossing into curatorial as well as theoretical production. In April 2004, Irwin received the Jakopic arts prize, the first Slovene award the group have received in twenty years of activity. This acknowledgment marks their full critical acceptance in Slovenia, long after their acceptance elsewhere.

NK mounted a major retrospective exhibition in 1999 and continues to play a role in NSK productions as well as commercial projects, but it keeps a lower profile than previously. Actions and texts by Peter Mlakar's Philosophy Department continue, both as part of NSK actions and separately. Noordung have also moved into historical activities. Dragan Živadinov continues cosmonaut training, and space themes dominate Noordung work. The performance *Supremat*, presented as a "farewell ritual" for NSK, symbolizes Živadinov's future trajectory.

If each group is now dispersing along different "lines of flight" with new projects, their work continues and will continue to generate new meanings and associations. Apart from the new projects, a subject as conceptually rich as NSK constantly suggests new approaches and metaphors. The "core text" here is important as the first comprehensive "assemblage" of the subject, but is not final or static, and will only be the starting point for some new "lines of flight."

One of these possibilities would be to view NSK operations as a type of "cultural hacking," manipulating the source codes of various systems and inducing their inherent dysfunctions. Moreover, NSK is effectively restoring deleted data that would otherwise build up and compromise efficiency. Another possible technical metaphor would be the NSK interrogation machine as a *culture oscillator*, recording and generating signals from shifts between cultural poles.

Finally, NSK's work can be seen as a type of encrypted culture, protected by layers of ambiguity and misleading static. It has become clear over time that NSK's body of work is also partly an assertion of the right to remain ambiguous, and the right not to be defined or categorized. In an age of "total information awareness" and the systematic monitoring of individuals, an encrypted mode of culture and communication becomes not only valuable but essential.

If current political and cultural trends continue, total transparency might be achieved on the surface, but (with luck) it will never be possible entirely to monitor the most esoteric, recessed, and deepest aspects of culture and thought. Cultural mystery, secrecy, and ambiguity have to be preserved, since freedom and spontaneity reside in such shadowy, nondetermined spaces. In this context, we can say that cultural obscurity works as an illumination of the forces that demand constant total surveillance and accessibility. A key slogan of hackers and anarchists is "encrypt and survive," and this is equally valid for culture. Encryption, the reproduction of obscurity, is a means of preserving autonomy. In the relation between state and individual, one of the key questions is becoming: *Who is allowed to make what visible?*

The business of the individual (or of the artist) now has to be totally transparent to the state and its supporting corporations, but this is absolutely nonreciprocal. The state's "right to know" has no limits, whereas the citizen's "right to know" can be ever more constrained under a "permanent state of emergency" and officially manipulated panic. The raison d'être or *raison d'état* of artists such as NSK is to reveal what authority wants concealed (everything), and to conceal what authority wants revealed (everything). One of the key values of this approach is the ability of NSK works to hold together, and *slow down* and *make visible* all these contradictory forces we are structured by and exposed to. In effect, NSK works as a type of ideological time-lapse photography through which we can observe power and history in motion. By continuing to slow down the accelerating flows of culture and politics, NSK may be able to maintain and defend a space within which it remains possible to render perceptible the underlying noise and shadowy forms of power.

Notes

For ease of reference, I have provided page references for the English version of the book *Neue Slowenische Kunst*. However, extracts from Laibach and NSK interviews and statements used here have been taken from online sources such as the NSK Electronic Embassy and the English translation of the Croatian edition of *Neue Slowenische Kunst*.

Chapter 1: Preludium

1. Laibach admire Kubrick's films. Coincidentally, since this text was first written, the track *The Great Divide*, which refers to 2001, has appeared on Laibach's *WAT* (London: Mute Records, 2003).

2. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 192–193.

3. Despite all the Germanic and "will-to-power" elements in Laibach's performance, Nietzsche is not the most useful author to apply to Laibach. The fact that his work seems so obviously relevant should arouse suspicions. There are far greater correspondences between Laibach and contemporary authors (albeit some influenced by Nietzsche). Laibach's only direct reference to Nietzsche is in an obscure early painting. Geoff Waite briefly interprets Laibach in the light of Nietzsche, and provides a detailed critique of the influence of "Nietzschean" thought on contemporary politics and culture. See Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche's Corps/E: Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, Or, the Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday Life (Post-Contemporary Interventions)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

4. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (London: Athlone Press, 1986).

5. A side effect of this operation will be that, in the ambivalent light of Laibach, Deleuze and Guattari's works can be retroactively restructured and affected by this interaction, reintroducing tension and ambiguity into their fashionable profile. The application of their thought to such a "problematic" subject may also be a counterweight to what they themselves acknowledged was the danger of depoliticized readings of their work (ibid., xxvi).

6. Ibid., xxv.

7. Ibid., 73.

8. Ibid., xxvii.

9. Ibid., 7.

10. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 52.

11. See Slavoj Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and NSK Not Fascists?," *M'ARS* 3–4 (1993), 3–4. Žižek argues that NSK suspends the efficiency of regimes by overidentifying with their hidden aspects (for instance, the latent totalitarianism of the Yugoslav system).

12. The black cross forms the basis of the NSK insignia. It features on the covers of Laibach's eponymous 1985 album (Ljubljana: ROPOT), the single *Gebürt einer Natian* (see NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 64), and the 2003 album *WAT*, and directly in many other Laibach posters and paintings (ibid., 44–63). It features in Irwin works such as *The Flag* (ibid., 92), *The Enigma of Revalutian* (ibid., 94), *Malevich between the Two Wars* (ibid., 101), and numerous others. This key NSK motif also features in the symbolism of NSK's drama groups, and the design studio New Collectivism (NK).

13. Kazimir Malevich, "From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism: The New Painterly Realism," in John E. Bowlt, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, 2d ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 116–135.

14. Erika Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum: A Cry of Despair ar Faith in the Spirit of Man?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), 156–157.

15. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 119.

16. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 73.

17. At an early stage, Laibach codified this process as "demasking and recapitulation."

18. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 60.

19. Ibid., 58.

20. Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and NSK Not Fascists?," 3.

21. Dina Iordanova, *Cinema af Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Medio* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), 73–76.

22. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafko*, 57.

23. Ibid., 55.

24. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 19.

25. This was one of the key themes of Michael Benson's film *Predictians of Fire* (New York/Ljubljana: Kinetikon, 1995). Benson argued that NSK works were auguries or direct predictions of subsequent events in Yugoslavia.

26. Peter Vezjak, *Bravo* (Ljubljana: Dallas D.O.O., 1993).

CHAPTER 2: BLOODY GROUND, FERTILE SOIL (NSK CONTEXTS)

1. *Krvavo grudo, plodnja zemljo*, from Laibach, *Nova okropolo* (London: Cherry Red Records, 1986).

2. James Gow and Cathie Carmichael, *Slovenia and the Slovenes* (London: Hurst & Co., 2000).

3. At least thirty-two separate Slovene dialects are spoken, some of which are extremely impenetrable even to other Slovenes.

4. J. Arnez stresses the status of the Windisch as the embodiment of pan-Germanic nationalist fantasy: "As such, the Wender do not actually exist, but only in German theories so as to prove a right to political expansion and to found the Germanization policy upon an imaginary will of a further imaginary 'Wendic' population." See *Slovenio in Europaen Affoirs* (New York: Studia Slovenica/League of CSA, 1958).

5. Gow and Carmichael, *Slavenia and the Slovenes*, 217.

6. Laibach, *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*, NSK Electronic Embassy October 1, 1995 (May 11, 1996) <http://www.lois.kudfp.si/lukap/embassy/3a/exc/13.html>.

7. Slovenia's highest peak, and preeminent national symbol.

8. John Loud, *France Prešeren* (Boston: Twayne's World Authors Series #620, 1981).

9. Zdenko Roter, "The Church in Contemporary Slovene History," in H. Huttenbach, ed., *Voices from the Slovene Nation, Nationalities Papers Special Edition* (Association for the Study of Nationalities, 1992), 71.

10. R. A. Kann and Z. David, *The Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands, 1526–1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), 43–49.

11. See A. L. Kuhar, *The Conversion of the Slovenes and the German-Slav Ethnic Boundary in the Eastern Alps* (New York: Studia Slovenica, 1967). Kuhar's account shows the extent to which, at least on the peripheries of Slovene-inhabited territory, conversion was often tantamount to de-Slovenization. As a Catholic priest himself, Kuhar may even have played down this aspect.

12. From the late eighteenth century, the Church encouraged peasant literacy, but stressed loyalty to Church and empire.

13. See Mark Thompson, *A Paper House: The End of Yugoslavia* (London: Vintage, 1993), 19.

14. Peter Vodopivec, "Seven Decades of Unconfronted Ambiguities: The Slovenes and Yugoslavia," in J. Benderley and E. Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 23–46.

15. A prosperous area of northern Serbia with large Hungarian, German, and other minorities.

16. Known as Trst in Slovene.

17. Dennison Rusinow, *Italy's Austrian Heritage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 270.

18. The assault commenced with a massive air raid on Belgrade. At Laibach's last concert in Belgrade before the collapse of Yugoslavia, a propaganda film commemorating the raid was screened.

19. Mussolini had long argued for the dismemberment of Yugoslavia.

20. Arnez, *Slovenia in European Affairs*, 85.

21. Thomas M. Barker, *Social Revolutionaries and Secret Agents: The Carinthian Slovene Partisans* (Boulder: East European Monographs CCLXXVI, Columbia University Press, 1990), 128.

22. One rare exception to this was a disturbance in Ljubljana in September 1908 over the issue of Slovene-language street signs. See also Carole Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism 1890–1914* (New York: East European Monographs, 1977). Rogel stresses the unthinkability of Slovene independence, because of Slovenia's small population and the fierce resistance even civic nationalism attracted from Austrians and their pro-Austrian Slovene allies. As she states: "Slovenes could not be daring and demanding in their nationalism" (*The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, v).

23. Barker, *Social Revolutionaries and Secret Agents*, 77.

24. Although Yugoslav forces briefly occupied Trieste in 1945, Slovene territorial claims in Italy and Austria were mostly sacrificed to political expediency after Yugoslavia broke with Stalin and needed Western assistance.

25. Roter, "The Church in Contemporary Slovene History."

26. The Vaška Straža (Village Guards) were often recruited from the most devout churchgoers, and the movement was actively encouraged by the clergy. However, many were pressed into service, and defected to the Partisans when the opportunity arose. These

units were partly a pragmatic expression of resistance to Communist antireligiosity and food expropriations, but the Church also provided explicit ideological support for the collaborationist authorities. Bishop Grigorij Rožman of Ljubljana even blessed Slovene SS auxiliaries in a 1944 ceremony (see Roter, "The Church in Contemporary Slovene History").

27. Rusinow, *Italy's Austrian Heritage*, 277.

28. Around the time of Slovene independence, this argument became increasingly excessive, rejecting any positive aspects of the Yugoslav era: "Seventy years of togetherness have taught us a bitter lesson; a lesson which is culminating in these days of national trial, when 'brotherly love' is on the other side understood as rape." M. Ježernik, "The Awkward Coexistence," in N. Grafenauer, ed., *The Case of Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Nova Revija, 1991), 57–60.

29. The liberation of Belgrade and most of Serbia was carried out by the Red Army.

30. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 122.

31. See Sabrina P. Ramet, *Notionolism and Federalism in Yugoslavio 1962–91*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

32. Laibach manipulated "nonalignment" as a theme, particularly in the track *Panoramo* from the *Nova akropola* album, which appropriates a 1958 Tito speech in defence of Yugoslav nonalignment. The text appears on the album sleeve—see NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 63).

33. James Gow, *Legitimocy and the Military: The Yugoslav Crisis* (London: Pinter, 1992), 9.

34. Ramet, *Nationalism and Federolism in Yugoslavia 1962–91*, 94–97.

35. See J. W. Tollefson, *The Languoge Situation and Languoge Policy in Slovenio* (New York: University Press of America, 1981).

36. See E. Dolenc, "Culture, Politics, and Slovene Identity," in Benderley and Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenio*. Dolenc sums up the contradictory effects of decentralization thus: "A new Yugoslav constitution in 1974 emphasized the integrative role of the LCY in the state order. . . . At the same time however, secessionism of Croats, Slovenes, and Albanians was ruled unacceptable. Ideological control over education, science, and to a minor extent, art intensified once again" (87).

