

Neue Slowenische Kunst and the End of the World

Unfinished Breakthroughs

The core efforts of the Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) art community are to preserve the standing of avant-garde art within the horizon of humanist thought. Central to this is NSK's commitment to fostering shifts in social thinking and influencing social practices through the impact of its artistic endeavours. We observe that NSK did not “merely” participate in social change, i.e. it was primarily politically counter-ideological, while it found itself in the midst of the transition from socialist to capitalist conditions in Southeast Europe, but consistently asserted the *poietic* abilities of the artist and in a completely avant-garde way asserted that art should not only change the World, but that the World should develop out of art. In NSK we note a wide field of artistic expression based on abstract thinking, as if, in the traditional humanist spirit, NSK were trying to raise itself through *art*, not only above the determination of its social position, but also above the determination of the natural givens. On October 30, 1984, during the ongoing process of merging the spiritual-aesthetic practices of art collectives Laibach, Irwin and the Scipion Nasica Sisters Theatre (GSSN) into a complex that we consider NSK today, Dušan Mandić (Irwin) mentioned in his personal art journal the “unsuccessful breakthroughs of avant-garde anti-production” as a problem that NSK had to solve, as he himself overviewed the failures within the Slovenian artistic avant-garde.¹ According to him, the specific avant-garde had thus ended its work before it managed to have an effect on the art system and cultural atmosphere it set itself up (against).

The problem of the avant-garde impact turns out to be a perennial one in the thinking of the persons within NSK, and latent or explicit among the effects they think about is also the concern for the preservation of NSK. The very act of linking the generic collectives of NSK was a reaction to the threat, first to Laibach, and then to the remaining entities, which from 1982 to 1987 operated under the circum-

¹ From an unpublished journal manuscript. Mandić reflects in concrete terms on the Slovenian artistic avant-garde active between 1960 and 1970.

stances of censorship and persecution exercised over them by the authorities of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 1982, the administrative authorities in Trbovlje reacted negatively to Laibach's poster campaign; in 1983 the Assembly of the City of Ljubljana declared the name of the collective inappropriate; and in 1987 the Yugoslav and Slovenian authorities exerted ideological pressure and announced repressive sanctions for the design of the poster, which was the joint work of persons from three generic NSK collectives within the *Novi Kolektivizem* (NK, an entity within NSK). As a rule, generic collectives defended themselves until 1991 by proclaiming the monumentality of NSK, and the 1983 publication of Laibach's organigram, *Principles of Organisation and Action* (Novak; Knez 1983) was essential in this, as it gave an inkling that in the event of the arrest or other forms of prosecution of those who had exposed themselves to the public as Laibach, many more persons, anonymous and invisible, would remain active in the same spirit. From Laibach's point of view, its activity was aesthetically and socially cohesive, whereas from the authorities' point of view, it was politically and socially destructive.

However, the more the authorities ascribed political attributes to Laibach's activities – which were initially visual, musical, literary and video-based – the more Laibach's discourse adopted a political language, shifting its focus from the ontological dimensions of its artistic production to emphasising the social impact of its activities. Over time, NSK's network of occasional co-creators, kindred spirits and supporters actually branched out into the hundreds, and today we can count NSK's loyal audience in the thousands. NSK itself is a cultural phenomenon in the global clustering of avant-garde art, having been continuously effective for more than four decades.² When we say effective, we must be aware of the distinction between NSK operation as such and the result of this operation. In 1991, two contradictory gestures were made by persons from the generic collectives: they published the NSK organigram on the Laibach model (Zinaić; NK 1991), thus declaring NSK a monumental organisation with a solid structure of established hierarchical relations, while at the same time the poetics of each individual collective within NSK began to diverge from each other at an accelerated pace. Today, NSK is a poetic reference for them, an expression of mutual affinities, and occasionally a designation for aesthetic-formal creations or actions.³

² As NSK has it, the founding years were: 1980 for Laibach, 1982 for Irwin, 1983 for the Scipion Nasice Sisters Theatre, and 1984 for NSK as a whole. But in fact, the founding process took place over several years, quite opposite to being a succession of momentary founding acts.

