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# The spectacle of socio-political imagery in Laibach's rock music performance

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THE SPECTACLE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL IMAGERY IN LAIBACH'S  
ROCK MUSIC PERFORMANCE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film and Theatre

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Sharon Ann Jennings

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## ABSTRACT

### THE SPECTACLE OF POLITICAL IMAGERY IN LAIBACH'S ROCK MUSIC PERFORMANCE

by Sharon Ann Jennings

This thesis addresses Slovenian musical performance group Laibach, and its use of rock and roll as a revolutionary tool to invoke change in the socio-political climate of Eastern Europe and abroad.

Research reveals that the rock group Laibach, in association with the artistic collective Neue Slowenschie Kunst (NSK), communicates politicized art in similar ways as did the Futurist movement started by F.T. Marinetti and Germanic theatre initiated by Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht. The detailed manifestos created by art collectives in the teens and twenties of twentieth century interwar Germany combined with the conventions of German theatre and Eastern European art movements are reflected in the unified group Laibach and the overall NSK collective from 1980s interwar to present day Slovenia.

Results found that Laibach's appropriation and decontextualization of high profile, recognizable symbols in concert with the adoption of multimedia technology enable it to successfully affect change within its community.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“We consider ourselves the creators of the art of the new age, politicians” (NSK 7).

Revolution comes in various forms. Rock and roll music is often one such form for change. The origins of rock and roll are deeply rooted in rebellion. This rebellious spirit has not always been so much about anarchist disobedience as it has been a forum for defiant exploration against the mainstream.

In the 1950s, counter-culture used rock and roll to invoke change. Piero Scaruffi's Alternative History of Rock Music online asserts that:

The "revolutionary" power of rock and roll far exceeded any political or cultural movement that had preceded it. Music became the terminal stage of an anelastic process: from social alienation to musical alienation to musical revolution to social revolution. Music became more than entertainment. Music became more than a universal language. Music became more than a message board. Music became a revolutionary tool...

Musicians continue to use rock and roll today to catalyze such change. Just as musical acts like Rage Against the Machine, U2, Pink Floyd, or Marilyn Manson create influential messages by blending socio-political content with rock and roll, Slovenian musicians Laibach, too, recognize the power of this genre of music.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines “art” as:

“Human effort to imitate, supplement, alter, and counteract.” Performance rock group Laibach’s use of the artistic expression of rock and roll to ferment revolution is unique; Laibach realizes that combining rock and roll music with major symbols enhances its influence. It mixes blatant political images with elements of dress, clothing, performance, and music that make for an explosive production. Perhaps part of the uniqueness of Laibach’s presentation is that its political stance remains completely unknown to the audience except within very abstract terms.

Individual or collective members of the audience can become empowered by their perception of art. The way an audience member consumes the presentation of Laibach’s performance and their perception of its meaning can, in turn, encourage a reaction. This outcome could appear to be in line with the intention of the artist’s creation or as a result of their own influences; either way, Laibach’s repurposed art is catalyzing the consumer to respond.

Artists, like Bertolt Brecht and Laibach alike, may repurpose imagery characteristic of the state in a revolutionary hegemonic attempt to blur the line between politics and art. In Neue Slowenische Kunst, Laibach calls its appropriation of political iconography, its commentary on current world events, and its ideological subversion “Retro-gardism.” That is:

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 the only tools which combine themes and symbols into dynamics, tension, excitement and

drama. (286)

In other words, looking back on symbols and recombining them gives them new life and power. Laibach's activities "are productively tied to the past, present and future; they are based on a fanatical transgression of the law of preservation of mass and energy, and draw fully on the Slovene program of spiritual, cultural and political liberation" (NSK 7).

In Michael Benson's Predictions of Fire film about Laibach and NSK, scholar and philosopher Slavoj Žižek argues that Laibach "... does not function as an answer but as a question" and the group's mode of interaction with its audiences constantly raises fresh questions, precisely because it refuses to be "located" in any camp but its own.

Laibach is the music arm of the Slovenian collective group of artists known as Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). On the official NSK web site, Charlie Krafft defines the NSK as a "small group of Slovene artists... [who] in the 1980s set out to parody contemporary Yugoslavian society and in the process developed a self-consciously utopian and nationalist Slovene school of art." He further explains that they have drawn inspiration from everything taboo in Yugoslavia from naming the collective to Neue Slowenische Kunst (German for New Slovene Art) to discrediting communist rule while appropriating Fascism, the Third Reich, totalitarianism and technology (1).

In Predictions of Fire, Eastern European historian Rasto Mocknik explains that Laibach and NSK arrived on the European scene with very good timing and intent:

I think that NSK really came at a good moment, and made a symbolical artistic recapitulation of the deep virus of fascism in Slovenian tradition,

as in every other European tradition. I mean, of course, fascism only came to power in certain countries. But it was present everywhere. And it still is. And you see, in Yugoslavia, how it is.

What Laibach is doing is nothing new. Early twentieth century Germanic theatre politicized art as an empowering wake-up call to the proletariat. Art's effect on people's perception of reality equaled, and at times, even surpassed the current ideological, socio-political propaganda of the state. Ideologies including fascism, dada, expressionism and Marxism, as constructs in the theatre and mixed media performance, established a covert forum for questioning the state in powerless, post-war societies mostly associated with Eastern Europe (Carlson 338-75).

Rock and Roll is a manifestation of art developed for political change in the twentieth century. In the case of Laibach, it is a band of rock musicians that says it is in the tradition of the twentieth early movements but updates the sound, look, and feel for a modern audience. Interestingly, and smartly, Laibach appropriates past symbols with heavy historical significance in the worldwide consciousness. Rather than create abstract images, Laibach plays upon signs that provoke because attention is already focused upon such symbols that already carry meanings. Juxtaposing such known symbols together, like the swastika or various crosses, causes dissonance by audience members.

In order to research Laibach's evocative style, it helps to draw comparisons between two eras of art and political revolution. Laibach is influenced by artists of this earlier wartime period in the twentieth century; it seeks to create revolution in the same way, the political conditions are in fact very similar to the situation that existed for these

earlier artists. This is important because many of the factors involved in both eras are extremely politicized in nature. Artistic expression appears to be the main mode of commentary on the government's domestic and foreign policies and social principles.

Laibach is looking for a way to force new forms of psychological influence upon the masses in order to thrust new humanist ideas upon their altered consciousness (Neue Slowenische Kunst 44). Although Laibach's influence could be traced to specific niche groups worldwide, this band's main sphere of influence has been in the Balkan regions and Europe as a whole (A Film from Slovenia). For this purpose, Laibach is selected as the research subject due to 1) the specific historical imagery it utilizes, which interestingly is from the era of influence they employ (e.g., the futurists, Brechtian theatre, etc.); 2) it has a sharply defined arena of influence; that is to say a Slovenian and Eastern European audience; and 3) its influence has occurred within a defined period of time concurrent with dramatic political upheavals.

Before the end of the Balkan Civil War, Laibach incorporates the grandiose wartime gloom of the Balkans into their performance aesthetic with an ambiguous fascist ideology to offer the proletariat an alternate direction. The approach by an artist collective from a war-torn Balkan nation relentlessly occupies a dualistic function - Laibach offers its "third way" because it cares about the people yet the influence wrought by its socio-political performance illustrates how art can control the state and heritage. This will be explained further in Chapter Four.

"True Fascists are always split between acknowledging public values and a hidden reverse" (A Film from Slovenia). Whether Laibach is actually fascist or not is

incidental. The hidden reverse exists as part of any political pretense. Laibach speaks as a unified collective decrying the use of individuality and rejecting the notion of artistic ownership much like the manifestos of F.T. Marinetti that “repeatedly advocate the death of the literary ‘I’ or authorial self...” (Poggi 20; Walker 1). It is the collective representatives of a collective ideology that disseminate its message collectively. In Laibach’s “10 Items of the Covenant” it professes that:

Laibach work as a team (the collective spirit), according to the principle of industrial production and totalitarianism, which means that the individual does not speak; the organization does. Our work is industrial, our language political. (Neue Slowenische Kunst 18)

Regardless of the rebellious nature or acting as an agent of the state, musicians and collective groups propagate the “message”--a message of social control and/or state of being. The element of irony and satirization found in Laibach’s work further substantiates the converging nature of global politics (Walker 2).

Johnny Walker explains that in a pure modernist form, Laibach “Operate(s) at a level of the deepest irony” (2) allowing for the appropriation of various ideologies. With their experience they are unable to do anything else. In Brian Duguid’s thesis on fascist imagery in industrial and experimental music, he points out that Laibach appropriates “symbols of both Nazism and religion, and are clearly of the opinion that to be able to subvert and destroy the state you must first enter and understand it” (1). He concurs that Laibach uses the tools of various ideologies as a face of their irony, and in doing so, use the historically revolutionary tool of dada-like confusion (5). With the newfound



freedom from communism, Slavic nations are searching for organization.

Based in Slovenia, a state of the former Yugoslavia, Laibach performs in both English and Slovenian languages and use Germanic symbols. The selection of the band name appears to be an example of how Laibach infuses politics into its performance aesthetic much like the early art movements. The name “Laibach” was selected because it was the term attributed to the Yugoslavian capital city of Ljubljana during Nazi occupation. This is a prime illustration of how modernist artistic performance groups like Laibach, as part of the NSK collective, is both empowered and influenced by Italian Futurism, Russian Constructivism and German Expressionism (Krafft 2). Krafft believes that the structure of NSK is set up like these early avant-gardist art movements and allows for the members of the collective to be in the service of totalitarianism and contributing to socio-political catastrophes. In other words, they appear to work as an agent of the state that forces ideological upheaval or change onto the community.

The breakup and de-centralization of Yugoslavia represents a model of disillusioned government control and creation (Pavlowitch 211). The nation state of Yugoslavia went through assorted changes in light of wars, religion and varying political ideologies. The internal and external chaos and struggle for leadership and government can occur anywhere—who takes control is the question. Art and media can act as conduits for the dissemination of messages and new ideologies in culture. This is why Laibach’s NSK and the dismantling of Yugoslavia is a good example to apply to any industrialized or societized nation.

The more industrialized and technically adept a nation becomes the easier it

becomes for a controlling state to impose upon the society; hegemony occurs through the dissemination of mass communication. One of the most effective means of sending your message through the technological filtration system is as an artistic performance.

Michael Benson, director of Predictions of Fire, states that “At the end of a century beginning and ending with Sarajevo, an era which married mass production techniques to mass murder, NSK draw from a well many thought was dry: the one positing that an entire state could become a work of art.”

Though utilizing art for political change is nothing new, a brief history of how movements have occurred and evolved throughout the twentieth century is in order. The detailed manifestos and conventions created by avant-gardist art collectives in early twentieth century interwar Germany (Bruck and Docker; Roose-Evans; Willet) established a system whereby artists protested the ideological structure promoted by the dominant group. Laibach would later emulate these conventions with its their participation in the creation of the NSK Collective and its subsequent manifestos.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

“Art is a higher mission and demands totalitarianism”

(Laibach, Neue

Slowenische Kunst 13).

There is not a great deal of discourse about Laibach outside of the Balkan regions. Therefore, a majority of this research will come from Slavic historians and the actual media created by Laibach. The NSK collective has internally produced a significant amount of collateral, pamphlets and publications. Although they are created within the organization and therefore biased, these pieces can be used for analysis as primary evidence and historical documentation.

Past examination into Laibach has been mainly limited to music reviews, a handful of documentaries, pop culture editorials, online fan dialogue, and one book. Few serious analyses of the current state of art in Slovenia exist, yet there is an inalienable alliance of art to government and society there. The majority of existent work attempts to deconstruct Laibach’s appearances in concert performances as a convulsion of the pop music spectacle of grandiose rock icons for entertainment purposes.