37. Gregor Tomc, *Drugu Slovenijo* (The Other Slovenia) (Ljubljana: Krt, 1989), 121–122.

38. See Dejan Sretenović, "Art in a Closed Society," in Dejan Sretenović and L. Merenik, *Art in Yugoslavia 1992–5* (Belgrade: Radio B-92, 1996).

39. P. Ramet, ed., *Yugoslovio in the Nineteen Eighties* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985).

40. Tomaž Mastnak, "From Social Movements to National Sovereignty," in Benderley and Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenio*, 224.

41. The increasingly bleak situation was mirrored by Laibach's acting out of a fierce strain of cultural pessimism that incorporated the work of authors such as Adorno and Horkheimer, as well as Soviet-style critiques of popular culture.

42. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 126.

43. Thompson, *A Paper House*, 20–21.

44. Ramet, *Notionalism and Federolism in Yugoslovia 1962–91*, 116.

45. See Drago Jančar, "Slovene Exile," in Huttenbach, ed., *Voices from the Slovene Notion*.

46. One of the key ideological themes of Yugoslav self-management was removing alienation between state and subject. The republican structures of federal Yugoslavia were intended to conceal the otherness or foreignness not just of the state the Slovenes lived under, but of the state per se. By presenting the public with the threat of absolute totalitarianism, Laibach again made visible the alienating otherness of the state which self-management was designed to conceal.

47. See Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism*, 35.

48. The issue of Slovene schooling led to the collapse of a reformist Austrian government in 1893.

49. Laibach, *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*.

50. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 4–5.

51. See *Two of Us* (ibid., 91), *The Ljubljana Trial* (ibid., 107) *Bloody Soil* (ibid., illustration 8, 112).

52. Ibid., 6.

53. This problem affects research into many other "unhistorical" peoples, who have only recently emerged from the shadow of collapsed states (particularly ex-Soviet nationalities), as well as those still living within larger states (the Welsh, Bretons, and Basques among others).

54. S. Z. Pech, "New Avenues in East European History," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 10, no. 11968 (1968), 14–15.

55. Laibach's work is a necessarily violent sonic encoding of certain ambivalent archetypes constituting Slovene identity. Laibach's "campaign" within the sphere of Western pop culture could be read as analogous to (and more successful than) mainstream efforts to force awareness of Slovene affairs onto the wider world.

56. None of the same ambivalence is displayed toward research into marginalized non-European nations carried out under the banner of postcolonial studies, despite similarities in the experiences of colonization.

57. The extremely fierce and systematic assaults on foreign scholars recognizing a Slav-Macedonian minority in northern Greece, and the criminal sanctions applied against Greeks who assert this, are the most extreme contemporary example of such attitudes.

58. The Slovenes may be less obviously "Slavic" than the Russians or some other peoples, but their collective name symbolizes the underlying Slav structure of their identity, even though this has been overwritten and augmented by several other cultures. Irwin texts relating Slovene experience to the Eastern, Slavic contexts could be seen as a response to the (unsuccessful) de-Slavicization of Slovene identity. See Irwin, "Concepts and Relations," in *Zemljopis vremena/The Geography of Time* (Umag: Galerija Dante Marino Cettina, 1994); and the "Moscow Declaration," in Eda Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East Sees the East* (Piran: Obalne Galerije, 1994).

59. See Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich, eds., *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

60. Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990).

61. Mikhail N. Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 205–208.

62. Aleš Erjavec and Marina Gržinić, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana: The Eighties in Slovene Art and Culture* (Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga, 1991).

63. See Sretenović, *Art in Yugoslovio* 1992–5.

64. Zdenka Badinovac and Peter Weibl, *Arteast 2000+ Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe* (Bolzano/Vienna: Folio Verlag, 2001).

65. L. Hoptman and Tomaš Pospiszyl, eds., *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Centrol European Art since the 1950s* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002).

66. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković, *Impossible Histories: Historicol Avant-gordes, Neo-Avant-gardes, and Post-Avant-gardes in Yugoslovio, 1918–1991* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

67. Elka Tschernokoshewa, "Born in Eastern Europe: Reality and Imagination," in U. Bechdolf, P. K. Hatzistrati, S. J. Johannsen, et al., eds., *Wotching Europe: A Medio and Cultural Studies Reoder* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Cultural Studies Foundation, 1993), 60–67.

68. This also corresponds to Pech's critique of the Western representation of the smaller Slav peoples.

69. Aleš Erjavec, Peter Krečić, Lev Kreft, et al., *Slovene Historicol Avant-Garde* (Ljubljana: Aesthetics Society, 1986).

70. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst,* 139.

71. See Marina Gržinić, "Galerija ŠKUC 1978–1987," *Sintezo,* no. 79–82 (1988), 66–104.

72. Erjavec and Gržinić, *Ljubljano, Ljubljana,* 126–127.

73. The banned 1980 Trbovlje event, which was supported by ŠKUC.

74. Marina Gržinić, "Art & Culture in the 80's: The Slovenian Situation," in Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow,* 43.

75. Mastnak, "From Social Movements to National Sovereignty," 97.

76. Gregor Tomc, "The Politics of Punk," in Benderley and Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia,* 126–127.

77. Hilary Pilkington, *Russian Youth Culture: A Notion's Constructors and Constructed* (London: Routledge, 1994), 125.

78. Slavoj Žižek, "A Letter from Afar," in Irwin, *Retroprincip* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2003), 64–65.

CHAPTER 3: *WAS IST KUNST?* (ACTUALLY EXISTING RETROGARDISM)

1. Quoted in J. Hopkin, "Red in Tooth and Claw," *Guordian,* May 11, 2002.

2. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 53.

3. Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 178–181.

4. Irwin agreed with Beuys in 1985 that Beuys would perform a joint action sowing the Slovene fields, a plan forestalled by his death. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst,* 125.

5. Laibach's stage mannerisms, and the silver face paint used on the *Kopital* tour in 1992, echo the "singing sculpture" phase of Gilbert and George, which also influenced Kraftwerk. Interestingly, Gilbert and George considered operating within music rather than visual art at an early stage in their work.

6. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst,* 47.

7. Ibid., 48.

8. Ibid., 46.

9. NSK Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, *Galdharn*, ibid., 223.

10. Each of the three main groups had a different but related "retro" terminology. Laibach used "monumental retro-avant-garde," Irwin "retro principle," and TSSN (Theater of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice) "retrogarde."

11. This statement echoes the desire of Malevich and the early Russian avant-garde to "go beyond" progress, and reach a stage of development at which all further progress would halt. See Boris Groys, *The Tatal Art af Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 16.

12. NSK, *Neue Slawenische Kunst*, 47.

13. Ibid., 111.

14. See Slavoj Žižek, *Repeating Lenin* (Zagreb: Arkzin, 2001), 107–108.

15. See this 1983 text at NSK, *Neue Slawenische Kunst*, 26.

16. Erika Gottlieb, *The Orwell Canundrum: A Cry of Despair ar Faith in the Spirit af Man?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992).

17. Laibach, 1987. NSK, *Neue Slawenische Kunst*, 56.

18. This Laibach text is very unusual in identifying its (obscure) source, which was not mentioned subsequently. The text is more typical in its reactivation of a long-forgotten art-historical source, demonstrating and creating a forbidding impression of specialist knowledge.

19. NSK, *Neue Slawenische Kunst*, 26.

20. Irwin, from *Retra Principle: The Principle af Manipulatian with the Memary af the Visible Emphasized Eclecticism—The Platfarm far Natianal Authenticity* (1985), ibid., 111.

21. The 1987 "Poster Affair" broke out after such an apparent chance discovery.

22. Mikhail N. Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradaxes af Pastmadernism and Contemparary Russian Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 102.

23. Stjepan G. Meštrović, *The Balkanizatian af the West: The Canfluence of Postcommunism and Pastmadernism* (London: Routledge, 1995), 60.

24. See Françoise Thom, *Newspeak: The Language af Saviet Cammunism* (London: Claridge Press, 1989).

25. Ibid., 115. Thom diagnoses the persistence of "Newspeak" techniques in the ostensibly post-totalitarian *perestraika* discourse.

26. Slavoj Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and NSK Not Fascists?," *M'ARS* 3–4 (1993), 3–4.

27. Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum*, 156–157.

28. Eda Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Mascaw: Haw the East Sees the East* (Piran: Obalne Galerije, 1994), 46. The quasi-political tone of the document is deliberate. Like Laibach, Irwin often use the style of political statements to disseminate concepts.

29. One commentator claims that "Kabakov questions the wisdom of simply jettisoning seventy years of endeavour and expertise in obeisance to the West's superior economic wisdom." Michael Archer, *Art since 1960* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 207.

30. For a discussion of the continuing problematic status of Eastern artists, see Zdenka Badinovac and Peter Weibl, *Arteast 2000+ Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe* (Bolzano and Vienna: Folio Verlag, 2001).

31. The work of NSK has a Russian parallel in the work of St. Petersburg's "New Academy of Russian Art," although its work has a far less paradoxical and more straightforwardly nationalist tone. For recent examples of New Academy work, see <http://www.lukart.co.uk/exhibitions/new-academy/> (May 28, 2003). NSK's use of totalitarian imageries was predated by Russian artists of the 1970s, such as Komar and Melamid.

32. Or that the therapeutic effects outweigh the initial trauma and shock caused.

33. Peter Vezjak, *Bravo* (Ljubljana: Dallas D.O.O., 1993).

34. See, for instance, their early descriptions (which may well have been retrospective) of their audiences' psychological processes, e.g., NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 44.

35. Which sometimes (deliberately, or characteristically) contradict other members' explanations, especially those given to interviewers or researchers.

36. Malcolm Sargent, foreword to Holst, *The Planets* (London: E.M.I. Records, 1958).

37. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 23.

38. E.g., see NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 52.

39. A term used in relation to Soviet propaganda by Scott Shane. See his *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), 184.

40. The mode and tone of Laibach interviews again parallel to some extent the work of Gilbert and George, who also treat interviews as an integral aspect of their total conceptual performance.

41. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 61.

42. Compare Laibach's statement with this one from Adorno:

    Now as ever, the culture industry exists in the "service" of third persons, maintaining its affinity to the declining circulation process of capital, to the commerce from which it came into being. Its ideology above all makes use of the star system, borrowed from individualist art and its commercial exploitation. The more dehumanized its methods of operation and content, the more diligently and successfully the culture industry propagates supposedly great personalities and operates with heart-throbs. (Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* [London: Routledge, 1993], 87)

43. Ibid., 127.

44. Mark Thompson, *A Paper House: The End of Yugoslavia* (London: Vintage, 1993), 39.

45. This doctrine was based on a constant state of low-level psychological mobilization of the population. In the event of war, the population was to confront the invader with partisan tactics based on elaborate planning and prepositioned weapons stores. This structure formed the material and tactical basis for the rival paramilitary groups of the 1990s.

46. See Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum*; Thom, *Newspeak*.

47. Thom, *Newspeak*, 22.

48. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 52.

49. Deleuze and Guattari (*Kafka*, 21) see repetition as a means to make language "vibrate."

50. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 5th ed. (London: Verso, 1995).

51. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 12.

52. Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum*, 134.

53. Thompson (*A Paper House*, 30) describes Kardelj's jargon thus:

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

54. Deleuze and Guattari (*Kafka*, 75) claim: "It seems that the most modern functionalism more or less voluntarily reactivated the most archaic or mythical forms. Then, too, there is a mutual penetration of two bureaucracies, that of the past and the future (we're still at this stage today.)"

55. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 48.

56. Laibach, *Art and Totalitarianism*, in ibid., 21.

57. See the catalogue *Padiglione NSK* (NSK Pavilion) (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 1993).

58. Many NSK projects discreetly acknowledge external artistic collaborators, and "guest" critics and academics have often contributed to NSK publications. In contrast, the sources of NSK works often remain unnamed and unknown, and are often given only because of legal requirements, not out of a desire to credit the original source. In the context of Laibach's "copies without originals," the specific identity of the individuals responsible (as opposed to their genres or associations) are of lesser importance, or even irrelevant. Asked about the source of a work, they will acknowledge an accurate detection but rarely volunteer information. "LAIBACH excludes any concept of the original idea," and see no need to acknowledge the specific source(s) of every image, particularly since the resultant uncertainties maintain audience speculation and fascination. Ramet's characterization of Laibach's work as "thought-energizing art" implicitly refers not merely to the aesthetic complexity but also to the effort required to track down the sources of the images, and process their implications. See S. P. Ramet, *Social Currents in Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 230.

59. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*.