³ 1994 saw the launch of the NSK Information Centre Association with its seat in Ljubljana, declared to be a “central point” for the information and administration of NK and the *NSK State* but also serving as a platform for the sale of the material production of NK and products associated with the *NSK State*. As Irwin writes, the *NSK State* has both an artistic and non-artistic dimension (Irwin 2012). The titles *NSK State* and *NSK State in Time* are frequently used as synonyms in written sources, which is

Persistence of the Avant-Garde

From today's perspective, each of the generic collectives resolves the problem of the impact of the avant-garde differently. In 1983, Laibach made a declaration that all human perspectives would eventually be defined by an aesthetic vision, implicitly expressing an awareness that we are living in a "late period" of the relationship between ideology and culture. Within the context of this late period, it "recognised the universality of the moment" in which Laibach assumes the role of the leader of humanity using the process of sublimation – i.e. the redirection of aspirations to a higher, more appropriate level – to "eliminate discursivity" and thus abolishing the confrontation between Laibach and metalanguage, while at the same time subjugating the "language of political manipulation, both direct and indirect", in an "artistic" manner. As a specific method of sublimation or redirection, it proposed the "programming of sensible functioning", which for Laibach is merely a technological process – suggesting that on a conceptual level, nothing *special* is required for the execution of the sublimation method except Laibach itself. Indeed, when referring to technology, Laibach emphasises adherence to the "biological evolution of man" and regards the "technological process" as "absolute", as a "triumph of anonymity and formlessness" (Novak; Knez 1983: 1460–1461). The condition for sublimation is the Laibach-with-humanity aspect: Laibach sees itself as *un-special*, even if it is qualitatively different from humanity.

Laibach takes the spiritual-aesthetic world of man for granted, so much so that it is already *biological*, referring to life itself, or *is* even life itself. Given that sublimation does not require anything new beyond what already exists in the "late period", and humanity-with-Laibach has evolved in life form (a process that continues because for Laibach the idea as the original impulse of life develops "entelechially" and re-creates) into an *artistic* mode, we understand this concept as pro-avant-garde, since it encompasses the essence of Peter Bürger's basic definition of the avant-garde: it expresses the consciousness of attacking the *institution of art* and rejecting the previous artistic mode, establishing a link between the two within a particular anti-institutionality and thereby asserting a specific and enduring spiritual-aesthetic mode. For Laibach, this mode is pen-ultimate, but at the same time it must not be ultimate if Laibach, as a specific avant-garde, is to fulfil its mission. Laibach's avant-garde stance resists the end of humanity, which from Laibach's perspective would also mean the end of the World because with the death of the last human being, the consciousness (including will and power) defining it would also be gone.

questionable precisely because of the wellspring of meanings derived from the intersection of the axis "art – non-art", and the axis "NSK State phenomenon – NSK State in Time concept".

The Finality of Understanding

In order to recognise the *artistry* of the *NSK State in Time*,⁴ the viewer must be capable of the kind of abstract thinking that grasps the essence of art in accordance with the spiritual-aesthetic viewpoint of NSK. Since the *NSK State in Time* is not presented as a directly objectified modernist artwork and does not conceal its conceptual construction, it is necessary to consider the difference between the positions of the artwork and its viewer in relation to its social space. Igor Zabel points out that since the 20th century, a piece of art could be conceived as an independent, self-sufficient and self-contained essentiality, as a kind of autonomous object. Contemporary modernism “demands *flatness, objectness, literalism and presentness*” (Zabel 2008: 59). The *NSK State in Time* exploits this context to present a group of artists⁵ as an object – almost like a sculpture:

The *NSK State in Time* is an abstract organism, a body in the manner of suprematism installed in a real socio-political space, like a sculpture composed of the concrete warmth of bodies, the movement of spirit and the work of its members. Rather than a territory, NSK confers the status of a state to a thinking that changes its boundaries in accordance with the movement and change of its symbolic and physical collective spirit. (Irwin; Čufer 1993)

Zabel believes that the contemporary viewer has no difficulty in understanding an art object placed in the same spatial order as human bodies: “The viewer can, in a sense, participate in the position of the Subject, whose gaze sees all points of the spatial continuum simultaneously; what cannot be seen (or is unseen generally) in a sculpture does not present any particular difficulty for the viewer” (Zabel 2008: 58). We ask ourselves whether any human being can detect and understand art in this way. The more the art of NSK is constituted by the

⁴ It is not always possible to tread the path of the historiographical tradition of the humanities, which conservatively leans towards describing phenomena with a fixed beginning and end. Although interpreters often note that the “emergence” of the *State in Time* is linked to the activities of NSK in 1992–1993 (in general this “emergence” relies on the renaming of the NSK art community as declared by Irwin and is contextualised with a large number of other NSK projects whose theme revolves around the state and statehood), for us, it is significant that alongside the *NSK Pavilion* there is a complex of texts that define the *NSK State in Time* as an artwork in terms of anthropo-sculpturality (cf. Čufer 1993), which is a specific artistic action or life activity of NSK. These did not likely begin to unfold in this way then but rather reflect the articulation of the awareness of this concrete mode of existence at the time.

⁵ There is no indication that it was publicly announced or explicitly stated which artists make up the *NSK State in Time*. The inclusion of real people in the sculpturality of the *NSK State in Time* is allusive, linked to the name of NSK and its contextualisation. (Even though communication regarding the *NSK State in Time* primarily takes place through the Irwin collective.) It is therefore possible that the recipients of NSK art, especially those who consider themselves “NSK citizens” because they hold an *NSK Passport*, also identified themselves as the *NSK State in Time*.

heritage of *humanitas* – specifically with the thought of art and even more explicitly with consideration of its essence – the more it addresses a specifically formed human community because this community must also be aware of art in the same way as the artists in NSK. The reach of the avant-garde project of turning art into life is constrained by this. In order to recognise the artistry of the *NSK State in Time*, the viewer must be capable of the kind of abstract thinking that grasps the essence of art in accordance with the spiritual-aesthetic principles of NSK. The skeleton of such thinking is conditioned by education in understanding *humanitas* and through practice in such comprehension. In the case of the *NSK State in Time*, the precondition for the success of an avant-garde project is that society is already imbued with humanist ideas, ideals and the will to realise them. Only under these circumstances could an NSK avant-garde project become comprehensible and acceptable to society as a whole.

Alexei Monroe reports that during the *1st NSK Citizens' Congress* in Berlin in 2010, some “NSK citizens”, – people who accepted the rules outlined in the *NSK Passport* but were not part of the NSK art collectives – expressed to members of the NSK collectives their expectation that the *NSK State in Time* would become real and materialised, at least through institutionalised (para)state attributes or (contra)participation in pragmatic political processes. Part of their expectation was also the conviction that the role of the *NSK State in Time* was to facilitate the realisation of the initiatives proposed by the “NSK citizens”. The institutional materialisation of the *NSK State in Time* would supposedly therefore also be a “cover” for state culture. In the current relations between the people from NSK and “NSK citizens”, one can observe a complex interplay of synergies, parallels and negations both on an aesthetic and existential level. The *NSK State in Time* initially presented itself with engaged messages that negate the political-economic reality of globalism and role of nation states within it for the following reason: “[...] the nation-state has become a dangerous anachronism, and the idea of dominant globalism is useless for regions with repressed national identities because of its ideology of violent universalism” (Irwin; Čufer 1993). The focus of Monroe's report is not on the problems that “NSK citizens” might have with national issues, but on the cultural dimension of the self-organisation of “NSK citizens”, which he identifies as a reaction to the crisis of legitimacy of Western culture.