The documentary, titled Predictions of Fire, opens:

Towards the end of the period of totalitarian control of East and Central Europe, an art movement named "NSK" appeared in a country then still called Yugoslavia. Using the materials of music, theatre, and the visual

arts, the NSK collective took on the role of catalyst, revisiting the repressed traumas of European history and exposing hidden mechanisms of ideological domination.

The 95-minute film recounts the development of the NSK collective using Laibach for the soundtrack as an example of the origins for the entire collective.

A thorough investigation of Laibach and NSK by Media Theorist, Alexei Monroe, is in the process of being distributed worldwide. Yet one independent literary piece is hardly enough to touch upon the influence of this band's work. Rather than attempt another similar study, this thesis will focus on parallels between Laibach and Germanic theatre, Eastern European artistic movements, and the iconography used in each.

Monroe's book has just been published in Slovenian with the release of the new 2004 Laibach album, WAT, and will be published in English in late 2004 and therefore is not incorporated into this thesis.

Based upon everything introduced about early 20th century art collectives, Laibach and NSK, and the origins of rock and roll as rebellious artistic expression, this paper will explore these questions:

- 1) How does Laibach attempt to use music as a revolutionary tool?
- 2) How does Laibach's performance aesthetic compare to the tradition of early twentieth century political theatre and avant-gardist art movements?
- 3) Do consumers participate in "collective perception" and/or how do they respond?

Within the parameters of these research questions, this paper will explore how Laibach manipulates and assigns new meanings to universal symbols based on the primacy of the visual image. The semiotics of visual imagery and the socialized

iconography used combined with the technology in rock performance create a virtual postmodern superpower in Laibach for content decoders to embrace (Amerika; Cook). With the technology available to Laibach in the later half of the twentieth century, it is possible for them to reach out to their specified audiences for mass consumption.

The analysis of Laibach with and allusion to the overall NSK collective will provide a foundation for rock music performance overall and how one can begin to assess its possible influence.

### Definition of Terms

Laibach procures and juxtaposes symbols from Eastern European history to create an idealistic motif for the future. Much of Laibach's performance and use of iconography is influenced by German experience and imagery. This is due to the history behind power positions in Eastern European development. The German-influenced culture throughout Eastern Europe will be referred to as "Germanic." Much of the Germanic iconography referred to in this paper will be from the Nazi era and will be referred to as "NaziKunst." This was the terminology for the art of the Fascist party in Germany that ruled during Hitler's reign. Additionally, "LaibachKunst" means Laibach Art--a collective group of performers creating political art. And, the overall artist "collective" (made up of painters, dancers, sculptors, and additional artisans) that Laibach performs with is called "Neue Slowenische Kunst" or "NSK".

The standard model of communication is used by Laibach to encode their message for the content decoders. Journalist Ken Freed explains, on his Journal of

Global Sense media web site, that:

The communication cycle is fairly easy to understand. Within any noisy universe, a sender encodes a verbal or nonverbal message, sends it through any message channel to a receiver, who decodes the message. The receiver then encodes a reply, which is returned through some feedback channel to the sender, who decodes it, deals with it somehow, and perhaps sends anew.

An artistic producer, or “rock musician” or “rock group,” is the encoder of communication -- they will be referred to as “content creators.” Various factors need to be determined to examine Laibach as the subject of rock performance. For the purposes of this research, the following items qualify a rock musician or group. A rock group has written or covered songs and performed them within the “rock” genre. Scaruffi’s rock and roll history online defines the “rock” genre by nature as been rebellious and anti-establishment. Thirdly, this rock band has a visual aspect to their performance through either live concerts and/or music videos. For the purposes of this study, “music videos” will encompass short videos to long form documentaries containing music videos, live concert footage, and other performance. The final factor of qualifying the rock group as an influential force is that they have written and produced albums that have been disseminated through a music distribution company thus made available within record stores; and, that journalists or scholars recognize all these factors and write about the influence in regards to this band.

Since the audience is also primary in creating meaning while consuming the

creation of the “meaning-makers,” they will at times be referred to as “content decoder” and will also assume the traditional role of viewer, reader and decoder. A group of consumers will be discussed in terms of a “community” who participate in “audience reception” and could create or share “collective perception.” The rock and roll audience actively participates in reconstructing performance messages.

In discussing the symbols used, we will address “appropriation” of “iconography;” and the content decoders’ “visual literacy”. Here appropriation means the borrowing, stealing or taking of something already in existence and incorporating it or recreating it for one’s own purposes; thus a symbol may or may not be utilized within the same context one is accustomed to. “Iconography” is “The art or representation by pictures or images” or specific symbols ([Dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)). “Visual literacy” is the understanding or reading of images, or iconography, by content decoders.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The research will employ a qualitative approach to do a cultural analysis; semiotics is the ideal method given the significant function of iconography. By looking at Laibach as a group brand consumed by the audience, especially in reference to “selling” certain symbols, we can use semiotics as a form of cultural analysis. Semiotics “looks broadly at cultural products such as popular media, and at all the advertising, packaging and merchandising in a field, as a context for analysis of a specific brand or product” (AQR). Signs are used by a collective or group to influence audience reception in a technological age.

While Laibach appears to adopt many traditional symbols, it manipulates the decontextualization with a non-linear approach to its music, theatre and film performance. Film was one of the first media to offer the concept of non-linear presentation to the mass consumer. After the first thirty years, film began to abandon solely linear narrative and adopt variation in sequencing that later would resonate as a major signifying practice of its descendent, music video. Gilles Deleuze presents a strategy of “deterritorialization” in which he applies semiotics to film theory (Cook 1). Deleuze’s assumption that “cinema is a composition of pre-linguistic images and pre-signifying signs” (1) initiates the necessary discussion of film as separate from alphabetical language, perhaps even worthy of creating a separate coding for the apparent visual cues – a visual literacy.



Although Ferdinand de Saussure suggested that semiotics should not necessarily be applied to film theory by overlooking it as an ideal way to assess the current state of “readership” in visual cues (Price), his early lecture series hinted at all media as a language. Steven Hoenisch explains that:

The central tenet of structuralism is that the phenomena of human life, whether language or media, are not intelligible except through their network of relationships, making the sign and the system (or structure) in which the sign is embedded primary concepts. As such, a sign--for instance, a word--gets its meaning only in relation to or in contrast with other signs in a system of signs.

In the communication and language section of Mick Underwood’s exhaustive Communication, Cultural and Media Studies (CCMS) database online, he writes that:

Many semiologists (or semioticians) when commenting on the media have used vocabulary that might strike you as more appropriate to the study of literature. Thus, for semioticians, TV documentaries, a radio play, a Madonna song, a poster at a bus stop are all texts. We users of these texts are referred to as readers. Thus you will find Fiske and Hartley titling their book *Reading Television* and Monaco calling his *How To Read a Film*. Similarly, some semioticians will tend to talk about the vocabulary of film, the grammar of TV documentaries and so on, following through the analogy with language, though some commentators would argue that it is fundamentally impossible to draw glib analogies between language and

cinema or photography.

Examining the performance code inherent within Laibach's body of work can expose the nature, or signified concepts, of its mission. Laibach has fused music, performance, art, poetry and politics. The signifying practices or codes of Laibach's performance materialize through: 1) a Slovenian framework (history and development of country); 2) NaziKunst/ Germanic symbols (socio-political contextualization, ideology and parody); 3) technology (industrial, machinization and utopian evolution); 4) performance presentation (media, staging, lighting, etc.); 5) sound (war music and voice); 6) physiognomy (posture, voice, costume, hair, eyes and "Hitler Youth"); and nature (mountains, forest and animals); and 7) audience (the selected recipients of the message). These signifiers are chosen for analysis because they are consistently used through Laibach's performance for the period of 1980 – 2004.

Research took place in four phases. The first phase was based on an in-depth look into early twentieth century, Eastern European multimedia performance of Bertolt Brecht and the futurists. Secondly, was the process of acquiring a thorough knowledge of English language material on Slovenian history and politics as it relates to art available in the United States and online. Next, an assembly of audio, press, music videos and other Laibach sources took place. The final step was a review of the development and effects of Laibach's short and long-form music videos as an artistic and advertising/marketing tool.

The four areas of performance that will be analyzed are: interviews, music video, concert footage, and videotaped footage other than these three categories (e.g. television

news segments, documentary films, etc.). Due to the fact that Laibach's performance also exists in many other forms (posters, albums, books, etc.) there may be references to other work or presentations as evidence, but the modes of address and codes will be specifically applied to these documented performances.

Laibach utilizes widespread "broadcast codes" to reach to the mass audience of Slovenia. Through reviewing the "mode of address" the redundancy and success can be measured. This means will include the 1) formality or proximity, 2) directness, and 3) point-of-view. Laibach consistently uses the same broadcast codes across their performance to attain a high level of redundancy and recognition (Chandler). In "Semiotics for Beginners," John Fiske wrote:

Distinguishes between broadcast codes, which are shared by member of a mass audience, and narrowcast codes which are aimed at a more limited audience; pop music is a broadcast code; ballet is a narrowcast code.

Broadcast codes are learned through experience; narrowcast codes often involve more deliberate learning. (315)

These narrowcast or "restricted codes" are considered repetitive and structurally simpler. This redundancy serves to reinforce and emphasize preferred meanings (Bernstein).

By embracing this semiotic approach to analyzing performance as texts, this paper historically compares the twentieth century political resistance performance of early Germanic theatre with the rock and roll of Laibach.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### LAIBACHKUNST: THE MODERN APPROPRIATION OF TOTALITARIAN IMAGERY

“Politics is the all embracing form of art, and we, who are creating the contemporary Slovenian art, consider ourselves as politicians” (Laibach, *New Collectivism* 13).

Laibach appropriates and manipulates political, religious, and natural symbols in a satirical form. It isn't clear whether this rock collective is primarily incorporating the imagery into its performance because it is truly totalitarian and promotes fascist ideology or is targeting the Slovenian people to thrust them into action by offense. The first notion may prove to be irrelevant in this analysis because the signifying practices in its performance do not rely upon the belief system of each individual member of Laibach. Just as the “National Socialist’s textbook, writers and anthologists worried little about the possible misinterpretation of Volkish thought as long as it helped to support their ideological orientation,” (Kamenetsky 9) so executes Laibach.

Laibach’s juxtaposition of imagery could confuse or upset the public and result in an examination of the ideological narrative rather than perform as misinterpretation. By bringing socio-political discussion to the forefront, a change in the society’s thought processes could occur.

Many Slavic theorists agree with Brian Dugald who in his article, “The Unacceptable Face of Freedom” found that Laibach use extensive ironic humor to act as a

reminder that they are not what they seem – using symbols of religion and Nazism to subvert and destroy the state...” (3). Early images are wrapped in a Germanic mystique that can be illustrated in the performance codes Laibach uses. Visual artifacts of the “das volk” (the people) are full of images with the kind of political content found in that sign (van Winkle).

Umberto Eco argues that through familiarity an iconic signifier can acquire primacy over its signified. Such a sign becomes conventional; “step by step, the more its addressee becomes acquainted with it. At a certain point the iconic representation, however stylized it may be, appears to be truer than the real experience, and people begin to look at things through the glasses of iconic convention” (204-5).

Larkey states that “there are symbolic aspects of music that help to both define ideology and develop solidarity that are not contained strictly in the lyrics;” these aspects include use of traditional melodies a.k.a. “people’s music” transformed, familiar rhythm patterns, traditional instruments as well as the presentation – “the body language of the performers, and the styles of dress they choose” (3). These aggressive appropriations of traditional aspects are usually in opposition to the presentation of popular music thus serving to identify the performance and group in a specific symbolic category.

Laibach also juxtaposes the Germanic convention of 1920s theatre where “shafts of light picked out figures on a darkened stage and scenery was limited to one or two symbolic forms. Characters were symbols instead of people” (“History of Western Theatre”). The music video, concert performance and interview sections from A Film from Slovenia all utilize this Germanic theatre aesthetic (see Fig. 1). Laibach uses a

variety of overt, recurring symbolism in their performance from: NaziKunst (featuring political, fascist, and Social Realist imagery with red, black, and white colors);



Fig. 1. Image from Laibach concert footage. Laibach, perf. A Film from Slovenia. 1993.