60. Laibach, *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*, NSK Electronic Embassy October 1, 1995 (May 11, 1996) <http://www.lois.kudfp.si/lukap/embassy/3a/exc/13.html>.

61. See R. J. Golsan, ed., *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1992).

62. A. Hewitt, "Fascist Modernism, Futurism, and 'Post-modernity,'" in ibid., 38–55.

63. Ibid., 39.

64. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 51.

65. In Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow*, 37.

66. Laibach, *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*.

67. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 50.

68. Ibid., 54.

69. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, 119.

70. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 60.

71. Ibid., 57.

72. Ibid., 81.

73. Ibid., 73.

74. Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 68.

75. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, 115.

76. Thom, *Newspeak*.

77. Ibid., 115.

78. Thompson, *A Paper House*, 39.

79. Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and NSK Not Fascists?"

80. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 84.

81. Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and NSK Not Fascists?," 4–5.

82. Ibid.

83. Similarly, asked by a journalist from the German newspaper *Die Zeit* "Are you Fascists or not, then?" Laibach replied: "We are Fascists as much as Hitler was a painter." (*Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 58.)

84. Epstein, *After the Future*, 285.

CHAPTER 4: NSK

1. "The Program of the Irwin Group," April 1984, in NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 114.

2. Friend of and early collaborator with Laibach's Dejan Knez.

3. Another example (among many) is Irwin's *Second Bombing* (see Aleš Erjavec and Marina Gržinić, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana: The Eighties in Slovene Art and Culture* [Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga, 1991], 102), based on Laibach's *Die Erste Bombardierung* (First Bombing); see ibid., 96.

4. Uranjek and Mohar are permanent members of NK.

5. A reference to NSK theatrical groups; see NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 120.

6. Ibid., 111.

7. See "Retro Principle The Principle of Manipulation with the Memory of the Visible Emphasized Eclecticism—The Platform for National Authenticity," in ibid., 111.

8. "The Program of Irwin Group," in ibid., 114.

9. J. C. Finley and Barrett Watten, "IRWIN: A Dialogue," in Irwin, *Kapital* (Edinburgh/Ljubljana: CO-LABORATOR/Institut NSK, 1991).

10. In this connection, it is interesting to note the popularity of Irwin works with the wealthy collectors of post-independence Slovenia.

11. Tomaž Brejc, "Slovene Images," in H. Huttenbach, ed., *Voices from the Slovene Nation*, Nationalities Papers Special Edition (Association for the Study of Nationalities, 1992), 142–143.

12. For both projects, see Irwin, *Trzy projekty/Three Projects* (Warsaw: Center for Contemporary Arts, 2000).

13. See Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stolinism: Avant-gorde, Aesthetic Dictotorship and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 117.

14. See E. Dolenc, "Culture, Politics, and Slovene Identity," in J. Benderley and E. Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 86.

15. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 163.

16. Ibid., 169.

17. D. Foretić, "Prekrščevanje slovenskega gledališče" (The Baptism of Slovene Theater), *Masko* 1 (1991), 29–31.

18. Groys, *The Totol Art of Stalinism*, 113.

19. The most expensive was probably the 1999 performance *Grovitocijo nič Noordung* (Gravitation Zero Noordung). State subsidies probably do little more than cover losses on ambitious projects such as complex Noordung performances, yet they can make the difference between a project going ahead or being shelved. Projects are often also funded by private loans and commercial sponsorship.

20. See Mark Thompson, *A Paper House: The End of Yugoslavia* (London: Vintage, 1993), 17. The suggestion of Slovene victory over the Germans through an overidentification with the Germanic regime is present in the works of both Laibach and the Philosophy Department.

21. See "The Third Sisters Letter," NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 176.

22. Dejan Kršić, "Krst pod Triglavom" (Baptism under Triglav), *Masko* 1 (1991), 24–25.

23. See *Masko* 1 (1991).

24. Foretić, "Prekrščevanje slovenskega gledališče."

25. See "The Act of Self-Destruction," NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 180–181.

26. See H. P. Noordung, *Das Problem des Befahrung des Weltraums* (The Problem of Space Travel) (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1993). Živadinov has been closely associated with the rediscovery of Noordung's work, even taking part in academic symposia on the subject.

27. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 198.

28. Ibid., 200.

29. Ibid., 208–209.

30. The same birds can be seen, for instance, in the Irwin work *Two Angels* (ibid., 95), and as part of Laibach stage sets (see Erjavec and Gržinić, *Ljubljano, Ljubljano*, 98).

31. See Stojan Pelko, "Dragan Živadinov Molitveni stroj Noordung" (Dragan Živadinov Prayer Machine Noordung), *Maska* 213 (1993), 22–23.

32. In conversation, October 12, 1994, Ljubljana.

33. Skupina Avtorjev, *Punk pod Slovenci* (Punk under the Slovenes) (Ljubljana: Krt, 1985). The first part of the book consists of analytical pieces by various academics and journalists. The documentary section is an extensive collection of interviews, articles, examples of graffiti, official statements, and transcripts of RŠ debates. It is an invaluable contemporary record of the Slovene punk scene, showing the extent to which open critical debate concerning controversial and only semilegal activities was possible in Slovenia. The publisher, Krt (Knijžicna revolucionarne teorije/Library of Revolutionary Theory), was run

by the Ljubljana and university sections of ZSMS. The book is one in a series dealing with topics such as "Socialist Civil Society," "Urbanism, Social Conflict, and Planning," "Women and the Women's Movement," and "Solidarity in the Polish Crisis," plus translations of Marx and Reich. This symbolized the relative autonomy of the alternative sector, and its use of institutional resources to support alternative viewpoints.

34. Most of these addresses from 1987–1992 are published in Peter Mlakar, *Reden an der Deutsche Nation* (Speeches to the German Nation) (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1993); and Peter Mlakar, *Spiši od nadnaravnem* (Thoughts on the Supernatural) (Ljubljana: Department for Pure and Applied Philosophy NSK/Analecta, 1992).

35. See, for instance, the excessively Laibach-like statement from the text *Chips* NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 217:

We consider order and discipline sacred; we completely submit ourselves to the law and may even be cruel if profit so commands. We are delighted to see healthy young bodies performing perfectly drilled exercises.

36. This aspect contradicts the socialist realist, modernist, and Stalinist elements in NSK works, and deliberately evokes a more archetypal premodern discourse.

37. From the text "God," NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 213. Laibach explored similar themes on the album *Jesus Christ Superstars* (London: Mute Records, 1996).

38. "Chips," NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 217.

39. These are entirely innocent, displaying no traces of their connection with NSK.

40. See *Mladina*, March 13, 1987; the issue contained various articles on NK and the poster affair.

41. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 271.

42. Gregor Tomc, "The Politics of Punk," in Benderley and Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia*, 127.

43. A report in *Teleks*, March 12, 1987, printed the word "discovered" in inverted commas, hinting that the discovery was not as casual as was reported. See B. Leškovar, "Inflacija dovoljenja, plakatiranje prepovedano" (Inflation Allowed, Bill-Posting Forbidden), *Teleks*, March 12, 1987.

44. The design also featured on the cover of Laibach's 1987 Yugoslavia-only *Slovenska akropola* album.

45. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 275.

46. NK initially presented the poster as a symbolization of the victory over totalitarianism per se. Its second statement, however, was less apologetic:

The political poster must be like a blow into an open wound. . . . The political poster YOUTH DAY by New Collectivism has a soothing influence on stable minds and is a disturbing appeal to the masses. A poster of New Collectivism is a text, and the text of New Collectivism is a poster! Its slogan is—humanist propaganda. (*Mladina*, March 6, 1987)

The text is as militant as all but the most extreme NSK texts, a fact that is particularly striking given that NK members were then under investigation. Even under severe criticism, NK could neither relinquish provocation nor defend itself in any terms other than its own, even at the cost of further antagonizing opponents. The references to posters as texts suggest that a variety of readings or interpretations are possible, and that judgment should be as much (con)textual as iconographic. The final phrase might seem like a belated attempt to soften the authoritarian tone, but as it implies that there is no inherent discrepancy between humanism and propaganda, it is no less challenging than the rest of the text.

47. The 1988 "JBTZ" secrets trial of four individuals accused of leaking plans for a Yugoslav military intervention in Slovenia was perceived as just such a violation of Slovene internal sovereignty and catalyzed the creation of a mass democratic movement in Slovenia: see Tomaž Mastnak, "From Social Movements to National Sovereignty," in Benderley and Kraft, eds., Independent Slovenia, 101−105. On the other hand, many Slovenes, particularly ex-Partisans, were as offended as other Yugoslavs by NK's "provocation," and a trial of the members of NK probably would not have caused major protests. Some people would actually have welcomed the punishment of such an irritating group. Nevertheless, several writers and magazines defended NK, and a criminal trial with heavy penalties would not only have been politically embarrassing, but could have been perceived (or presented as) state persecution of artists. See also discussion of the Slovene media debate on Laibach/NSK in chapter 6 below.

48. See Mastnak, "From Social Movements to National Sovereignty," 101.

49. Novi Kolektivizem, Izhodisco in zohteve Studia NK (Novi Kolektivizem) ob plakotu dan mlodosti (Platform and Demands of Studio NK [New Collectivism] on Youth Day Poster), Mlodino, March 6.

50. NSK, Neue Slowenische Kunst, 59, illustration 28.

51. The original can be seen at <http://www.earthstation1.com/pgs/posterprop/dep-gwwii014.jpg.html>.

52. It is significant that, despite the logistical and other difficulties caused by the collapse of Yugoslavia, all NSK groups continue active cooperation with theorists, curators, and artists from the other ex-Yugoslav republics.

53. The fact that Tesla came from a Serbian-inhabited area of Croatia, and is alleged to have been involved in quasi-occult experiments, makes the context of the image far more ambiguous.

54. See Become a Citizen, illustration at the opening of chapter 9 below.

55. See, for instance, those reproduced in NSK, Neue Slowenische Kunst, 278−285.

56. Ibid., 273.

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

58. NSK, Neue Slowenische Kunst, 273.

59. Ibid., 53.

60. NSK, NSK Informotion Bulletin 1 (Ljubljana: NSK, 1994), 2.

61. Ibid.

62. From Laibach, Opus Dei (London: Mute Records, 1987).

63. The periodical Nova revija published Laibach's manifesto 10 Items of the Covenant in 1983, as well as an essay on the group.

64. Excluding early Laibach exhibitions held at ŠKUC, funded partly by ZSMS, Laibach is the only NSK section never to have received direct state (rather than commercial) subsidies, although only their popular-culture status as a commercial group prevents the Slovene state subsidizing them directly. Interestingly, when Irwin applied for cultural funding for the NSK Embassy Moscow, the application was supposedly turned down on the basis that at

that time, Slovenia could not afford to support its own state embassy (see Eda Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East Sees the East* [Piran: Obalne Galerije, 1994], 54). Domestic projects such as the 1994 NK installation *NSK Pošta*, however, do receive funding. NSK has benefited from the fact that many of the new post-independence elites at the ministries were associated with or involved in the NSMs, or were ZSMS members or officials (the core of the current Liberal Democratic Party). Some of them were familiar with, or had even worked with, NSK. Several NSK projects, from Irwin's 1987 London exhibition to the 1992 Moscow Embassy project and beyond, have been sponsored by Slovenia's airline Adria Airways, which seems keen to associate itself with Slovenia's principal cultural export.

65. Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow*, 28.

66. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kofka: Toward a Minor Literature* (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 86.

67. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 52.

68. See Marina Gržinić, "Art and Culture in the 80's: The Slovenian Situation," in Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow*, 32–38.

69. M. Dunford, J. Holland, J. Bousfield, et al., *Yugoslavia: The Rough Guide* (London: Harrap Columbus, 1990), 244.

70. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafko*, 55.

71. The plan's primarily abstract status is confirmed by the fact that no attempt has been made to update it; for example, there would now be scope for a passport office or postal bureau, yet since the plan was never intended to be literal, altering it would be irrelevant, or possibly counterproductive.

72. The majority of work in this area is undertaken by NK Studio, although each section maintains its own records, or asks others to do so. There is no single complete archive of all NSK records and press materials, and producing one would be a mammoth task.

73. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 4–5.

74. Ibid., 50.

75. Conversation with Peter Mlakar, October 12, 1994, Ljubljana. This did not mean central approval of all projects of the individual groups; rather, it arose if a member felt that there was a serious problem with a work, and/or that it would somehow affect NSK adversely.

76. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 4–5.

