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**MORE TOTAL THAN TOTALITARIANISM
THE STRATEGY OF NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST**

by

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SCRIPT

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INTRODUCTION

Neue Slowenische Kunst are a Slovenian based global multi-media art collective and, ultimately, a global multi-media collective art work. The central focus behind NSK's structure, practice and theory is totalitarianism, not just in the political sense but,

...any kind of strict rules, from political systems down to the individual human mind and taste.

(Wilkinson, 1994, p.61).

All NSK production is informed by, utilises, and ultimately comments on different forms and aspects of totalitarian rhetoric and imagery. This production comes in the form of music, painting, sculpture, graphic design, performance, film, the NSK State (see Chapter 3) and the actual structure and existence of NSK and it's various constituent departments. The totalitarian systems which are most evidently utilised and appropriated by NSK are Communism, National Socialism and Capitalism.

The purpose of this Thesis is to firstly explore the structure, philosophy and production of NSK and then question its supposed function. NSK presents itself as the ultimate totalitarian monolith. Item seven of the Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK Members states:

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

Item 2 states:

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

(See Appendix for full Constitution)

I will show that NSK is much more than just a totalitarian collective producing artwork under a strict set of rules using the language of already existing authoritarian regimes and systems, but that the very structure of NSK, and all its production, from painting to music to ideological statements to the NSK State, is part of a huge, global art work, whose

function is to make a critical comment on the totalitarian nature of all systems, especially those regarding cultural production and philosophy in the West, or the so called free world. Therefore, NSK is not an artistic collective that produces artwork under a totalitarian, hierarchical regime; they are not (as they have been accused of being many times) "fascists." I propose to show that NSK is a pastiche model of the ultimate totalitarian system, almost a parody (without the obvious humour) of the logical conclusion of all aspects of totalitarian systems combined. By exploring and questioning the two most important parts of NSK's strategy, (musical group Laibach and the NSK State), I will consider Roy Wilkinson's stipulation :

Either NSK are the most rigidly deadpan satirists on the planet, or what they actually claim to be - serious thinkers systematically drawing out the totalitarian dimensions which they say lie at the heart of the cultural industry.

(Wilkinson, 1994, p.60)

My view is that while NSK do draw out these totalitarian dimensions, they do so not as totalitarian advocates, but as "rigidly deadpan satirists", making a pastiche mockery of all totalitarian systems by apparently becoming the ultimate totalitarian movement. My strategy, therefore, is to introduce and analyse the NSK group, with particular reference to musical group Laibach (the ideological foundation of NSK), through which I will illustrate the theory behind NSK as they present it. I will then enlarge in a full analysis and description of the NSK State which is possibly the most important and striking illustration of the true function behind Neue Slowenische Kunst. These in-depth descriptions of NSK's structure and production are necessary due to the obscure nature of the group, and a sound understanding of how NSK present themselves is needed before I can present my argument of NSK as a parody/pastiche model of totalitarian systems.

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CHAPTER 1

What is NSK?

“NSK is in its structure a simple and yet complex mechanism which makes any precise explanation in a few words practically impossible”

(First NSK Bulletin, 1994, p.1)

Therefore, as precise explanation is needed, an in depth description is called for. To start off with, Neue Slowenische Kunst is German for New Slovenian Art. NSK was founded in 1983 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia. The NSK Collective united groups engaging in cultural production in various fields: musical group Laibach, painters Irwin, and the Theatre of the Sister of Scipio Nasica (now called Noordung). Since then NSK has expanded to include many other groups and departments. The main ones are the New Collectivism Design Studio, the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy and film-makers Retrovision. According to NSK :

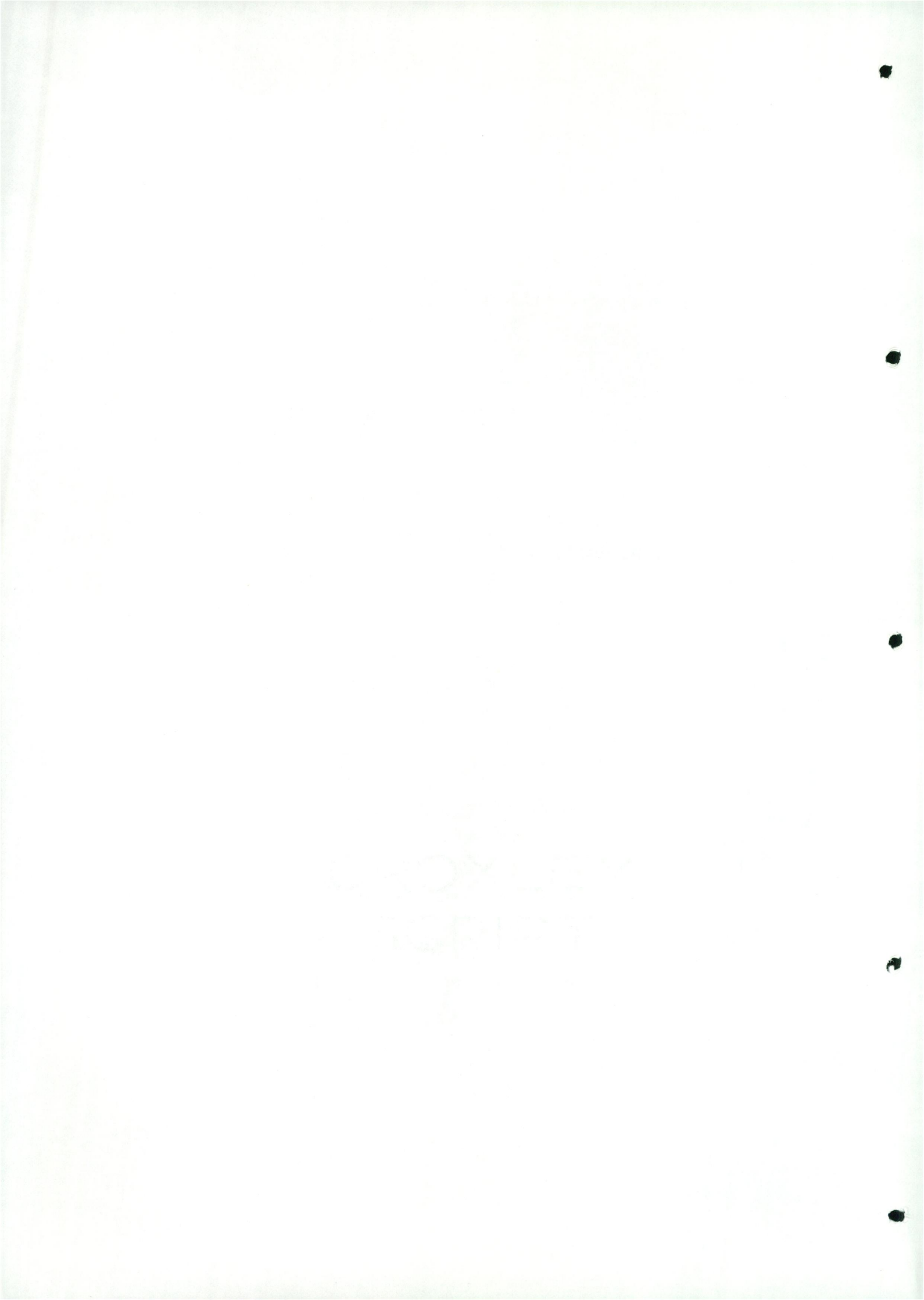
Each of the groups works according to its internal logic, its rules and principles of work, whereas they are connected by a certain contextual and formal aspect, and this aspect is what forms NSK.