The *Congress* recorded concrete forms of attempts by “NSK citizens” to “install themselves as something *special* in a real socio-political space” (as the *NSK State in Time* refers to itself), but all such installed syntheses were of different regional and linguistic cultural variants of social formations which, as solid bonds of the new-old gathering of “NSK citizens”, were set far off from the sublimity of the *NSK State in Time* (which explicitly *merely* thinks of itself as a state). Rika Spiekermann, an “NSK citizen” explained where the perspectives of NSK and “NSK citizens” meet: “When talking about NSK and its citizens, one should not define them as ‘left-wing’, ‘right-wing’ or ‘liberal’ [...]. Although citizens may see

themselves as part of one or the other option, this is an uninteresting and unpromising question, because, in the NSK universe, these categories lose their basis. They lose their meaning” (Monroe 2011: 19). Both the *NSK State in Time* and the efforts of "NSK citizens" to reform the organisation of society turn away from the current political realities of the World. However, they cannot completely turn away from material conditioning: the existence of both depends on the *biological* bodies of people (*NSK State in Time* = energy of the people; “NSK citizens” = people) and the cognition primarily conditioned by them. Their proposals – despite their radicalism – are precisely because they cling to this given, alternative rather than altering, in view of their determination by social position and natural conditions.

The Spiritual Closure

To change the spirit is shown as the mission of the theatre performance *Odilo. Obscuration. Oratorio.*, directed by Dragan Živadinov.⁶ No misunderstandings were observed between the production and reception of this artwork, as the audience's reaction matched the artist's intention: the ritual killing of the name of Odilo Globočnik, a person who truly existed. The man in question turned against humanity in an extreme way: by murdering people. The performance was received by critics as a “protest against the re-emerging forms of fascism, racism, sexism, xenophobia and nationalism” (Radaljic 2018), as a “conspiratorial ritual of expelling evil from the community, which mentally distances itself from the regime of the ‘dramatic’ and any specific personalisation, including that of the titled (anti) hero” (Butala 2018), etc. The performance was also awarded by the on-line international theatre festival *Sturm und Drang 2021* for “its (admirably conveyed) conscience”; described in the justification of the award as “a true weapon against evil and a staging in which the past communicates with the present to prevent a (particular) future and fight against the ontology of evil inscribed in it by the re-actualisation of Nazism” (Dermelj 2023). In the layers of meaning of this performance, however, we can trace several symbolic ends that have either a social or communal effect. Živadinov, through an aesthetic mode, projectively ended a society based on a system of economic exploitation, in relation to capitalism as accelerated by Nazi ideology. With the “aesthetic conspiracy”, this mode of society was “disavowed – dis-confirmed – denied” as inhuman, even if it is a durable economic mode of society, lived by existential necessity by the creators of the show; lived (if not otherwise, then by consequence) by the majority of humanity. This

⁶ A person who is the *spiritus agens* of the developmental path that leads from GSSN with anonymous agents to authorised creation. The premiere took place on April 20, 2018, at Kino Šiška Centre for Urban Culture, Ljubljana, produced by the Mladinsko Theatre in Ljubljana.

was not symbolised in the performance, but the fact that in this economic mode, human beings also act as market commodities was exposed through documentary elements in the *schemata*.