77. John E. Bowlt, ed., *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde*, 2d ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 243.

78. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, 21.

79. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 126.

80. See the back cover of *Neue Slowenische Kunst*. The quotation, also used by Laibach, paraphrases Hitler.

81. "O financiranju Nove revije, Gledališča sester Scipion Nasice idr" (On the Financing of *Nova revija*, Scipion Nasice, etc.), *Ljubljanski Dnevnik*, March 16, 1987.

82. Document E6, NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 163.

83. "Resurrection," Document D4, 1984 (ibid., 169).

84. Conversation with Roman Uranjek, Ljubljana, July 28, 1994.

85. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1970).

86. The American artist Charlie Krafft, who has collaborated with NSK, had his NSK passport confiscated by customs officials on his return to the USA, even though he had not attempted to use it to gain entry. See Douglas Cruikshank, "Been There, Smashed That," *Salon.com*, May 30, 2002: http://www.salon.com/people/feature/2002/05/30/krafft_profile/index.html (March 4, 2004).

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

88. See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

89. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, 119.

90. Laibach in particular stress the use and demonstration of fear, fascination, manipulation, and mystification, qualities that characterize and help to constitute the actual works. Underlying what could otherwise be seen as a perverse celebration of such tactics and their effects, however, is a finely tuned analytical framework that possesses its own particular rationality. See Laibach's detailed theoretical rationale for its mode of presentation, "Laibach: nastop na zagrebskem bienalu" (Laibach: Appearance at the Zagreb Biennale), *Mladina*, May 12, 1983.

91. See Erica Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum: A Cry of Despair or Faith in the Spirit of Man?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), 186.

92. For example, "The Golden Bird Prize Address" (NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 6–7).

93. This is not to say that some sections of the Laibach audience do not assimilate the group's work as a confirmation of their preexisting negative projections against their own "other." However, they are denied the satisfaction of being told whom they should direct their negative energies against, leaving room for doubt about whether they have misinterpreted the "message" they (want to) believe they are being given, bringing their experience into question. Additionally, the absence of any specific program or set of actions to be implemented, even at the most general level, can have only limited appeal to a type of audience desperate to be able to internalize and execute whatever orders they are given. Laibach exercise (and demonstrate) command and control over their audiences, but do not actually lead them to a specific objective or viewpoint: ideally, to a questioning. See the interview conducted with Greek Fascists (displaying the German imperial flag!) outside Laibach's 1992 Athens concert in Michael Benson's *Predictions of Fire* (New York and Ljubljana: Kinetikon, 1995). Benson allows the camera to run, and the Fascists to speak freely. Their awkwardness recalls Adorno's comment about Fascist audiences having to perform their own enthusiasm (Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* [London: Routledge, 1993]).

94. Irwin, 1988, NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 123.

95. Even North Korea would fall short of the Laibach paradigm, since although it has probably taken depersonalization and subordination as far as possible within a coherent

society, it remains based on an all-pervasive personality cult, and even this would be easier for subjects to relate to and identify with than the type of anonymous regime a literal political application of Laibach rhetoric might suggest.

96. E. K. Bramstedt, *Dictatorship and Political Police* (London: Butler & Tanner, 1945), 166.

97. Ibid., 168.

98. Ibid.

99. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 44.

100. Ibid., 52. See also the comment "'Defeat' is a word which does not exist in our vocabulary," printed on the same page.

101. At a more abstract level, the state or state power features as an influence in a whole range of works, such as Irwin's 1988 object *L'État* (see NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 151), and the 1983 Laibach poster and publication *The Instrumentality of the State Machine* (ibid., 47). The poster, showing a regimented mass meeting addressed by a leader in a hall decorated with Laibach insignia, promoted the notorious show at the Zagreb Biennale in April 1983 (see figure 7.3).

102. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 55–56.

103. From the 1984 Irwin document *Retroprinciple: The Principle of Manipulation with the Memory of the Visible Emphasized Eclecticism—The Platform for Notional Authenticity.* See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 111.

104. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Penguin, 1994), 227.

105. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 111.

106. Ibid., 53.

107. An NSK term first used by Laibach in a 1983 interview (ibid., 51) to describe what they termed a "TV personality," worn down by exposure to TV into a humbled member of the mass.

108. Statement at the opening of NSK Exhibition in Ljubljana, 1988 (ibid., 8–10).

109. Ibid., 67.

110. Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum*, 120.

111. Ibid., 92.

112. Ibid.

113. Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, 18.

114. For instance, Irwin's statement "The Future Is the Seed of the Past," NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 131.

115. See Irwin, *La geografia del tempo* (The Geography of Time) (Florence: Galleria Carini, 1991). A new version, *One*, appeared in 2003 (see Irwin, *Retroprincip* [Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2003]).

116. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 111.

117. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 25.

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 93, note 6.

2. NSK, *Neue Slawenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 122.

3. Ibid., 4.

4. See Aleš Erjavec and Marina Gržinić, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana: The Eighties in Slovene Art and Culture* (Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga, 1991), 156. After 1945, institutional titles were changed—for instance, the prewar "Slovene Alpine Society" became the postwar "Alpine Association of Slovenia."

5. NSK, *Neue Slawenische Kunst*, 114.

6. Irwin describe the displacement of socialist realism by Western artistic styles in postwar Yugoslavia as a process of one artistic dictatorship (socialist realism) being replaced by another (the Western influence); see ibid., 122). This statement, however, is more ambiguous than it seems, since without the influx of Western styles, NSK's synthesis would not have been possible. It is a critique of the largely uncritical reception of Western art in Yugoslavia rather than a critique of its actual presence.

7. See ibid., 6.

8. One of the earliest examples of this was the *kazalec* (distinctive Slovene hayrack) featured on the sleeve of *Rekapitulacija* (Hamburg: Walter Ulbricht Schallfolien, 1985)—see fig. 5.1. Other such images include the five monumental paintings of Irwin's *Slavenske Atene* (Slovene Athens) series. NSK's repeated use of the sower motif first Slovenized by the impressionist Ivan Grohar is also part of this cultural Slovenism (see Erjavec and Gržinić, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana*, 94–95).

9. NSK, *Neue Slawenische Kunst*, 121.

10. G. R. G. Mure, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 76.

11. NSK's use of German can also be read in the light of the processes of linguistic appropriation outlined by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka*.

12. NSK, *Neue Slawenische Kunst*, 18.

13. See, for instance, "The Program of Irwin Group" (ibid., 114).

14. The Slovene President claimed at the declaration of independence that there was an uninterrupted tradition of prodemocratic sentiment among the Slovenes: "Democracy, freedom, respect for human dignity and rights, respect for ethnic minorities and immigrants, openness and cooperation with others—to these values we will always remain faithful. Generations of Slovenes before us believed in them, just as all free and democratic peoples in the world have always believed in them." See Milan Kučan, "Tonight Dreams Are Allowed," in N. Grafenauer, ed., *The Case of Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1991).

15. Ivan Šepetevac, "Laibach in osvajanje Evrope" (Laibach and the Conquest of Europe), *Delo*, September 12, 1987.

16. See Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia* (London: Verso, 1994), 149.

17. Mark Thompson, *A Paper House: The End of Yugoslavia* (London: Vintage, 1993), 43.

18. See Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslavia*, 133. Nationalist claims about the inherent repressiveness of Belgrade were partly self-fulfilling: greater nationalism in the Slovene media and public opinion provoked Belgrade into attempting to curb Slovene autonomy.

19. Address at the *Zlata ptiča* prize award ceremony, 1986. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 6–7; emphasis added.

20. Official Slovene attempts to secure greater protection for their minorities in Austria and Italy have a deferential tone and, like the minorities themselves, are primarily reactive rather than proactive, never matching the vehemence of their opponents. Some foreign commentators seem more concerned about the minorities than are Slovene representatives and commentators.

21. One of the paradoxes surrounding Laibach's early (re)presentation of Slovene archetypes was that the only people actively behind it were members of alternative groupings and intellectuals, rather than nationalists or the wider public.

22. The situation was even more paradoxical in that the actual political nationalists in Slovenia presented their claims in terms of civil society and pragmatic self-rule. Laibach's severity preemptively abstracted into the cultural sphere the violence and paramilitarism associated with other ex-Yugoslav nationalisms.

23. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 120.

24. Laibach's first singer, Tomaž Hostnik, hanged himself from a *kozolec*.

25. Nineteenth-century Slovene socialism opposed liberal nationalism because it embodied a bourgeois mode of authority (see Carole Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism 1890–1914* [New York: East European Monographs, 1977]).

26. In fact, all NSK groups, particularly Irwin, are on good terms with, and often work with, many former "dissident" Russian and Eastern European artists. NSK's fierce rhetoric was designed to open a new discursive space within which a new "post-dissident" mode of relations between culture and power could be defined.

27. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 60.

28. From *LAIBACH: 10 Items of the Covenant*, ibid., 18–19.

29. Laibach, ibid., 48; emphasis added. The quote alludes to one by Hitler: "I am an artist and not a politician. When the Polish question is finally settled, I want to end my life as an artist" (Adolf Hitler, 1939). Irwin adopted the phrase for their statement on the back cover of the NSK monograph: "We are artists and not politicians. When the Slovene question is resolved once and for all, we want to finish our lives as artists." A less Slovene-oriented version of Laibach's statement appears in the same place: "Politics is the highest form of popular culture, and we who create the contemporary European pop culture consider ourselves politicians."

30. Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990), 166.

31. *Krst* (1986) is the most charged example of such juxtaposition.

32. See Peter Vodopivec, "Seven Decades of Unconfronted Ambiguities: The Slovenes and Yugoslavia," in *Independent Slovenia*, ed. J. Benderley and E. Kraft (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 25.

33. Sabrina P. Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia 1962–91*, 2d ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 22.

34. Thomas M. Barker, *The Slovene Minority of Carinthia* (Boulder: East European Monographs CLXIX (Columbia University Press, 1984), 45.

35. Laibach, *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*, NSK Electronic Embassy October 1, 1995 (May 11, 1996) <http://www.lois.kudfp.si/lukap/embassy/3a/exc/13.html>.

36. The views of the most notorious *nemškutar*, Dragotin Dežman (1821–89). Dežman pointed out that Slovene literature had sprung from the German-educated, German-speaking

Slovenes, influenced by the Reformation. See Peter Vodopivec, "Die sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Ansichten des Deutschen Bürgertums in Krain vom Ende der sechziger bis zum Beginn der achtziger Jahre des 19. Jahrhunderts" (The Social and Economic Opinions of the German Citizens in Carniola from the End of the 1860s to the Start of the 1880s), in H. Rumpler and A. Suppan, eds., *Geschichte der Deutschen im Bereich des heutigen Slowenien 1848–1941* (History of the Germans on the Territory of Present-Day Slovenia 1848–1941) (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik Wien), 85–119.

37. See Rogel, *The Slovenes and Yugoslavism.*

38. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst,* 126.

39. Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do,* 2d ed. (London: Verso, 1994), 92–93.

40. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst,* 126.

41. R. D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (London: Macmillan Papermac, 1994), xxiv. Žižek also recognizes the role of the southern frontier in Austrian nationalism, arguing that it acts as a kind of civilizational marker, beyond which lies "the rule of Slavic hordes." However, he shows that the Slovenes in their turn, and subsequently the Croats and Serbs, also ideologize their frontiers. For some Slovenes, Western civilization ends on the Croatian border; for Croats it ends on their borders with the Bosnian Muslims and the Serbs; and for the Serbs, on their borders with the Albanians and Bosnian Muslims. See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 222–223.

42. Barker describes Carinthia as "the most loyal of the Führer's Alpine fiefdoms." Thomas M. Barker, *Social Revolutionaries and Secret Agents: The Carinthian Slovene Partisans* (Boulder: East European Monographs; New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 11.

43. See J. Šavli, *Slovenska znamenja* (Slovene Symbols) (Ljubljana: Gorica-Bilje, 1994), 73–81.

44. See N. Grafenauer, ed., *The Case of Slovenia* (Ljubljana: Nova Revija, 1991), 173.

45. This stone throne was the site of a unique ducal induction ceremony in which the lord was acclaimed by the people in a Slovene ritual that lasted until the fifteenth century. See Šavli, *Slovenska znamenja,* 73–81.