Physiognomy (body type, posture); to Utopia (an idealized place of perfection with a perfect political and social system); and Nature (forests, mountains, animals).

Laibach has been interpreted, supported, or torn apart by a small group of historians, philosophers, and political analysts. Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek believes that Laibach stages a hidden juxtaposition of everyday socio-political discourse. He believes that they are not truly fascists. Lutz Becker, a current Social Realist art historian writes that Laibach is in a game engaged with the audience that they neither reflect manipulation in capitalism nor socialism but choose a third way. Paule Gantar is concerned about Laibach's influence in America because he believes that Americans do not understand the subtleties of European symbolism – America sensationalizes it while

in Europe they are extraordinary and anti-dictatorial (A Film from Slovenia).

### Slovenian Framework

Laibach presents a synthesis of totalitarian visual and rhetorical tropes that bring into focus the uncertain future in Eastern Europe after Marshall Tito. In doing so, it seemingly anticipates the outbreak of war and the collapse of Slovenia's self-managing socialism (Krafft 1). Laibach's first full-length album is a state manifesto to the technological, social and political society of Yugoslavia. The track "Panorama" sets the words of Yugoslavia's founder and president for life, Marshall Tito, in a context that exposes them as nonsense (Laibach). This echoes the tactic used by Piscator and Brecht of appropriating politicians' speeches into their works.

Michael Benson, in Predictions of Fire, states that:

Forty years after the anti-Communist rally in Congress Square, Laibach, the first component part of the NSK art movement, appear directly at the center of a media sensation that they themselves have designed. Although presenting themselves as the blank-faced robots of history, Laibach stage a carefully crafted challenge to state authority. Their German name alone functions as a provocation in Socialist Yugoslavia, a state founded on a mythologized cornerstone of partisan resistance to Fascist occupation.

In the December 1996 "Serbia Bulletin," Prof. Serge Regourd explains that the lines are blurred between previous thinking; "There is no differentiation between the effects of communist, fascist or futurist ideology. In a region that is on constant flux, the

ideologies get jumbled up” (1).

Laibach decrees that the only way to stay partly out of the system is to speak the same language of the ideology; in order to survive or change the state you must first conform and subvert. It incorporates a portion of the system into itself. Laibach believes that government is not concrete and when dealing with communism before the civil war, it was easy for the audience to deal with because Laibach “took it more seriously than it took itself” (Jester).

Between art and ideology: “Each direct ideological discourse is eliminated. The tensions are sublimated in expression” (A Film from Slovenia). Laibach approaches various rhetoric and discourse over the past century in a collective manifesto of their own artistic ideology. Balkan philosopher Slavoj Žižek explains that Laibach “subverts the system, not to criticize it but expose the hidden reverse of implicit transgression” (A Film from Slovenia).

Unlike openly totalitarian societies, where the seizure and control of the channels of mass communications and political debate are obvious to all, the informal sequestration of such channels in our society is made invisible by the appearance of freedom in Western media. Even to point to the fact is to invite ridicule. It is conveniently deniable. Yet Eastern Europe at the time was neither an open totalitarian society nor a free democratic society. The net effect of this ideological stranglehold is a sinister culture of persistent degradation of men and masculinity, a feature of everyday life which has become so pervasive and mundane as to form a critical and largely unchallenged part of the received



wisdom which informs our laws and cultural norms and establishes the hegemony of which in some respects has already begun.

Although a content decoder may claim that they can see through the overt propagandistic techniques of Nazi cinema – that may be the point: Laibach appropriate the techniques used by Nazi cinema to overtly catalyze behavior and thought modification. This leaves a clear path for questioning Laibach’s motives. This may or may not be Laibach’s intention but it comes across that way (Rentschler 32). Josef Goebbels and Nazi directors understood the power of images and their ability to “stir imaginations and activate emotions. The formal surfaces and general strategies of these period films should not be underestimated” (32). Nazi Socialism was a function of stirring spectacles and pyrotechnic demonstrations (33).

Laibach incorporates Stalin and Hitler in their mixture of messages. They have taken words and imagery of both regimes and put their signature underneath. The result is more than satire, it is meant to unmask something. Fig. 2 shows a Laibachian likeness appropriating Hitler’s image mixed with Marx characteristics. This may be the most



Fig. 2: Laibach seizure of Hitler iconography and ideology. At The Centennial Of Marx's Death. Poster. 1987.

overt symbolism in the appropriation of NaziKunst. On the Official Laibach and NSK website, Laibach proclaims:

Stalinism and Nazism are deadly enemies of any art. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that all this time we -- LaibachKunst... are talking about art and not about the Yugoslav constitution. Slovenian post-war literature has been formed as literature and ideology, and in this way existentially freed - made possible in the contradiction between these two ideologies and practices, which have always coexisted in history and mutually identified, though differently labeled.

The Laibach collective claims that it doesn't attack pop, religious and political icons. It claims that it "creates a dialogue of a phenomenon in youth culture" (Bear 31). Laibach's intent will not be exposed as attacking or not attacking but to simply open dialogue. Laibach claims, "Big work has to have a certain amount of humor in itself otherwise something is lacking. Things can only be completed when they have all the elements" (Faqt 4).

Through the analysis of Laibach's performance code, substantial effort by Laibach illustrates an irony in their appropriation of the Nazi performance aesthetic, but there remains no evidence that Laibach do not believe in totalitarianism or that the individual members are not really fascists. Krafft's notion that Laibach's performance cannot be challenging misses the entire point of their effect of their manipulation of Germanic iconography.

Regardless of their personal feelings, Laibach has observed the conventions of the

totalitarian performance code, incorporated them into their work, and exposed the hidden formula of potentially explosive equations. They clearly demonstrate through their performance aesthetic their capability of manipulating the state.

Charlie Krafft claims that artists are forced to declare their own ideology and he feels that:

Laibach with their irony, they have had to temper their deliberately confusionist stance with a certain disclaimer and as a result what they present can never again be so challenging. If we know that they are not really fascists, then the ambiguity of their presentation is removed - we know that they disapprove of what they are releasing, and we know how we are expected to react. (5)

The early public works projects of Mussolini's artists (and of his engineers, architects, and scientists) "contribute to the propaganda of the Fascist practical political role" (Schnapp 118). So, too, does NSK employ artists, architects, engineers, and more. Like the Fascists, NSK creates public works that embody their ideology. Schnapp reveals a "third way to industrialization that the Fascist regime seem to have discovered" (119) and the Fascist-emulator Laibach is known for having this "third" or alternative way in their approach to political art ([A Film from Slovenia](#)). In Helena Sheehan's research in "European Socialism," she agrees that the act of "constructing a third way on the left" opens a new way for history between capitalism and socialism (10). She feels that a reconstruction of the collective past of the socialist movement results in a utopian idealization.

Schnapp explains “Fascism consists in cooperation inside the orbit of the state among all the forces active within society... that a collective good is... the ultimate expression (of) the nation’s grandeur and power” (125). Like the fascists, Laibach, too, believes that collective effort creates grandeur and power.

### Politics, NaziKunst, and Germanic Culture

The performance of rock musicians and the reaction of their audiences have a dominant tradition in political resistance. Warren Sack argues that “hegemony connotes or anticipates the possibility of effective counter-cultural practices by the less-than-powerful” (1) while Chuck Kleinhans examines the Marxist research exemplified by John Fiske and Adorno to substantiate a subversive resistance reading of mass political culture. “By granting the audience almost complete autonomy to construct meaning, Fiske pushes an impulse to democratizing media reception about as far as it can go without becoming purely relativistic” (3).

Idealism of cooperative activity that embraces penetrates and unites art, science and technology (Schnapp 117) may be found in: exploring the roots of Italian Futurism inherent with fascism; then the German appropriation of fascism, and its evolution into National Socialism.

The link between the early twentieth century in Europe and 1980s civil strife and polarization of the breakdown of the Soviet satellites and communism cannot be made without a review of the social and political ideologies of both regions in both eras. The interwar years in Europe with torridly clashing politics and ideology made the political

aesthetic possible. Walter Benjamin commented that “while communism politicized art, fascism ‘aestheticized’ politics” (Reed 51). From the era of avant-gardism of expressionism, futurism, dadaism and surrealism, politics and art as one became established.

Slovenians had not displayed consistent nationalism during the 1900s. This is a result of the evolution from the inception of Yugoslavia in the early teens through the Second World War, into Marshall Josip Broz Tito’s regime and the recent civil warring of the past twenty years. To Marx, “society is a moving balance of antithetical forces, strife is the father of all things, and social conflict is the core of the historical conflict” (“Socialism” 1).

In an online letter of support for artist protestor Alexander Brener, Eda Cufer states, “Contemporary art may be the only value system that opposes aggressive narrow and social political divisions therefore fighting for primacy, globalization of ideologies and change.” Roumen Daskalov adds that artisans exercise their imagination in discovering the spiritual locust of the nation... and Laibach helps define national traits or penetrate national identities (164).

Ultimately, Laibach appropriates the conflict brought about during the efficient assimilation of historical avant-garde movements in totalitarian states during which this period was naively glorified and mythicized. On the other hand, its abuses are counted with pedantry to remind us that this magnificent delusion should not be repeated (Neue Slowenische Kunst). Laibach performance, music video, concert footage, interview and other media do it all--glorifies and dispels.

Laibach does indeed thoroughly appropriate conventional Germanic symbols. The effect appears to be a successful re-contextualization of traditional definitions of these signs if not an entire drain of Germanic connotation; the point of Laibach's performance code would be missed if Laibach chose to give these symbols entirely new meanings. The hidden reverse between manipulating the imagery and ideology creates a much more compelling paradigm.

The use of certain symbols certainly catalyzes contemplation of historical organization. Laibach embraces, creates, and offers alternative meanings to the symbols in an act to take on the government and an appropriation of Germanic imagery into their performance aesthetic; the swastika didn't originate in Germanic culture—Laibach reminds society that a symbol can have more than one meaning.

Germany experienced an explosion of collective music, art and philosophy due to the loss of the war (Laquer 181-2). With a mixture of abundant art talent, sources of conflict, and the political freedom that made experimentation possible, the Weimar culture was born. In light of the similar Eastern European climate in the later half of the twentieth century, the Balkan conflict catalyzed the emergence of new Slovenian art of the socio-political age.

Similarly, LaibachKunst realizes the Arts' greater purpose, or at least ability to engender historical ideology and practices to create a new system for future government. They feel that it is basically the same process and can be applied to any society. Laibach mixes imagery used by Stalin and Hitler in their own creation of the dominant spectacle.

Much like the contemporary exhibition Laibach create, John Willet and James Roose-Evans reveal that Piscator and Brecht used the theatre as a stage for inciting social change in the dissonant workers and Nationalists in the interwar years in Germany. Futurism became the main cipher of contemporary interwar crisis by taking the elements of aesthetic and political content and using it to apply to the current disruption and change of social and cultural ideology (Tickner 95). Adamson decries that you cannot deny the influence of futurism on subsequent, yet politically different movements:

Futurism as an avant-garde project must be historicized. Much of the literature on avant-gardism, particularly that which slights the Italian Futurism in favor of Franco-Germanic and Russian successors, associates it entirely with the politically turbulent atmosphere of war and immediate postwar years and, therefore, with the notion of a revolutionary reconstitution of modern culture.

(91)

As mentioned before, Laibach calls appropriation and manipulation of this iconography and its ideological subversion, Retro-gardism. In Predictions of Fire, Slovenian historian Dragan Zivadinov explains his take on Laibach's Retro-gardism:

If the beginning of the avant-garde is romanticism and the avant-garde is the legal successor of romanticism, then Retro-gardism is the legal successor of the avant-garde. Historical avant-garde is a

style, written at the beginning of the century as a response to the mimetic art that dominated the world for 2000 years. Retro-gardism, of course, is like the avant-garde a style formation in art. Its method is the retro-method.