It can be concluded that in this case the “spellbinding ritual” is a performative anamorphosis: it shifts the viewer's gaze from the real to the abstract, in order to see a distorted image of the real and, in this seen real, a distorted self. The change of spirit on this level takes place as a negation of the omnipresent economic system. From the original dramaturgical script written by Peter Mlakar, an entity within NSK, Živadinov retained only the dialogue between Himmler and Globočnik for the performance. Mlakar's in-text can be seen as an anamorphic stain in Živadinov's script, a point where it is necessary to show the distorted image of society in the mirror that society itself has left (over) in the avant-garde text. This stain is ethically oriented differently from the general orientation of Živadinov's poetics. In Mlakar's entire oeuvre, as a general anthropological supposition, we trace subjectivity *appropriated from pleasure* in the sense that Bürger finds in the literature of Charles Baudelaire – the subjectivity of humanity exists as the ambivalence of good and evil (Bürger 2001). And although Mlakar does not negate the positive humanist tradition in his philosophically grounded (nihilistic) literature, his negative heroes in fiction usually occupy powerful social positions and abuse the power that their position offers to the detriment of individuals and society, they are therefore anti-human. The tragic aspect of Mlakar's literature is often that the negative hero wants to change, but no one understands his desire, and thus no one is able to enact the change. Through the anamorphic juxtaposition of the two elements (Mlakar's in-text vs. Živadinov's text), the symbolically distorted world as depicted by Mlakar is revealed, i.e. the world of humanity driven by the will to want nothing in the infinite finitude of the transition from something to nothing and back through death. Živadinov anamorphically recrumpled the negative literariness to make it a smooth, positive existence of the dramatic performance (and at the same time of the human perspective the performance evokes).

If we pause at the discussion of the institutional nature of NSK, we can recognise an additional layer that goes beyond the ones just mentioned: through this act of artistic creation of Živadinov, the trauma suffered by persons of NSK's generative collectives was limited. In the logic of NSK's interweaving poetics, Živadinov rejected the *perpetuum* of the trauma related to the regionally specific political moment in which the antagonisms of the Second World War were still active, and which in 1982⁷ prompted the emergence of NSK's collective spiritual-aesthetic subjectivity as an artistic negation of the political and moral negation of NSK's artistry. The 1980s remain a constant and influential point of self-reference

⁷ Laibach's proto-institutionality begins to formally emerge when Irwin presents itself to the public as an affiliated collective later that year.

for NSK. The NSK narrative continues to draw on the experience of *life* victimisation endured by the people of NSK at that time, whereas their *art* was considered so undesirable that it was perceived as legally forbidden in the minds of broader society, but *de facto* it was “only” banished from the social milieu (Stepančič 2024). Bürger pointed out that in the contemporary avant-garde, phenomena tend to get stuck at the same point, dwelling on and repeating the same “assault” over and over again. We conclude that the reason for this lies in the persistence of traditional antagonisms within intellectual, political and economic structures. In 1996, for example, Čufer (by Misiano's shoulder) from the Irwin collective recognised the Grand Narrative of the ongoing polarisation between East and West, which cannot escape the political antagonism of the past and therefore significantly shapes culture, as a search for the “Really Bad Guy” (authorial term), a truly harmful human being (Čufer; Misiano 2003: 3). In 2018, Živadinov symbolically found him and symbolically killed his name through an aesthetic ritual; he removed from the dialogue that which sustained him, according to the insights demonstrated in the performance. It is as if room was being made for the thoughts of the people from NSK, by which they should put a full stop at the end of the last sentence of their trauma from the 1980s.

Živadinov's performance is a call to no longer transfer the weight of traditional values into actual space, but rather to discard and shift it into the authentic counter-space of avant-garde values. The spirit should stop wandering (back and forth); it should manifest itself as an authentic productive force. A dialectical process can be discerned in NSK's intra-dialogue: within the shadow of the significance of the performance lies the memory of the name-deposing (this name is entirely rooted in *l'art pour l'art-ist* origins⁸) of the *artistic* collective Laibach from social milieu, as it was forcibly removed from the public sphere by the ruling *political* set-up. This is intertwined with a memory of Irwin's collective warning about the *ideologised social* hunt for an “ultimate guilty party” or anyone with a potential to become such a figure. These elements are further surpassed by Živadinov's demonstrative contraction of the space for *avant-garde values*. However, these values are not presented in his performance for their own sake as an isolated, autonomous order. Instead, they are intricately woven into a *critique of the prevailing spirit* of humanity. The tradition of avant-garde art is to fulfil the will of