46. Such "Germania" was echoed in the backgrounds of some of the most fanatical Nazis. SS Standartenführer Odilo Globočnik is associated with atrocities in Poland, and is notorious among Slovenes for brutal anti-Partisan operations conducted around Trieste from 1943 to 1945. See B. C. Novak, *Trieste 1941–54* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Barker (*Social Revolutionaries and Secret Agents,* 11) describes him as "at least in a cultural and ideological sense, one of the principal artificiers of the holocaust." However, he still bore a Slovene surname, a trace left over from the Germanization of his family. As Kaplan suggests, some of the most vehement Carinthian pan-Germanists are motivated by the fear that their pure German status is compromised by the persistent stain of a Slovene presence in the region and in their own ancestry. Hitler himself, as an Austrian conspicuously unable to trace a pure German family line, is the most spectacular example of such overcompensatory Germanophilia. His vehemence was also intended to erase the ambiguities of his actual identity. The psychological discipline necessary to assume the new identity is akin to the Orwellian procedure of "doublethink." Even the memory of the discarding of the original identity has to be repressed so that it is apparent neither to the individual nor to others, and aggressive vehemence is the means used to effect the necessary erasure of personal history.

47. Arnez states: "Violence, forced Germanization, expulsion, killing, imprisonment, and like measures against the Slovenes were considered by the Germans as civilized acts of their cultural mission" (J. Arnez, *Slovenia in European Affairs* [New York: Studia Slovenica/ League of CSA, 1958], 17).

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

49. See Barker, *The Slovene Minority of Carinthia*.

50. See Thompson, *A Paper House*, 20.

51. "Two Addresses Delivered at the Concert of Laibach in Vienna, Kaiser Franz Joseph Reitschule, June 1988" (NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 220).

52. Some of the more extreme pan-Germanists still see all Slovenes as Windisch; politicians such as Haider insist on the rights of German speakers in Slovenia, and attempted to frustrate Slovenia's entry into the EU (a final recognition of Slovenia's autonomous post-Habsburg existence).

53. See Irwin, "Concepts and Relations," in *Zemljopis vremena / The Geography of Time* (Umag: Galerija Dante Marino Cettina, 1994).

54. "Old-fashioned" concepts now almost absent from mainstream political discourse in Europe feature frequently in NSK texts, particularly in those of the Philosophy Department. In a Düsseldorf concert address, discipline is described as "a bad word for a good thing." See Peter Mlakar, *Reden an der Deutsche Nation* (Speeches to the German Nation) (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1993).

55. H. J. Syberberg, *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (Germany/UK/France: WDR/BBC/INA, 1977). The fact that one Laibach video is entitled "Laibach: A Film from Slovenia," plus visual and other references in their work and in *Predictions of Fire*, illustrate the film's relevance to and influence upon the Laibach/NSK aesthetic. Like Laibach, Syberberg has been criticized for fostering an apparent nostalgia for traditional Germanic traits that the Nazis are seen to have tarnished irreparably, and he has subsequently assumed a more nationalist position.

56. Laibach's music is frequently described as Wagnerian.

57. Kiefer's *Die innere Raum* features on the cover of *Nova akropola* and on the rear sleeve of Laibach's *Slovenska akropola* (Slovene Athens) album (NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 66). The image also features in Irwin's monumental painting *Resurrection of The Sisters of Scipion Nasice* (see figure 3.2).

58. Kraftwerk's music has been described as "Industrielle Volksmusik" (industrial folk music), a description that could also be applied to the industrial-pastoral ambience of Laibach's *Rekapitulacija*.

59. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 54.

60. Laibach, *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*.

61. Ironically, in reality Laibach are by no means fluent in German.

62. The fact that the title is grammatically incorrect makes it seem even stranger and more alienating.

63. For a summary of some German reactions to Laibach, see M. Zajc, "Laibach v Hamburgu (Laibach in Hamburg)," *Mladina*, October 23, 1987, 18–20.

64. The performance of militant Germanicism has disturbing implications across Europe and beyond, and the Germanic elements remain one of the key paradigms used for representing and understanding Laibach.

65. The Germanic element in Laibach's work declined sharply after the release of *Kapital* (1992), and largely disappeared from the work of the other NSK sections. Its peak was roughly 1985–89.

66. Both incidents were described by Laibach as tests of ideological preparedness and social defense mechanisms. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 50, 51; A. Lenard, "Laibach Pietà ali zvok revolucije ponoči" (Laibach Pietà or the Sound of the Revolution at Night), *Mladina*, October 14, 1982.

67. Goran Gajić, *Pobeda nad suncem* (Victory under the Sun) (Belgrade: Avala Film, 1987). In one camp scene, Laibach visit a Gasthaus in full Alpine costume, and solemnly drink beer.

68. From the album *Let It Be* (London: Mute Records, 1988).

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

70. NSK oscillates between a Syberberg-like concern to carry out a limited recuperation of certain Germanic qualities, and a more ironic, dispassionate approach.

71. Mikhail M. Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 282.

72. See N. Damjanić, "Laibach v trebuhu trojanskega konja" (Laibach in the Belly of the Trojan Horse), *Nedeljski Dnevnik*, December 20, 1987, 22–24.

73. Organizers of the concert almost cancelled the event because of the speech. See M. Megla, "Kdo in kdaj, Laibach" (Who and When, Laibach), *Mladina*, October 30, 1995.

74. A traditional Slovene role performed for the Habsburg nobility. This hunting reference (one of many in Laibach, Irwin, and the theatrical works) has a further connotation. During the war, the gamekeepers (*Aufsichtsjäger*) in the Carinthian forests were feared as the eyes and ears of the SS in the anti-Partisan struggle. They were especially reviled as *nemškutarji* (see Barker, *Social Revolutionaries and Secret Agents*, 10). References to Slovenes both as hunters and as beaters evoke the Slovene-German (Austrian) dynamic (NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 220).

75. See Mlakar, *Reden an der Deutsche Nation*.

76. Peter Mlakar, *Spiši od nadnaravnem* (Thoughts on the Supernatural) (Ljubljana: Department for Pure and Applied Philosophy NSK/Analecta, 1992), 77.

77. See Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution after the Cold War* (Washington: Brookings Institute, 1995), 94.

78. Ibid., 94. The memorandum was the first codification of contemporary Greater Serb nationalism; it argued that Tito's regime had conspired to keep Serbia down, particularly by granting autonomy to Vojvodina and Kosovo.

79. See James Gow, *Legitimacy and the Military: The Yugoslav Crisis* (London: Pinter, 1992), 84–88.

80. S. Markotich, "Slovenia," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report Southeastern Europe*, 3, 16, 1994: 101–102.

81. With no offensive military capability and vulnerable minorities in Italy and Austria, a more aggressively nationalist Slovenia would have very limited options.

82. Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 201.

83. See Erjavec and Gržinić, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana*, 156.

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

85. Ibid., 222.

86. The type of militant Slovene nationalism Laibach appear to deploy is inherently unreal or spectral—there are no real precedents for such extreme Slovenism (only for its opposites), and it seems unlikely to emerge now, after Laibach's interventions and the resolution of the national question.

87. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 58.

88. See Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 8.

89. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 52; emphasis added. The conclusion of the statement reads: "Only God can subdue LAIBACH. People and things never can"—a paraphrase of a 1933 Mussolini statement. See G. Lisič, "Laibach: zemeljski ključ & pogovor z demoni" (Laibach: The Key to Earth and a Conversation with Demons), *Mladina*, September 3, 1985.

90. This contradicts Laibach's self-denotation as Yugoslavs, and their reference to Yugoslavia as "our country" in some statements (NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 54). NSK as a whole came to be spoken of in the Yugoslav media as the country's leading cultural export, and it did nothing to discourage the Western perception that its members were de facto Yugoslav cultural ambassadors.

91. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 43–44.

92. Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, 159.

93. Such essentialist views about national environment and history finding expression in the collective and individual psyche, and in culture, are echoed in the works of Jung.

94. Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art*, 146–147.

95. Any future political or cultural project that attempts to appropriate the Slovene national Thing (of which there is no sign) would have to carry out a dissociation whereby extreme manifestations of it would not automatically recall NSK (and all its disturbing ambiguities).

CHAPTER 6: LAIBACHIZATION

1. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 43.

2. The title of an early anti-Laibach letter; see Ljubljanski Dnevnik, October 19, 1982.

3. Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 51.

4. Only one protest letter, written primarily in response to the TV incident, mentions Tito, Yugoslavia, or the system. The letter, sent on behalf of the veterans and citizens of Domžale, is as bombastic and formulaic as a Laibach statement: "We will always remain faithful to our socialist, self-managing, nonaligned homeland, Tito and our Yugoslavia,

and will invest all our strength for the improvement of our economy and . . . also for the political stabilization of our society." See D. Zidarič, "Protestno pismo" (Protest Letter), *TV-15*, October 20, 1983.

5. Skupnost koroških partizanov Slovenije (SKPS) (Association of Carinthian Partisans of Slovenia), "Ponemčevanje imen je genocid" ([The] Germanization of Names is Genocide), *Delo*, February 21, 1987.

6. A similar set of reactions might have followed the emergence of a Polish group called "Danzig," although in 1980s Poland such a group would probably have been suppressed long before it became a public issue.

7. The city celebrated the 850th anniversary of the first recorded mention of the city (as "Laibach") in 1994. The first written mention of "Ljubljana" was in 1146.

8. Only the final military defeat of Germanizing, Italianizing, and Magyarizing regimes in 1945 allowed Slovene place names to be recognized as international geographic terms. However, some contemporary German maps still use "Laibach," and the Freedom Party in Austria is pressing for Austrian road signs to show "Laibach" rather than Ljubljana.

9. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 44.

10. In the late 1980s, the Serb leadership and most of the media claimed that Fascistic forces really did control Ljubljana.

11. For similar reasons, it is equally unlikely that there are any provisions or sanctions against the use of the term "Danzig" in Gdansk, or "Königsberg" in Kaliningrad.

12. For instance, Nova revija's 1987 "Contributions to a Slovene National Program."

13. See a letter written by M. Kmecl in response to a pro-Laibach article. Kmecl states that the city's name must be both pre-Slovene and pre-German; however, in the sentence "Order and Freedom are the basic elements of purity" he seems to demand something more rigorous than historical accuracy in the use of the name. M. Kmecl, "O Slovenskem prevodu Laibacha" (On the Slovene Translation of Laibach), *Delo*, October 24, 1986.

14. Unlike elsewhere in ex-socialist Europe, many of the plaques, inscriptions, and sculptures commemorating the Communist-dominated OF remain in Slovenia. However, the official historiography of the resistance front is widely discredited, and the Church and émigré groups in particular constantly focus on Partisan atrocities rather than those carried out by collaborators and their Axis allies.

15. One of the most infamous of these, "Fašizam na ljubljanskoj sceni" (Fascism in the Ljubljana Scene), appeared in the Zagreb magazine *Start* in July 1984 (Slavenka Drakulić-Ilić, "Fašizem na alternativnoj sceni" [Fascism on the Alternative Scene], *Start*, July 28, 1984). It provoked a detailed response from Igor Vidmar entitled "Fašizem na Startovi sceni" (Fascism on the *Start* Scene), *Mladina*, September 6, 1984.

16. See the *Mladina* report, "Documents of Oppression," June 21, 1984.

17. See I. Uranič-Drago, "Protest koroških partizanov" (Carinthian Partisans' Protest), *Delo*, April 12, 1986.

18. Tomaž Mastnak, "Civil Society in Slovenia: From Opposition to Power," *Studies in Comparotive Communism* 23 (1990), 305–317.

19. See Branka Magaš, *The Destruction of Yugoslovio* (London: Verso, 1994), 149–150.

20. See S. Markotich, "Slovenia," *Rodio Free Europe/Rodio Liberty Research Report Southeastern Europe*, 3, 16, 1994.

21. Tomaž Mastnak, "From Social Movements to National Sovereignty," in J. Benderley and E. Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 99.

22. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 50–51.

23. Excerpts appear in *Predictions of Fire* and *Bravo*.

24. See Martin Fritzl, *Die Kärntner Heimatdienst* (The Carinthian Home Service) (Klagenfurt/Celovec: Drava Verlag, 1990).

25. Michael Benson, *Predictions of Fire Dialogue List*, <http://www.lois.kud-fp.si/~lukap/kinetikon/diolist.html> *NSK Electronic Embassy* (October 1995) (January 10, 1997), 19.

26. After the interview, Laibach took refuge at various locations, including a monastery. The performance ban led to a renewed effort to penetrate foreign markets, and the commencement of Laibach's first "Occupied Europe" tour (see chapter 7).

