

NSK: FROM *KAPITAL* TO CAPITAL

Neue Slowenische Kunst
An Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia

Exhibition Guide



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Garage Museum of Contemporary Art

NSK: From Kapital to Capital

Neue Slowenische Kunst—An Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia

September 30–December 9, 2016

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Guide

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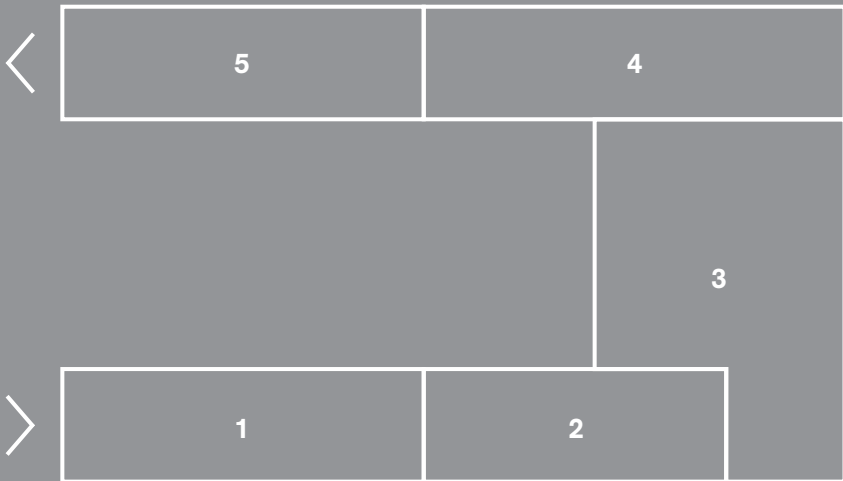
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The collective Neue Slowenische Kunst was founded in 1984 by three groups—the multimedia group Laibach (formed 1980), the visual arts group IRWIN (formed 1983), and Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater (1983–1987). In the same year, the three groups founded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

The emergence of NSK is closely connected to the economic and socio-political context of the 1980s, a turbulent decade that preceded the collapse of the old world order and heralded the ever-increasing reach of capitalism. As a unique self-organized alliance formed in response to this situation, NSK proposed a different system and a new type of institution, developing its own principals of organization, economy, and terminology for the collective's practice. The proposal they put forward challenges the simplistic binary

opposition of socialist versus capitalist ideology, marking NSK as a global cultural phenomenon transcending its specific time and space.

Neue Slowenische Kunst (German for New Slovenian Art) operated with anachronistic images, juxtaposing seemingly contradictory artistic traditions in an ambiguous fashion: Nazi and communist, realist and abstract, Western and Eastern. By repeating the symbols and rituals of several social systems in their various events, concerts, theatrical performances, and paintings—as well as programmatic texts, codified attire and behavior—NSK performed a monumental act of exorcism, framing a world of alternative rules and conventions. The collective's German name challenged the long-repressed trauma resulting from more than a thousand years of German political and cultural hegemony over the small nation of Slovenia. Using the "retro" method as a new artistic approach, NSK looked back in order to examine the present as a continuous and repeated trauma of the past, while simultaneously envisioning a future beyond the failures of socialism or capitalism. In 1992, after Slovenia gained independence with the breakup of Yugoslavia, the group founded an alternative state—the "NSK State in Time"—which brought together a transnational community grounded in aesthetics and thought rather than territorial or economic principles.

NSK can be understood as both a complex and ambivalent reflection of the global events that characterized the 1980s and an intrinsic part of a subculture in Slovenia which took collectivism seriously. The collective succeeded in articulating, at least on an aesthetic level, what the newly-emerging civil society movements in the country could not. Avoiding attempts to improve the existing societal system through critique which subscribed to the values of that system, NSK aimed to bring about fundamental changes through artistic approaches such as the retro method, estrangement, over-identification, appropriation, and by underscoring the economy of pleasure.

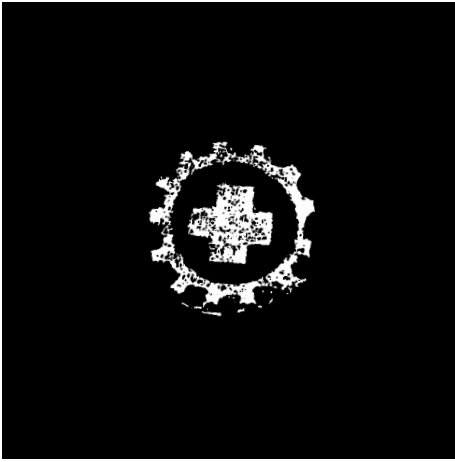
In the current moment, thirty years after the collective was founded, NSK's principles, artistic methods, reactivating of symbols, and their efforts to produce a commons rather than theorizing one resonate with particular strength. In many ways, what unfolded in the 1980s as artistic and political propositions are becoming fully visible and comprehensible only now, making this current presentation of NSK's global legacy all the more pertinent.

NSK: FROM KAPITAL TO CAPITAL

NSK: FROM KAPITAL TO CAPITAL is the first major survey show of the art collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). Curated by Zdenka Badovinac, Director of Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, the exhibition traces key events from 1980 to 1992—concerts, shows, theatrical productions, performances, guerrilla actions, public proclamations—by the four core groups that comprised NSK. In 1992, partly in response to the breakup of Yugoslavia, the groups ceased working as a collective and launched the NSK State in Time, a utopian formation which describes itself as “the first global state of the Universe.”

Within the exhibition, three sections follow the individual groups, and one is dedicated to the five departments, expanding the way each enacted the core principles of NSK within its own field. A fifth section looks at the key themes the groups critically examined together which, after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the formation of the new state of Slovenia, would lead to the creation of the NSK State in Time. NSK’s aesthetic and vast theoretical output made use of various art traditions, including the ideas of the Russian avant-garde, which experienced a revival in Yugoslavia in the early 1980s. Each group adapted the avant-garde’s utopian tendencies and iconography to produce individual versions of the retro method they adopted as an artistic approach.

In the early 1990s, the collective started an intense relationship with the Moscow art scene which, in 1992, resulted in the organization of the NSK Moscow Embassy—a month-long series of lectures and debates as part of the NSK State in Time. Their exhibition in Moscow twenty-four years later can thus be seen as both a symbolic “return” and an homage to the birthplace of one of their major influences, the Russian avant-garde.



Laibach was formed on June 1, 1980 in the industrial town of Trbovlje in Yugoslavia (now Slovenia). The group members are anonymous and work as a team—a collective spirit—according to the principles of industrial production and totalitarianism in which the organization speaks for the individual. The flexible and anonymous membership of the group works on the quadruple principle (the use of the pseudonyms Eber, Saliger, Keller, and Dachauer), concealing within its structure the inclusion of an arbitrary number of subjects.

The group's approach to art, as well as to social and political reality, adheres to the principle of "retro-avant-garde." Accordingly, the material it works with is often sourced from various locations and historical periods, and then copied and montaged. At other times, Laibach intervenes directly into existing models. Through the use of contradictory motifs, militarist imagery, and manifestos quoting seemingly incompatible sources—from political speeches to hunting club regulations—Laibach explores the relationship between art and ideology. Its industrial aesthetics serve to emphasize the group's origins, referring to the working-class and revolutionary traditions of the Red District, the industrial area of Trbovlje. Laibach continuously returns to the industrial era in order to use its almost archaic iconography to deconstruct the post-industrial nature of both socialism and capitalism, as well as that of the cultural industry. Laibach's heavy, booming industrial

music draws on a number of sources, from Bach and Wagner to more contemporary classical music by Gustav Holst and Krzysztof Penderecki, as well as the electronic music of Kraftwerk, and pop.

The group courted controversy from the beginning, provoking strong reactions from the authorities. The name Laibach first appeared in 1144 as the original name for the city of Ljubljana. It came into usage once again during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and finally, in 1943, during the German occupation of the city. From 1983 to 1987, the group was banned from performing in Yugoslavia under this name. The key Laibach motif is the cross—an independent symbol integrating a number of artistic, totalitarian, and religious references. It is not intended to be used for any sort of social identification, but is instead a sign which aims to arouse social fascination. Laibach shocked people with its use of Nazi iconography, treating it as a taboo topic which had to be foregrounded and connected to the totalitarian impulses within socialist society. In its artistic productions, Laibach brings together a variety of practices, in line with the concept of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art).

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

For their first public show as part of the exhibition *Alternative Slovenian Culture*, the members of Laibach wanted to present their multimedia work in their home town of Trbovlje. On the day the exhibition, three controversial posters appeared around town: the largest was an invitation to the exhibition; the second depicted a violent scene from John Carpenter's horror film *Halloween*; and the third featured a black equilateral cross—later also called the Laibach cross—which was to become a permanent symbol of the group, and which triggered a host of associations.

The local authorities had the posters removed from the walls on the same afternoon and banned the exhibition and all related events. They claimed that the posters insulted public morality and socialist humanity, and incited religious intolerance. This scandal announced the emergence of Laibach on the cultural scene, as well as its future strategy. It would be more than a decade before the group appeared in its home town again, performing at the abandoned Trbovlje Power Station in December 1990.

2. *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst*, Srećna nova umetnost Gallery, SKC, Belgrade, June 14–18, 1981

The first exhibition in the series *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst* took place in the Galerija Srećna nova umetnost [Happy New Art Gallery] in Belgrade's Student Cultural Center. The only work from the exhibition known to have been preserved is *Tarquinius and Lucrece* (1979), a variation on the motif of stabbing.