(First NSK Bulletin, 1994, p.1)

This contextual and formal aspect is, in essence, the language of totalitarianism. NSK presents itself as a totalitarian group. Membership of the group requires strict obedience and loyalty to NSK and its objectives, denial of personal freedom regarding religion, aesthetics and politics;

Once a novice has given his pledge of allegiance, he is required to adopt the principle of conscious renunciation regarding his personal tastes, judgement and beliefs; he is required to renounce his personal practice of the past and devote himself to work in the body whose integral element he has become by joining the Organisation.

(Item 11, Constitution of Membership..., 1985)



This totalitarian collectivism is further re-enforced by the personal anonymity of NSK members: The individual painters that Irwin consist of never identify themselves, and always act and exhibit as a group under the collective name 'Irwin'. The same is true of all the other NSK constituent groups (except, to a certain extent, Laibach). NSK, or individual group statements or writings, are never credited with an author other than NSK or the name of the individual group. Each group interacts with each other group on various projects, (for example Laibach provided the soundtrack to the theatre of the Sisters of Scipio Nasice's 1986 play "Krst pod Triglavom - Baptism", and New Collectivism designed both the stage sets and the compact disc packaging for the Laibach soundtrack), but also act alone, sometimes issuing work and statements that are not necessarily related to other NSK groups or NSK as a whole (such as Laibach's re-mix of American Satanic 'death metal' band "Morbid Angel" song "Lost Souls" which was nothing more than an exercise in commercial music production). Despite such rare excursions into autonomy and non-NSK activities, it is the hard-core collectivism and the multi-media nature of the groups that give NSK its totalitarian structure. NSK does not have to depend on anything outside itself (in theory), especially now that it has declared itself to exist within its own autonomous country, the global state of NSK (see Chapter 3). The groups that make up NSK cover all aspects of cultural production and information distribution. Now that they exist within their own state (denying the principles of (limited) territory and national borders), NSK, in theory at least, are free to be truly totalitarian under their own terms, without any interference or need for support from outside agents be they cultural, commercial or governmental. Of course in practice they are not free to act in any way and are subject to outside forces, as I will point out later.

Irwin are the painters and installation artists, and one of the founding groups of NSK. In the true spirit of collectivism, no information is available on individual members.

A single painter's canvas is never more persuasive than five. A collective is in a position to express the difference by repeating the same motif.

(Item 2, The Future is the seed of the past, 1, 1987).

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1954

1954

The leading theory behind Irwin's painting is the retro-principle (which Laibach also employ). The retro-principle calls for a constant alteration of language, and a shifting from one pictorial expression to another. It is a form of artistic re-cycling, taking images from all or any tradition that has gone before, especially Third Reich, Communist, Nationalist, Modernist and Christian. Irwin, and their retro-principle, are not concerned with 'style', but rather strategy. One Irwin statement describes it in this way:

It eclectically refers to the history of art, choosing it, along with the entire cultural sphere, as the field of its operation. It makes use of various already existing models, modifies itself through the past on the formal level, but remains intact on the conceptual one. Without giving up achievements of modernism and without seeking new formal patterns, it remains a principle of thought maintaining a process of assimilation.

(Irwin, Retro-principle, 1985)

While the images are direct quotations from historical traditions, they are transformed through conceptual re-contextualisation. Modernism and Post-modernism are, traditionally, anti-totalitarian. Totalitarianism is, traditionally, anti modernist and post-modernist. Therefore, combining language from both seemingly opposing traditions would seem to create a dichotomy, since combining modernist imagery with totalitarianism would seem to subvert the totalitarianism, but still Irwin work as a totalitarian group within a totalitarian framework. To understand the dichotomy, one must look at the Avant-garde of Eastern Europe, the geo-political and social territory from where Irwin hail. Eastern Avant-Garde movements such as the Bauhaus and especially Russian Suprematism and Constructivism, aimed to create a unified aesthetic - a "true art", in which control was to be with the artist rather than with the viewer.

Totalitarian art did not appear out of a vacuum. It was preceded by a long period when in the crucible of the more radical artistic movements - Italian Futurism and the work of the Soviet Avant-garde in particular, political ideas of social transformation were translated into the precise formulae of a new art. Too conservative by its nature to generate new ideas, totalitarianism takes them ready-made, translates them into its own language, distorts their aesthetic nature, transforms them into their opposite and forges from them a weapon with which to destroy its enemies - including the very creators of these ideas.

(Golomstock, 1990, p. xiv)

SONNE
SCHMIDT

Just as totalitarianism (with the exception of the Nazis) took and subverted the Avant-garde so Irwin take and subvert both totalitarianism and the Avant-garde. Irwin, therefore, 'out-total' totalitarianism, so to speak. Russian Constructivism aimed to put art into production for the workers and the new Communist State. Russian Constructivist theory and production were at one with the needs and goals of the Communist State, until the State had no more need for it, denouncing it and replacing it with Socialist Realism. Futurism played a similar role in the growth of Fascism in Italy, and suffered a similar fate. Art (even Avant-garde art) and totalitarianism are not mutually exclusive. However, totalitarianism will use and destroy any tool in order to advance itself. Totalitarian systems (Nazi, Communist, Capitalist) use art as a tool. It is a tactic not only confined to traditional Dictatorship style systems. The C.I.A.'s use of Abstract Expressionism in the 40's as American and anti-Russian propaganda, is as much an example of art as state tool as anything Russia or Nazi Germany engaged in. Similarly, Irwin and NSK use totalitarianism, totalitarian art and any other art they choose as a tool.

Any art is given to manipulation except that which takes deliberately the language of manipulation.

(Oblak, 1994, p. 30)

The tactic of manipulation in Eastern European Avant-garde was not, or indeed is not, solely tied into that of totalitarian systems. Some artists, (Yurii Albert and Braco Dimitrievic, for example), use artistic manipulation to comment on other art. This (more recent) form of appropriation is just as relevant to Irwin's strategy. It also links the tradition of Eastern European artistic manipulation from the revolutionary modernism of the twenties and thirties to the post-modernism of today.

When Irwin and NSK take from the language of manipulation (totalitarian language or artistic language), they do so not to reaffirm it, but to appraise it by using it against itself. When one looks at the two major elements of NSK; Laibach and the NSK State, it is clear that the NSK strategy to expose totalitarianism by example, rather than just engage in totalitarian production. Therefore, NSK create a humourless parody, - a pastiche version - of all things totalitarian not to celebrate it, but to put it up for criticism.

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SCRIPT

CHAPTER 2

Laibach

Laibach started out in 1980 as a multi-media art group engaging in experimental music, gallery and theatre installations in their home city of Ljubijana, the capital of the then Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia. (Laibach is the German name for Ljubijana). When Laibach co-founded NSK in 1983 they switched their main focus almost exclusively to music, and due to their position within NSK and their relative popularity in both the East and the West, Laibach have been the main spokespeople and developers of the NSK archetypes, both through their music and statements. (It is through the music of Laibach that I became aware of NSK). While in terms of Western popular culture Laibach and their music are somewhat obscure, they are the most critically and commercially successful band from socialist Europe to win Western renown. (Thompson, 1992, pp 42,43). Since 1987 they have been signed to Mute Records, Britain's largest independent record label.

In common with the rest of NSK, Laibach engage in collectivism and totalitarianism:

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

(Item 1, Ten Items of the Covenant, Laibach, 1983).