F.T. Marinetti organized the school of Futurism in Italy in the early teens; consequently, the Futurism formation coincides with the development of Fascism. Both constructions led into the 1920s Germanic theatre and performance socio-political identity.

The pre and post-war ideology of the artists in Germany created a rift between Marxist-centric utopian ideals and communist promises. Artists were either embracing the state or protesting against the propagandist nature of government. Expressionist groups like Erwin Piscator's Epic Theatre purported to question the "state."

Performance collectives in the twentieth century, creating the talents and thoughts of artists and scientists, result from the convergent use of technology and art (Books for Unstable Media 1). In the midst of artistic expressionism, performers found shared harmony in forming diverse groups to further their ideology. "Savant-gardist" Guy Deobord explains that the predecessors (dada, Surrealists, Futurists) to German theatre sought to blur the distinction between art and life (Boy 33). Painters, philosophers and architects mobilized into collectives to further express their ideology with the use of manifestos. The groups used these canons to establish rules, motivation and explanation for their existence.



Much like Laibach assault their audiences is an attempt to create a sense of criticism within the collective culture, Meaghan Morris observes:

...the thesis of cultural studies as Fiske and [Ian] Chambers present it runs perilously close to this kind of formulation: people in modern mediatized societies are complex and contradictory, mass cultural texts are complex and contradictory, therefore people using them produce complex and contradictory culture. To add that this popular culture has critical and resistant elements is tautological--unless one (or a predicated someone, that Other who needs to be told) has a concept of culture so rudimentary that it excludes criticism and resistance from the practice of everyday life. (24-25)

The political element on Laibach's performance fully exemplifies their idea of NaziKunst. Nazi art contains the superheroic mode of oversized expressionism in a utopianic, totalitarian society. The element of color, the use of red, black and variations of gray, in totalitarian societies also expresses something. Charlie Kraft, in "The Unacceptable Face of Freedom," states that "Black, red and silver make a very attractive color scheme, and fascist insignia are extremely powerful symbols" (2).

State iconography, ideology and art appropriation is evident in political posters. Laibach uses posters to identify and promote itself. Erwin Piscator's collage of "das volk" Nazi imagery of and Laibach's modern reconstruction of

this imagery is a clear line drawn through authoritarian fascist appropriation of aesthetics of artistic techniques of political groups that don't agree with them (van Winkle). The first image, Fig. 3a, is Piscator's original, Fig. 3b is a Nazi appropriation of Piscator's style, and Fig. 3c is Laibach's appropriation of both styles.

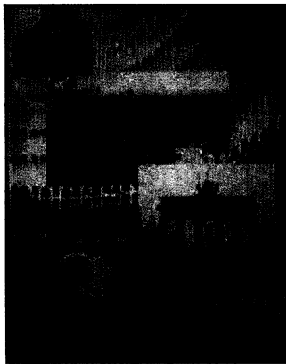


Fig. 3a. Erwin Piscator's original Das Volk. Poster.



Fig. 3b. Nazi propaganda image. Triumph of the Will. Video capture.

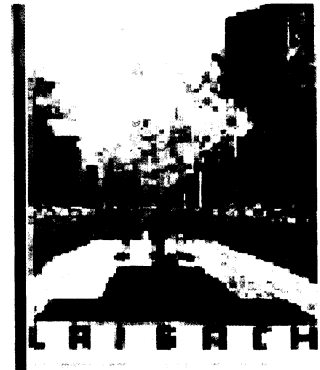


Fig. 3c. Die Freiheit Fuehrt Das Volk – Gerhilda. Poster. 1985

Political ideas and images in film “must assume aesthetic force,” states Eric Rentschler that “does not mean... simply reenacting parades and spectacles, photographing marching storm troopers and fetishizing flags and emblems” (25). Laibach's imagery assumes that aesthetic force yet fetishizes these signifying practices of 1920's German film. In A Film from Slovenia, Laibach manipulates the placement of the Nazi Flag by placing their cross upon the flags and placing them upon buildings, above podiums in much the same fashion of Nazi performance (See Fig. 4).

The Nazi flag is established as one of the most symbolic images of the totalitarian state. In Hitler Youth Quex, when a boy who has just submitted to Nazism dies, he pledges allegiance to the Nazi flag



Fig. 4. The Laibach cross is on the banners on either side of the building. Neue Slowenische Kunst.

while the image of a Nazi banner encompasses the screen with marching figures parading in geometric configurations” (Rentschler 25).

### Technology, Industrialization, and Futurism

A strong industrialized motif exists concurrently with the Germanic mystique in Laibach’s performance code. Signs of industrialization can be characterized through Laibach’s music in that it is labeled in the industrial genre, to the fascist appropriation of early futurist imagery and the idealization of utopian society. All of these elements are an important thread in Laibachian performance code.

The technological revolution in the first half of the century created an environment of industrialization within Eastern European countries. Individual workers were simply cogs in the greater industrial machine. Early theatre, and especially futurism, is where the origins of industrial music, which Laibach

perform, are found. By reviewing the development of artistic performance and media influence throughout the 20th century, a clear parallel can be drawn between performance aesthetic of two major technological eras. The posters used to promote Laibach's performance aesthetic combine the stylistic sensibilities of early propagandistic art with the industrial symbols of "the worker" – the cog (See Fig. 5a and 5b).



Fig. 5a. The Thrower. Poster. 1980.



Fig. 5b. Free Yugoslavia. Poster. 1984.

The ultimate evidence of the effect of their performance is the destruction of Yugoslavia culminating in the concurrent performance in Sarajevo when the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed. In a truly Laibachian style, Laibach performed with a larger group and disseminated its message on that historical day.

Due to the secession of Slovenia from Yugoslavia, Laibach's importance could no longer be isolated to the representation of a chaotic state with no nation or recognition. At that point, Laibach and NSK created a virtual state of mind. This exists as a transcontinental and national state of mind that creates citizenship for the collective by issuing out passports (see Fig. 6). Within this function, Laibach attempts to promulgate the utopian government dreams.



Fig. 6. NSK Promotional Poster for Passport and Citizenship of NSK. Become a Citizen of The First Global State of the Universe. Poster.

Michael Benson in Predictions of Fire describes that:

By the middle of the century, the machinery producing power from coal and steam and the machinery producing mythology from images of power are manufacturing each other. The mass reproduction of images on strips of moving celluloid prefigures the mass media which will follow -- the beginning of new, increasingly global, cycles of manipulation.

The creation of a worldwide virtual state and embrace of technology is the realization of early twentieth century Eastern European thought. With the emergence of technology of the Internet, art is truly becoming all-powerful. Those in charge of the media will be those in charge of the message (McLuhan). The blending of mixed media will determine that artists will be in charge of the political message. Laibach's embrace of the new media heralds the intent of the avant-gardists to the National Socialist artists. Laibach and NSK conclusively appropriate the ideology and organization of early twentieth century interwar Europe.

An ensuing formulation of manifestos indicated that art was quickly becoming the hegemonic force. For example, Boccioni outlined futurist sculpture in 1912 while in 1914 architecture was addressed by Antonio Sant'Elia whose designs foreshadowed the soaring buildings of the later 20th century. Besides the visual arts, futurism manifested itself in literature, the theatre and music, with proclamations eventually reaching clothes fashions, food and drink, and even toys (The Challenge of Futurism 1).

Laibach's ideology is documented in multiple manifestos as well. They contend that "Every historical manifesto, as a program, collection of aims, forms and principles of movement, is basically incomplete, burdened with itself and the dynamism of the time (e.g., the Communist Manifesto and the Futurist Manifesto" (New Collectivism 43). A complete manifesto for NSK does not exist because it is in continuous flux, but the "10 Items of the Covenant" (Laibach's doctrine)

remains the basis for all successive manifestations (See Appendix A).

Laibach appropriates historical, political stratagems with the desire to create a new nation

state. Before the

Balkan Civil War and

ensuing recognition of

Slovenia as an

independent nation

(See Fig. 7), Laibach

and NSK's actions

catalyzed major

political and historical

change. Since 1980,

Laibach rehearsed the

break-up of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Bloc as their “early art and (their) music

was tense with the underlying frictions threatening to blow Yugoslavia apart;” the

band blew and the nation destructed (Bohn 3).

Marinetti built technological artistic and political barriers against military-

industrial nations (Foster 9). The pseudo-fascist pre-text of early Futurist

manifestos laid the foundation for the indoctrination of a new performance

“State” defined by collective work of 1920s German dramaturgy and present day

Eastern European societies. The collectives battled with nationalism in light of

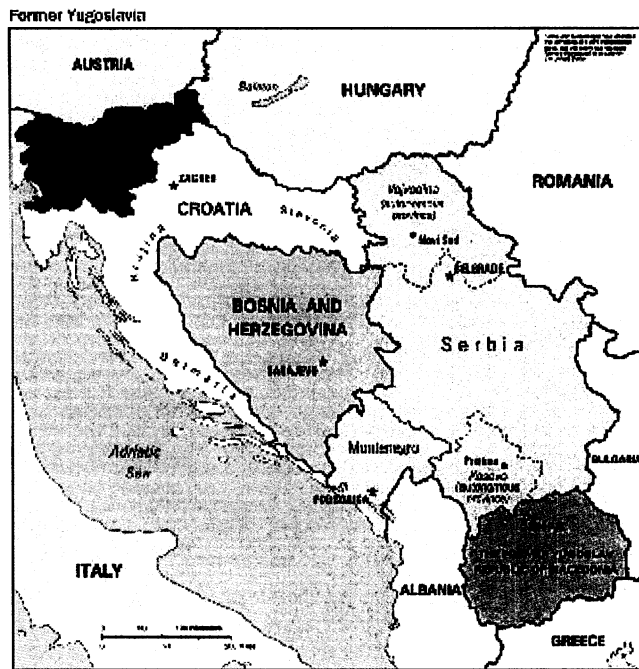


Fig. 7. States that make up the former Yugoslavia; Slovenia is the northern-most state.

destruction; and civil war set the stage for the machinization of the political theatre of Piscator. The social processes in development over the subsequent decades has led to the postmodern convergence to “rethink the idea of performance in the mid-1980s and thereafter” with current postindustrial communication technology and mass media (Birringer 169). Laibach and NSK embody the re-thinking of the 1920s spectrum of ideological, machinization and theatre manifestos for 1980s appropriation.

Currently, Laibach and NSK are borrowing and creating from the same system that existed in early to mid-twentieth century Germanic-Slavic nations. The newfound “freedom” from communism left Slavic nations searching for organization and ideology. By appropriating the ideology of collective machinization and futurist manifesto of the early avant-gardists, Laibach believe they can define a familiar structure for the people of Slovenia. As Marinetti maintained and Laibach preaches, you must recognize history before you can change it.

Although the futurists contend to be anarchists who deride any allegiance with communism, fascism or socialism movements, they created art doctrines similar to such political manifestos. Laibach’s work encompasses the futurist origins of noise and technology art (“Art of Noise” 1) that evolved into industrial music. Here again lies the confusion between the origins of Slovenian art and collectives who use manifestos. NSK and Laibach are obviously influenced by the futurists but also emanate fascist iconography (Innes 15). Laibach was in



search of inventing a new society and state for Slovenia and “Futurism was the first attempt in the twentieth century to reinvent life as it was being transfixed by new technologies” (“Italian Futurism” 1). The new technologies are here and Laibach is embracing them through music, performance and narrative.

Hal Foster asserts that “the aestheticist occlusion of the socio-economic bases of technology was not limited to the pro-fascist aspects of Futurism;” that constructivism as a collectivism for culture also laid the groundwork (with dada and surrealism) that later developed into the technological political artistic appropriation by Erwin Piscator and Laibach alike (6-7).