Happy New Art Gallery was a center of fanzine production, and the exhibition was accompanied by the first Laibach fanzine, composed of documents related to the revolutionary history of Trbovlje's miners in the period between the two world wars. The fanzine was a chronicle of the town's community, highlighting Laibach as part of a new era, whose path was prepared by the revolutionary spirit of the Red District. The exhibition was dominated by imagery of workers. It explored themes such as freedom, manipulation of both individuals and the masses, issues of totalitarianism and democracy, torture and oppression. As a result, the group's identity and character were clearly established, and it became obvious that music was only one aspect of a wider principle of action called Laibach Kunst.

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

Laibach's first public performance in Ljubljana took place at Disco FV 112/15—located on a student campus—which played an important role in the alternative culture scene of the 1980s. Conceived as an environmental exhibition, *Air Crash Victims* was staged as a rapid reaction to a tragedy: an air crash in Corsica which killed all 180 passengers and crew on board.

The atmosphere around the tragedy, further exacerbated by elements of horror aesthetics and the distance from the event, was made all the more palpable by Laibach's first appearance in Ljubljana. The performance was extremely loud and comprised a powerful audio-visual experience, based on repetitions and transformations of sound. Band member Srečko Bajda commented on the instruments they used: “[They] were created out of necessity, because we didn't have any instruments. But it was also about the idea that a new music requires new machines. Mastering the means of

production was crucial. This was in keeping with the tradition of twentieth-century avant-gardes—especially noise, futurist, and concrete music—but it also corresponded to the practice of contemporary industrial music bands.”

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

Each of the Laibach exhibitions in ŠKUC Gallery took place over the course of a single evening, attracting large audiences and often provoking strong reactions.

The first exhibition was experimental in character, combining the practice of Xerox montage with a noise concert of the Laibach Kunst subdivision 300,000 V.K. (*Dreihundert Tausend Verschiedene Krawalle*). The event was announced on Xerox posters featuring a black cross inside a cogwheel, and created outrage because of the use of German and of the word “Krawall” (din, racket). The invitation was similarly provocative: it bore the taboo image of Hitler visiting the *Great German Art Exhibition* (Munich, 1937) on one side, and a programmatic text on the other. The text asserted that art and totalitarianism were not mutually exclusive and that individual artistic freedom was an illusion. It announced “a demasking and recapitulation of the official trans-avant-garde.” Along with reworked and labelled Socialist Realist prints referencing artist Janez Knez’s Red District motifs, the exhibition included large images of the Laibach cross and two wall-size compositions created from black-and-white photocopies. One of these featured a classic painting of a stag (an appropriation of Sir Edwin Landseer’s *Monarch of the Glen* from 1851) against a background made up of multiplied images of a metalworker.

5. *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst*, Srećna nova umetnost Gallery, SKC, Belgrade, May 15–18, 1982

Laibach appropriated the image of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* and used it for a poster that announced the exhibition *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst* at Srećna nova umetnost gallery in May 1982. In Laibach’s version, the screaming figure is set in an industrial environment and Munch’s primal scream is escalated to an industrial scream epitomizing the sound of the band Laibach.

The appropriation of existing images was to become an important strategy of artistic production for the group, and later for the entire NSK collective. In 1983, Laibach shot their first staged music video, at Disco FV, for the song "Mi kujemo bodočnost" [We are Forging the Future]. The video, directed by Richard Heslop, was inspired by George A. Romero's horror film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). The faces of Laibach members were painted in black and white to resemble skulls. They moved with stiff, jerking movements like zombies, referencing Munch's *The Scream*. The emphasis was on an anonymous, depersonalized position onto which viewers might project their own fears.

6. Laibach at the Novi Rock festival, Križanke, Ljubljana, September 10, 1982

One of the best-known Laibach concerts, which acquired cult status, took place as part of the *Novi Rock* festival of alternative music. The concert kicked off with a provocation: the group was introduced using words taken from one of the numerous protest letters that expressed people's outrage at its German name: "Is it possible that a youth band in Ljubljana—the first Hero City of Yugoslavia—has been permitted to bear a name that forces us to recall the bitter memories of Laibach?" The tension was exacerbated by the violent scream of the group's instruments, and peaked when singer Tomaž Hostnik walked onstage wearing military boots and an officer's uniform. He complemented his totalitarian appearance by yelling Mussolini's words at a confused and enraged audience: "Cari amici soldati, i tempi della pace sono passati!" [Dear friends, soldiers, the times of peace are over!]. The audience started throwing objects at the stage, and part of a bottle hit Hostnik in the face, injuring him. He continued the performance: standing at full attention with head raised high, he faced the audience, his face bleeding for all to see.

This event marked the final severing of ties between Laibach and the punk rock movement. In distinct contrast to the raw, immediate sincerity of the punks, Laibach developed a strategy based on manipulation.

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

Laibach continued to use farce as a means of critique of totalitarian governments—first attempted at the *Novi Rock* festival—at a show in Zagreb later that year. The band members wore Yugoslavian People’s Army uniforms. For the first time, they also wore bands with black equilateral crosses on their sleeves. Laibach planned to use military smoke bombs during the show, but one went off too soon, injuring a friend of the band. Military police came to the venue, along with the paramedics. When asked why they were wearing Yugoslavian army uniforms and using weapons, the group answered that they were working on war-related subject matter. Just as Laibach had incorporated an incident provoked by the audience into its performance at the *Novi Rock* festival, the intervention of the repressive organs of the state became part of the Zagreb event.

Another unusual feature of this concert was that it was performed despite the absence of the drummer. *Touch of Evil* was also the last concert that Tomaž Hostnik played with Laibach; ten days later, he committed suicide.

8. “Totalitarizem,” *Nova revija*, 13–14, 1983

In 1983, the literary journal *Nova revija* published for the first time in its entirety Laibach’s foundational manifesto: the “Ten Items of the Covenant,” collectively written by group members a year before. The document emphasized ten key starting points for the group’s work, such as following the models of industrial production and totalitarianism, collectivism and member anonymity; analyzing the relationship between ideology, culture and politics; negating the originality of ideas; practicing provocation and manipulation; and identification with ideology.

Nova revija was also the first to publish the Laibach Kunst organigram, which was created in 1982 and later used as a model for the Neue Slowenische Kunst organigram. It offered a schematic explanation of the principles of the group’s organization and activities. The texts were published using the title “Action in the Name of an Idea” as part of an ad hoc rubric entitled “Totalitarianism,” as demanded by Laibach in a letter addressed to *Nova revija*. The letter also stressed the purpose of publishing this contribution:

raising the fighting morale of readers. The contribution started with a full-page reproduction of *The Metal Worker* (1980), followed by two quotes by Hitler ("Art is a sublime mission") and Stalin ("Artists are engineers of human souls" [misquoted]).

9. *Ausstellung Laibach Kunst—Monumental Retro-Avant-Garde*, ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana, April 21, 1983

For this exhibition, Laibach printed a poster with a reinterpretation of the painting *Coffee Drinker* (a popular painting by Slovenian artist Ivana Kobilca, made in 1888), in which the coffee cup bore the Laibach cross. The same image was used for the invitation, while the other side featured a passage from the so-called "Rayonist Manifesto" (1913) written by Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova. The excerpt from the manifesto proclaimed the rejection of individuality and of all historical and contemporary styles. Below it, the text stated that Laibach's exhibition "represents the end of the era of movement, of searching, of stylistic and aesthetic innovations" and "a more mature, critical re-evaluation of art". The exhibition was an homage to deceased group member Tomaž Hostnik. Besides the reworked and labelled Socialist Realist prints with Red District motifs by artist Janez Knez, there were also a number of oil paintings with additions of honey, grain or tar, constructed from appropriated works and featuring Laibach crosses as well as other interventions and montages.

The exhibition took place just before the joint concerts of Laibach and two British groups, 23 Skidoo and Last Few Days, in Ljubljana and Zagreb. At the same time, the fanzine *The Instrumentality of the State Machine* was published.

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

The appearance of Laibach at the 12th Music Biennial in Zagreb was announced by a poster depicting a Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg. Laibach performed with the British bands Last Few Days and 23 Skidoo in an event entitled *We are Forging the Future*.

The concert included an installation composed of four video monitors on each

side of the stage and a projection with the propaganda film *The Revolution Is Not Over Yet* by Milan Ljubić (1971), celebrating the successes of socialist Yugoslavia. At certain points in the film, when Tito was shown giving a speech, a pornographic scene on Super 8 film was repeatedly projected over it, so that both scenes were superimposed. The concert organizers, the police and even soldiers rushed into the hall and attempted to end the concert amidst complete chaos. These events resulted in a country-wide scandal, followed by a media witch-hunt against the group.

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

11. Laibach and TV Ljubljana, XY-Unsolved, TV Interview, July 23, 1983

The same year of the scandal around the concert *We Are Forging the Future*, Laibach accepted an invitation to appear on the cultural-political program "TV Weekly," which was broadcast on national television. The group staged a controversial appearance, executed as a meticulously directed artistic performance. They had accepted the invitation exclusively on their own terms. They wore Yugoslavian military uniforms and asked that the journalist submit his questions in advance. The interview took place at ŠKUC Gallery, with *The Metal Worker* and posters depicting a Nazi rally in the background.

During the interview they described themselves as the first TV generation, saying: "Laibach is aware of the manipulative abilities of modern media instruments (and the system which connects them), so it exploits fully the repressive power of media information in its propaganda actions." After the interview, in a conclusion added later, the journalist Jure Pengov addressed the public and called for a political lynching of the group. His appeal was successful. They were banned, and remained so until February 1987.