27. The Ljubljana municipal assembly of the SAWPY organization.

28. "Documents of Oppression." Interestingly, this text also criticizes Laibach's use of non-Nazi totalitarian and Stalinist symbols, which was seen as being as reprehensible as the Nazi images.

29. Ibid.

30. The subtle distinction between the Party discourse of "socialist self-managing" democracy and the NSMs' demands for an unqualified democracy-as-such reveals a gap far wider than it looks on paper.

31. "Documents of Oppression."

32. The fact that the primary threat issued was financial illustrates that in some respects the status of alternative culture in Slovenia was already closer to that in the West than to that in the rest of Yugoslavia and the Eastern bloc.

33. "Zadeva: priglašitev za prireditve" ("Documents of Oppression," 17).

34. The application to perform as "Laibach-Kunst" was probably a device to ascertain if the ban applied only to a group calling itself simply "Laibach," but also an attempt to goad the authorities into further self-contradiction or—most unlikely—a lifting of the ban.

35. "Zadeva: uporaba imena mesta Ljubljane" ("Documents of Oppression," 17).

36. In a 1983 letter, correspondents introduce themselves as "The Fighters and Citizens of the Community of Domžale" (Zidarič, "Protestno pismo").

37. Peter Vezjak, *Bravo* (Ljubljana: Dallas D.O.O., 1993).

38. See U. Vovk, "Laibach v vsako Slovensko vas" (Laibach in Every Slovene Village), *Tribuna*, April 13–14, 1986.

39. The first report on Laibach appeared in *Mladina* on November 20, 1980, and during 1981 group members were dispersed across Yugoslavia for military service.

40. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 120. Laibach's increased visibility provided a pretext for a return to the unhealed wounds their name represented. The timing also suggests not just that the works themselves were more or less irrelevant to the questions of the name and the group's image, but that beyond those well disposed to Laibach, there was little knowledge of the specific works involved. This certainly helped Laibach, as a more detailed familiarity with their works on the part of critics would have invited far more severe condemnation.

41. Some reviews of *Krst* drew attention to the fact that the ban on Laibach appearances had been indirectly circumvented by the inclusion of their music and name in the production, which took place at Slovenia's leading cultural venue, Cankarjev dom. At a press conference the general director of the venue, Mitja Rotovnik, was asked how it was that the forbidden name appaered in the text of advertisements for the production; he replied that the venue took full responsibility for publishing it. See Jelka Šutej, "Mističnost četrtkove premiere" (Mysticism of Thursday's Premiere), *Delo*, February 4, 1986. Tacitly and openly supportive cultural institutions helped to maintain "Laibach" as a public presence. A literal interpretation of the ban on Laibach would have meant that permission had to be sought for every public use of the name. The fact that this was not enforced, despite calls for it, suggests that beyond preventing public appearances by Laibach, the council (and its national superiors) were not prepared to cross the line into heavy-handed media censorship which would have compromised attempts to modernize the Party's image, and rendered it open to ridicule.

42. Actual Slovene Partisan uniforms (and those of all Tito's forces) were an ad hoc mixture of British, Soviet, and other fatigues with OF insignia.

43. The material was taken from the Slovene national film archive. Clips feature in the video *Tanz mit Laibach* (Dir. Sašo Podgoršek, London: Mute Records, 2003).

44. Additionally, both *Država* and *Panorama* (see Laibach, *Nova akropola*) feature samples of Tito's speeches which were excised from the versions released on Laibach's 1985 first Yugoslav album.

45. From the *Address at the Occasion of Opus Dei Album Release in Yugoslavia*, November 1987, NSK, Neue Slowenische Kunst, 67–68.

46. T. Čajhen, "Laibachizacija II" (Laibachization II), Ljubljanski Dnevnik, October 19, 1982.

47. S. Babnik, "Protestno pismo" (Protest Letter), *TV–15*, July 28, 1983.

48. Uranič-Drago, "Protest koroških partizanov."

49. The Partisans needed to present Laibach as a grave threat in order to justify their intervention. They also hoped to win over as wide a proportion of the public as possible, and persuade the authorities to intervene. In attributing to Laibach the power to reintroduce Germanization, however, they were actually only amplifying Laibach's perceived power and importance. Yet even if they were aware of this, the Partisans could not see any alternative to their intervention, which added to Laibach's dramatization of social repressiveness.

50. Historical German names for various Slovene towns—"Trefail" is Trbovlje; "Cilli" is Celje.

51. Uranič-Drago, "Protest koroških partizanov."

52. The most recent such official campaign was against the Ljubljana punks in 1981.

53. According to Laibach, the ban was no longer enforced, partly due to the realization that as "Laibach" was a (Germanophone) geographical expression, it could not be banned. A further factor was the realization that continuing to enforce the ban on the group was increasingly absurd, given its success elsewhere in Europe and Yugoslavia, and the fact that small concerts had taken place outside Ljubljana. By 1987, the ban was more damaging to the authorities than to Laibach.

54. SKPS, "Ponemčevanje imen je genocid."

55. SKPS, "Ponemčena imena sredi Slovenije" (Germanized Name at the Heart of Slovenia), Ljubljanski Dnevnik, February 25, 1987.

56. SKPS, "Protesti brez odmeva" (Protests without Response), *Komunist*, February 27, 1987.

57. The fact that the second Partisan intervention was necessary was a sign that their struggle was already lost. By 1987 the Slovene government was trying to create a more tolerant image, and was increasingly embarrassed by hardline rhetoric as propagated by both the Partisans and Laibach.

58. SKPS, "Ponemčevenje imen je genocid."

59. Uranič-Drago, "Protest koraških partizanov."

60. Irwin's comment "The more Slovene our art is, the more Yugoslav it will become" (NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 121) is a paradoxical acknowledgment of the progress it was possible for Slovene culture to make within Yugoslavia. This acknowledgment contrasts with the views of nationalist intellectuals, for whom such an admission is anathema.

61. Jože Osterman, "Zavajanje nepoučenih" (Misleading the Uninformed), *Delo*, February 28, 1987.

62. The letter of April 12, 1986 states: "This [the initiative for the recognition of Laibach] comes at a time when Carinthian Slovenes abroad are fighting for Sloveneness [and] need great personal courage, will and renunciation, but also the moral and political support of the mother nation."
   Another letter, H. Kuznik, "Protest koroških partizanov" (Carinthian Partisans' Protest, *Delo*, April 19, 1986), says: "Our sacred duty is to support Austrian Slovenes in their just struggle against denationalization."
   The SKPS letter states: "We feel we have shamed and betrayed ourselves in front of the Slovenes of Carinthia and Primorska," and congratulates RTV Ljubljana for its reports on the struggle of these Slovene minorities, while criticizing writers of recent pro-Laibach articles for unintentionally showing support for those who agree with the denationalization of Slovene culture (a reference to Laibach and the Italian and Austrian governments).

63. S. Majstorović, *Cultural Policy in Yugoslavia* (Paris: UNESCO, 1972), 24–25.

64. Anti-Laibach letters contributed by individual correspondents were able to take a stronger, less placatory line.

65. Letter by M. Čepe, "Ogorčenja nad izzivanjem" (Indignation at Provocation), *Delo*, May 5, 1982. Featured in the compilation *Ljubljana—Beograd—Zagreb* (London: Mute/Grey Area, 1993). The introduction is followed by *Cari amici*, which appropriates Mussolini's wartime rhetoric: "Dear friends, soldiers, the time of peace is now over" (Cari amici soldati, i tempi della pace sono passati).

66. "Documents of Oppression."

67. Gregor Tomc, *Druga Slovenija* (The Other Slovenia) (Ljubljana: Krt, 1989).

68. In 1984, Yugoslavia's first gay club night opened at an alternative venue in Ljubljana.

69. Aleš Erjavec and Marina Gržinić, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana: The Eighties in Slovene Art and Culture* (Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga, 1991), 100.

70. P. Gantar, "Protest koroških partizanov" (Carinthian Partisans' Protest), *Delo*, June 21, 1986.

71. It also typifies a theoretical argument employed by liberal theorists and sympathetic journalists arguing for the recognition of Laibach, the connection between a name and the existence or otherwise of its subject—see Ervin Hladnik-Milharčič, "Kmečke in rokodelske novice" (Farmers' and Craftsmen's News), *Stop*, December 27, 1984.

72. Hilary Pilkington, *Russian Youth Culture: A Nation's Constructors and Constructed* (London: Routledge, 1994), 84.

73. Tomaž Mastnak, "Dialog ni možen" (Dialogue Not Possible), *Mladina*, June 6, 1986.

74. The "Youth Day" poster was controversial within Slovenia, and some attacks on NSK continued, but these were far overshadowed by the onslaught from the rest of Yugoslavia, and it was now from here that the heaviest pressure for action against NSK came.

75. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 252–253.

CHAPTER 7: RETROGARDE EVENTS

1. See Eda Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East Sees the East* (Piran: Obalne Galerije, 1994), 106–107.

2. Mute Records press release, September 1994.

3. Tracks feature on *Ljubljana—Zagreb—Beograd* (London: Mute/Grey Area, 1993).

4. "Laibach: nastop na zagrebskem bienalu," *Mladina*, May 12, 1987.

5. See Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 45–52.

6. "Laibach: nastop na zagrebskem bienalu."

7. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 48.

8. Laibach have undertaken several "themed" tours, often independently of album releases. The imagery of each is designed to make specific symbolic or ideological points (for instance, the first German tour [*Die erste Bombardierung über dem Deutschland*]). Other "themed" tours include a tour of Yugoslav industrial cities in 1989, and of Siberian cities in 1997.

9. See T. Lorenčič, "Okupirana Evropa" (Occupied Europe), *Mladina*, January 26, 1984, 38–41, for an account of the first leg of the tour.

10. Highlights from the tour can be heard on the self-produced cassette release *Through the Occupied Netherlands*, and *The Occupied Europe Tour* album (London: Cherry Red Records, 1986).

11. A legendary show held in a disused thermoelectric power station.

12. Laibach, *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*, NSK Electronic Embassy October 1, 1995 (May 11, 1996) <http://www.lois.kudfp.si/lukap/embassy/3a/exc/13.html>.

13. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 51.

14. John Honderich, "Rock and Rally," *Guardian*, January 4, 1991.

15. "Laibach: nastop na zagrebskem bienalu."

16. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 44.

17. Mercury spoke openly in interviews about his pleasure in the manipulation and control of audiences.

18. Laibach shows in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Russia, and elsewhere have had ticket prices that reflect local incomes, not the group's expenses.

19. Ironically, branded cars were pioneered by Pink Floyd.

20. See Simon Ford, *Wreckers of Civilization* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 1999), 8.10.

21. As well as being a provocative novelty, this recalled the mode of conceptual performance for which Joseph Beuys was known. Laibach are also seen chopping wood in *Pobeda nad suncem*.

22. See Peter Mlakar, *Reden an die Deutsche Notion* (Speeches to the German Nation) (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1993), 20. Footage of the Belgrade speech is included in *Predictions of Fire*.

23. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 218–219.

24. Ibid., 219.

25. On the "NATO" tour, the banners bore dual NATO/Laibach insignia.

26. See J. C. Cooper, *An Encyclopedio of Troditionol Symbols* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1982), 13.

27. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 56.

28. See *Melody Moker*, December 5, 1988.

29. On the "Kapital" tour, Laibach's faces were painted silver, and while they still wore the usual Tyrolean loden jackets, the image was less Alpine or paramilitary. On the "NATO" tour the jackets featured again, but with blue NATO/Laibach shirts underneath.

30. See the concert footage in *Pobeda nad suncem*. The concert sequences in the film are tinted and faded, creating the impression that they could have been filmed at the height of the totalitarian era.

31. Beuys used these materials in his 1965 action *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. Beuys smeared his head in gold and honey, as did Laibach's singer at the "illegal" Ljubljana concert in December 1984. Irwin used the same materials in some pieces, and Laibach also used a hare in some early performances.

32. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 44.

33. The title of an early Laibach concert.

34. From the early 1980s onward, Budapest was a center for alternative culture, and even industrial groups such as B.P. Service.

35. Stjepan G. Meštrović, *The Bolkanizotion of the West: The Confluence of Postcommunism and Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1995), 104.

36. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 44.

37. Cathi Unsworth, "Laibach," London concert review, *Melody Maker*, December 24, 1988.

38. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1993), 131; emphasis added.

39. See R. Wilkinson, "Slavs to the Rhythm," *Sounds*, August 8, 1987.

40. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*.

41. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 46; emphasis added.