While officially anonymous (i.e.. their individual names are never credited on any release or official statement), they are identified individually by name in interviews, reviews and other magazine reports. (Ivan Novak, Dejan Knez, singer Mican Fras and Ervin Markosek. A fifth member and former singer and spokesman, Tomaz Hostnik, committed 'ritual suicide' after a show in Zagreb, 1982.)

Originally Laibach wrote and performed their own songs with overtly totalitarian and industrial titles and lyrics: "Delo in Disciplina" (work and discipline), "Machine factory Trbouse", and "Drzava" (the State) [Audio cassette track 1]:

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SCRIPT

The State is responsible for/ protecting/ raising and exploiting the forests./ The State is responsible for/ the people's physical education particularly youths'/ in order to raise standards of national health/ national/ working/ and defence capability./ It is behaving ever more indulgently/ all freedom is allowed. / Authority/ here belongs to / the people.

(Laibach, "Drzava", 1983)

Such lyrics (originally sung in Slovene), coupled with militaristic drum beats and Wagnerian music create totalitarian anthems that have little relevance outside the subject of the Eastern block experience with both Nazi and Communist Regimes. However by 1987 when Laibach signed to both British and American record companies, they had developed a new and more complex strategy. Laibach began re-working songs which were considered classic western pop anthems. Subverting them by a process of careful selection, subtle lyric changes, German translations, over the top deep, grunting vocal style and the Wagner/ military march musical style. Laibach turned the Pop and Rock anthems of the West (symbols of freedom and hope, especially to the youth of Eastern Bloc countries) into sinister, ambiguous totalitarian soundtracks. One of the first songs to be subverted was "Life is life" by Opus; Laibach renamed the song "Opus Dei" (Work of God). [Audio cassette track 2].

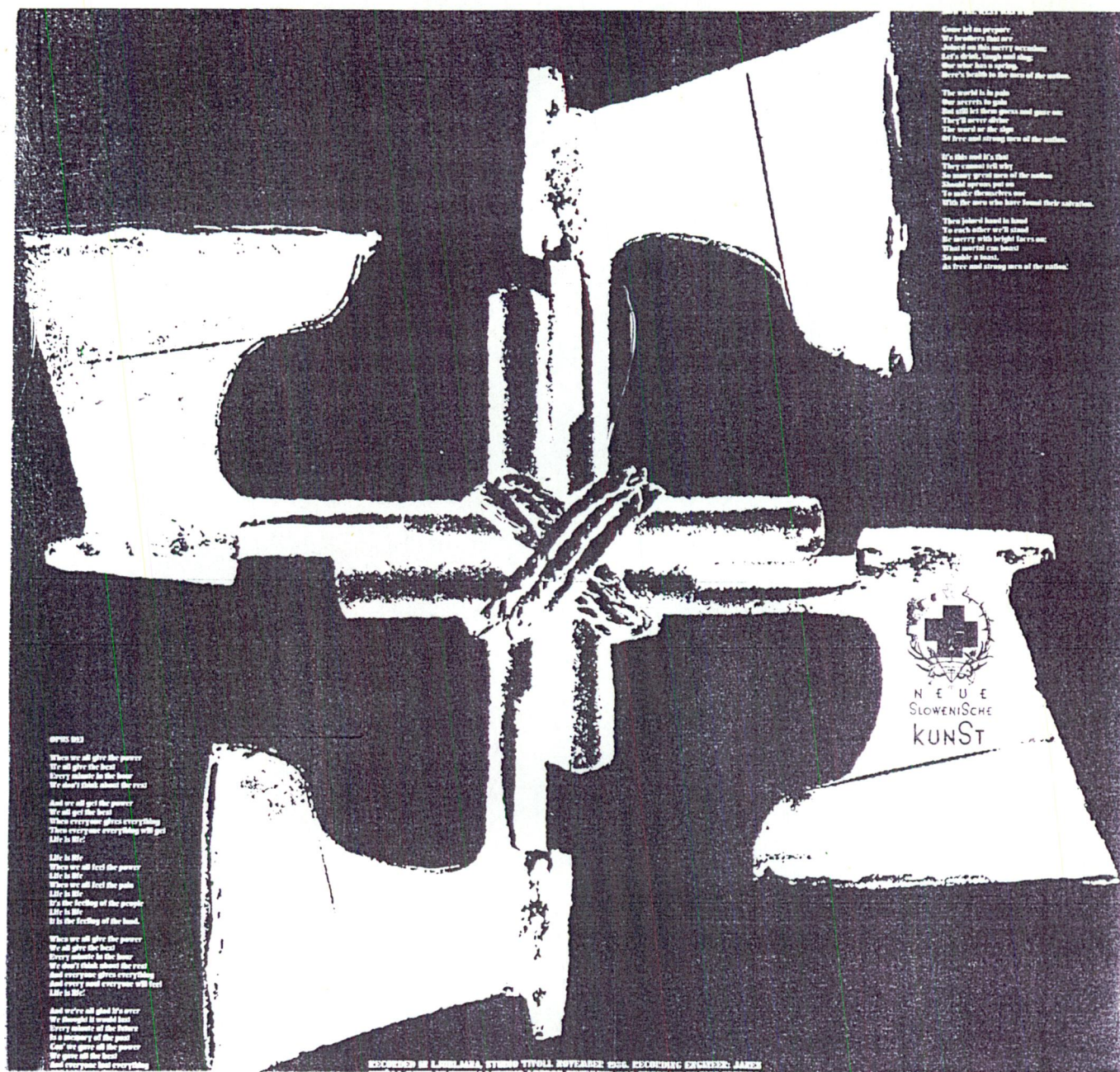
When we all give the power/ we all give the best/ every minute of the hour/ we don't think about the rest./ and we all give the power/ we all give the best/ when everyone gives everything/ then everyone everything will get/ Life is life!

(Laibach, "Opus Dei", 1987)

When these lyrics combine with the music, the song becomes nothing short of a collectivist anthem, totalitarian, but not specifically Nazi or Communist. This ambiguity is furthered by the inner sleeve of the record. The lyrics are printed beside a large Swastika made from four axes (plate 1), taken from a World War Two poster by anti-Nazi artist John Heartfield. Here this Swastika loses its *immediate* anti-Nazi context, but still it cannot be ignored due to its *historical* anti-Nazi context. (The same Swastika appears on the NSK logo, plate 2).

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SECRET



Come let us prepare
 We knowers that we
 Indeed on this sorry occasion
 Let's drink, though not deep
 For what has a spring
 Here's health to the sons of the nation.

 The world is in pain
 Her sorrows to gain
 But with her tears and grief we
 They'll never die
 The world of the sign
 As free and strong men of the nation.

 It's this and it's that
 They cannot tell why
 In every spirit men of the nation
 Should appear not on
 To make themselves new
 With the men who have found their salvation.

 There's a word found in hand
 To each other we'll stand
 For every man's right here on
 What world can best
 To make a man
 As free and strong men of the nation.

When we all give the power
 We all give the best
 Every minute in the hour
 We don't think about the cost

 And we all get the power
 We all get the best
 When everyone gives everything
 Then everyone everything will get
 Like in life

 Like in life
 When we all feel the power
 Like in life
 When we all feel the pain
 Like in life
 It's the feeling of the people
 Like in life
 It is the feeling of the land.