Todd Gitlin refers to Walter Benjamin's research writing that "technological change has been the major force for social and cultural change for at least a century, and... art making serves a social function in assessing such changes." Benjamin's analyses of the interconnecting relations among art, culture, and technology have become bedrock influences for many of the current debates surrounding the concept of postmodernism. By positioning the viewing participant in history, the critical, de-centering, and utopian effect of the work is strengthened.

In the era of hegemony of technology, a technology that stimulated a reality of its own artists are “ask(ing) themselves the question of how to deal with the hegemony and the repression of, and the liberation by, technology” (Books for Unstable Media 2).

The Reception Theory work by Martin-Barbero stresses that although

Americans may be susceptible to domination by communication technologies, “they are able to exploit contradictions that enable them to resist, recycle and redesign those technologies... and people are capable of decoding and appropriating received messages and are not necessarily duped by them” (225).

Technological advancement in concert with the global and informational revolution is considered by many the most “fundamental change in textual culture since Gutenberg” (Delany and Landow 5). This innovation has profound implications for concepts of knowledge, subjectivity, sociality, citizenship and community (Baym, Benedikt, Landow).

Luke and Bricken suggest that we resist the temptation to explain new information technologies in terms of earlier technologies and must approach evolving or new media with possibly an interdisciplinary approach at first at the same time as moving towards a new theoretical framework altogether (3; 380).

### Performance Media

Laibach uses various media to comment on the political system. The comparison of how artists create and audiences consume in the industrial and technological eras illustrate evolution in media. In times of extreme development and expansion, there is often struggle in political and social development and both eras capture the strife in performance.

A large portion of its performance is fundamentally theatrical as with any propagandistic performance. The images, costuming, action and setting are

carefully fashioned in an excessive yet superfluous way. Germanic imagery is dark, there is a dismal foreboding underlying within this spectacle, especially in the postwar periods. Laibach's performance is meant for that audience—without the bourgeois, working class and proletariat there is no audience to send the message to.

The performance elements are constructed in the tradition of Socialist Realism in the sense that Laibach idealizes heroes and events to “mold the consciousness of the masses” (“Socialist Realism”). They play on socio-politically established heroic imagery and sound to create their ambiguous message. They appropriate the molding process of Germanic lineage. Germans developed and perfected propaganda through using such techniques; Michael Benson explains in Predictions of Fire:

Everyone loves a parade. The concept of politics as entertainment was one of the great inventions of mass propaganda. Although the fascist states had been defeated, the aestheticization of politics lived on in communist rituals. As for the parades, they were an assembly line manufacturing the new history. Traditions had to be invented and well documented. In its own way, the ideology that had been planted in Europe's Eastern half believed itself to be at the beginning of a thousand year Reich.

It is widely debated whether Laibach takes itself seriously; theorists to content-consumers are unsure whether they are creating political parody or united

belief as its goal. On the other hand, it could simply be doing what it knows best: “lead(ing) a search for construction of new political identities as a former Yugoslav nation; they are questioning their own identity by embarking on restoring original identities that predated the common state” (Bakic-Hayden 922). Disillusioned Eastern European communities have returned to values based on leadership, ancestry and self-mystification – in a way cherishing the injustices received (Pavlowitch 216).

From a critical cultural perspective, this theory “argues that mass media could and should be used to guide and implement constructive social change. The values outlined in critical cultural theory are used to critique existing social institutions and social practices” (Baran and Davis 338). In reviewing Laibach, one must look at the way in which Laibach performs their message and the way in which society interprets it.

Slovenian news journalist Jure Pengov questioned Laibach on the national Slovenian political news show, “TV Tednik,” as an exercise in trial by television on June 23, 1983. Pengov attempted to use the television as a tool to mobilize the Slovenian government and public against

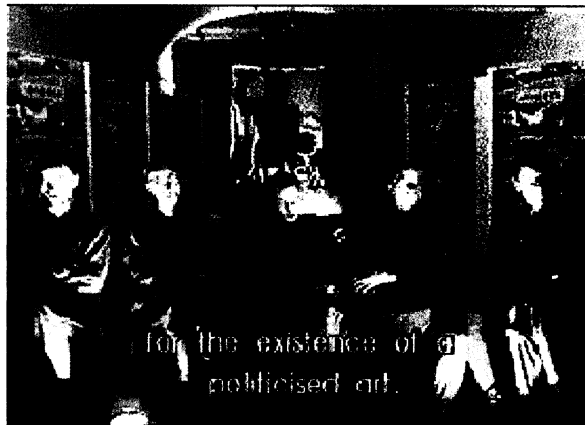


Fig. 8a. Performance by TV trial. A Film from Slovenia. Video capture. 1993.

Laibach. It worked--government placed a political ban on Laibach's live performance and use of their name. The image (Fig. 8a) taken from A Film from Slovenia and (Fig. 8b) from Predictions of Fire illustrates its NaziKunst performance code that will be discussed further. In a concert review, Johnny Walker Black referred to the imagery used in their performance as "Laibachian symbols" thus acknowledging a convention.

Yugoslavian government banned Laibach performances until 1987 because of their namesake (Krafft 2). Laibach, the name given to the city of Ljubljana under Nazi occupation in 1943, is a means of making those in power address the events of the past. It appeared that LaibachKunst reflected what the government felt should be propagandized against. The government in Yugoslavia was actually threatened by the power, imagery and narrative of Laibach (A Film from Slovenia).



Fig. 8b. Production of TV trial. Predictions of Fire. Video capture. 1997.

Laibach recognizes this dominant spectacle and thus relies on visual

media, including music videos, as a key component to their performance aesthetic for the ability to reach thousands of people beyond live performance. As music video is a fairly young medium, there is a major gap in music video studies (Cook). Laibach's message dissemination and development of its broadcast codes were concurrently evolving in the 1980s with the birth of Music Television (MTV), a 24-hour-a-day visual assault of rock images. Laibach is a good subject because of its full embrace of the music video language.

There is a fundamentally theatrical performance incorporating flash and sensationalism in Laibach's appropriated video performance code. The band uses irony to communicate their message. The appropriation of fascist, Nazi and totalitarian imagery provokes both considerable notoriety and gives rise to much confusion (Bear 11). The Germanic spectacle (see Fig. 9a) is situated in a fix gaze of the "erect body of a new order... and intoxication of billowing banners and parallel lines" (van Winkle 34) as illustrated in a Nazi rally with the endless flags and parallel lines of people; compared to the aesthetic of the audience with fists clenched and upraised in the air at a Laibach performance in Fig. 9b.

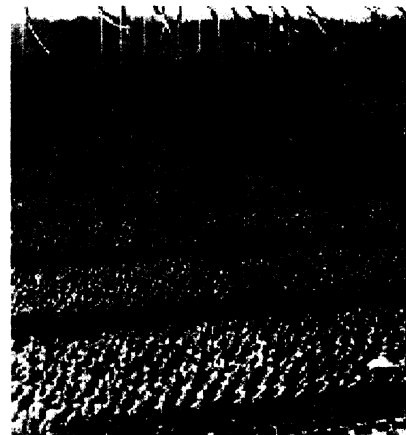


Fig. 9a. Nazi Rally. Triumph of the Will. Video capture.



Fig. 9b. Laibach Audience. A Film from Slovenia. Video capture.

Documentaries were produced either by their record label, Mute, or by their colleagues working in NSK. This obviously lends itself to a large bias. In turn, many of the documentaries of broadcast news stories about Laibach are in Slovenian, in German or are not in a VHS or DVD format. The process of finding the video archived information about Laibach remains an extensively difficult task. In particular, Michael Benson's Predictions of Fire about art war and focused on NSK exists in 16mm and is not prepared for distribution but the dialogue is available on the film distributor's website. Within the film, Benson explains how Laibach and NSK serve as what he refers to as "art war":

Throughout history, art has served power--be it political, religious, or economic. Viewed in the light of Kazimir Malevich's observation, the entire NSK project can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim an aesthetic legacy. If political forces exploited the ideas and artistic methods of the early avant-gardes, creating a kind of ceremonial theatre in the service of politics, then NSK was reasserting aesthetic control over this work--while accomplishing an even more subversive reversal. Politics and religion would not only remain within the work. It would now be they that would serve art. This is the "hidden transgression" at the core of the Neue Slowenische Kunst art movement. Call it politics in the service of theatre. (Predictions of Fire)



Fig. 10. The historic Volksbuehne Theatre as an NSK territory. Neue Slowenische Kunst.

In the space where Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht staged the political theatre of the early twentieth century, NSK now organized two major shows featuring Laibach, sections of the NSK collective and lectures delivered by Balkan philosopher Slavoj Žižek. East German Director Frank Castorf managed the 1992/93 season of the Volksbuehne Theatre (Fig. 10) in East Berlin during which he avowed that “The Volksbuehne is a place where the viewer must make a stand either for or against.” (New Collectivism 28). On October 8th, 1993, Castorf invited NSK to declare its “state” a territory at the historic theatre as an act in the political lineage of Piscator and Brecht.

Collectives work together to broadcast their unified ideology. Agents of



the government like Hitler, Marshall Tito in Yugoslavia, and the Balkan states as a whole embraced media art after World War II. An artist's work consists of no less propaganda than the state. The proletariat simply perceives a difference between the nature of a state controlled message and an artist's creation, yet artists utilize mass media to espouse their one-sided message also. Laibach overtly incorporate the contradiction by appearing to be an agent of the state.

The etymology of the term fascist is fascia--the tissue that binds the muscles stands for the collective energy that connects art and politics together with "such traditional opposites as Left and Right, revolutionary and conservative, populist and elitist, technological and primitive" (Foster 9) creating a similitude to other ideology constructs. Laibach accordingly integrates a variety of ideologies from surrounding countries of Slovenia.

The collective ideology can be traced to Marinetti's warning that "To deny the fatherland is the same as to isolate, castrate, shrink, denigrate or kill yourself" (Foster 17) and that the country must be unified in a state of "totality ideologically" (18). Fascism grew out of widespread disillusionment with the ineffectual government, uninspired leadership and chaotic economic conditions after World War I" ("Fascism" 2). This era is similar to Laibach's existence in 1980s and 90s Yugoslavia. This sentiment creates conditions conducive to glorification of authoritarian virtues, thus we have the work of Laibach.

The first principle of Laibach manifesto states "Laibach works as a team (the collective spirit), according to the principle of industrial production and

totalitarianism, which means the individual does not speak, the organization does—our work is industrial, our language political” (New Collectivism 18). The principle of the collectivism is one of the main systems of totalitarianism—“systematic art occurred as the result of the impact of politics and ideology” (Neue Slowenische Kunst 281).

In Brecht In Context, John Willet affirms “Brecht and Piscator’s use of collectivism and manifestos in reference to his ideology and theatre companies and dramaturgy” (87-91). Graham Holderness declares that the two origins of overt political theatre are the development of Piscator’s Proletarian Theatre in the early 1920s and Piscator’s conception of “epic” theatre as a co-operative structure made up of “politicos and economists as well as dramaturges and directors” for the bourgeois theatre (25-6).

In 1921, Piscator organized political reviews including the Red Riot Revue with a collective communist group to propagandize a candidate for a political campaign (Braun 146) and Russia’s Day to exploit the stage for purposes of propaganda (Innes 37). The fanaticism of Piscator’s political theatre brings his aim of adapting the theatre to conform to contemporary reality in question. This process shows ideological effectiveness of agitating propaganda.

Piscator’s goal was to create a stage capable of dealing with twentieth century realities (62). He created an artist collective for his theatre in Nollendorfplatz in 1928, as Brecht later did at the Theatre in Schiffbauerdamm. The main aim of these collectives was to create a unified tone of presentation and

ideology (116) enabling art to assume the role of authority. This unified tone codifies the existence of politicking art as a challenge to or replacement for government – an entertaining form of control.