⁸ Aleš Dejan Knez, who “conceived” the Laibach collective and gave it its name, has often explained that the word was taken from the German cultural space, just as the history of the Slovenes, especially that of Ljubljana, is permeated by German cultural influence. We can see that this word in itself therefore does not convey a view other than respect for the *uninterrupted course* of history. According to Knez's testimony, this acknowledgment of the cultural past as a narrow interpretation of the use of the word Laibach in connection with Laibach's poetics is neither affirming nor negating, it simply *is*. For us, it points to the attachment of Knez's thought to the humanist tradition, which places history in one of the most important positions. Among other humanist influences that shaped his life, Knez was brought up in a family of artists and teachers and educated in art institutes.

humanity to create visions of its future destiny. This performance offers itself as a vision of an *equilibrium* between art and society, in which art has a greater weight; it opens the doors to a greater flow of sovereign, aesthetically generated content in dialogue with the public, carried out by the entities of NSK. It calls on humanity to turn away from ontological nihilism, not to persist in materialistic repetition and no longer avoid passing into transcendence.

Despite Death

Živadinov, together with Dunja Zupančič and Miha Turšič (ŽŽT), among other things, creates for a time in which humanity may no longer exist, or for a space in which humanity cannot yet live. In other words, for dimensions in which the World as understood (known and occupied) by human beings does not exist. The syntapiens (authorial term), the codes of life created by ŽŽT, retain the bond with the human way of the technological mastery of the World because they are placed on material supports when they are released to Space. This support is a technological abstraction, a posthumous substitute for the actors in the performance *Noordung: 1995-2045*,⁹ with the authorially coined name *umbot* (= *um* + *robot*, while “*um*” is Slovene word for mind). It is the productive realisation of the refusal of the end, primarily the end of the theatrical performance, but in an extreme range – and not in itself, which is why we stress that it is only as a support to the syntapiens and in the role performed by it – also of the refusal of the end of the World. On a material and symbolic level, the *umbot* is the transhumanist basis of the posthumanist syntapiens.

Namely, the syntapiens are potentially the seed of a new being that depends on the perspective of the Other and not on the human perspective. Živadinov understands that in the extreme distance, in the ultimate transformation of the universe followed by a shift in humanity's cosmogony, which avant-garde art aims to achieve, the entire anthropological nature of art will be ended. He conveys this understanding through “theatre for that which is not the human eye”, a concept that already emerges latently in the staging for “topical spectators and utopian observers” in *Noordung, The Prayer Machine*.¹⁰ According to Živadinov, the avant-

⁹ The premiere took place on April 20, 1995, on the premises of and in co-production with the Mladinsko Theatre in Ljubljana. The first iteration took place on April 20, 2005, in the hydro-laboratory of the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre, on the model of the International Space Station, in Star City, Russia, and the second on April 20, 2015, at the Cultural Centre of European Space Technologies, in Vitanje. All performances are (co-)produced by the Delak Institute, Ljubljana. The next one is scheduled to take place every ten years until 2045.

¹⁰ The premiere took place on February 17, 1993, at Cankarjev Dom in Ljubljana, produced by the SNG Opera in Balet Ljubljana.

garde-driven ultimate transformation of the universe was to be achieved once the concept of “empty-body direction” (authorial term) reaches its ultimate goal: the population of Space with artistic satellites containing syntapiens – synthetic *Homo sapiens* – and the self-sacrifice of the art regime, represented by Živadinov himself, through his planned suicide in Space on May 2, 2045 (cf. Anđelković 2019). Then *the art* will still be there, but not for people to look at/perceive. Whether the being-in-encounter-with-art will be a no-longer-human, a new human, or something other-than-human – these questions related to the *poiesis* of ŽZT remain unanswered (for now). Given the utopian projection, there can be no predetermined answers for humanity, since what is to occur lies entirely outside the human regime as we are capable of conceiving it today. The genesis of the syntapiens is digitally based but invokes an ontological level of interpretation since it offers itself as highly aesthetic and socially cohesive in a vastly innovative way. It moves away from revolutionising towards something even more extreme in the direction of otherness: the status of syntapiens for society, even by definition for art, depends on understanding by someone or something that is not human and that may also know absolutely nothing about human beings. With ŽZT, the death of humans and the end of humanity do not necessarily signify the end of art; however, the fate of art created by humans remains uncertain after humanity's demise.