Laibach published a statement distancing itself from fascist and neo-Nazi tendencies and inviting the public to discuss the group's activities. They suggested viewers critically analyze genuine manifestations of fascism in

Slovenia, in particular the fascism of information, as demonstrated by the program "TV Weekly."

12. Document. Occupied Europe, ŠKUC Gallery, Ljubljana, May 5, 1984

The exhibition *Document. Occupied Europe* was organized despite the ban on performing and on the use of the name Laibach that had been in effect since 1983. It presented posters, photographs, and videos from *The Occupied Europe Tour*. The exhibition was accompanied by the release of the cassette *Laibach: Resurrection in Berlin*, recorded at a concert in Berlin, and the publication *Over Europe*, which documented the tour and its reception in the media. There was also a poster featuring a metalworker, hammer raised above his head, astride "Laibach-occupied Europe."

This was to be the last Laibach exhibition until 2005. The tour had heralded Laibach's breakthrough on the international music and music publishing scene, but, before and during the tour, the group underwent significant changes in its membership. There was also a change in strategy, which now focused on producing concerts and albums, and on creating an integrated performative and visual image. It no longer included visual arts projects and gallery exhibitions of paintings and print materials.

13. Laibach Concerts in Germany, 1985–1987

In February 1985, Laibach performed at the Atonal festival in Berlin which was dedicated to avant-garde electronic and experimental music. During the concert, the frontman Milan Fras smeared his face and head with honey and gold paint—an allusion to the artist Joseph Beuys' performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965)—in reference to the redeeming and regenerative aspects of artistic creation. In an early interview, Laibach stated: "Our performance has a cleansing (exorcism!) and regenerative (honey + gold) function." The group's practice of terror in the form of overwhelming sound, which was supposed to have a therapeutic effect on the audience, was explained in a similar vein.

In November of the same year, Laibach embarked on its first independent tour to West Germany, entitled *Laibach uber dem Deutschland—die*

erste Bombardierung. The poster for the tour employed a montage of a photograph by Jane Štravs depicting band members in uniform posing in military postures, with bombers flying across the sky above their heads. At the concerts, a rabbit would be brought on stage, again referencing Beuys. At that time, Laibach shows were characterized by a cold, militant-classicist form, strict military percussion and the sound of horns, classical music models, and lyrics in German and Slovenian.

14. No Fire Escape in Hell, Manchester Polytechnic, Manchester, September 4, 1986

In 1986, Laibach was invited by the controversial British choreographer and dancer Michael Clark to collaborate on the dance performance *No Fire Escape in Hell*. From the orchestra pit, they provided live musical accompaniment for the third part of the performance, which followed the transformation of dancers into public personalities and into deities.

In this “play of light and shadow,” to quote Clark, Laibach’s music and appearance represented the shadow: a frightening and aggressive element, the sheer force of their sound encouraging or even compelling the dancers to perform with more intensity than usual. The performance comprised a raw fusion of music and classical ballet moves, with an eclectic blend of Eastern and Western aesthetics.

In 1986, director Daniel Landin created the short film *Država* [*The State*]. It was shot at Sadler’s Wells Theater in London, home of the *No Fire Escape in Hell* performance, with the collaboration of Michael Clark. Sequences from the film were also used for a music video. From an aesthetic point of view, it is widely considered one of Laibach’s most totalitarian videos.

15. The Ban on the Name Laibach, 1983–1987

Following their controversial interview on “TV Weekly” in 1983, Laibach were banned from using the name or making public appearances.

A secret concert in Ljubljana took place on December 21, 1984. It was announced using posters featuring a black cross on a white background;

the only concrete information posted was the time and venue. The banned name was replaced with the black Laibach cross, in keeping with the group's statement: "The very name and the sign are the visual materialization of the Idea at the level of an enigmatic cognitive symbol." The concert was dedicated to the memory of Tomaž Hostnik, who committed suicide in 1982.

The first legal Laibach concert in Ljubljana after the five-year ban, *Svoji k svojim* [Birds of a Feather], took place on February 17, 1987 at the Festival Hall.

16. Yugoslavian Tour *Sympathy for the Devil*, March 30, 1989

The *Sympathy for the Devil* tour was named after Laibach's album, which featured cover versions of the eponymous Rolling Stones song. The poster for the tour depicted an exemplary six-member Aryan family, taken from a Nazi propaganda poster promoting higher birth rates. In the background, instead of the Germanic eagle from the reverse of the Deutsche Mark coin, was the reverse side of the Yugoslavian dinar, with the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia coat of arms and the burning torches. At the time of Laibach's Yugoslavian tour, demands for democratization and for a fundamental restructuring of the Yugoslavian state were being openly expressed in Slovenia; and a sense of foreboding, of impending war and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, loomed.

After successful concerts in Ljubljana, Sarajevo, Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split, the provocation escalated with the group's two shows in Belgrade. Each concert was prefaced with a speech given by Peter Mlakar, member of the Neue Slowenische Kunst Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, in which he would address the Serbian nation, warning it of the imminent catastrophic war to come. The speech would be given in German and Serbian, and begin with the words: "My Serbian brothers! You are the masters here. But we are not going to allow you to be violated," which the audience recognized as the nationalist call to battle given by the Serbian president Slobodan Milošević in Kosovo. All the while, a Third Reich film entitled *The Bombing of Belgrade* ran in the background.

17. Laibach Music videos

Die Liebe, 1986, directed by Marijan Osole-Max

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

Life is Life, 1987, directed by Daniel Landin

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

Across the Universe, 1988, directed by Bucko i Tucko



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

Shortly after their first "classical" exhibition, *Back to the USA*, held in Ljubljana in 1984, IRWIN started working on a number of projects that focused on Slovenian art groups or movements which the group recognized as crucial reference points for defining its own activity. In addition to artistic relevance, there were two other selection criteria: the contemporaneity and close connectedness between IRWIN and the other groups with which they founded the collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) in 1984; and the importance of Slovenian impressionists and the group OHO for the development of Slovenian visual arts and of Slovenian society in general.

One of IRWIN's most important projects is the series *Was ist Kunst*. Evolving over more than thirty years, this series of paintings currently numbers

several hundred works mounted in heavy, often black frames. The key theme of the series is exploring the ideological context of art. It started with the appropriation, development, and transformation of motifs used by Laibach Kunst: the iconography of Socialist Realism, Nazi propaganda, religious art, the art of avant-garde movements, and archetypal Slovenian works of art.

Another guiding principle of IRWIN's art is the priority of the chosen motif over artistic style, which is described as "the dictate of the motif" over "the dictate of style." The mode of execution is thus secondary to the motif. The author is also secondary, and IRWIN's works were all signed collectively, with the painter regarded as the chronicler of their time and culture. IRWIN also developed a specific strategy of institutional critique, drawing attention to the exclusion of Eastern European art from the international art system, and making a major contribution to the emergence of artistic histories of Yugoslavian and Eastern European art, as evidenced by the *Fra-Yu-Kult* and *NSK Embassy Moscow* projects, which it carried out in collaboration with other NSK groups.

1. Early Graffiti Projects, 1983–1984

In 1983 and 1984, a group of artists (most of them still students at the Ljubljana Academy of Fine Arts) who would later take the name Rose Irwin Sélavy, produced graffiti paintings on paper and on walls and presented them at exhibitions at Disco FV and ŠKUC Gallery. By using graffiti, they could distance themselves from institutional art and position themselves within rock and punk culture.

The group's first exhibition, *Slaughters and Tortures*, included graffiti paintings on paper depicting massacres and torture during World War II. Adapting the subject matter to the club venue and its social mores, the authors correlated the ritual of torture with the ritual of dancing and with the behavior typical for a rock club. For the second exhibition, *For Long I Hoped and Feared*, the group chose the topic of eroticism, depicting sexual activities (both homosexual and heterosexual) and sadomasochistic practices. The exhibition underlined the fact that pornography, which was forbidden in Yugoslavia at the time, could only be represented in an artistic context. On other occasions, the graffiti works were based on photographs of scenes from the

Bauhaus theater—as in the work *Bauhaus*—or associated with Orthodox icons and their overall effect (*Medieval Obscurity—Russian Sacral Art—Icons*).

As a result of the graffiti *Hysteria and Her Two Retro Girlfriends*—where the group used the motif of Rank Xerox, a character from the comic strip magazine *Frigidaire*—the office of ŠKUC Gallery was completely transformed, giving it a new wave or “alternative” appearance. With this intervention, IRWIN symbolically moved into ŠKUC Gallery and would strongly influence its future cultural policy.

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

The first “classical” exhibition of the group is considered to be *Back to the USA*, based on German curator Klaus Honnef’s touring show *Back to the USA* (1983–1984), which aimed to present artists from the New York scene in Europe. IRWIN’s proposition in Ljubljana offered “reconstructions” of selected pieces from Honnef’s exhibition. The artists did not follow the original models particularly closely: some pieces were altered, reproduced in different formats, materials, and techniques. Dušan Mandič, for example, executed Cindy Sherman’s photo series *Untitled Film Stills* as video stills; Borut Vogelnik “reconstructed” Richard Bosman’s painting *Sunday Morning* as a story and depicted it as three separate scenes executed as a wood-cut; Bojan Štokelj cast busts of his colleagues in plaster as a nod to the work of John Ahearn; while Andrej Savski brought together the duality of Neil Jenney’s motifs and style in a single image. Jonathan Borofsky’s installation, *Man with Briefcase*, was adapted by Roman Uranjek to the smaller exhibition venue, with the silhouetted figure painted on a sheet of plastic in foreshortened perspective, as the work was based on a photograph from an exhibition catalogue rather than the original.