Brechtian political theatre targets the “most powerful weapon of social control, ideology” (Holderness 9). The political role of art becomes exposing the ideology that is naturally rooted in the structures of culture and in artistic forms. This allows the artists collectives with various media to blend the political ideology and art as one in their nation.

Laibach utilizes the credo Carl Daulhaus explains in the Foundations of Music History, that “Marxist aesthetics and art histories of recent decade’s music is presented as a fragment of ideology conditioned by the structure of society from which it originated” (114).

The music, sound and voice are collectively representative of the



Fig. 11a. Laibach “Opus Dei” music video. Video capture.



Fig. 11b. Hitler Youth drums. Triumph of the Will. Video capture.



Fig.11c. Hitler Youth horns. Triumph of the Will. Video capture.

Germanic style. Laibach and German music of the early twentieth century include brass fanfares, strident tempos and spirited lyrics. Germanic music creates a fervent wartime attitude that perpetuates unity, war and boastful feelings. The video “Opus Dei” features members of Laibach (Fig. 11a) pounding on drums and blowing horns in the same fashion as the actual Hitler Youth in Leni Riefensthal’s Triumph of the Will (Fig. 11b-11c).

Also appealing to the Germanic culture is a rough, violent approach to the music. Evident in A Film from Slovenia concert and music video footage are harsh illustrations of a vehement performance aesthetic in pounding drums and seething vocals. The intense “industrial music” is characterized in the dark, zealous performance aesthetic. This aggressive approach could be a result of NaziKunst musicology or industrialized rock genre emergence in youth rebellion (Attali 10).

Another element of discussion for Laibach’s musical aesthetic is repetition. Richard Leppert contends that much of music’s power lies in repetition, he states that it inscribes reassurance and predictability; it is the “sonic-visual simulacrum of contentment... that can be taken up in a utopian moment in culture...” The visual and sonic elements of Laibach’s performance enact a stylized and “aesthetized order [that] human beings valorize highly, especially in light of abundant chaos” (86). Carl Dalhaus asserts that even though the signifying practices in modern music may imply classicism, we should listen for the nature and objectives of new music (64).

There is a reason that Laibach appropriates both modern and early twentieth century elements in their overall sound. Brecht encourages distancing the audience, or consumers, from the act or production of art, thereby allowing them to (Kotsopoulos 6) participate in criticizing the text. Laibach further distances themselves from their audience by frequently using their music videos in their live concert performance. These videos are fundamental to the meaning-making espoused by the band. The collective appears to make the music videos as support material for their sermon, not to be dismissed as simple promotional material thrown together by the record label for promotion. Laibach's performance appears to have a greater purpose, whether the consumers individually or collectively perceive that or not.

As Liz Garnett describes, this examination incorporates all codes of performance with "just such a musical community, as they fold the poietic (formative) and aesthetic levels together to form a category of socially mediated meanings, as opposed to the 'music itself', equivalent to the neutral level" (11).

Lucy Green labels this as:

Individual experience is understandable only in the light of collective social meanings and structures: the individual is not isolated, and experience is not really immediate, but mediated through social history. Music could not be collectively defined without individual temporal experience of its inherent meanings, and such experience could not take place without collective

definition of what music is. The two sides - individual experience and collective definition - have equal status in making up the whole story. (18)

Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure Barthes worked on the meaning of everyday life. His notion of culture extends beyond the elitist forms typically measured – such as the opera, literature and politics. Dick Hebdige refers to this as arbitrary cultural phenomenon (10). Everyday life and behavior clearly results in the creation of ideological systems and beliefs. An audience at a rock concert or watching a musical performance on television has just as a significant experience as an individual at the symphony. Both are “cultural” experiences that result in a collective experience and ideology.

Dick Hebdige discusses in Subculture: The Meaning of Style, that any institution such as a university carries ideological assumptions. From the categorization of disciplines to the relationship and order between teacher and student, there is an underlying structure that is taught and understood through culture (12).

The rock amphitheatre or living room television is not traditionally thought of as an educational tool. This generates a non-traditional opening for reaching various subcultures that otherwise may be resistant to specific readings of content. The artist is afforded a forum for espousing his or her message.

Audience members individually experience the performance based on ingrained belief systems and the presentation of the artist. Regardless of personal

background and belief systems, there tends to be a collective “understanding” constructed from performance. Laibach’s initial focus is that of its own country, Slovenia. As one half of the former Yugoslavia consumed by totalitarianism and made up of mainly industrialized, factory works, the collective experience is established.

While gender roles, sexuality, religion, and political systems vary throughout the world, consumption of the same media will bring some reaction. Must we account for the background of the artists or the audience when determining the overall effect of the performance? Regardless of Laibach’s actual background, the key is the consumers that they are trying to affect. The meaning-making is unique to their performance as a group but the evaluation and understanding of their message varies based on audience consumption.

Media critics have attempted to understand the meaning or influence of the content creator often disregarding the content decoder. Various media are not only interpreted based on the era in which they were created but also by the changing times in which it is consumed. Although no one will truly understand the intent of the content creator but that person, the music or performance may ultimately have effects beyond those planned. This is why Laibach is an excellent example for these purposes as they openly proclaim their meaning – their third way.

Laibach’s third way appears to take into account the connotative codes that Stuart Hall (Hebdige 14) argues that “...cover the face of social life and

render it classifiable, intelligible, meaningful...” He describes these codes as maps of meanings, or signs, which Volosinov explains are always subject to ideological evaluation (x). He believes that signs exist as not just a part of reality but also a reflection of it based on point of view. While each sign may have an institutionalized or standard meaning, standards and institutions vary among race, class, gender, and culture for example.

Hebdige states that these signs and codes cut across a range of potential meanings. The process of interpretation and distribution leads to the dominance of specific ideologies. Inherent in the dissemination of standard meanings is the need for interpretation. Whether a content maker intends or not to ascribe specific meanings to signs in performance, the audience will undoubtedly interpret those codes. Some groups will traditionally have less power to impose their definitions of signs to the world at large. Yet, collective interpretation may result in specific action.

Hebdige and Hall refer to Marx to make the point that perhaps the “connotative codes” or “maps of meaning” are “charged with a potentially explosive significance because they are traced and re-traced along the lines laid down by the dominant discourses about reality, the dominant ideologies.” Marx explains that the class who controls the means of production also controls the “means of mental production” thus having control of the intellectual force or ruling ideas. Hebdige submits, “The symbiosis in which ideology and social order, production and reproduction, are linked is neither fixed nor guaranteed”



(16).

Andrew Goodwin takes on the development of Cultural Studies as a field of research; in “Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture,” he presupposes that “...the actual, material relations of cultural production are unexamined, and explorations of institutional contexts that could help to explain counter-hegemonic reading are never delivered” (xxi). A key theme in Goodwin’s research is that he points out the trend in cultural studies, making a connection between political economy and cultural pessimism while alternatively text/audience analysis and cultural optimism on the other (xxi).

Goodwin suggests concurrence with Graeme Turner’s hypothesis that video’s lyrics make the possible reading specific and explicit leaving a small amount of room for the consumers to read the image in their own way (11; 109). Goodwin points out that “this is not a case of video imagery transforming pop meaning so much as an example of a video clip building on the video codes already in play” (11). In order for this to be of significant impact on the phenomena, critics would have to consider discourses such as performance, promotion and image that intercede between the lyrics and the video.

It might be worthwhile in this exploration to assess if videos are subject to interpretation or the visual image, in addition to the lyrics or genre signifies a standardized meaning. The specific symbols in the performance aesthetic could stand the test of time more than the style of song itself; for example, the use of a Christian cross, a symbol thousands of years old, could be more relevant and

fixed than the various music or lyrics that accompany that cross over its thousands of years of existence.

In “God is God,” the lead singer appears elevated with hands outwardly extended as in a political or religious leader’s stance while speaking to a large audience. This video includes semiotic cues in specific words such as God, capitalism and religion used in the visual. Whether the music volume is muted or not while watching, the visual theme in addition to words provides a very clear meaning.

Musical taste tends to switch more often than the symbols used in society. Goodwin contends that music television’s critics have been unable to demonstrate that the visual signification in the video dominates the song itself and that it is not open to the same degrees of interpretative framework as the music (12).

Rather than focus on the stand alone video, it might be more important to consider the relative effect the entire music video package has when the artist, song or promotional material is more heavily distributed or played on the radio and television. It would seem safe to assume that the more promotional material thrust into the public eye, the more “fixed” a particular reading would be. Laibach supplements their performance with posters, t-shirts, books, passports (NSK) and even dishware. This does not take into account the background, beliefs or location of the consumer. Regardless of promotion, different groups of people that make up collective perception will read the video cues in different ways. There can be no safe assumption that the music video performance will be

uniformly, or fixed, in interpretation.

Conversely, the interpretation of various, collective groups may be fixed in their separate interpretations. Thus, this mitigates the actual intention of the artist, if any. Music video is a worldwide communications medium. Consumers have access to video not only via music video channels but also on the Internet. This technology enables the consumer to have access to the performance unfettered by the traditional structure of television. This may or may not complicate the reading of the video. The point herein lies in the fact that individuals may not be subjected to the additional programming on the television like commercials, commentary by music video hosts and other music videos if they so choose not to watch them. This enables the consumer to navigate between their chosen videos.

V.N. Volosinov's concept of "inner speech" developed in Marxism and the Philosophy of Language may be relevant to the consumer's deconstruction. He critiques socially dislocated linguistic analysis in both semiotics and individualistic psychologism. He states:

Everything vital in the evaluative reception of another's utterance, everything of any ideological value, is expressed in the material of 'inner speech.' After all, it is not a mute, worldless creature that receives such an utterance, but a human being full of inner words. All his experiences – his so-called apperceptive background – exist encoded in his inner speech, and only to the extent do they come

into contact with speech received from the outside. Word comes into contact with word. The context of this inner speech is the locale in which another's utterance is received, comprehended and evaluated; it is where the speaker's active orientation takes place.

(118)

Goodwin adapts this comment for the context of music television through arguing that "it is clear that the 'inner speech' of the music television audience is significant for the intertextual moments of interpretation, for it is a moment that music take account of the words, sounds, and images that have already 'filled up' the viewer" (13). The extent of a music video's imagery enjoying primary significance is a result of the "inner speech" of the consumer. Inner dialogue includes: 1) exposure to marketing imagery, 2) familiarity with prior performance imagery of the particular artist, 3) the song itself, and 4) similar, other video clips.

It is well established that reading of music videos of mainstream artists are tainted by the aforementioned items listed above. Rather than focusing on a handful of well-known videos or a combination of various videos, we have focused on the relatively unknown Laibach – this enables a reading unfettered by Volosinov's "inner speech."

Much has been written about music videos as a purely promotional tool in addition to their cultural impact (Attali; Goodwin). What about the content creators who truly intend to create a video as part of their entire art, or as a political tool, possibly propaganda? The argument stands that the intent of the

artist or of the industry for the medium may be irrelevant or at least far secondary in the meaning-making or reading by the consumer of the video. Videos are key in understanding the significance of Laibach's impact due to the fact that they have rarely played within their own country because of governmental control. Circulation of videos has enabled individuals to consume short bursts of their message at a time (Goodwin 22).

The specific desire is to find whether the performance in the video reinforces collective perception or incites new readings as a result of specific iconography. Because, as consumers or content creators, we will never completely understand the intent of works by other content creators, we can only determine the works value by the effect it has on the consumers. Works of art may bring groups together, tear people apart or be completely ignored. Many factors in the marketing and commercialism machine may help affect the acceleration of consumption, but even the smallest, or lesser known, work of art may have an affect on even fringe-sized groups. This reinforces the reason for using Laibach as the subject – they affected a large group of people in a focused area while remaining a fairly unknown content creator, at least on a worldwide scale. Whether the style of music or specific intentions may be irrelevant to alternative groups remains unknown. It can be assumed that the impact isn't shared outside of the European block but the model and use of symbols are relevant on a worldwide scale. In the case of Laibach, the videos are full of imagery prevalent in Eastern European history, art and mythology.