42. Personal conversation.

43. Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 130.

44. Slavoj Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and NSK Not Fascists?," *M'ARS* 3–4 (1993), 3–4; emphasis added.

CHAPTER 8: APOLOGIJA LAIBACH

1. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Politicol Economy of Sound* (1985; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 46.

2. See S. P. Ramet, *Social Currents in Eostern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); and "The Rock Scene in Yugoslavia," *Eostern European Politics and Societies* 2 (Spring 1988), 396–410.

3. See S. P. Ramet, ed., *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics In Eastern Europe and Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

4. I. Vidmar, "Punk na Slovenskem: od kod in kam" (Punk in Slovenia: From Where and to Where?), *Valj*, March 1983.

5. See Ramet, *Rocking the State*; Gregor Tomc, *Druga Slovenija* (The Other Slovenia) (Ljubljana: Krt, 1989); and "The Politics of Punk," in J. Benderley and E. Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

6. Attali, *Noise*, 14.

7. Ramet states that the scene was not controlled directly by the state, but indirectly through record companies and producers who would "advise" bands to change their image or lyrics in order for their work to be released. When Laibach refused such changes to their first album, *Nebo žari* (The Sky Glows), release was canceled.

8. Ramet, *Rocking the State*, 111.

9. Examples can be heard at <http://www.titoville.com>. Note the combinations of military drums, pro-Tito lyrics, and pop ballads.

10. See Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992).

11. Ervin Dolenc, "Culture, Politics, and Slovene Identity," in Benderly and Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia*, 87.

12. Tomc, *Druga Slovenija*, 121–122. By contrast, the Belgrade music scene operated under less severe conditions. The particular repressiveness in Slovenia supports arguments about antidemocratic tendencies within Slovene society.

13. Ramet, "The Rock Scene in Yugoslavia," 407.

14. Laibach, *Ten Items of the Covenant*, NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 18.

15. Ibid., 21.

16. See S. P. Ramet, *Balkan Babel* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 87.

17. A rare example of a Soviet-style polemic against rock as such is quoted by Ervin Hladnik-Milharčič. He cites a statement by S. Verbič that linked rock to the "imperialist expansionism" of the Carter administration. See S. Verbič, "Kmečke in rokodelske novice," *Stop*, December 27, 1984.

18. Imported rock'n' roll records were present in Yugoslavia even in the 1950s, meaning that Slovene audiences in particular (because of their higher purchasing power) had been able to follow (if not participate in) all the postwar musical trends, and thus had a full historical understanding of them.

19. See Mark Thompson, *A Paper House: The End of Yugoslavia* (London: Vintage, 1993), 40.

20. Aleš Erjavec and Marina Gržinić, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana: The Eighties in Slovene Art and Culture* (Ljubljana: Založba Mladinska knjiga, 1991), 60.

21. Vidmar, "Punk na Slovenskem: od kod in kam?"

22. See Erjavec and Gržinić, *Ljubljana, Ljubljana*, 48–49.

23. See Tomc, *Druga Slovenija*, 92. Tomc compares a disinformation campaign against a sixties dance club with the 1981 "Nazi-Punk" media scandal.

24. Roy Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music* (1994; reprint, London: Routledge, 1995), 281.

25. See *Punk pod Slovenci* (Ljubljana: Krt, 1984).

26. The appearance of graffiti was one of the most visible symptoms of the spread of punk into Slovenia, and both Tomc (*Druga Slovenija*) and Erjavec and Gržinić (*Ljubljana, Ljubljana*) stress its importance. The appearance of foreign slogans and band names on the walls of Ljubljana was also a precursor to Laibach's "making strange" of the city.

27. Vidmar, "Punk na Slovenskem."

28. Ramet, *Rocking the State*, 114.

29. Stalin's image appears in the Irwin painting *Basics of Morphology*, which was used as a *Mladina* front cover in 1988 (see NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 93). Laibach never used Stalin's voice, but quoted a great deal of Stalinist discourse, including the term "engineers of human souls."

30. From an interview featured on the *Bravo* video.

31. Together with *Decree*, *Panorama* constituted Laibach's first British single release in 1984. Both feature on the albums *Nova akropola* (London: Cherry Red Records, 1986) and *Occupied Europe Tour 1983–5* (London: Side Effects Records, 1986).

32. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 63.

33. See Laibach, *M.B. 12.84* (London: Mute/Grey Area, 1997, CD). The booklet includes full translations of the Tito speech extracts featured on the track.

34. See *Ljubljana—Zagreb—Beograd* (London: Mute/Grey Area, 1993).

35. Like Laibach's ambivalent use of Partisan imagery, the use of Tito functions as a mark of recognition, or even of respect for his significance. The uncanny power still exerted by Tito's image was noted by Meštrović, Letica, and Goreta. Discussing the continued presence of Tito portraits in official buildings in independent Croatia, they note that when questioned, people are unable to explain why they have not removed the portraits. See S. G. Meštrović, S. Letica, and M. Goreta, *Habits of the Balkan Heart: Social Character and the Fall of Communism* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1993), 63.

36. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 44.

37. See Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 258–259.

38. Attali, *Noise*, 19.

39. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 18.

40. See Pascal Bussy, *Kraftwerk Man, Machine and Music* (London: S.A.F. Publishing, 1993), 74.

41. The group's name came from the Dadaist meeting-place in Zurich.

42. See M. Fish and D. Hallbery, *Cabaret Voltaire: The Art of the Sixth Sense* (London: S.A.F. Publishing, 1989).

43. Laibach are much closer in tone, and in their militant ideological approach, to the near-contemporary British industrial group Test Dept. Like Laibach's examination of art and ideology, however, TG's work is presented as "an investigation" of "to what extent you could mutate and collage sound, present complex non-entertaining noises to a popular culture situation and convince and convert." (Throbbing Gristle, *TG CD1*, London: Mute Records, 1986).

44. Another difference was that most Laibach members came from the industrial environment of Trbovlje, and had either personal or family experience of heavy industrial work.

45. The performance ended when the audience seized the singer's microphone. The live recording was reissued as *23 Minutes over Brussels* (London: Mute/Blast First, 1998).

46. Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 61.

47. The 2003 compilation *An Anthology of Noise & Electronic Music*, vol. 1 (Brussels: Sub Rosa SR 190) includes the early Laibach field recordings *Industrial Ambients 1980–82*.

48. The Slovene term for nostalgic, kitschy songs from the 1950s and 1960s, similar to the German term *Schlager*.

49. From Laibach, *Rekapitulacija 1980–84* (Hamburg: Walter Ulbrich Schallfolien, 1985).

50. Attali and Laibach's critiques of popular music also refer back to the critique of jazz, popular music, and the culture industry made by Adorno, Horkheimer, and the Frankfurt School.

51. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 19.

52. Beuys also used coal in his works.

53. A more concrete fascination with terror is present in the work of Laibach's Belgian contemporaries Front 242 in slogans such as "Moment of Terror Is the Beginning of Life." See Front 242, *Front by Front* (Brussels: Red Rhino Europe, 1988). 242 have also been condemned for their ambiguous use of paramilitary imagery, and have encountered difficulties as a result.

54. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 46.

55. "Nova akropola," *Sounds*, February 20, 1986.

56. Ron Goodwin, *Where Eagles Dare* (London: MGM Records Limited, 1969).

57. References to exorcism also occur in works by Irwin and Scipion Nasice (see NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 170).

58. Ibid., 44.

59. See Goran Lisić, "Laibach: zemeljski ključ & pogovar z demoni" (Laibach: The Key to Earth and a Conversation with Demons), *Mladina*, September 3, 1985.

60. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 55.

61. A nineteenth-century romantic nationalist depiction of a nation such as Smetana's *Ma vlast* (My Country) necessarily repressed the ambiguous and problematic aspects of national identity that NSK manipulate.

62. *Krst's* introductory track *Hostnik*. *Ohm Sweet Ohm* from 1975's *Radio Activity* album features a vocoded voice and a mournful refrain for analog electronics. Laibach use it as the instrumental backdrop to a spoken lament for former singer Tomaž Hostnik. Kraftwerk's influence upon Laibach specifically (their retrofuturism and corporate image) and electronic/industrial music generally is immense. Discussing the red-shirted paramilitary image of 1978's *Man Machine*, Bussy (*Kraftwerk Man*, 100) compares such ironic re(tro)quotations to the contemporary work of Kiefer and Gilbert and George, other key Laibach influences.

63. This refers to the track *Jezero/Der See* (The Lake). See Alenka Barber-Keršovan, "Laibachova simulacija totalitarizma kot izziv semitotalitarnemu političnemu režimu" (Laibach's Simulation of Totalitarianism as Challenge to a Semi-Totalitarian Political Regime), in P. Kuret, ed., *Provokacija v glasbi* (Provocation in Music) (Ljubljana: Festival Ljubljana/Slovenski glasbeni dnevi, 1993), 91.

64. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 45. This text is the clearest example of Laibach's use of the work of Attali as a theoretical template. Attali wrote (in 1977):

Make no mistake: if all of society agrees to address itself so loudly through this music, it is because it has nothing more to say, because it no longer has a meaningful discourse to hold, because even repetition is now only one form of repetition among others, and perhaps an obsolete one. In this sense, music is meaningless, liquidating, the prelude to a cold social silence in which man will reach his culmination in repetition. (*Noise*, 122)

However, Attali, unlike Laibach, concedes that popular music might perhaps be "the herald of the birth of a relation never yet seen."

65. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 45.

66. The single *War/In the Army Now* contained remixes by Johnny Violent (Ultraviolence), producer of a lurid and defiantly tasteless version of Gabber techno.

67. See Hilary Pilkington, *Russian Youth Culture: A Nation's Constructors and Constructed* (London: Routledge, 1994), 106–107.

68. See E. Dolenc, "Culture, Politics, and Slovene Identity," in J. Benderley and E. Kraft, eds., *Independent Slovenia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 84. Laibach's totalitarianism refers more to totalitarianism in general than to the brief period of absolute totalitarianism in Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1948.

69. Pilkington, *Russian Youth Culture*, 109.

70. Dolenc, "Culture, Politics, and Slovene Identity," 88.

71. *Laibach: Wirtschaft ist tot & Kapital* (Laibach: The Economy/Capitalism Is Dead & Kapital), press release (London: Mute Records).

72. Laibach, *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*, NSK Electronic Embassy October 1, 1995 (May 11, 1996) <http://www.lois.kudfp.si/lukap/embassy/3a/exc/13.html>.

73. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 49.

74. This theme was most sustained in interviews and texts from the *Kapital* period (1992–93), but had been present intermittently throughout the 1980s. The clearest example is from a particularly strident 1987 interview: "The Western market is a synonym for the cultural hegemony of the West. . . . Every cultural exchange with the East or the South is only political courtesy" N. Damjanić, "Laibach v trebuhu trojanskegu konja" (Laibach in the Belly of the Trojan Horse), *Nedeljski Dnevnik*, December 20, 1987.

75. S. P. Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia 1962–91* (1991; reprint, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 24.

76. The emphasis on the value of "Eastern" culture and experience seen in the *Moscow Declaration* (see Eda Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East Sees the East* [Piran: Obalne Galerije, 1994]) clearly places Slovenia in an Eastern context, which is at odds with the country's dominant self-image.

77. For a more detailed comparison, see Alexei Monroe, "Art & Strategy: Laibach versus Turbo," *New Moment* 9/10 (1998), 78–81.

78. NSK, "Address at the Occasion of *Opus Dei* Album Release in Yugoslavia, November 1987," *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 67–68.

79. Ibid., 58.

80. Similar debates over popular music and "cultural imperialism" take place in France, New Zealand, and Canada as well as the "Third World"; see Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music*, 60.

81. See Ramet, *Rocking the State*, 109.

82. Françoise Thom, *Newspeak: The Language of Soviet Communism* (London: Claridge Press, 1989), 91.

83. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 59.

84. Ramet, *Rocking the State*, 115.

85. *Opus Dei* (London: Mute Records, 1987).

86. Laibach released both a German and an English version. The German version is performed at a slower tempo, and has a more severe arrangement than the relatively melodic English version.

87. See "Laibach—Howg!," *Mladina*, November 20, 1987.

88. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 55.

89. Ibid., 58.

90. Symbolically, the Beatles had already introduced military elements into rock. Friedrich Kittler claims that they recorded secret messages on their albums using tape machines based on Second World War military decoding equipment. See Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. G. Winthrop-Young and M. Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 283.

91. An MTV presenter.

92. *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*.