 When we all give the power
 We all give the best
 Every minute in the hour
 We don't think about the cost
 And everyone gives everything
 And every one everyone will feel
 Like in life

 And we've all had it over
 We should be proud to
 Every minute of the hour
 Let's give all the power
 We give all the best
 And everyone has everything

RECORDED IN LAIBACH, STUDIO TIVOLI, NOVEMBER 1988. RECORDING ENGINEER: JAMES

plate 1 : LAIBACH "OPUS DEI" LP inner sleeve, Laibach, 1987.



plate 2 : NSK logo, New Collectivism, 1985

It is obvious that at the time , with the music, lyrics and artwork, Laibach were making some comment about some aspect of totalitarianism, but exactly what was not made obviously clear. In 1994 Laibach said this about "Life is Life":

'Life is Life' is a classic euro-pop hit. No, it is not a ridiculous song. It is a bigger challenge to analyse that sort of song than any work of art. The militant multi-national penetration of this song showed militant subconsciousness in the pop market.

(Wilkinson, 1994, p.61)

Laibach's venture into some of the language of western pop culture, mixed with the eastern totalitarian references, in many ways mirrors Irwin's retro-principle, except that it is much more accessible and powerful than Irwin's paintings and western pop music always had a very strong identity with freedom and individuality (on the surface at least), and this a strong opposition to totalitarian systems. Thus the Laibach (and NSK) paradox: seemingly totalitarian messages through a seemingly anti-totalitarian medium. So which is subverted, the message, or the medium? On first look it seems that the medium, pop/rock music, is subverted. The tradition is taken by Laibach and turned against itself, or at least what it claimed to be. The Beatles, Queen and the Rolling Stones, icons of the rebellious, free youth of the West, twisted into sinister songs of repression with blurred socialist/fascist undertones but obvious militaristic intent. In 1988, Laibach released an album comprised of eight versions of the Rolling Stones "Sympathy for the Devil" (in musical styles ranging from Wagner to Disco, but all united by the ever present Laibach military beat. The album cover (plate 3, designed by New Collectivism of NSK) comprised of a drawing of a mother, father and four children taken from a Nazi poster advocating the perfect image of the Aryan family. In the lyrics of the song, [audio cassette track 3], the Devil lists his involvement in such decisive moments of history as the Crucifixion of Christ, the Russian Revolution, the Nazi occupation of Europe and the Kennedy assassinations.

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plate 3: LAIBACH "SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL" LP cover,
New Collectivism, 1988

Furthermore, he calls for courtesy, sympathy and respect from all who encounter him or he will "lay your soul to waste". In the Laibach version, with its obvious visual and aural references to totalitarian (especially Nazi) language and tradition, and knowing the background practices of Laibach and NSK, the song takes on a new meaning; seemingly substituting the concept of Satan as Devil with totalitarianism as Devil. Thus a unified totalitarian motive was behind all the aforementioned atrocities. The Laibach strategy therefore seems to be not to espouse totalitarianism as a worthwhile structure, but to create a totalitarian structure in order to expose its universal flaws. The line "what is puzzling you is the nature of my game" from Sympathy for the Devil can be read in two ways from the Laibach perspective, i.e.: "what is puzzling you is the nature of totalitarianism's game" and "what is puzzling you is the nature of Laibach's game." The former is not really a puzzle. All totalitarian systems aim to assert themselves as the central and universal factor governing everything within a particular sphere, be that on a global or national level or within a smaller group or facet of society or culture. Totalitarianism's "game" is clear - total, unquestioned control. Laibach's "game" (and by extension, NSK's) is not so clear. While on one hand setting the example by being the ultimate totalitarian movement, encompassing (and so controlling) everything from High Art to popular culture, Fascism to Stalinism, images of freedom to mind controlled slavery, Laibach still raise serious questions about exactly how totalitarian such totalitarian systems are. Totalitarianism is, by definition, all embracing and, therefore, should not be open to subversion and manipulation. But yet Laibach manipulate and subvert totalitarian language of all kinds which, in effect, denies the existence of true totalitarianism.

Any art is given to manipulation except that which takes deliberately the language of manipulation.

(Oblak, 1994, p. 11)

Totalitarian art such as Social Realism, Nazi Kunst, Russian Constructivism and Socialist Realism all deliberately engage in the language of manipulation. Yet Laibach and NSK manipulate this language of manipulation, creating not a paradox within the NSK strategy and philosophy, but a paradox within totalitarianism. Another problem with and for totalitarian systems is that they are not indestructible, and the break-up of Yugoslavia's system and nationhood is of particular relevance to



Laibach. Slovenia, the first Yugoslav Republic to declare Independence, came out of the process relatively un-troubled in June 1991 (Thompson, 1992, p.8). (There was a small, 10 day war between the Slovenes and the Yugoslav People's Army.) As a country rich in industry and raw materials and low in ethnic mixture and conflict, Slovenia escaped the disastrous problems experienced by Croatia and Bosnia. Yet naturally the Balkan War has played a significant part in recent Laibach activity. In 1994, in an interview on Radio Zagreb, Laibach were asked:

Are you happy now? War is here. You have got what you always wanted!

(Wilkinson, 1994 p.60)

Roy Wilkinson, in reporting this incident, gives no indication of Laibach's reply. However, the answer may be found on Laibach's most recent album, "NATO" from 1994. "NATO" is a collection of nine cover versions of mainly western pop classics. (original artists in brackets):

1. NATO (Based on Mars from Holst's Planets Suite)
2. War (Edwin Starr)
3. The Final Countdown (Europe)
4. In the Army Now (Bolland and Bolland, later covered by Status Quo)
5. Dogs of War (Pink Floyd)
6. Alle Gegen Alle (DAF)
7. National Reservation (JD Loudermilk, also a hit for Don Fardon)
8. 2525 (Zager and Evans)
9. Mars on River Drina (Based on March on the River Drina by S. Binicki)

(Chris Bohn, Laibach:NATO, 1994, p.1)

The cover of the album (again designed by New Collectivism, fig 4) depicts the Goddess of Peace over the NATO symbol. Inside the album sleeve, Laibach quote from the NATO Charter:

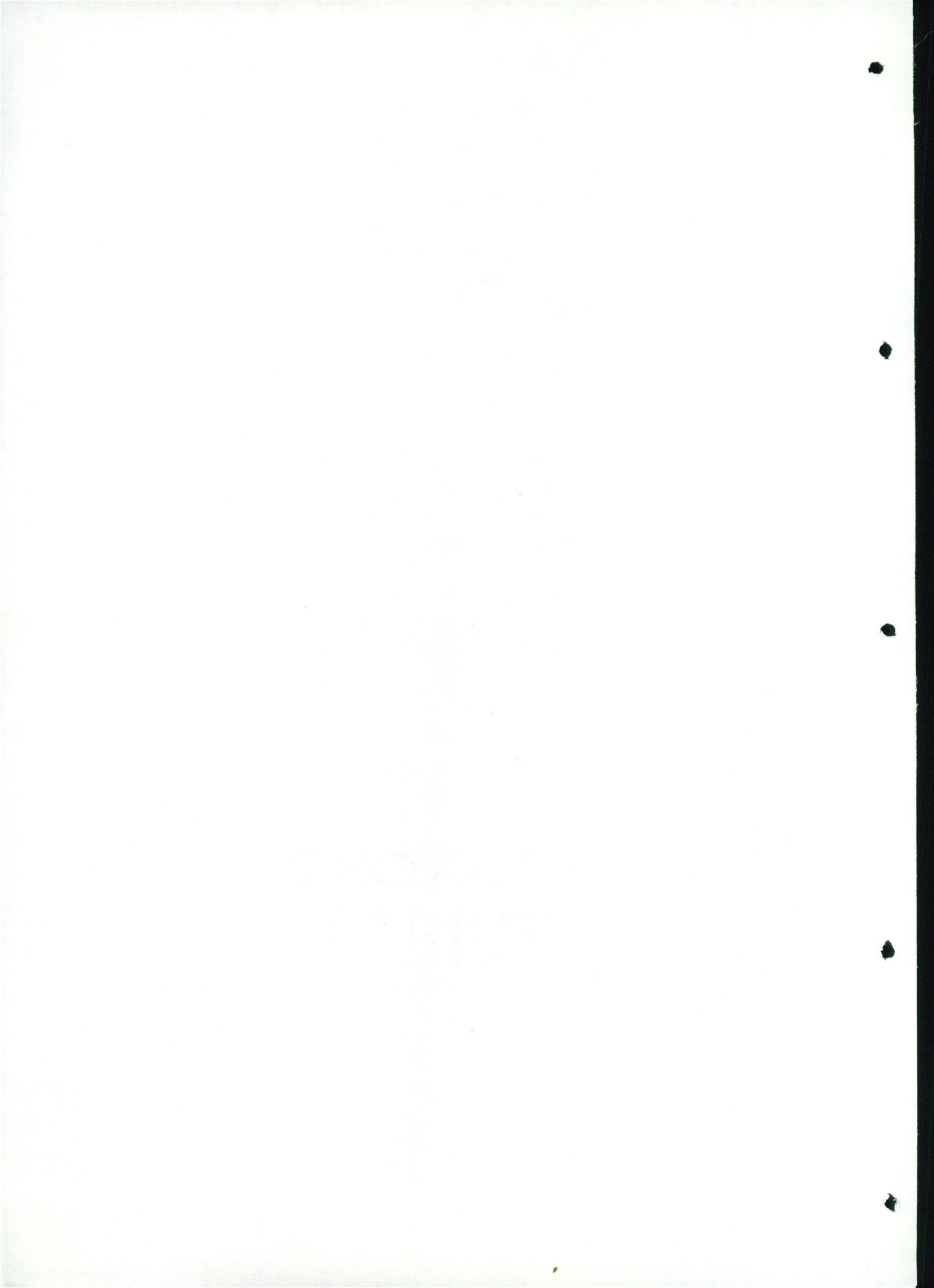




plate 4: LAIBACH "NATO" LP cover,
New Collectivism, 1994

NATO is the framework for an alliance designed to prevent aggression or to repel it, should it occur it is determined to safeguard freedom, common heritage and civilisation, founded on the principles of democracy, liberty and the rule of Law. It provides for continuous co-operation and consultation in political, economic and other military fields. It is resolved to unite its efforts for collective defence and seek to promote stability, security and well being in the North Atlantic area. It is of indefinite duration.

Washington DC 1949-1994

(Laibach, NATO, 1994)

As is obvious from the song titles, album title, artwork and above quotation, "NATO" is concerned with the west's inability and/or unwillingness to resolve the Balkan conflict. One of the first concerts Laibach played in 1994 after the release of the Album was in Sarajevo, thus Laibach brought NATO "where NATO itself has refused to go", (Bohn, p.1)

Each of the songs get a new context (sometimes new lyrics) when re-worked by Laibach. "War" (written by B.Strong and N.Whitfield) as originally performed by Edwin Starr, contained the line: "War..., what is it good for ?/nothing...". The Laibach version [audio cassette track 4] is more honest in a cynical way. When it asks what war is good for, it answers with a list, first of concepts such as science, religion, domination etc. and then a list of companies, General Motors, IBM, Sony, Unilever, and American News T.V. Station CNN, etc., who all benefit in some way from war.

It is healthy for the rich and a deadly disease for the poor. War is capitalism with its glove off.

(SPEX, 1994, p.8)

So Laibach blame Western capitalist interests for the continuation of the war and the inactivity (until very recently) of NATO. NATO was of course set up to safeguard western capitalist freedom from eastern Totalitarian Communism. So NATO is in effect, anti-totalitarian. But is Laibach anti-NATO? The answer seems to be yes, but this needs to be qualified. NATO, as Laibach point out, has failed in its own objectives and failed the people of the former Yugoslavia. Laibach show this by adopting the role and form of NATO. By representing themselves as NATO through their album and representing NATO's capitalist motives through songs such as "War" Therefore, "NATO" by Laibach is a pastiche model of the real NATO, with the purpose of showing it up in its true light. But just because NATO are anti-totalitarian and Laibach are anti-NATO does not mean that

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SOPHIE

Laibach are totalitarian. Laibach and NSK have used these same tactics in relation to totalitarianism, by setting themselves up as a model of the system (in fact all conflicting aspects of the system) in order to show it in its true light, including its ugly negative side. With both NATO and totalitarianism, NSK bring positive and negative aspects to the one level, displaying them equally, creating paradox, conflict, but ultimately a appraisal of both. In reality NATO's failure is totalitarianism's failure: NATO have failed to stop a war that communism's failure helped start. Communism and capitalism are equally responsible for different aspects of the war. While communism and capitalism oppose each other, Laibach see them both as totalitarian systems.

The biggest problem with understanding Laibach, was that people would connect the totalitarianism we were talking about only with political systems. We can now clearly say we were thinking about any kind of strict rules, from political systems right down to the individual human mind and taste. But most of all we were talking about the marketplace. Every group who want to succeed has to regard certain rules, and that is no less totalitarian than any political system with its mechanisms of control.

(Wilkinson, 1994, p. 60)

If the marketplace is totalitarian, then to an extent, so is capitalism, as the marketplace is a symptom of it. So in Laibach's eyes, totalitarianism has failed the people of the Balkans on two counts: post communist war and NATO/capitalist inactivity. In commenting on and criticising NATO/capitalist interests, Laibach comment on and criticise an aspect of totalitarianism. The paradox of Laibach is that while the totalitarianism that they talk about is not a globally unified doctrine, (fascism, communism, capitalism, popular culture, art etc. oppose and resist one and other in various ways), NSK present totalitarianism as globally unified. NSK's latest step towards the full embodiment of this impossible global unification is the NSK State.

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CHAPTER 3

The NSK State

With the break-up of Yugoslavia and Slovene independence in 1990 NSK no longer existed within the totalitarian state but in a proto-western style democracy. The old Yugoslav State had investigated and banned Laibach in 1982 for "apparent use of military expedients in a show" and again in 1983 for "inappropriate" use of symbols. Over the years, various NSK events and products were banned or censured by the Yugoslav State. (However the official state record company ZKP RTV did sign Laibach for a short while in 1983 and released one of their records "Opus Dei" in 1987). With Slovene independence, NSK faced no official opposition, which was not necessarily welcomed by NSK:

The only link with the State we wanted was some kind of friction and at least the former state (Yugoslavia) showed whether it was for or against us. The Slovenian State, as with any democratic state, is basically without colour, without whatever makes a human being alive.

(Wilkinson, 1994, p 61)

NSK's solution to existing within a frictionless, dead state was to form their own: the State of NSK. The actual date for the creation of this State ranges from 1990 according to Laibach on their 1993 album "Ljubljana - Zagreb - Beograd", to the 1992 'Moscow Declaration', according to Majca Oblak. However it was not until 1993 that the real structures of the State began to emerge, such as passports and embassies. The NSK State is no ordinary one.