The differences in materials and execution pointed to the very different circumstances of production in Yugoslavia and the West, as well as to the different statuses enjoyed by artists.

3. Red District, Mala galerija, Ljubljana, 1985

The first *Red District* exhibition was held at Mala galerija, a former temporary outpost of the Moderna galerija exhibition space. It included a series of IRWIN prints based on Slovenian artist Janez Knez's prints of the 1950s and 1960s. Knez's motifs had already been repeated by his son Dejan Knez, a member of Laibach, and so in reusing them IRWIN played the role of double chronicler, narrating both a local tradition and that of Laibach Kunst.

The exhibition included a series of linocuts printed on paper that had been soaked with animal blood, with black coal edges and set in gilded frames. Later, IRWIN would return to this theme, producing the object *Red District* (1987), which was based on an enlarged print by Janez Knez. Bronze casts of a male sculpture's muscular back were placed at the corners of a gilded frame. Standing on supports fashioned from the found remains of a tombstone, the object was designed to appear monumental, like a Socialist Realist altar.

IRWIN constructed its art on suppressed truths about the industrial and mining region of Zasavje, where the town of Trbovlje is located. They put "the blood of the miners" in frames as if it were a holy relic, attempting to preserve the emancipatory power of the local workers' history, as well as of their fierce rebellion against fascism. With these gestures, IRWIN brought attention to the potential regenerating power of art.

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

In 1985, IRWIN made the project *Like to Like*. It drew on the tradition of Slovenian avant-gardes, specifically on the art of the group OHO, which emerged in the mid-1960s first as a movement, then as group, and finally, in the early 1970s, as a commune whose members aspired to fuse art and life.

For the project *Like to Like*, IRWIN began by creating four oil paintings employing motifs from various OHO works from 1969 such as Tomaž Šalamun's haystack, David Nez's mirrors, and Marko Pogačnik's family of fire, air, and water. Then, in June 1985, they exposed their paintings to the elements: earth, fire, water, and air. Andrej Savski buried his haystack painting overnight; Borut Vogeljik seared the image of the burning field with

a blowtorch; Dušan Mandič submerged the canvas depicting plastic bags on water in a river, keeping it there for an hour; and Roman Uranjek exposed his painting to air by strapping it to the roof of a car and driving from Ljubljana to Trbovlje. As a result, OHO member Marko Pogačnik suggested that these IRWIN paintings fell within the overall concept of OHO.

These conceptual gestures by IRWIN were meant to “preserve” the ephemeral material left by OHO actions. By constructing these works, the primary aim was to bring OHO, who were central to their own interests, to wider attention and with this to highlight how radical art can regain a more central position by critical references and repetitions in the work of new generations of artists.

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

In 1989, IRWIN developed the idea for a permanent collection called *Fra-Yu-Kult* as a result of its collaboration with Jadran Adamović, who was on good terms with the monks of a Franciscan monastery.

Located in the small town of Široki Brijeg in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the monastery became famous in the 1980s, when the Virgin Mary was said to have appeared there. It rapidly became a destination for Roman Catholic pilgrims from all over the world. The Franciscan brothers decided to take some of the unanticipated influx of money and set it aside for the acquisition of art. IRWIN responded to the idea by suggesting that the monastery purchase works by the most radical Yugoslav artists of the 1970s and 1980s, who were not—for the most part—included in any state collection. As a result, the monastery’s collection was able to circumvent the state, institutions, curators, and critics, developing only through the participation of artists. It was accompanied by a catalogue, which is one of the very few detailed presentations of Yugoslav art of the period.

IRWIN saw its participation in the assembling of this collection as part of its art: both an aesthetic concept and a pragmatic gesture aimed at building an art system, which did not exist in Eastern Europe at the time.

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

The project *Slovenian Athens* started in December 1985 with a “missive” or official invitation from IRWIN, inviting artists from various aesthetic schools and generations to produce works using the motif of the sower. The purpose of the project was a “planar and plastic” reconstruction of Slovenian modernism. At the center of *Slovenian Athens* was an icon of Slovenian art, *The Sower* (1907) by painter Ivan Grohar. IRWIN’s missive was followed by an exhibition at Moderna galerija in 1991.

The title of the project refers to ideas developed by certain Slovenian intellectuals, who imagined Ljubljana as the spiritual center of Europe. IRWIN’s choice of the sower motif and their allusion to a grand intellectual dream which, if fulfilled, would have raised Slovenia above its provincial status, was intended to deconstruct national myths.

IRWIN’s concept for this project was based on the “dictate of the motif,” which the group considers a prerequisite for the juxtaposition of different styles and aesthetic concepts in order to gain a distanced view of history—a view from outside the logic of development of modernist styles and modernism’s concept of originality. In parallel with the *Slovenian Athens* project, IRWIN also developed a related series of five paintings, which was first displayed at Riverside Gallery in London in 1987.

7. NSK Embassy Moscow—Interiors, 1992

After organizing the NSK Embassy Moscow in a private apartment (see pages 27–28) between May 10 and June 10, 1992, IRWIN made five paintings as a means of preserving the experience of the event.

The five painters of IRWIN defined three common points of departure for their paintings. They agreed to:

1. use a base board on which a photograph of the display of IRWIN’s paintings on the walls of the apartment at 12, Leninsky Prospect would be mounted under Plexiglas;
2. attach their paintings onto the base with a webbing strap tied in the shape of a cross, in order to point out the mobility of their paintings;

3. make the label with the information on the painting and the project in the form of a certificate bearing the stamps of IRWIN and NSK.

8. *Was ist Kunst*, 1984—

IRWIN's project *Was ist Kunst* started in 1984 and is ongoing. *Was ist Kunst* paintings are created in various artistic styles, ranging from medieval to modernist and avant-garde, from totalitarian art to pop culture. The project also brings together a variety of motifs associated with IRWIN's role of chronicler within the NSK collective: it directly appropriates motifs developed by Laibach, other NSK groups, and Slovenian art as a whole.

In the *Was ist Kunst* series, socialist motifs are associated with various types of realisms. The teeming imagery brought together by *Was ist Kunst* calls into question any notion of purity and originality; it speaks about the inherent eclecticism of national cultures, in particular smaller cultures like that of Slovenia. IRWIN called their method "emphatic eclecticism."

Heavy frames made of tar, timber, and coal—often made in collaboration with other artists, particularly Slovenian sculptors—play a particular role in *Was ist Kunst*. The frames demarcate the autonomous space of each work of art, and also tie the works together conceptually and visually. In public spaces, the *Was ist Kunst* paintings are usually displayed together, but they are conceived as market-oriented objects intended to hang in private apartments, and their formats are adapted to that purpose. These paintings do not hide their antagonistic nature as both critiques of the art system and its products.



1. NSK Embassy Moscow, May 10–June 10, 1992. Organized by IRWIN

In response to a 1991 invitation to participate in the *APT-ART International* project in Moscow, IRWIN proposed that NSK move there for a month.¹ The action *NSK Embassy Moscow* took place in a private apartment at 12 Leninsky Prospect from May 10 to June 10, 1992. The concept of the Embassy was a live installation.

The central event was a one-week program of lectures and public discussions organized by Eda Čufer in cooperation with IRWIN. The project also included a series of documents and artefacts by IRWIN, NSK, and their guests Goran Đorđević, Mladen Stilinović, and Milivoj Bijelić; an action in homage to H. P. Noordung by the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung; and the daily operation of a videotheque, phonotheque, and library. The aim of this event was to confront two similar social contexts—those of the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. The meeting of individuals with similar

¹ *APT-ART International* (1991–1993) was a project initiated by curator Viktor Misiano, artist Konstantin Zvezdochotov, and critic Elena Kurlyandtseva, which aimed to show international artists in domestic settings, in homage to the Soviet practice of apartment exhibitions.

aesthetic and ethical interests, as well as social experiences, revealed that the topic which prompted the most intense debate was the art and culture of the 1980s and their role in the transformation of Eastern Europe.



2. NSK State in Time (1992–)

NSK Embassy Moscow was followed by a text written by Eda Čufer and IRWIN, entitled “NSK State in Time.” After the breakup of Yugoslavia and the end of socialism, NSK’s “state” was one of the rare entities to offer a different vision from the emerging capitalist system.

NSK State in Time was created in the autumn of 1992 by the groups IRWIN, Laibach, Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, New Collectivism, and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy. The new movement brought into existence an artistic state, a global community based not on territorial or economic principles, but on aesthetics and cognitive principles. The first citizens of NSK were the groups’ members, but ever since its founding, citizenship has been open to all who decide to apply for an NSK Passport. The state has been a central preoccupation for NSK ever since its founding, a fact evidenced by the organizational scheme representing the hierarchical structure of the functioning of individual groups, headed by the Immanent Consistent Spirit. Both this

organigram and the "Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members" mirror existing documents describing the organization of state structures in the exaggerated manner so characteristic of NSK.

3. NSK Organigram, 1986

In 1986, NSK created the organigram—an organizational diagram showing the various real and imaginary groups—reflecting the trend of self-organization within Ljubljana's alternative scene of the period, as well as NSK's interrogative re-materialization of ideology in the field of the visual arts.

The organigram took the process of alternative institutionalization to its (il)logical formal extreme, recapitulating and attempting to transcend the institutional anarchy of the period and the complex, deliberately opaque web of state and parastate organizations within the late Yugoslavian system. The diagram appears to symbolize the traumatic return of an inhuman, mass-organized totalitarian state. Its significance did not diminish with the collapse of the Yugoslavian system or the fall of Communism. Like many other NSK works, it looked forward while simultaneously reflecting on the past. Its menacing quality resides in the representation of the political state of the present, a period marked by the dominance of corporate ideologies.