93. As early as May 1984, Laibach's *The Debate over Man* was presented at a video festival at the Pompidou Center, Paris.

94. For Retrovision's work, see NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 227–239.

95. The combination of the Nazi-Kunst sleeve artwork and the reformed lyrics ("I rode a tank, held a general's, when the Blitzkrieg raged and the bodies stank") added to Laibach's demonic image in the West.

96. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 203.

97. Elka Tschernokoshewa, "Born in Eastern Europe: Reality and Imagination," in U. Bechdolf, P. K. Hatzistrati, S. J. Johannsen, et al., eds., *Watching Europe: A Media and Cultural Studies Reader* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Cultural Studies Foundation, 1993), 63.

98. Attali, *Noise*, 8.

99. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 48.

100. *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95*.

101. The *Macbeth* soundtrack album was issued at the start of 1990, but contained material dating from 1987.

102. The track *Illumination* is accompanied by the following passage: "Pour blood into the pot Boil it dry Follow it with rabbit's testicles and pigeon liver to produce aphrodisiac."

103. *Predictions of Fire Dialogue List*.

104. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (online version retrieved from <http://hamp.hampshire.edu/_cmnF93/culture_ind.txt> [October 24, 1999]).

105. Translation from the sleeve of *Kapital*.

106. Translation by Winifred Griffin.

107. The vinyl and cassette versions conclude with two different versions of a Europop-style song, *Steel Trust* by the intermittently active Laibach subgroup Germania.

108. *LAIBACH: NATO* (press release) (London: Mute Records, 1994).

109. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 93.

110. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 46.

111. *LAIBACH: NATO.*

112. For an account reading Laibach's *NATO* and *Jesus Christ Superstars* in the light of the NATO action, see the webpage *The Art of East and West Laibach, NATO and Yugoslavia*, <http://members.iinet.net.au/~lamoore/portfolio/web_portfolio/laibach/> (September 21, 1999). NATO insignia first arrived in Sarajevo not with the IFOR troops but with Laibach, just as the Dayton Agreement was signed and the war ended.

113. After the fall of Vukovar in 1991, Serbian tanks toured the ruins with *Marš na Drini* and other national songs blaring from loudspeakers.

114. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 50.

115. *Excerpts from Interviews Given between 1990–95.*

116. Fredric Jameson, introduction to Attali, *Noise*, p. xi.

117. Laibach continue to provoke the Slovene Church into exposing its authoritarian tendencies, as in the 2003 "Kum Affair." After the Church hierarchy realized that Laibach had used the church on Mount Kum for a party and speech by Peter Mlakar, it was reconsecrated.

118. Shuker, *Understanding Popular Music*, 68.

119. The only Slovene artists currently achieving much Western success are instrumental techno acts such as Random Logic and DJ Umek. The only other act singing in Slovene with any foreign profile is Sidharta, a group strongly influenced by Laibach.

120. Damjanić, "Laibach v trebuhu trojanskega konja."

121. A. Hewitt, "Fascist Modernism, Futurism, and 'Post-Modernity,'" in R. J. Golsan, ed., *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1992), 39.

122. Laibach's 1994 concert at the German artistic colony in Hellerau was protected by riot police against possible attacks by local Fascists. See Johannes Birringer, *Media & Performance: Along the Border* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 73. Laibach have been threatened by both right- and left-wing German groups.

123. Controversy rages on the Gothic and industrial scenes over attempts at infiltration by far-right groups. If there are now more overtly rightist groups—Von Thronstahl or Der Blutharsch—than previously, this is due more to the general rightward shift of the political and cultural zeitgeist than to the influence of Laibach, exposure to which carries the price of accepting antithetical non- and anti-Fascist imagery.

124. Ramet, *Social Currents in Eastern Europe*, 230.

125. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 44.

CHAPTER 9: DRŽAVA: CULTURE AS A STATE

1. See Irwin, *Interiors of the Planit* (Budapest: Ludwig Museum, 1996).

2. Eda Čufer/Irwin, "Concepts and Relations," in Irwin, *Zemljopis vremena/The Geography of Time* (Umag: Galerija Dante Marino Cettina, 1994).

3. S. Majstorović, *Cultural Policy in Yugoslavia* (Paris: UNESCO, 1972).

4. Erika Gottlieb, *The Orwell Conundrum: A Cry of Despair or Faith in the Spirit of Man?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), 55.

5. This took place on the fiftieth anniversary of the Anschluss. See NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (Los Angeles: Amok Books, 1991), 50.

6. See the Laibach statement printed on the back cover of *Neue Slowenische Kunst*. "Politics is the highest form of popular culture and we who create the contemporary European pop culture consider ourselves politicians."

7. Marina Gržinić, "Transcentrala of Exorcism," in Irwin, *Zemljopis vremena*.

8. Eda Čufer/Irwin, "NSK State in Time," in ibid.

9. See D. Rupel, "Slovenia in Postmodern Europe," in H. Huttenbach, ed., *Voices from the Slovene Nation, Nationalities Papers Special Edition* (Association for the Study of Nationalities, 1992).

10. Čufer/Irwin, "Concepts and Relations."

11. D. Jančar, "Slovene Exile," in Huttenbach, ed., *Voices From the Slovene Nation*, 99.

12. Čufer/Irwin, "Concepts and Relations."

13. The difficulty in placing NSK on the Slovene sociopolitical spectrum, and their constantly evolving praxis, support the reading of NSK as a category in itself, pursuing a course that brings it into conflict or cooperation with a variety of bodies but never "arriving" at any fixed social position.

14. G. Paunović, "Laibach's Homecoming," *The Wire*, December 1998.

15. Sleevenotes, Laibach, *Krst pod Triglavom*, 1987.

16. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, ed. M. Tanner, trans. S. Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993), 32.

17. Slavoj Žižek, "Why Are Laibach and NSK Not Fascists?," *M'ARS* 3–4 (1993), 3–4.

18. *NSK Information Bulletin 1* (Ljubljana: NSK, 1994).

19. Ibid., 23.

20. Application forms stipulate only that citizens should not bring the State into disrepute.

21. Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (London: Verso, 1996), 5.

22. Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 292.

23. Slavoj Žižek, "Es gibt keinen Staat in Europa" (There Is No State in Europe), in *Padiglione NSK (NSK Pavilion)* (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 1993).

24. J. C. Finley and Barrett Watten, "IRWIN: A Dialogue," in Irwin, *Kapital* (Edinburgh/Ljubljana: CO-LABORATOR/Institut NSK, 1991).

25. M. Glenny, *The Rebirth of History: Eastern Europe in the Age of Democracy* (London: Penguin, 1990).

26. Žižek, "Es gibt keinen Staat in Europa."

27. Ibid.

28. The full title of the text is "Cari amici soldati, i tempi della pace sono passati" (Dear Friends, Soldiers, the Time for Peace Is Now Over) (Theses for the NSK Pavilion), referring to Laibach's track *Cari amici*.

29. Epstein, *After the Future*.

30. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

31. NSK, *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, 46.

32. Ibid., 60.

33. G. R. G. Mure, *The Philosophy of Hegel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 59.

34. S. Redhead, *The End of the Century Party: Youth and Pop towards 2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 87–88.

35. Marina Gržinić, "Art & Culture in the 80's: The Slovenian Situation," in Eda Čufer, ed., *NSK Embassy Moscow: How the East Sees the East* (Piran: Obalne Galerija, 1994), 43.

36. The NSK State has no territory either to defend or to claim, makes no demands upon its citizens beyond sympathy with its outlook, and is fully self-sufficient, with no literal political objectives or requirements. Compared to other available outlets such as football teams, political parties, or even rock bands, the NSK State seems to offer a more healthy outlet for emotional identification.

37. Čufer/Irwin, "NSK State in Time."

38. Similarly, the London-based Association of Autonomous Astronauts (AAA) expresses a revolutionary desire for popular involvement in the exploration of space, and refuses to recognize practical or ideological limitations on its ambitions. Another parallel is the work of maverick British inventors designing autonomous space-going rockets. Such initiatives attempt to bypass the monopolization of space by the military-industrial complex and private corporations, and to this extent they are more pluralist than Noordung actions which, as Johannes Birringer argues, are heavily centered on one individual (Živadinov). See Johannes Birringer, "The Utopia of Post-Utopia," in *Theatre Topics* 6, no. 2 (1996), 143–166. However, while the AAA is politically radical, there is no equivalent to the spiritualism and romanticism of the Noordung projects.

39. Herman Potočnik Noordung, *Das Problem des Befahrung des Weltraums* (Vienna: Turia & Kant, 1993).

40. Since NSK does not pretend to be a dissident group, this does not preclude commercial sponsorship of its projects.

41. Some producers of electronic music are making a similar attempt to demonstrate that values such as "soul" can play a positive role in the use of technology (see Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (London: Quartet, 1998).

42. It could be argued that pragmatic acceptance of realities is more "escapist," because it implies repression of the knowledge of the economic and political contradictions that challenge the "given" nature of present systems.

CHAPTER 10: *DAS ENDE?*

1. Laibach, *Hymn to the Black Sun*, from *Kapital*.

2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (London: Athlone Press, 1996), 83.

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INTERROGATION MACHINE
LAIBACH AND NSK

Alexei Monroe
foreword by Slavoj Žižek

NSK is considered by many to be the last true avant-garde of the twentieth century and the most consistently challenging artistic force in Eastern Europe today. The acronym refers to Neue Slowenische Kunst, a Slovene collective that emerged in the wake of Tito's death and was shaped by the breakup of Yugoslavia. Its complex and disturbing work—in fields including experimental music and theater, painting, philosophy, writing, performance, and design—has an international following but a powerful and specific cultural context. Within the NSK organization are a number of divisions, the best-known of which is Laibach, an alternative music group known for its blending of popular culture with subversive politics, high art with underground provocation—reflecting the political and cultural chaos of its time.

In *Interrogation Machine*, Alexei Monroe offers the first critical appraisal of the entire NSK phenomenon, from its elaborate organizational structure and its internal logics to its controversial public actions. The result is a fascinating portrait not only of NSK but of the complex political and cultural context within which it operates. Monroe analyzes the paradoxes, perplexities, and traumas of NSK's work at its deepest levels. His investigation of the relationships between conceptual content, stylistic method, and ideological subtext demonstrates the relevance of NSK in general and Laibach in particular to current debates about culture, power, war, politics, globalization, the marketplace, and life itself. As Slavoj Žižek writes in his foreword, "Today, the lesson of Laibach is more pertinent than ever."

Monroe uses a variety of theoretical and historical approaches, as is appropriate to the shifting and elusive nature of his subject. The use of theory reflects NSK's own theoretical engagement; it is also a valuable way to read the issues raised by the work. Neither oversimplifying nor uncritically mystifying, Monroe leaves intact the "gaps, contradictions, and shadows" inherent in his subject, demonstrating that "it should still be possible to appreciate the work as art that moves, confuses, agitates, or fascinates."

Alexei Monroe received a Ph.D. from the University of Kent. He has published many articles on contemporary music, culture, and politics.

'Hitler, Stalin, Tito . . . art theorists? How have these icons of totalitarianism inspired the politically subversive aesthetic interventions of Laibach and the NSK art collective? *Interrogation Machine* offers what is to date the most historically detailed, factually accurate, and theoretically insightful account of what is arguably the most significant artistic phenomenon in Eastern Europe since the Soviet avant-garde."
   Dušan I. Bjelić, Professor of Sociology, University of Southern Maine, coeditor of *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*

"A real explosion of artistic and intellectual energy took place in Ljubljana during the 1980s, the impact of which reverberated throughout the global cultural landscape. Alexei Monroe not only describes this explosion but transmits its energy to the reader."
   Boris Groys, Professor of Philosophy and Art Theory, Academy of Design, Karlsruhe

"Among postcommunist states, Slovenia is widely known to have one of the most vibrant contemporary art scenes, at the center of which are Laibach and NSK. Alexei Monroe's book is a thoroughly researched and theoretically witty account of the strategies behind these well-known cultural brands."
   Konstantin Akinsha, art historian, contributing editor to *ARTnews*, and coauthor of *Beautiful Loot: The Soviet Plunder of Europe's Art Treasures*

"This book is for intelligent troublemakers everywhere and a must for those who would learn how to challenge any state hegemony through art. Following the story of NSK, we see how artists can open up the cracks in belief systems, whatever their political orientation, through a precise combination of pop culture and critical engagement."
   Charles Esche, Director, van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, and Editor, Afterall Publishing, London

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