Eastern European historians worry whether Western nations, specifically Americans, can appreciate the significance of Laibach's impact on their country or specifically differentiate between traditional Slovenian (e.g., Yugoslavian) imagery and political iconography. Specifically, Art Historian Lutz Becker, believes that Americans may be more fascinated with the fetishistic use of fascist imagery rather than realize the ironic intent of use. He doubts whether if Americans can "read" the codes since they do not have the same historical and cultural background as those in the band's homeland (*A Film from Slovenia*). The exercise here is to understand if universal cues exist regardless of background and culture.

In the "Introductory models and basic concepts: semiotics" segment of the CCMS, Mick Underwood proposes that "Semiologists generally prefer the term 'reader' to 'receiver' (even of a painting, photograph or film) and often use the term 'text' to 'message'. This implies that receiving a message (e.g., 'reading a text') is an active process of decoding and that that process is socially and culturally conditioned."

Part of what Brecht et al were attempting to do was use media to comment on society. In turn, they would incite those same members of society decode and participate in the meaning-making of their ideologies. Laibach follows the same modes of address today. Brecht and Laibach are then in effect, theorists on a massive level. Rather than be restricted to academia, they are able to analyze and regurgitate back to a larger audience-mass society with their forum of

performance art.

### Audience

Audiences are clearly defined by signifying characteristics. Such signifiers, likeness in fashion, behavior, and lifestyle for example, create various forms of subculture (Hebdige 2-10). This is important in assessing the impact of Laibach's performance aesthetic in successfully contextualizing and decontextualizing symbols for content decoders.

Culture is the meanings and values of implicit and explicit in a particular way of life (Williams 7). David Bordwell explains that although a universal code exists within filmic visual cues independent of culture-specific traits he argues that film literacy is a learned skill due to technological evolution of the non-linear, interactive apparatus (164). A content decoder's skills are honed between their cognition of visual cues and adaptation to technological communication. This results in a visual spectacle of film or video iconography as the dominant communication (Deleuze, Rodowick).

Laibach adopts and recontextualizes unoriginal concepts thus creating an illusion of development and a new determining unit. This happens through "expressing its timelessness with the artifacts of the present and the intersection of politics and production (the culture or art, ideology and consciousness)" (NSK 19).

Media asserts hegemony over culture, displacing cultures that find no

voice or a limited voice. Simply to defend their cultural identity, countries outside the technological or dominant axis strive to claim their parcel of media-- and cyberspace, and feel compelled to seize any opportunity that presents itself. This venture brings its own danger, as media unleash an inherent power of transformation (Hertz 1).

Marxist media theorists use the Althusserian concept of interpellation to explain the political function of mass media texts whereby the subject (viewer, listener, reader) is influenced by the collective state apparatuses. This results in individuals having a shared understanding of ideology and behavior.

Changes in genre conventions may both reflect and help to shape the dominant ideological climate of the time. Some Marxist commentators see genre as an instrument of social control that reproduces the dominant ideology. Within this perspective, the genre is seen as positioning the audience in order to naturalize the reassuringly conservative ideologies that are typically embedded in the text. Certainly, genres are far from being ideologically neutral. Daniel Chandler, in "Notes on 'The Gaze,'" states that different genres produce different positionings of the subject that are reflected in their modes of address.

The theatre initiated by Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, and films of Sergei Eisenstein, used these media as a forum for inciting social change and dissatisfaction with the socio-political reality while "participating in producing a new regime of sensorium by advancing an increasing integration of machines and culture, labor and perception" (Beller 173). Laibach, in this tradition, "reveal(s)



and express the link of politics and ideology with industrial production and the unbridgeable gabs between this link and the spirit” (NSK 18). This treatment of art as a tool to unify the people and reject the fascist system led to speculation by critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

The Frankfurt School, developed by Adorno and Horkheimer, began to assess the ramifications of media in the early development of Critical Cultural Studies (Kellner 3). They inaugurated an interdisciplinary approach to “cultural and communication studies, combining critique of political economy of the media, analysis of texts, and audience reception studies of the social and ideological effects of mass culture on communications” (Kellner 1). Their work was groundbreaking in their assessment of political and economical transition in the era of industrialization and machinization. It evolved into the “Dialectic of the Enlightenment” in the 1940s whereby technology was dismissed as problematic rather than progressive (Luke 1). Laibach recognize this discomfort in that they find that use of industrialization to “incite change... in foregoing ones individuality... thus leading consumers to a collective identity whereby their mass response will become prevalent causing problems for the government at large...” (Neue Slowenische Kunst 19).

When asked the purpose of their performance, Laibach explain that they “practice sound/force in the form of a systematic (psychophysical) terror as therapy and principle of social organization” and break it down to: that the purpose of their performance:

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 in turn is the principle of social organization (Official NSK Embassy).

As a Neo-Marxist response to Adorno and Horkheimer's developing theories, a new era of British cultural studies began in the 1960s. Stuart Hall argued as a principle visionary "mass media can best be understood as a public forum in which various forces struggle to shape popular notions about social reality" (Baran and Davis 322). John Berger used English Screen Theory film and video studies within his 1972 BBC series "Ways of Seeing" to deduce mass culture is not the product of "low genres" that the Frankfurt School might suggest, but actually "the realist text... where mass readers/spectators" were subject and bound to the political messages inherent in the text (3). Yet Brecht's theatre "does not prevent them [the consumer, the audience spectator who consumes the

media] from thinking” (4) that is akin to the “multiconscious” audiences intended by Shakespeare.

In America, post-modern innovator Marshall McLuhan entered onto the media studies scene in the 1960s with the most successful theory of consumer consumption to-date within Critical Cultural Studies ideals. McLuhan theorized on the global messages of media and the international community’s response to the socio-political advancement of media technology. He felt that technology is more about convergence on multiple planes rather than displacement of information (Luke 2).

#### Physiognomy and Nature

Elements of the physiognomy include: posture, stride, body type, and facial expression. Evidence of this physiognomy archetype can be found in Eastern Europe and German textbooks. This “look” was perpetuated and standardized in Nazi cinema that portrays the “Youth Day” mystique whereby fit boys were to march and walk straight.

Physiognomy is appropriated through the statuesque appearance of the band members clearly formed as a response to their fascist, totalitarian guise. In its performance, Laibach’s physiognomy commands that of an idol or an established statue. It has an excessive, well-manicured appeal.

The folklore of the Hitler Youth movement resulted in outdoor activities (Germanic affiliation with nature) and Nationalistic celebration of unity in form

(Kamenetsky 20). Eric Rentschler recalls scenes from the film, “Hitler Youth Quex,” which illustrates a master narrative wherein “human subjects become state objects and loving beings give way to abstract patterns” (24). The body no longer belongs to the individual; the state creates what the ultimate body type must be.

The “Hitler Youth” aesthetic, Socialist Realist idealization of “Dauntless, well-muscled and youthful farmers and workers” (“Socialist Realism”) all contribute to this Germanic aesthetic of the ideal body type. Bodies suggest and possess political ideology.

In his novel, The Discovery of Heaven, Harry Mulisch illustrates that biology, physiognomy, is the essence of politics. He explains that you do not have to consume media of speeches or stories on the action of a politician, you can simply view a picture and you can assess their power. He says that Hitler (Fig. 12) succeeded because of “the pale forehead, those fanatical cheekbones, those smooth cheeks and pinched lips, that appearance accounted for 33 percent of his effect and the Neo-Nazis are still in love with it” (557). Laibach continues to be lumped in the category of the Neo-Nazis that love it because they appropriate the look.



Fig. 12. Hitler. Triumph of the Will. Video capture.

Each member of Laibach has similar facial features that accent the elements in Mulisch's example. The black and white film or dreary colors used throughout most of A Film from Slovenia emphasize the "Neo-Nazi" aesthetic. The condition of the physicality is power and the condition of power is physicality (Mulisch 559). Laibach juxtapose the power of the image with the power position they create for themselves in media. They construct their entire performance code carefully.

The state mandates that the body (Hitler Youth) must be "all dressed the same" (29). Laibach dresses in the Nazi uniform-style. Stacy Richter states that the connection between the aesthetics and the totalitarian state are made through such imagery as the "stiff collars, groomed hair and jackboots" (see Fig. 13a) (1).

She continues that this is a critique of the whole totalitarian aesthetic



Fig. 13a. Laibach physiognomy in 1985. Mute. Publicity photo. 1985.



Fig. 13b. Laibach physiognomy in 2003. Mute. Publicity photo. 2003.

through adopting it. Germanic folklore of the twentieth century portrays man as a “heroic warrior fighting” for the preservation of family and culture. Laibach maintains the militaristic dress in a recent press photo for their 2004 CD release, WAT (see Fig. 13b).

The body type and dress is most idealized when the lead vocalist of Laibach dresses in uniform pants, boots and suspender exposing his chest (see Fig. 14b). This image is in the same likeness of the men in Leni Refenstahl's Triumph of the Will (See Fig. 14a).

There is an overt neo-Nazi “masculine, angry violent presentation” (Duguid 1) in the appropriation of the militant ideal (see Fig. 14c) that comes

through in Laibach’s juxtaposition of NaziKunst and idealistic physiognomy.

In music video and random performance footage, Laibach mirror the notion that “youths were forced to march sing and celebrate according to the same blueprints” (Kamenetsky 22).



Fig. 14a. Nazi men in uniform. Triumph of the Will. Video capture.



Fig. 14b. Laibach lead singer in a music video. A Film from Slovenia. Video capture.



Fig. 14c. Laibach lead singer in Nazi uniform. A Film from Slovenia. Video capture.

Looking at this image, Fig. 15, you can see the solidarity in Laibach's performance. Its physiognomy components apparent are: posture, stance and march in a militaristic fashion.

Inherent within Laibach's performance is the material manifestation of the dimension of human identity in the physiognomy, or body type, in shaping performance values. Eric Rentschler recounts early German cinema as a mode of education, military training and

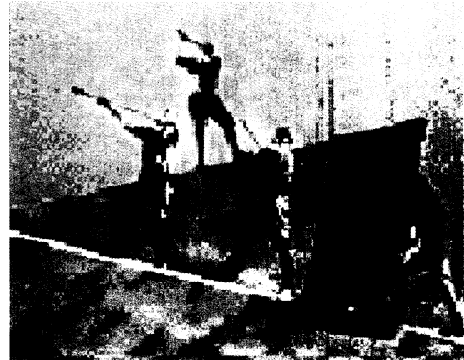


Fig. 15. Laibach "Opus Dei" music video. Video capture.

recreation that should "provide children the knowledge about Germany's past... and future development... and deliberately makes the film the transmitter of its ideology" (26). National Socialism sought to organize the will of the youth by redirecting identification and fabricating the image of the ideal man.

Laibach upholds the characteristic of physiognomy in all forms of the media code. An interview is not any different from a music video; in this sense the performance code is also always upheld. There is an undoubtedly implicit attitude toward approaching the explicit body image of the Laibach collective.

The imagery was held up in an idealistic indoctrination of NaziKunst and totalitarianism physiognomy. Germanic culture not only strove to dress and lo ok the part, they couldn't help it as a result of history. Fig. 16 exhibits this sensibility.

Laibach's intent in early formation was "precisely those universal motifs which clearly mirrored the Slovenian national identity and history, (e.g., industrial



Fig. 16. La Liberte Guidant Le Peuple. Poster. 1985.

worker, the hayrack, the Slovenian women, the Alps, the red deer, hunting, and Slovenian architecture) and kept stressing that it was organically tied to their homeland, jealously nursing their instinctive link with the nation and its history" (Swezey 279).