4. Tomaž Mastnak, *The 1980s: A Retro Future*

The timeline conceived and compiled by Tomaž Mastnak especially for this exhibition represents a narrative of the 1980s that differs from that prevalent since the declaration of Slovenian independence. According to the latter, the principal driver behind the events of the 1980s was the establishment of an independent and sovereign nation-state. Mastnak suggests that what we witnessed was, on the contrary, Slovenia's increasing loss of independence.

Moreover, because of the increasing entanglement of nation-states in global processes—dictated, above all, by the United States—the state as such has lost its role and independence. What really defines the 1980s is not the triumph of an abstractly conceived democracy, it is the triumph of the West in the Cold War, which appears to be a process of democratization. The events highlighted in this alternative narrative show the suppression

of democratic movements, the endorsement of coups and dictatorships, and military interventions across the globe. The more the real power of global capital grew, the more individual states clung to their national symbols. This was what NSK underscored: they made evident the fact that Nazi fascism had not been conquered on the symbolic level. Rather, the state was left holding the symbols of authority, while real power had been taken over by multinational corporations.

5. Laibach, “Geburt einer Nation,” *Opus Dei*, 1987

Laibach’s first cover version, “Geburt einer Nation” (originally “One Vision” by Queen), was included in the album *Opus Dei* (1987), which inaugurated Laibach’s period of greatest success and their tactic of reworking Anglo-Saxon rock “classics.” Despite their transgressive content, Laibach’s music videos received extensive airplay on MTV, an institution Laibach would both benefit from and attack. Laibach retroactively transformed “One Vision” into a fascistic hymn to power, an effect amplified by the bombastic militaristic arrangement and harsh German vocal. The opening bars set a militant, uncompromising tone that creates the uncanny impression that the song is the natural expression of Laibach’s *Weltanschauung* (world view). Lyrics such as “One man, one goal, one solution” have sinister connotations when sung in German by a group such as Laibach, and Queen’s song loses its innocence and neutrality. Laibach did not ascribe any specific hidden agenda beyond the conquest of new audiences, but amplified and made problematic the operation of unquestioning worship common to both totalitarian mass mobilization and capitalist mass consumption.

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

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

On June 6, 1992 between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m., IRWIN and Michael Benson performed the action *Black Square on Red Square* in which fifteen former-Yugoslavian and Russian artists, critics, and curators—participants in the month-

long series of lectures, discussions, and exhibitions that later came to be known as *NSK Embassy Moscow*—re-enacted Malevich’s iconic painting *Black Square* on Moscow’s Red Square.

There were no announcements or prepared statements; no one appeared to be central to the event. A somewhat unusual mix of artists, critics, curators, police, and FSB officers, as well as tourists and native Muscovites, mingled around the square and talked casually. Half an hour after the participants unfolded the 22×22 m piece of fabric on Red Square, they folded it up, took it to the edge of the square, where a small bus was waiting, and drove away.

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

In 1986, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater (SNST) staged the lyrical epic poem *Baptism at the Savica* by France Prešeren—a modern Slovenian national myth. SNST approached the task from a radically different angle than that dictated by a canonical reading of Prešeren. Instead of harking back to the pre-modern, mythical pagan epoch when Slovenians lost their “national” autonomy in a battle with Germanic Christianizers (the theme of the epic), they focused on the element of “rebaptizing,” characteristic of twentieth-century revolutionary culture. The entire NSK collective participated in the realization of this spectacular event, which brought to life Wagner’s model of a “total work of art” (*Gesamtkunstwerk*).

The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater’s successful breakthrough from the underground stage to the largest stage of Cankarjev dom attests both to SNST’s acumen and determination in pursuing its stated goals, and to the willingness of Slovenian institutions to participate in the broader processes of democratization that were taking place in late-socialist countries in the mid-1980s.

8. Institution Building

NSK’s art can be compared with the international genre of institutional critique. There is, however, one key difference: while in the West this critique

predominantly dealt with strong existing institutions and often involved proposals for their improvement, the central idea in the case of NSK focused on *building* institutions. This idea is expressed in NSK's projects and manifestos, shaped by the collective's analysis of the relationship between culture and ideology, both in the local context—where the collective, by virtue of its extensive membership, self-organization, and strong network of like-minded people, served as a strategic stand-in for the official (and poorly-developed) cultural infrastructure—and in the international context, which they aspired to enter as equal partners. The following three events, which took place as interventions or critical commentaries on various local institutions, highlight NSK's institutional focus in particularly iconic ways.

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

In its first programmatic text, "The Founding Act" of October 13, 1983, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater published a four-year program, which was divided into "internal" (creative) and "external" (manifesto) parts. The *Resurrection* was part of the latter, an act addressing Slovenian institutional theaters and calling on them to "revive the performing arts."

Using the metaphor of the ninety-five "theses of Luther," members of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater posted ninety-five theses of their own on the doors of Slovenian institutional theaters. SNST called on Slovenia's institutional theaters to begin a public discussion on fundamental questions of the performing arts, inviting them to a collective revival and to create "a unified Slovenian national theater." As part of the joint NSK action, IRWIN exhibited its monumental painting *The Resurrection of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater*.

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

In 1984, the members of Laibach posed for photographer Jane Štravs

outside central institutions in Ljubljana, in front of buildings and sculptures associated with state building, ideology, and totalitarian impulses, that is, with all the objects of Laibach's concept of "over-identification."

They deliberately excluded the Slovenian National Assembly, since at the time it did not really function as a state institution: as the assembly of one of the six republics of Yugoslavia it did not operate autonomously, but was largely subject to the central authority in Belgrade. Posing in front of these highly symbolic institutions, self-confident and striking militant poses, Laibach looked as if they were standing in front of their own doors, as if they themselves were institutions.

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

Acting outside the official Biennale programme, IRWIN staged an exhibition in a private apartment, showing a selection of paintings from the *Was ist Kunst* series and putting up posters bearing the NSK coat of arms, guerrilla-style, ahead of the Biennale opening. With the help of Chrissie Iles, a flyer presenting the IRWIN exhibition as part of the Biennale went into circulation, stating the location of their "pavilion" and thus incorporating the project in the Biennale's information system.

The purpose of the poster action was to promote both the exhibition and the presence of the entire NSK collective at the Biennale. The exhibition itself continued the tradition of exhibiting in private apartments, or Apt-Art, which functioned as a parallel infrastructure during the socialist period and was often the only option available for exhibiting non-official art. The project also drew on a long tradition of rebelling against prevailing modes of selection and of intruding into dominant patterns of art presentation.

9. NSK Members, Photographs 1984–1992

For the members of NSK, every appearance in public was a statement, with nothing left to chance. Everything was *Kunst*: posing for group portraits, appearing in the media, in the street, at private parties, or in clubs. They

spread their message in the public sphere with their attire and image, with codified conduct and socializing—*Kunst* took over the NSK members' lives.

Consequently, at least in the 1980s, the members of Laibach would wear a uniform of sorts—the so-called *Jäger* (hunter) look—and not only on stage, but also in private. Philosopher Peter Mlakar, who often performed with Laibach, maintains the *Jäger* look to this day. Dragan Živadinov long sported a jacket with motifs from a Mladen Stilinović work with references to Mayakovsky; he would also wear jumpsuits quoting László Moholy-Nagy. The members of IRWIN dressed in black suits and ties from the beginning, emphasizing that, as artists, they were themselves part of their exhibitions. These photographs thus depict both NSK members' official portraits and social occasions with friends, like-minded people, and representatives of the international art scene who visited Ljubljana in the 1990s.

10. Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, *Transcentrala (NSK State in Time)*, 1993

The video *Transcentrala* is a documentary film/artistic project about the NSK movement. It involves members of the core NSK groups travelling into the structure of the “utopian” NSK state, a state in time. IRWIN premiered the video as part of their installation at the Slovenian Pavilion at the 1993 Venice Biennale. A year later, it was presented in the competition program of the Oberhausen International Film Festival.

11. The Three *Kapital* Projects

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

The three groups expressed their respective takes on the transition from one system to another in different ways: matching their primary division of roles, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater (and its successors Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot and Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung) explored the role of religion in society; Laibach worked in the domain of ideology; and IRWIN assumed the role of chronicler of the work of NSK and of the historicization

of local traditions and the sociopolitical context. In addition to observing the differences between the three *Kapital* projects through the prism of this essential division of roles, another aspect should be taken into consideration: the shifts taking place in the groups' diverse aesthetic approaches as the time of close collaboration between NSK members was drawing to a close.

12. Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot, *Drama Observatory Kapital*, Public Warehouses, Hall 13, September 18, 1991

Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot's final project, *Drama Observatory Kapital* was based on integrating the conceptual and spatial principles of Russian suprematism and constructivism with the issues of spatial and physical reconfiguration, as broached by the reality of modern space technology.

The first futurist opera, *Victory over the Sun* (1913), was placed in a trans-artistic-scientific dialogue with Herman Potočnik Noordung's *Problems of Space Travel* (1928–1929). The result was a performance that simulated the interior of a spacecraft (Noordung's cabinet) by enabling mechanical rotation of the space inhabited by the audience (the space could accommodate 18 spectators). Malevich's set from *Victory over the Sun* was reconfigured as a jigsaw of white, black, and grey crosses forming the walls, which could be taken apart during the performance to emphasize the instability of the relationship between the observer and the observed, the exterior and interior aspects of the space.