And this is the avant-garde gesture of ŽZT, because in general, the avant-garde artist requires the viewer to critically engage with the standard understanding of art seeing as otherwise, the viewer would not be able to “read” the logic that makes up the composition of the artwork the artist offers for understanding. Just as the avant-garde artist interprets the meaning of traditional artworks as deception about the function of *art* as they imagine it themselves, the viewer should also remove any traditional understanding of art from their mind as self-deception, while deciphering the meaning of an avant-garde artwork. It is radical that syntapiens appear to inherently possess a total openness of their meaning, as they can pass into use beyond the reach of human capability, tradition, or understanding – paradoxically, in order to possibly present themselves as elemental art from the human way in a society that is, until now, unimaginable to humans. The question of whether we can still speak of society at all in that case rests precisely on whether we could call syntapiens an *artistic* creation under those circumstances. In this case, artistic creation strives to be a conceptual impulse that is passed on to future generations of humanity, although not necessarily directly to the generation immediately following the one to which the avant-garde artist belonged. But ŽZT does not (merely) send an impulse to future generations of people; it seems as if it is much more intended for someone or something beyond the edge of the World as humans can conceive it. Peter Osborne observes that things which have not been recognised as *art* somehow become so; thus, artworks are capable of surviving the destruction of their own materiality through posthumous replication, re-production, and added supplements. This means also that the avant-garde art move-

ments do not realise their goal within the immediate chronological future of the people that personify the movement. He defines avant-garde artists as functioning: “[...] as a kind of pre- and non-capitalist anthropological reserve, which achieves its avant-garde status not via its anticipation of a prospective post-capitalist future, but rather from its prospective subsumption to the art institution itself (ultimately, the art market)” (Osborne 2012–2013: 35). The life span of avant-garde art is therefore not necessarily continuous, nor is its fate necessarily *artistic*.

There is at least one instance in the *oeuvre* of individuals from the Irwin collective demonstrating a concrete expression of awareness that the impact of the avant-garde extends beyond the lifespan of the individuals who represented it. The obsessive creation of a single depiction of the outline of a cross a day, which from 2002 to 2022 can be identified under the Neo Standard Kultur signature, often appears as a collage in which paper with texts or scenes from everyday life is integrated. These texts or scenes are functionally dead to the artist, so he “crosses” them (introduces logic) into the life of the artworks yet to come, in the manner of Osborne's post-conceptual temporal structuring of the position of art, which takes into account the delay in understanding the art. In fact, this “crossing” is accompanied by a *schemata* elucidating that the act of artistic creation is about the hope of transcending an originally obscure activity and the expectation of establishing itself on the path of humanity before its end by means of the nostalgia of humanity. The assumption of Neo Standard Kultur is that the end of art will come with the end of human understanding and emotion, therefore, with the end of humanity. Even if the life of an avant-garde artist can easily fall into oblivion within the history of humanity, Neo Standard Kultur shows the conviction that the artistic creation emerges from this oblivion all the more easily.