Nature is a major signifying practice in German myth and character and the use in performance perpetuates physiognomy within German imagery. There is a mythic and heroic image found within nature. Eastern Europe is in the process of recovering the paradise and idealized landscape in the wake of the German deconstruction of nature in the early twentieth century.

The nature element is explored in a variety of fashions: man's conflict



with nature and the use of nature imagery and specific animals appropriated into Laibach imagery. Animals are a large part of Laibach's performance aesthetic.

Antlers (Fig. 17a) and deer (Fig. 17b) are prevalent in Laibach videos and art.

Donald Kuspit explains "Germans have claimed a special rapport with nature... in which man and nature are intimate to the point of merger" (166). The landscape of the forest remains a therapeutic and transitional space for Germans. The German hero solitude for burgeoning success lies within the forest. The forest forms a protective atmosphere that allows man to realize his capabilities.

Kuspit explains for Germanic heritage the "nature remains self-identical, which is why it can be a reliable source of security and identity" (167). He further claims that nature "was raped and murdered by the Nazis" (169) and the traditional Germanic obsession with nature remains alive as a reflection of a "compulsive effort to restore her" (169). Laibach partake in the acknowledgment of nature (see Fig. 18) through their video "How the West Was Won" in order to identify with it, to make the first modern attempt at reconciliation.

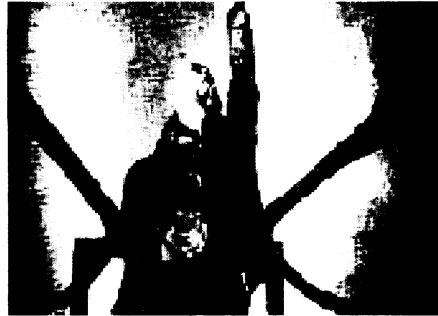


Fig. 17a. Antlers surrounding Laibach member. A Film from Slovenia. Video capture.

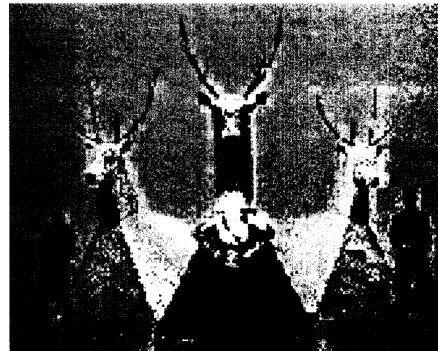


Fig. 17b. Laibach music performance. A Film from Slovenia. Video capture.

Kuspit claims that nature's disillusionment with man results in the destruction of the society while "their faces hidden in deep shadows, their bodies often dealt in heavy, black, rather stark contours" (174);

this is another example where

Laibach has a similar style and ideology.

Rock and roll content creators Laibach juxtapose the signifiers discussed in this chapter in their unique approach to the performance aesthetic.



Fig. 18. Hiking in the Alps in the "How the West Was Won" music video. A Film from Slovenia. Video capture.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

“In the dark times, will there also be singing?

Yes, there will be singing. About the dark times”

(Brecht).

This quote, attributed to Bertolt Brecht, is the first title text seen in the Predictions of Fire documentary about Laibach and NSK.

Laibach successfully infuses rock and roll into the tradition of the early twentieth century avant-gardist movements like futurism, Germanic art, and Brechtian theatre in 2004. It has appropriated various international socio-political symbols; recognized the effects of government; and recreated the reality for the mass audience in a postmodern form of revolution and cultural hegemony. It takes on the state by assuming it, not by opposing it. Laibachian imagery effectively deals with mechanisms of power and control in different political systems.

Laibach feels that “you should take history into account and you should mistrust it. It is an invention of several different processes [including government and politicians] which have purely economical reasons” (A Film from Slovenia). Their performance has created frenzy within Slovenian society and government by acting on the culture’s institutionalized belief systems.

Carmen Luke states that:

“Social discipline and ideological control engineered in the collusion of interests between the state and capital, tend to ignore cultural mediation, grassroots diversity and cultural struggles over meaning, instead imbuing ‘culture’ with a monolithic... essentialism variously aimed at the state or capital. Yet the transposition into the electronic datasphere of alphabetic writing and reading, of analog images of the phenomenal world into digital graphics ... and other traditional narrative forms, or even the theoretical and cultural residue that spills into contemporary academic theorizing about cyberspace, attest to the culturally mediated terms of debate and the cultural (re)construction of the social and subjectivity in digital cyberspace [and art making]” (2).

Laibach creates such debate and reconstruction by incorporating and decontextualizing positive, negative and familiar symbols in its performance aesthetic. This cultural analysis using semiotics has shown that its approach with this familiar iconography has affected the content decoders and society at large especially due to the integration of fascist, Nazi and totalitarian signs and ideology based on a government where one political group maintains complete control.

There are many directions future research could go. This should include a review the implications of a variety of political ideologies and an examination of

Laibach's self-created Retro-gardist style of adapting "Nazi and fascist iconographies... were exposed in their shocking correspondence to the official aesthetics of a Stalinist-type Social Realism" (Berringer 152) would be compelling. Future study can also look at the gender identity issues and homoerotic imagery evident within Nazi visuals, technology of the utopianistic ideal and Germanic culture.

Other avenues for research to be considered would be an audience analysis on local and global scales; a musicology study of the music itself and response of the audience; the impact on audiences in relation to ticket sales; and behavior/ ideologies of individuals or audience groups before and after live performances.

Further research could change Western interpretation of Laibach as simply an industrial, political parody band. The impact that Laibach and NSK have had on Eastern Europe, and specifically Slovenia, could be applied to Western philosophy. While the dream of a utopian society is deeply ingrained in Eastern European culture, every civilization has the desire for an ideal state of existence.

The rise of new communications channels empowers both the individual content decoder and rock musician as a whole. Artists participate in the appropriation of all media to communicate their message. The new media revolution has elevated the role of the pop star. By continuing to take the control away from the political elite and creating accessible forums for the artist, rock musicians are empowered. Through use of visual cues and creation of new ones, artists succeed in perpetuating an entirely random or planned message.

With the development of multimedia communications, modern inventions, and futuristic technology, society is becoming a global culture striving towards an idealized utopian existence. In order to communicate on the international scale, a need exists for uniform ideologies and symbols of understanding regardless of the limitations of language and alphabet. But, cultural backgrounds affect belief systems; inevitably this discussion connects with some issues well known in other frameworks such as the nature of the culture industry, issues of postmodernism, and the relations of gender, age, and class in cultural analysis, identity politics, and activist media making.

While media sociologist Todd Gitlin proposes that consumers must find “the resistance,” I suggest that they want to identify with the political leaders in order to subvert them – they do not simply want to resist government (191). This postmodern hegemony is not a clear rejection of the power hierarchy, but an embrace of the dominant visual ideology iconography, appropriation and subversion – the consumer then accepts or rejects the message of the rock music performance.

The individual power of the image will continue to become paramount in the future of technomedia and political institutions. The acceptance of the dominant power of visual literacy could give rise to the entirety of power available and assimilated into rock music and media overall. The political system could continue to collapse and a new form of representation will begin. Mass society may place more value in the messages disseminated by these pioneers of

performance. Rock musicians, painters, and television actors are but a few of the representatives of the people that will continue to invade the representational system of government.

Laibach takes advantage of Lewis' notion that making music is not often taken seriously as political activity. "[This process] often gives musicians... involved in creating oppositional ideologies more license to reach a broad range of audiences than would be possible for other types of political activists" (2). As a result, Laibach shows that rock and roll (especially industrialized/electronic) continues to be the soundtrack of the revolution being televised and now dispersed globally instantly in this multimedia era.

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### **10 Items Of The Covenant \***

**1.**

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

**2.**

LAIBACH analyzes the relation between ideology and culture in a late phase, presented through art. LAIBACH sublimates the tension between them and the existing disharmonies (social unrest, individual frustrations, ideological oppositions) and thus eliminates every direct ideological and systemic discursiveness. The very name and the emblem are visible materializations of the idea on the level of a cognitive symbol. The name LAIBACH is a suggestion of the actual possibility of establishing a politicized (system) ideological art because of the influence of politics and ideology.

**3.**

All art is subject to political manipulation (indirectly - consciousness; directly), except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation. To speak in political terms means to reveal and acknowledge the omnipresence of politics. The role of the most humane form of politics is the bridging of the gap between reality and the mobilizing spirit. Ideology takes the place of authentic forms of social consciousness. The subject in modern society assumes the role of the politicized subject by acknowledging these facts. LAIBACH reveals and expresses the link of politics and ideology with industrial production and the unbridgeable gaps between this link and the spirit.

**4.**

The triumph of anonymity and facelessness has been intensified to the absolute through a technological process. All individual differences of the authors are annulled, every trace of individuality erased. The technological process is a method of programming function. It represents development; e.g., purposeful change. To isolate a particle of this process and form it statically, means to reveal man's negation

of any kind of evolution which is foreign to and inadequate for his biological evolution.

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. The form of social production appears in the manner of production of LAIBACH music itself and the relations within the group. The group functions operationally according to the principle of rational transformation, and its (hierarchical) structure is coherent.

## 5.

The internal structure functions on the directive principle and symbolizes the relation of ideology towards the individual. The idea is concentrated in one (and the same) person, who is prevented from any kind of deviation. The quadruple principle acts by the same key (EBER-SALIGER-KELLER-DACHAUER), which - predestined - conceals in itself an arbitrary number of sub-objects (depending on the needs).

The flexibility and anonymity of the members prevents possible individual deviations and allows a permanent revitalization of the internal juices of life. A subject who can identify himself with the extreme position of contemporary industrial production automatically becomes a LAIBACH member (and is simultaneously condemned for his objectivization).

## 6.

The basis of LAIBACH's activity lies in its concept of unity, which expresses itself in each media according to appropriate laws (art, music, film...).

The material of LAIBACH manipulation: Taylorism, bruitism, Nazi Kunst, disco...

The principle of work is totally constructed and the compositional process is a dictated "ready-made:" Industrial production is rationally developmental, but if we extract from this process the element of the moment and emphasize it, we also designate to it the mystical dimension of alienation, which reveals the magical component of the industrial process. Repression of the industrial ritual is transformed into a compositional dictate and the politicization of sound can become absolute tonality.

7.

LAIBACH excludes any evolution of the original idea; the original concept is not evolutionary but entelechical, and the presentation is only a link between this static and the changing determinant unit. We take the same stand towards the direct influence of the development of music on the LAIBACH concept; of course, this influence is a material necessity but it is of secondary importance and appears only as a historical musical foundation of the moment which, in its choice is unlimited. LAIBACH expresses its timelessness with the artifacts of the present and it is thus necessary that at the intersection of politics and industrial production (the culture of art, ideology, consciousness) it encounters the elements of both, although it wants to be both. This wide range allows LAIBACH to oscillate, creating the illusion of movement (development).

8.

LAIBACH practices provocation on the revolted state of the alienated consciousness (which must necessarily find itself an enemy) and unites warriors and opponents into an expression of a static totalitarian scream.

It acts as a creative illusion of strict institutionality, as a social theatre of popular culture, and communicates only through non-communication.

9.

Besides LAIBACH, which concerns itself with the manner of industrial production in totalitarianism, there also exist two other groups in the concept of LAIBACH KUNST aesthetics: GERMANIA studies the emotional side, which is outlined in relations to the general ways of emotional, erotic and family life, lauding the foundations of the state functioning of emotions on the old classicist form of new social ideologies.

DREIHUNDERT TAUSEND VERSCHIEDENE KRAWALLE is a retrospective futuristic negative utopia (The era of peace has ended).

10.

LAIBACH is the knowledge of the universality of the moment. It is the revelation of the absence of balance between sex and work, between servitude and activity. It uses all expressions of history to mark this imbalance. This work is without limit; God

has one face, the devil infinitely many. *LAIBACH is the return of action on behalf of the idea.*

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