Dragan Živadinov explained the title of the show at a five-hour press conference, which was itself conceived and carried out as a performance. He expounded his plan for the renewal of the local art system (into a global one) through a series of ten so-called detonations, each of which called for a redistribution of the local system of art funding and considerable capital investment.

13. Laibach, *Kapital*, Mute Records, 1992, London

Kapital was Laibach's first post-Yugoslavia work, the result of a long period of experimentation conducted in Paris with previous collaborators such as Bertrand Burgalat and Sean Oliver of Rip, Rig and Panic. Little of this

material was used in the final release, and most was recorded in NSK Studio Reichstag, Ljubljana, as Yugoslavia disintegrated.

While the title suggested an intensely ideological album, it was one of Laibach's most esoteric and poetic releases, simultaneously archaic and futuristic. The sleeve contained only fragments of the lyrics plus cryptic-esoteric phrases, making it all the more obscure. Each album format (CD, tape, vinyl) contained a different sequence and alternate—and sometimes dramatically different—mixes of the tracks, heightening the sense of a complex, unstable work.

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

14. IRWIN, *Kapital*, 1990–1991

IRWIN's *Kapital* series of paintings was first shown at Equurna Gallery in Ljubljana in December 1990. In this and other early shows, the paintings were hung on fiberboard panels mounted with photographs of earlier IRWIN exhibitions. This hanging scheme was abandoned for the PS.1 show in 1991, where hunting trophies were interspersed between the paintings. Generally, IRWIN tends to exhibit the *Kapital* series together with works from the *Was ist Kunst* series to underscore their organic kinship and self-generative power.

The artists started working on the five large *Kapital* paintings in 1990, at a time when socialist Yugoslavia still (formally) existed. They completed them in 1991, when socialist Yugoslavia was virtually defunct and the nameplates of political organizations such as the League of Communists were being removed from town buildings. Having obtained such nameplates, IRWIN incorporated them into all five of the paintings and wrote *Kapital* on them.

Instantly given a new life, the plates stand for the experience of socialism as IRWIN's capital. IRWIN defines both its own work and its history as its capital. Once IRWIN started displaying these paintings together with mounted hunting trophies, the concept of capital became even more multifaceted: now it also referred to the fact that art is always a trophy, no matter what the system, serving both ideology and capital equally well.

An integral part of the project is the book *Kapital*, published by Collaborator/Edinburgh. In it, IRWIN and Eda Čufer put forward the thesis of Eastern European modernism standing in contrast to and confrontation with Western modernism as a universal concept. The authors suggest that there is a difference; that is, that there are different modernisms to consider in the East and the West, and different production conditions and perceptions of art to take into account. The *Kapital* project thus creates and expresses the need for a different understanding and description of art production, one focused more on differences than similarities.



The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater (SNST) was created on October 13, 1983 with “The Founding Act”—a programmatic text in which the anonymous members set out the group’s program and announced its plan for eventual “self-termination” once its goals had been achieved. SNST’s basic objective was to “revive the performing arts.” The plan was divided in three stages—the underground, exorcism, and retro-classical—with the aim of breaking through to the stage of national institution. While focusing on a creative method called the “retrogarde,” the group also framed its programmatic task as analyzing the relationship between theater and the state. Both theater and state are based on the production of events (performativity); as a result the methods and the effects of theater and the state are often indistinguishable from one another (“Theater is a State”).

The Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater is named after the Roman consul Scipio Nasica, who ordered the destruction of a theater. As it had predicted in 1983, SNST brought an end to its activities from 1986, when it announced its imminent self-termination—and in 1987, when it carried out the “Act of Self-Destruction.” After that, the anonymous theater members identified themselves as Eda Čufer (dramaturge), Miran Mohar (set designer), and Dragan Živadinov (director).

In January 1987, the Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot was founded, its

name alluding to Slovenian avant-garde poet Anton Podbevšek's 1922 journal, *The Red Pilot*. Rather than turning back to history, like SNST had done with its retro orientation, Rdeči pilot set its sights on the ultramodern future dictated and shaped by advances in science and technology. Furthermore, instead of focusing on the idea of the event, Rdeči pilot centered on the act of watching and observing (the Observatory), a key activity in both theater and science. The spatial organization of the act of watching in Rdeči pilot's projects rejects the division between stage and auditorium, creating a unified space that director Dragan Živadinov called "inhabited sculptures." In a similar way to that in which SNST explored the relationship between theater and state/religion/ritual, Rdeči pilot probed the relationship between theater and science and technology.

In September 1991, at a five-hour press conference (performance), Dragan Živadinov explained the transformation of the Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot into the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, also presenting to journalists his plan of work to 2045. The items on his agenda (called "detonations") included the systematic mythologizing of Herman Potočnik Noordung, whose scientific work and pioneer spirit Živadinov set out to honor. This started in the early 1990s with Slovenian and English translations and international distribution of Potočnik's book *The Problem of Space Travel: the Rocket Motor*. It culminated in the opening of KSEVT, the Cultural Center of European Space Technologies, in Vitanje, Slovenia in 2010.

1. SNST, Underground Stage, *Retrogarde Event Hinkemann*, private apartment, 14 Titova Street, Ljubljana, 26 March 1984

On October 13, 1983, the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater (SNST) set out in "The Founding Act" its plan to revive the performing arts. This was divided in three stages: the underground, exorcism, and retro-classical. *Retrogarde Event Hinkemann* was SNST's first event-performance, premiering in a private apartment. Twenty-nine spectators were invited to the premiere and repeat performances, with printed invitations including programmatic texts, information on the event, and specific instructions on how to attend.

Half an hour before the beginning of the event, a man dressed as a priest would meet spectators at the intersection of two streets and direct them to the entrance of the building. There, a man in a Yugoslavian Army officer's

uniform would direct them to the second floor, where they were met by a Sister, who took them into the room where the event was performed. Based on motifs in Ernst Toller's expressionist drama *Hinkemann*, the performance was the central part of SNST's underground stage, the objectives of which were to introduce a theater group without institutional backing into the public space, to devise the "retrogarde" method of work and a recognizable aesthetic, and to form a creative team.

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

Retrogarde Event Marija Nablocka was SNST's second event-performance, premiering in Slovenian designer Matjaž Vipotnik's apartment and studio, which was being renovated. Invitations to the premiere included SNST's programmatic texts, in addition to the event's location. They were met by two costumed actors outside the building and then led, one at a time, through a dark, narrow passage crammed with actors, to their seat in the event's set-as-sculpture.

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

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

After announcing its self-termination in September 1986, the group planned

another event-performance to symbolically end its activities with the "Act of Self-Destruction." Approached by the League of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, who were organizing the annual all-Yugoslavian celebration of Youth Day (also called the Tito Relay) in 1987, SNST wrote a script and a production book for the spectacle. Other NSK groups were also involved in designing the event.

SNST was to stage the introductory spectacle at Lake Bohinj a few weeks before Youth Day (which was celebrated on May 25). All of the delegations of Yugoslavian youth would gather at 6 a.m. and, after watching the event staged on a specially-built pontoon bridge in the middle of the lake, carry on the relay toward Belgrade. All work on the project stopped when the "poster scandal" broke out, the result of a controversial poster designed by New Collectivism as part of the overall visual identity of the event. Eventually the project was cancelled altogether, but SNST nevertheless viewed it as a successfully executed "Act of Self-Destruction" in which, as the final programmatic text stated, "the observation of the relationship between theater and the state had achieved its climax."

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

The successor of the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater, the Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot, laid out its program in a text published in the daily *Delo* in January 1987, setting its sights on the ultramodern future dictated and shaped by advances in science and technology. Instead of focusing on the "event" as the SNST did, Rdeči pilot centered on the act of watching and observing (the Observatory), a key element of both theater and science. The spatial organization of watching, a basic element in theater, is always treated as a unified space (set design), which the director Dragan Živadinov has called "inhabited sculptures."

In the *Drama Observatory Fiat*, the space was shaped to resemble the interior of a spacecraft, putting the spectator in a situation that could potentially be taking place in zero gravity. The spectators observed the action through three apertures (triangular, cruciform, and square) that represented the scientific focus on observation, and also symbolized the three fundamental theatrical forms—drama, opera, and ballet. Taking the myth of

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

5. Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot, *Ballet Observatory Fiat*, a Collaboration Between Rdeči pilot and the Randy Warshaw Dance Company, Kotor, Montenegro, July 17, 1987

In 1987, the Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot invited the choreographer Randy Warshaw (a former dancer in legendary dancer and choreographer Trisha Brown's company) and dancer Meg Stuart (now a choreographer) to collaborate on the group's second project, the *Ballet Observatory Fiat*.

The focus of this work was on what happens to the thoughts and emotions of a top-level dancer during the process of total body reconfiguration which they undergo when following a disciplined, daily training routine. The collaboration between Rdeči pilot and the Randy Warshaw Dance Company was not realized in full, due to the absence of director Dragan Živadinov, who was called up for compulsory military service and ended up in jail because of his refusal to enlist. The *Ballet Observatory Fiat* nonetheless premiered in Kotor, with later repeat performances in the Students' Cultural Centre (SKC) in Belgrade.

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

The second series of productions-observatories, entitled *Zenit* after a Yugoslavian avant-garde magazine, investigated—according to the programmatic text—the theme of the “zenith of the human epoch.”