Defying the End

In all generic NSK collectives, the collective attempt to transcend the social situation and/or the determination by the natural givens has the character of an avant-garde artistic opposition to the end of the World, but not necessarily a denial of the end of the World in each of them. Nor is it about the total end of the humanistically conceived World. Rather, they remove the anti-humanist elements from the World and offer humanity possibilities spanning from halting the onslaught of an anti-humanist society to a post-humanist World in which nothing remains of the human World but the intelligible-material trace of avant-garde art or the tangible result of a particular way of thinking. In its ultimate reach, according to the aspiration of NSK, avant-garde art should “outlive” the human being (enduring even after the generic existence of humankind has ended) or at least the avant-garde artist who created it (persisting even after the individual existence of the artist has come to an end). Essential to this seems to be the temporal dimension of

human subsistence and sustainability of human thought and memory – both of which with NSK appear as the inherent strength of avant-garde art. This means that for NSK, *the end of the World* is a concept that carries at least two qualities. First, it is the end of the antagonisms and hegemonies imposed on society by the politics of realities, whereby the *World* is synonymous with the global or all-pervading status of such politics for humanity. NSK sees this as a largely permanent process. *The end of the World*, then, is the final act, the singular perfected act by which humanity can remove autonomous reflection from the mental perception of the World, the consequence of which would be its negation, because – according to NSK – it is indeed the thinking that is essential for human beings. From the NSK perspective, it is the removal of the spiritual-aesthetic elements tied to avant-garde art that would be profoundly critical. This is because, without autonomous reflection, humanity would become entirely subjected to the “will” of that which is other than the human(ity).

NSK recognises that what is harmful to humanity is that which is other than humanity (or, in the case of the politics of realities, even humanity's own inhumane actions), which is anti-humanistic oriented, whereby NSK can be seen as if it understands humanism directly as a tradition of *humanitas*. The confrontation of humanity (even after its cessation, thus merely the confrontation of its “remnants” or “legacy”) with the Other or other (perhaps even within itself as a residue of its own self) completely independent of the humanist orientation, can, however, provide humanity with something new – something still completely undefined and therefore not necessarily anti-human either (even if it were post-human). Even in this scenario, NSK posits avant-garde art as a guarantee that (even in the time of its non-memory) nothing truly harmful will happen to the humanity-with-avant-garde. This is sooner a spiritual process than a material one; in its drastic form after the end of the World, the space of humanity may also be outside its existence, recognition and memory. Humanity can undergo a fundamental transformation in essence through avant-garde activity. Therefore, as observed in the poetics of the NSK collectives, avant-garde art either is or should become an absolute value of humanity; with its trans-temporal power, it can even serve as an authority that transcends humanity.

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SAŽETAK

NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST I KRAJ SVIJETA

Unutar avangardnoga djelovanja umjetničke skupine *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK), odnosno kolektiva Laibach, Irwin i lanca izvedbenih umjetničkih projekata Kazalište sestara Scipiona Nasice→Kozmokinetički teatar Crveni pilot→Kozmokinetički kabinet Noordung→Dragan Živadinov & Dunja Zupančič & Miha Turšič, artikulira se kraj neoliberalnoga kapitalističkog svijeta, a zajedno s njim i kraj nepravde kao sastavnoga dijela njegove ideološke, političke i ekonomske strukture. To najkonkretnije čini Živadinovljeva višeslojna kazališna predstava *Odilo. Zatamnjenje. Oratorij*, koja simbolički dokida društvo utemeljeno na sustavu ekonomske eksploatacije i sve njegove posljedice. Istovremeno, u radu se istražuju dva procesa unutar djelovanja NSK-a koja se bave problemom kraja, immanentnim avangardi kao kulturnome fenomenu: 1. u svojoj umjetničkoj praksi Laibach odgađa kraj svijeta; 2. Irwinova energetska skulptura *NSK Država u vremenu* nadilazi živote umjetnika iz Irwina, stvarajući napetost između konačnosti materijalnih uvjeta i beskonačnosti promišljanja o njima, te pokušava ukazati na kraj društvenoga antagonizma i egzistencijalnih trauma.

Ključne riječi: *Neue Slowenische Kunst*, estetizacija kraja, društveni utjecaj, avangarda, *humanitas*, dijalektika poetskog