The NSK State is a global State which denies the principles of (Limited) territory and national borders

(Gates, K., NSK Honorary Consul to the US, 1995)

In 1994 I became a Citizen of the NSK State, simply by sending an application form and \$50 to NSK. (The Application Form was contained within the packaging for Laibach's album "NATO".) I received a 34 page NSK passport (figs. 5,6) which states that "ownership

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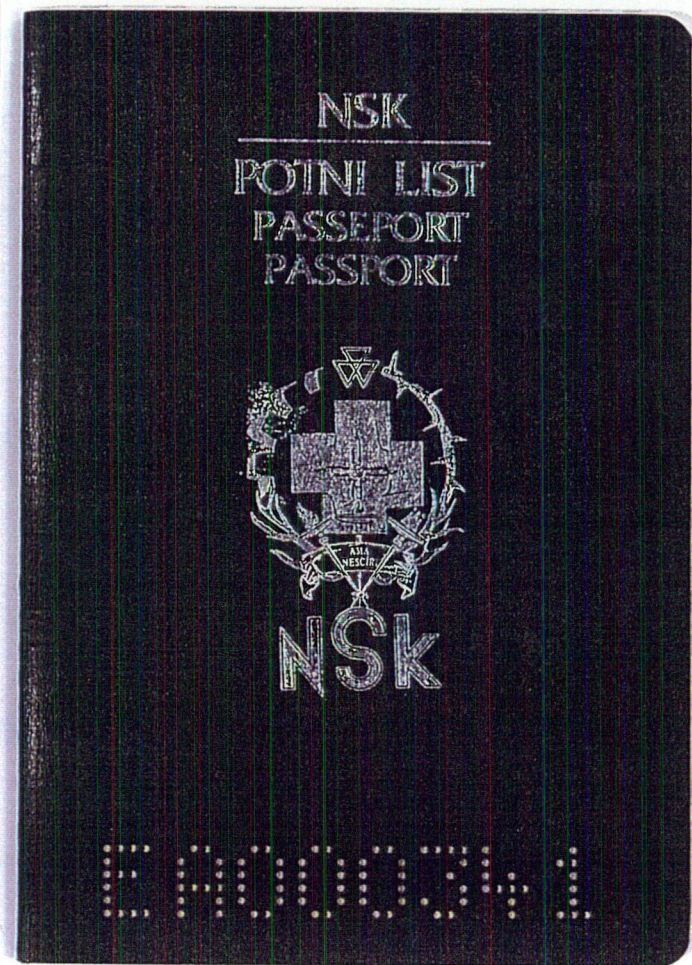


plate 5: NSK Passport cover, New Collectivism, 1994

THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF NSK
requests all competent foreign authorities to
allow the bearer of this passport

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CLARKE

to pass freely without let or hindrance and to
afford the bearer such assistance and
protection as may be necessary.

1 4 5 0 0 0 4 3

Stalno prebivališče/Domicile/Permanent residence

30 BELTON PARK ROAD
DUBLIN
IRELAND

Rojstni datum/Date de naissance/Date of birth

15.10.1973

Spol/Sexe/Sex



Rojstni kraj/Lieu de naissance/Place of birth

DUBLIN

Višina/Taille/Height

183 CM

Barva oči/Couleur des yeux/Color of eyes

BLUE



Lastnoročni podpis/Signature du titulaire

Signature of bearer

Peter Clarke

1 4 5 0 0 0 4 3

of this passport shall not constitute membership in the NSK Organisation.” NSK, therefore, declared itself to exist within the State of NSK and invited others to become citizens. The NSK State is not a totalitarian one and citizenship is open to all, provided they pay their money, fill out the form and,

Pledge to participate on a best-effort basis to support the integrity of the NSK State. This Passport may not be misused for criminal, ideological or political purposes conflicting with the concerns of NSK and/or jeopardising the reputation and good name of NSK.

(NSK Passport, 1994, p 33)

Claiming no territory and existing within and beyond all current national borders, the NSK State claims to be global, yet it is not a “virtual” country as might exist on the Internet (NSK do, however, have a virtual embassy on the World Wide Web). It defines itself as an “extra territorial State”, capable of temporarily materialising within the space of any pre-existing state, in peaceful co-existence. One such temporary materialisation was the NSK Staat Berlin, which occurred in the Volksbuhne Theatre, East Berlin from the 8th to the 11th of October, 1993. During this time the Theatre was declared the territory of NSK. Entry was restricted to NSK Passport holders, however, instant visas were available to holders of other Passports. The programme of the event included a press conference on the Theses of the NSK State, Lectures by Slavoj Zizek, (the Slovenian writer and founder of the Ljubljana Association for Theoretic Psychoanalysis), and the Department for Pure and Applied Philosophy, Laibach concerts, NSK films, Noordung Theatre performances and lectures and an exhibition by Irwin.

The NSK State can be viewed in a number of ways. While NSK themselves insist that the NSK State proves that it is possible for one sovereign state to peacefully co-exist alongside, inside or outside any other, and that on such occasions “The NSK State shows the way forward”. (Laibach and NSK: The Birth of a New State, 1992).

NSK cannot be seriously considered a viable alternative to pre-existing countries. At best, with the call for a lot of imagination, NSK could be seen as a temporary diversion from the current world wide nation set-up. It could

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also be seen as little more than a money making ploy on the part of NSK. Passports cost \$50, postage stamps are soon to be on sale and even plans for NSK currency have been announced, each of which are/would be commercial collector items. The most reasonable way to look at the NSK State is as a global art-work in the form of a country, and NSK are prepared to admit to this "art in the image of the State" strategy. But the function of this art work is obscure. One NSK document claims:

Neue Slowenische Kunst - as art in the image of the State - revives the trauma of Avant-garde movements by identifying with it in the stage of their assimilation in the systems of totalitarian states.

(Cufer and Irwin, 1993 , p.2)

But NSK does no such thing. For a start the NSK State is not a totalitarian one. Citizens are free to use their citizenship as they wish, with some exceptions, and this is something no totalitarian state would allow:

Applicability of the Passport is unlimited and is subject to the responsibility of its holder.

(NSK passport)

So if the State is not totalitarian, how can NSK identify with these Avant-garde movements? Secondly the artistic groups within NSK are not in the stage of assimilation with the NSK State: The groups (especially Laibach) invented the State, so if anything the process is reversed and the State is forced to assimilate to the systems of the group, as was the case with the NSK Staat Berlin where the NSK State became not much more than a three day NSK exhibition where Passports were substituted for invites or tickets.

NSK seem to have let themselves down with the NSK State. It is obviously an art work, but it raises too few questions. It is too easy to become a citizen for anything truly constructive to come from citizenship. To become a member of NSK, one has to comply with all 21 items of the Constitution of Membership and Basic Duties of NSK members" (see Appendix), and this is what gives NSK its collective power and monolithic totalitarian image. Anyone with \$50 and two passport photographs can become a citizen, and citizenship has no real function, either to the citizen or the State, other than establishing the identities of citizen and State. While establishing an independent country seems like a radical thing to do, NSK have done

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nothing radical with it. If a citizen wishes to travel using an NSK passport, he or she does so at their own risk, thus the power and responsibility of citizenship lies with the individual rather than the State; a philosophy in direct conflict with the seemingly hard-line totalitarianism of the rest of NSK.

The NSK State is a more obvious parody of the concept of the state than NSK is of totalitarianism. There are humorous elements to the NSK State, such as the claim that the NSK currency is expected to

quickly establish itself as a replacement for the unpopular ECU...and...The exchange rate is 1NSK = 7dm or £2.85 Sterling approximately (check your bank for up to date exchange rates before you travel).

(Bohn, 1994, p.2)

The claim that NSK signifies that it is possible for one sovereign state to peacefully co-exist inside or outside any other is evidence of this parody too, especially when the Balkan War is taken into account, which signifies that a sovereign nation cannot even exist on its own without self destruction into bloody civil war.