The ritualistic kinetic choreography of the *Ballet Observatory Zenit* first introduced the theme of a hero and foregrounded the motif of a spacecraft, both of which would go on to become central themes in director Dragan Živadinov's subsequent work, particularly in his Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, which would be established in 1991. In the Rdeči pilot cosmogony, a hero is an individual who feels called upon to constantly transcend and push the limits of the still visible and observable, the zenith,

thereby changing the definition of everything human. Because, according to the programmatic text, "Man is a transitory form, changing in front of our eyes."

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

The *Drama Observatory Zenit* was staged in a specially-built monumental object: a train car turned into a spacecraft with a boxcar attached to it, both parked on a siding at Ljubljana Central Railway Station.

Spectators entered the boxcar one by one, receiving a ritualistic blessing from Dragan Živadinov at the door, and then had to stand still in utter darkness in the crowded car. After a prolonged period of adjusting to the dark, the spectators were pushed, one at a time, into the train car/spacecraft where the performance-observatory took place. Taking T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* as its point of departure, the *Drama Observatory Zenit* performed the emancipation from the weight of Christian history (the horizontal position of the spacecraft underscoring gravity), and the "exorcising" of the NSK retro aesthetic from the cosmokinetically-conceived space explored by Rdeči pilot. Allusions to the NSK collective included references to Nazism (the boxcar recalled the way Jews were transported to concentration camps), the motif of the Alps, and such typical Laibach and IRWIN symbols as mounted hawks, black crosses, the Sacred Heart, and the exorcist's words "vade retro" (go back).

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

The *Opera Observatory Record* was an unrealized project by the Cosmokinetic Theater Rdeči pilot, which had been fully developed before the group encountered difficulties with the production. The libretto (Eda Čufer and Katarina Pejović), musical score (Tekton/Branko Mirt in collaboration with Peter Šavli), set design (Samo Lapajne and Matej Mihelčič), and production book (Dragan Živadinov) focused on the heroic mythologizing of

the Slovenian scientist and pioneer of space technology Herman Potočnik Noordung. After the Rdeči pilot artistic team broke up, director Dragan Živadinov took up this subject again, making it the central theme of his next project, the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung, founded in 1991.

Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung's first performance was the *Drama Observatory Kapital*, in 1991 (see pages 34–35).

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

The second production of the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung was a recapitulation of the previous groups' philosophy of theater space as performed and authored by Živadinov, and at the same time an act of subtle mythologizing of the Slovenian pioneer of modern space technology Herman Potočnik Noordung.

As opposed to SNST's focus on the idea of the "event" or on the function of "observing" as in the Cosmokinetic Rdeči pilot stage, the Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung foregrounded the ritualistic and mythogenic power of the theater and organized it as a "prayer machine" in content and form. The set design openly transposed the idea of moving the spectators from a rustic-humanistic miniature, to a monumental, ultramodern, post-humanistic space-time machine, which left them—deprived of their physical individuality and motion by the authority of the space, a spacecraft simulation—no place of retreat except profound meditation, which was also dictated by the authority of the images surrounding them.

In addition to the spatial references to *Nablocka*, the *Prayer Machine Noordung* alluded to SNST's final production, the *Retrogarde Event Baptism under Triglav* (see page 31) in its form as a Wagnerian total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). The manipulation of physical rather than simply mental motion, introduced by Živadinov's artistic events, causes estrangement, affirming the mutual dependence between automated physical and mental processes, controlled in the modern world by science and technology.



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

The group carried out the following projects: renovation of the apartment of T. Lorenčič, (1985); *Retro-building miniatures* (1986); *Gesundes leben–Frohes schaffen* (1987); *Ausstellungssaal der Ausstellung* (1987); *Gradoustrojstvo* (1987); *New in the Old*: competition project (1987); *Fiat Haus* (1988); set design for the film *Silicon Horizon* (1988); *Slovene Territory* (a project on the colonization of Slovenian soil) and *Ossuary for Slovenia* (1991); and *Project: Furniture for Gallery Anonimus* (1992).

The formal expression of Builders' practice was based on the retro-avant-garde principle, incorporating quotations and collages from contemporary and historical sources, and reworked symbols, particularly from totalitarian regimes in recent history. Their message was socially provocative, in the spirit of NSK.

Builders employed the aesthetics of the NSK movement and a specific

language in architecture and urban planning which, during the disintegration of authoritarian regimes at the end of the 1980s, was used to express socially-committed attitudes within architecture.

Builders' ideological orientation is well illustrated by the following quote from a manifesto it presented publicly on the steps of the National and University Library in Ljubljana in May 1985. In order to downplay the stale ideology of "patriotic Slovenianness," they read their manifesto in English: "What matters is not agreement or disagreement with what we love, with our faith, which is absolutely not the basis of our ideas. It is not a question of creating truth where there is none. We are, however, strict and relentless if we see that foul blends with fair, friend associates with foe. This is why our method is the method of social totalitarian realism, incompatibly linked with unrealistic humanism, this strong relativism. Was it not Lenin who said that of all arts, 'construction is the most important?' [...] 'And the one most accessible to people,' added Stalin."

1. Competition project *New in the Old*, RIBA, 1987

In 1987, Builders submitted a project titled *New in the Old* for the RIBA International Student Competition.

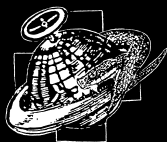
The project proposed to re-urbanise the capital through symbolic, ideological interventions on the four sides of the city, by erecting and reinterpreting archetypal architectural elements from Slovenian and European history. The floor plan shows the directions for the realization of individual interventions, as well as their source influences. The project was displayed at the Royal Academy in London as part of a presentation of the competition's results.

2. *Ossuary for Slovenia*, 1991

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

3. Project: Furniture for Gallery Anonimus, 1992

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



In 1986, NSK produced an organigram—a conceptual organizational structure showing existing groups, planned groups, and groups that never had or never would materialize. This was the first mention of a Department for Pure, Practical Philosophy and Rhetoric. All the NSK groups were adept at the production of rhetorical and theoretical texts, so a central body was partly superfluous. The organigram represented the sections' individual texts and statements as well as collaborative NSK texts not ascribed to a particular group. This was followed by the establishment of an actual Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy, symbolizing NSK's intellectual ambitions. It was created in 1987 by and for philosopher, editor, and NSK associate Peter Mlakar, during Laibach's residency at Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg.

Mlakar found a natural affinity between NSK and his own elemental neo-Hegelian or neo-neo-Platonic discourse, and had already been aware of, and on good terms with NSK for some time. Among his influences he lists apophatic philosophy, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Marquis de Sade, Martin Heidegger, Sigmund Freud, and the atmosphere of his hometown, Škofja Loka, a thousand-year-old castle town northwest of Ljubljana. He had contributed a theoretical piece to the anthology *Punk pod Slovenci* (*Punk under the Slovenes*) in 1985, and worked in the same year with Dušan Mandič of IRWIN on the editorial board of the periodical *Problemi* when it

published a special NSK issue. He also wrote *The Beauties of Carthage*, the first sadomasochistic story in Slovenian literature.

4. Speeches

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

One of Mlakar's most highly-charged speeches was given at Belgrade in 1989, delivered in German and Serbian and incorporating Milošević's nationalist slogan “No one should dare to beat you!” Mlakar also assumed the role of “master of ceremonies,” providing speeches and texts for formal NSK occasions from internal events to gallery openings and record launches.

5. Writings

In addition to the speeches included in the exhibition, several longer texts have been issued, many around themes such as God, the devil, eroticism, and national questions. The tone is often very Hegelian, the texts laden with references to “God/transcendence,” “spirit,” “Being,” “nothing,” “absolute,” “infinity,” and “enjoyment.” Their essentialist and theatrical tone has much in common with some Laibach texts, and the Department has a close affinity with Laibach. The texts recapitulate previous philosophies in the classic *retrogarde* style, but they are not simply a philosophical adjunct to other NSK activities. They consciously explore and stress NSK's interest both in totalitarianism and in spiritual issues, and firmly implant an absolute, all-encompassing—albeit impersonal—deity within the NSK *Weltanschauung* (world view). “God is Spirit. Spirit is a Being eternally experiencing its own being, creating from nothing. It is a self-applying perfection, infinite and limitless, existing in and for itself.”



The Film department, led by Igor Zupe, then a student of film directing, focused largely on the phenomenon of Edgar Reitz's *Heimat* film series in all its ideological dimensions.² The key creations of this NSK department are *From the Mouths of Animals* (1984) and *Beauty and the Nation* (1985).

6. Production Book for the Heimatfilm *From the Mouths of Animals*, 1984

From the Mouths of Animals is the production book for a Heimatfilm by Miran Mohar and Andrej Savski—a *retrogarde* retelling of the story of the nation through familiar NSK symbols such as the black cross, the stag antlers, the hunter, the hero, and Mount Triglav.

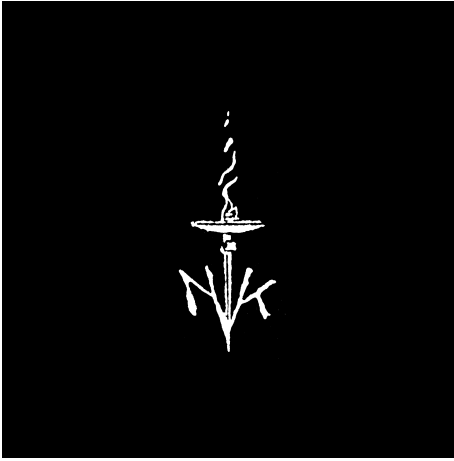
7. *Beauty and the Nation*, Heimatfilm, produced by AGRFT, 1985

Beauty and the Nation is a 1985 Heimatfilm about Slovenian composer

² *Heimat* is a series of films in thirty-two episodes which looks at life in Germany between 1919 and 2000 through the eyes of a single family.

Marij Kogoj. It was directed by Igor Zupe and produced by the Academy of Theater, Radio, Film and Television (AGRFT) of the University of Ljubljana. The film used the narratives of three key characters—the intellectuals Bratko Kreft, Taras Kermauner and Josip Vidmar—to explore the typical fate of the Slovenian avant-garde artist, torn between creative frenzy and existential anguish. Bratko Kreft spoke about the opening night of Marij Kogoj's opera *Črne maske* [*Black Masks*], Taras Kermauner recounted the existential anguish experienced by Kogoj on the streets of Ljubljana, and Josip Vidmar described the story of Kogoj's failed attempts to establish himself on the international music scene.

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



New Collectivism is a design studio established in 1984, which provides design services and ensures the consistent overall image of Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). When the NSK collective was founded, the three core groups set up New Collectivism, consisting of one member from each of the others: Dejan Knez (Laibach), Miran Mohar (SNST), Darko Pokorn (NC), and Roman Uranjek (IRWIN).

New Collectivism first designed a coat of arms for NSK, and then went on to produce mostly catalogues, posters, album covers, and special promotional objects, the most notable being the *Suitcase for Spiritual Use*, made in the context of the *Baptism under Triglav* project. New Collectivism was also entrusted with marketing these products, and thus shaping NSK's economy. Besides work for NSK, New Collectivism offered design to outside clients, especially to cultural institutions both in Slovenia and abroad. The output included various cultural products, especially theater posters, book designs, magazine covers, corporate design, and exhibition design.

Like other NSK groups, New Collectivism freely employed the retro principle method, which involved the eclectic use of relevant historical motifs and their reinterpretation. It also employed montage. In the 1980s, New Collectivism often stirred up public opinion by juxtaposing symbols from heterogeneous, and often antagonistic, political and cultural contexts. Posters produced

using this method were undoubtedly one of the high points of political poster design in Slovenia.

Among New Collectivism's best-known projects was the work that set off the so-called poster scandal in 1987 (see page 54). Later, in 1991, New Collectivism reacted to the Ten-Day War in Slovenia by producing posters and putting them up around Ljubljana with the help of their friends. They were the only posters publicly displayed during the war in Slovenia. New Collectivism also collaborated in establishing the NSK State in Time, designing its passport and other state insignia.

8. New Collectivism, Laibach Kunst Posters

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

Laibach's posters are predominantly monochrome, and draw on the tradition of the expressionist poster, Dadaism, Futurism, and the work of German artist John Heartfield, who used photomontage as an effective anti-Nazi device in the 1930s. Alongside the more familiar iconography, Laibach's posters also feature symbols such as locusts, the harbingers of apocalypse; artist Joseph Beuys' cross (in addition to the Laibach cross); Heartfield's axes and paintbrush; cogwheels; and wreaths. Sometimes Laibach would also hand paint individual letters, as in the underlined word Laibach which became one of the emblems of the group.

Most posters were made for Laibach concerts and tours, but some had no direct connection to any event and led an independent existence. Laibach also contributed posters to other NSK groups' projects. One of the most important collaborations of this type involved individual NSK groups creating posters for the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater's production of *Baptism under Triglav* (1986).

9. The Poster Scandal, 1987

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

New Collectivism had submitted a draft proposal based on a work by a Third Reich German painter, Richard Klein, including some key substitutions: the Yugoslavian flag instead of the Nazi one; the dove of peace instead of the Germanic eagle; the conical cupola from Jože Plečnik's design for the Slovenian Parliament instead of the torch in the figure's hand; and Slovenia's Mount Triglav in the background. The members of New Collectivism were accused of insulting the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the public prosecutor brought charges.

New Collectivism's reaction to the accusations was to produce a poster with a statement of their artistic position. There followed a series of posters in which the Yugoslavian flag was replaced with flags of other countries, democratic and parliamentary. A year after the scandal broke, the Ljubljana Public Prosecutor's Office dropped the charges, claiming the poster remake was simply an act of artistic expression. A new poster and a new baton were chosen, and the year's Youth Relay unfolded according to standard practice, with all of the usual ceremonies, but for the very last time.

10. IRWIN catalogue series

As the design section of NSK and all of the groups under the NSK umbrella, New Collectivism created promotional and informational material, communications, and a wide range of other work, on posters, album covers, catalogues, information materials, and NSK merchandise, as well as events, press conferences, exhibitions, and more. In the process they were responsible for a harmonized overall image of NSK. They also designed the IRWIN exhibition catalogues for the group's international shows from 1987 to 1994. This series of nine catalogues has a highly unified look with

unmistakeable covers, taking their inspiration from the rocks typical of the regions where the exhibitions took place.

11. Theater Posters

Besides designing for NSK, New Collectivism worked regularly on projects for external clients, including theaters and opera houses. The theater posters designed for the Slovenian National Drama Theater in Ljubljana, the Croatian National Theater in Split, and the Serbian National Theater in Novi Sad use methods characteristic of NSK: appropriations, montage, and recycling of heterogeneous visual elements and styles from various periods of cultural history.

Despite drawing largely on art and theater history, in order not to be overtly political or provocative, these posters can also be understood as being a subtle yet biting commentary on the role of (national) theater in the construction of national identity. An exception to this was the poster for *Top Girls* at the Drama Theater in Ljubljana, which featured an apparently nonsensical (given the subject of the piece), yet clever use of Churchill's portrait (referring to the surname of the playwright, Caryl Churchill). It proved too much for the theater's managing board, which refused to release the poster.

12. *Mladina* Magazine Covers

The covers created by New Collectivism for the weekly magazine *Mladina* in the period 1987–1991 referred to current political, social, and cultural events. While the 1987 cover, featuring the throne of the Carantian princes in flames and the title “Laibach Trst Ljubljana Celovec” [Trst and Celovec are Slovenian names for Trieste and Klagenfurt, two towns with large Slovenian minorities] alluded to issues of national culture, and the 1991 cover commented on the cultural capital of Europe, the remaining three covers addressed important political events such as Insurrection Day or Youth Day. The 1988 Youth Day cover, featuring Tito hacking at the Nazi flag with a sword, was an ironic reference to the “poster scandal” (1987), while the cover published two years later on the same occasion combined the face of Adolf Hitler and the colors of the Yugoslavian flag. Surprisingly, these magazine covers were not censored.

In a time of increasingly terse relations between the Yugoslavian republics, the *Mladina* covers commented on the idea of homogeneity and on the suspicion that the country was falling apart. By playing with a range of eclectic, provocative, and contradictory sources, and by confronting and combining iconographies, symbols, and motifs of totalitarian and socialist regimes, New Collectivism remained faithful to the retro methods of NSK, which laid bare the paradoxes of national culture and identity as well as the heterogeneity of Yugoslavian unity.

13. The War Posters

The war posters were both an immediate reaction to the events of the Slovenian war of independence and, on a more general level, a commentary on the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the increasing economic and political inequalities between the republics in the 1980s, which led to the proclamation of Slovenian independence.

In 1991, the Yugoslavian People's Army announced air raids on Ljubljana and carried out a number of attacks across Slovenia. In the first days of the fighting, at the peak of uncertainty, New Collectivism produced and printed "war posters" on their own initiative, putting them up around Ljubljana. The three posters employed the rhetoric of propaganda, symbols, and imagery of opposing political and social regimes to draw attention to the hidden contradictions and traumatic issues at the heart of the ruling ideology. The posters share the familiar motif of the recruiter pointing his finger at the viewer, but it is associated with recycled motifs and concepts from various political, artistic, and historic sources as well as from other NSK groups.

The war posters testify to New Collectivism's commitment to the radical ambivalence that characterized NSK as a whole, even in times of political crisis, and despite the fact that such conditions generally require taking an unambiguous stance and clearly choosing sides.



Retrovision, formed in 1987, was the film and video section of the Neue Slowenische Kunst collective. It was charged with keeping up with the fast-developing media landscape that characterized the 1980s and 1990s. This turned out to be an important space within which the collective could work with not only its own public image, but also the mode of mass communication of information.

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

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

GARAGE

Garage Museum of Contemporary Art is a place for people, art, and ideas to create history. Through an extensive program of exhibitions, events, education, research, and publishing, the institution reflects on current developments in Russian and international culture, creating opportunities for public dialogue, as well as the production of new work and ideas in Moscow. At the center of all these activities is the Museum's collection, which is the first archive in the country related to the development of Russian contemporary art from the 1950s through the present.

Founded in 2008 by Dasha Zhukova and Roman Abramovich, Garage is the first philanthropic organization in Russia to create a comprehensive public mandate for contemporary art and culture. Open seven days a week, it was initially housed in the renowned Bakhmetevsky Bus Garage in Moscow, designed by the Constructivist architect Konstantin Melnikov. In 2012 Garage relocated to a temporary pavilion in Gorky Park, specifically commissioned from award-winning architect Shigeru Ban. A year later, a purpose-built Education Center was opened next to the Pavilion. On June 12, 2015, Garage welcomed visitors to its first permanent home. Designed by Rem Koolhaas and his OMA studio, this groundbreaking preservation project transformed the famous Vremena Goda (Seasons of the Year) Soviet Modernist restaurant, built in 1968 in Gorky Park, into a contemporary museum.

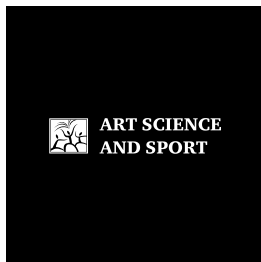
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