In any case, NSK is hardly a sovereign nation. In "How to start your own country", Erwin S. Strauss identifies five present opportunities for new country projects:

1. Traditional sovereignty
2. Ship under flag of convenience
3. Litigation
4. Vonu (out of sight out of mind)
5. Model country

(Strauss, 1984, p. 5)

Traditional sovereignty requires some degree of international recognition, exchange of ambassadors with other sovereign nations, acceptance of passports as official travel documents etc. As of this time no sovereign nation has recognised or officially exchanged ambassadors with NSK. It is possible that some NSK passports have been successfully used as travel documents, partly due to their professional and authentic look, and partly due to the inattentiveness of some officials.

You might want to try presenting your new-country passport when crossing a border - border officials aren't always especially alert, and they just might stamp it and pass you on.

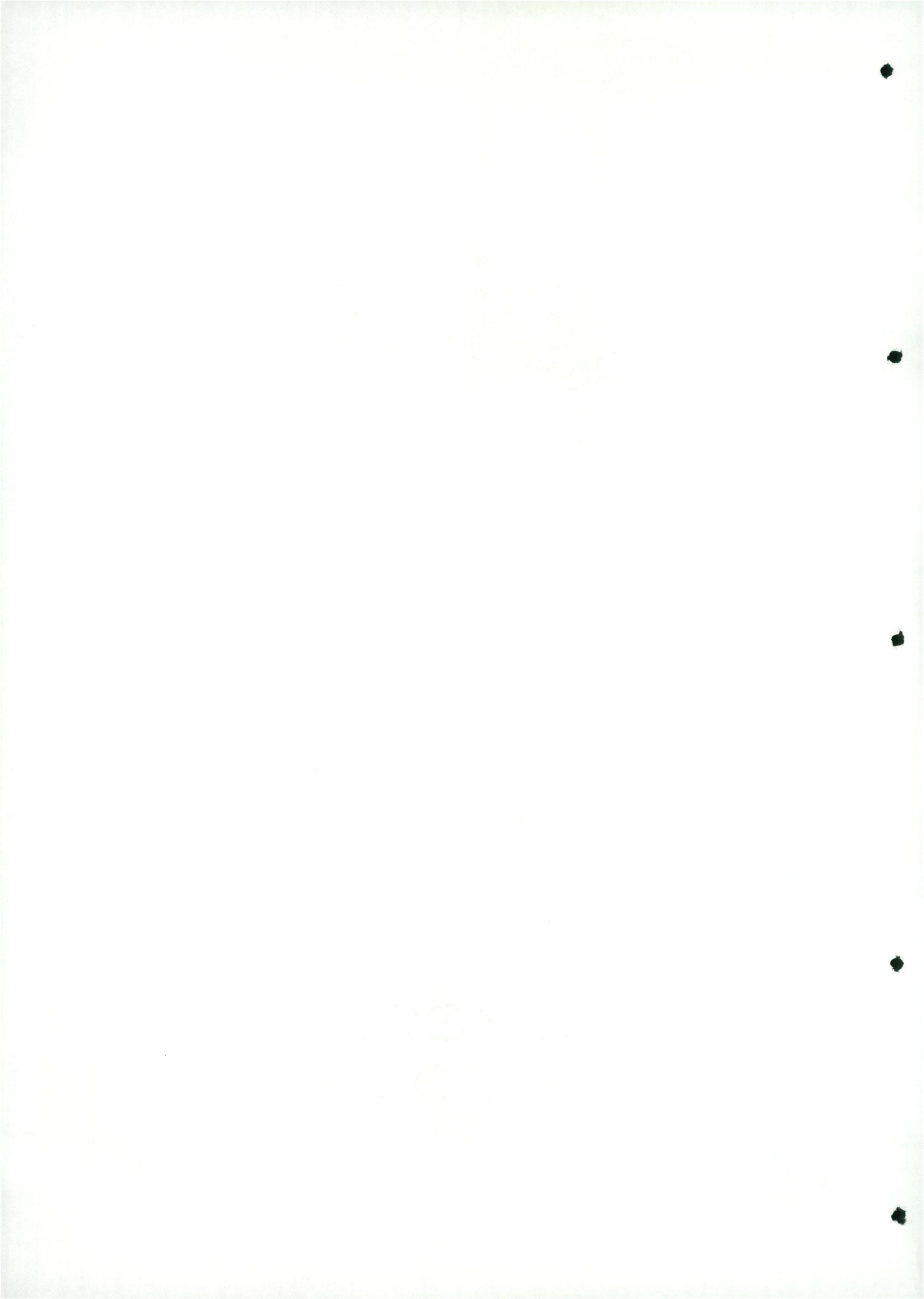
(Strauss, 1984, p. 29)

NSK seems to fall under Strauss's "model country" category, although on a larger scale than most model countries, with different aims, structure and results.

Many find it a rewarding hobby to run a model railroad, or operate model aeroplanes. These model enterprises have all the trappings of the real thing, in miniature. Similarly, it's possible to run a "model country" you need only declare your home to be an independent nation and start from there.

(Strauss, 1984, p. 28)

NSK declared the concept of no territory to be their independent nation. The NSK model state subverts the idea of the state, without subverting any actual state. The model state has no function within the totalitarian framework of NSK, but does go to show that NSK deal in issues other than totalitarianism with a model/parody strategy. The NSK State is not a state. It is this parody/model which allows for the subversion of the concept through the language. In creating and maintaining a country, NSK raises questions and problems with and about other existing states, although at present with limited success.



CHAPTER 4

The Totalitarian Model

The concept of NSK operating as a model state can also be applied to NSK's totalitarian structure and ideology. NSK as a group is obviously constructed as a totalitarian monolith. Its constitution of membership is rigidly and uncompromisingly anti-individualistic and fanatically collectivist and hierarchical. Groups such as Irwin and Laibach act and interact in totalitarian ways. The imagery of other totalitarian systems is abundant and obvious. But what is the purpose of this totalitarianism. Both fascism and communism employed totalitarian systems to gain complete control of the state and the people for the sake of the state. (It is of course open to debate whether those in control of fascist and communist regimes employed such strategies for the genuine benefit of the state or for their own position of privilege and megalomania.) The general theory behind such previous systems was that one party dictatorships, collectivism, state intervention, anti-individualism regarding citizens and absolute authority of the state as power structure strengthened and empowered the state, and so strengthened and empowered the citizens. So long as they took an active part in the state mechanisms and played by the rigid rules, with the classic totalitarian systems, fascism and communism, the totalitarian strategy is completely interlinked with the state, the citizens and their production and productivity either in terms of goods or services (including food, machinery, cultural production, science and military/defence/security structures). NSK is obviously in a different situation. For almost ten years NSK was a totalitarian movement without a country. It had little influence and no responsibility for Yugoslavia while it existed within it, even less so with Slovenia.

When the state of NSK was declared, as I have shown, NSK failed to make it part of its totalitarian project. NSK seems to be totalitarian for the sake of being totalitarian. NSK's only production is cultural production, no food, no machinery, no army. NSK produce art and ideology. Of course they produce collectivist art and ideology with both totalitarian motives and themes, but to what end? NSK are more than just an exercise or experiment in this mode of production. Their purpose, as I see it, is as model totalitarian system structure. They are a scaled down version of a

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conglomerate of fascism, communism, the art market and art history, capitalism, nationalism and collectivism, and all the other systems and ideologies that NSK see as falling into this sphere of reference. By being model, rather than the real thing, they attain certain advantages: more control over their operation, less personal or collective risk, the ability to experiment with un-realistic proposals, (no real totalitarian country or system could even realistically expect to demand such duties and conditions as the constitution of membership of NSK requires (see appendix), the freedom to be all embracing without the limitations of reality, and the ability to be objectively studied from the outside, without the risk of being undermined. The disadvantage with being a model regime is that one must discuss it in terms of being a model, so it is always separate from what it aspires to be. NSK could not seriously be compared to communism or Nazism on any grand scale simply because they were (are) realities with real consequences; NSK is a mock-up with experimental conclusions.

The fact that NSK has such a strict constitution of membership, which must be adhered to before becoming a member, negates it from being a true totalitarian movement. A true totalitarian movement would seek to enforce its ideology and authority on all those who came into its influence, and systematically expand to increase its influence in order to enforce itself on more people, thus facilitating its progressive survival and growth. Totalitarian systems strive to become universal and absolute (Nazism, communism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) NSK, by only offering membership to those who agree with it in the first place, do not engage in this defining totalitarian tactic. In Russia after the revolution, for example, even those who did not agree with the principles and methods of the state were forced into its service and structure - or shot. NSK must seek members who agree with its aims and objectives. One advantage of this, however, is that by definition no member of NSK opposes or disagrees with the collective, as agreement is a condition of membership. This, in one sense, gives NSK the appearance of a totalitarian monolith, as it has no internal discussion, making it the ultimate, smooth running collective.

In assimilating tactics and language from all totalitarian systems, NSK become (as they themselves point out) apolitical, simply because they must deal with the tactics and language of politically opposing totalitarian systems. While the claim is made that:

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The biggest problem with understanding Laibach was that people would connect the totalitarianism we were talking about only with political systems. We can now clearly state we were talking about any kind of strict rules, from political systems down to human mind and taste. But most of all we were talking about the market place.

(Wilkinson, 1994, p. 61)

It should be noted that human "taste", and especially the market place are political systems, maybe not in the traditional party political sense, but related to it. Human taste and market forces both influence and are influenced by party political systems. The market place exists, and has an equally strong role, if somewhat different in each case, under capitalism and communism. Human taste has a profound influence on political systems in democratic countries, and even in totalitarian ones where collectivism is supposed to reign, individual taste does have an impact on the system, especially if it is expressed from near the top of the hierarchy. So while most of what NSK assimilate from the outside world is politically charged, the fact that they engage it all on an even plane negates its political clout, sterilising it for NSK production. By virtue of the fact that totalitarianism is intrinsically political, and NSK is by definition the exact opposite, NSK cannot be engaging in true totalitarianism, but rather a model of it.

In order for NSK's project to work, in order for them to explore all the different aspects of totalitarianism through physical example as opposed to theoretical discussion, NSK must act and claim to be nothing short of totalitarian. It is not that NSK have failed by not being a true totalitarian movement, or that they are operating a wilful deception for ulterior purposes, but rather it is an intrinsic part of the strategy. NSK must set themselves up to look and act as serious and genuine as possible in order to engage in their task. They are acting out the role of totalitarianism, and must constantly stay 'in character' in order for the model to be effective.

Hand in hand with the model of totalitarianism that NSK employ is another tactic, which lies somewhere between pastiche and parody:

Pastiche is, like parody the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter... pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humour.

(Jameson, 1983, p. 114)

NSK do engage in an ulterior motive, not just imitating the language and style of various totalitarian systems to emulate them, but to subvert them. The model of totalitarianism they have created is ultimately a parody without the humour. The model and the pastiche are intertwined, creating the superstructure of NSK. As to the lack of humour in NSK, it is not to say that NSK do not have a sense of humour: "We have always preferred humour that is not a joke" (Wilkinson, 1994, p.61). NSK take their task seriously. If they were to poke obvious fun at totalitarianism by engaging in straight parody, their intent would become clear, but their position would be weakened as they would be engaging with totalitarianism from the outside. By creating the totalitarian model through a pastiche process, they engage with it from the inside, causing some confusion as to their exact intent, but making their subversion and manipulation much more effective.

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CONCLUSION

Neue Slowenische Kunst are clearly much more than just a totalitarian art movement, so much so that to identify them as such is a gross underestimation of their strategy and intent. But yet for their strategy to succeed, they must be seen as nothing more than a totalitarian collective making totalitarian statements. This is NSK's surface appearance, and one which they themselves go to great lengths to promote. Under that one dimensional surface lies the true, very complex identity of NSK. Using the language, form and strategy of totalitarian systems back on those systems, NSK assimilate and subvert them, showing that on one hand totalitarianism is not as total and monolithic as it makes itself appear to be (it can be manipulated) and on the other, that those systems that claim to represent freedom and anti-totalitarianism, such as capitalism and popular western culture, are in fact, just as restrictive, manipulating and totalitarian as those they claim to oppose.

Through the constant and universal appropriation of totalitarian language of all types, NSK build a model of totalitarianism, engaging in every facet, in itself more total than any one of the individual systems that make up the different examples and forms of totalitarianism as a universal, yet not unified phenomenon. NSK unify totalitarianism not to affirm it but to parody it. In order to do this successfully, it must not be obvious, or else it would too be subject to manipulation, therefore, NSK create pastiche totalitarianism - parody without the comedy, humour that is not a joke.

This pastiche model is built from the various departments of NSK, and in turn by their various functions. Not only do NSK engage in the language of totalitarianism, but also in the total language of art; painting, music, film, graphics etc. are all tools or potential tools. Laibach, as founders and chief theoreticians of NSK and as manipulators of popular music - one of the most powerful and universally understood languages of global culture - are the most successful of NSK's groups, not only in terms of fame and fortune, but in terms of NSK strategy.

The biggest paradox in this strategy is that NSK can never be seen to admit to being anything other than plain totalitarianists. If they did, the pastiche model would become too obvious to be effective and totalitarianism is not open to obvious attack. Therefore, NSK would never

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to able to condone my findings in this Thesis. The final words go to Laibach, in reference to this interpretation of NSK's structure and strategy.

We are not politically correct enough to correct anybody's opinion. We can only help you to create your own answers to your own questions.

(Spex, 1994, p 9)

APPENDIX

Constitution of Membership And Basic Duties of NSK Members.

1.

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

2.

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

3.

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

4.

In carrying out the exacting tasks, in view of accomplishing the objectives required to attain common goals, the members make use of every means permitted or required by the "Law of Action" , should the situation require it.



5.

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

6.

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

7.

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

8.

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

9.

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

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10.

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

1. Do you present yourself before this organisation, with truth and honesty, free of any prejudice that would interfere with your personal dispositions, as a free person and of your own free will, without being forced or subjected to inappropriate pressure, and present yourself as a candidate for membership in this organisation?

2. Do you maturely and responsibly claim the status of member in this Organisation and its pertaining privileges, having taken a clear stand on the world and its history?

3. Do you truly and responsibly pledge to perform your duties for the Organisation loyally, respectfully, and in the spirit of its laws and practices?

11.

Once a novice is given his pledge of allegiance, he is required to adopt the principle of conscious renunciation regarding his personal tastes, judgement, and beliefs (...); he is required to renounce his personal practices of the past and devote himself to work in the body whose integral element he has become by joining the Organisation.

12.

Novices must respect elder members and the "Triple Principle", which is the supreme designer of the Law of the Organisation.

13.

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

14.

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

15.

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

16.

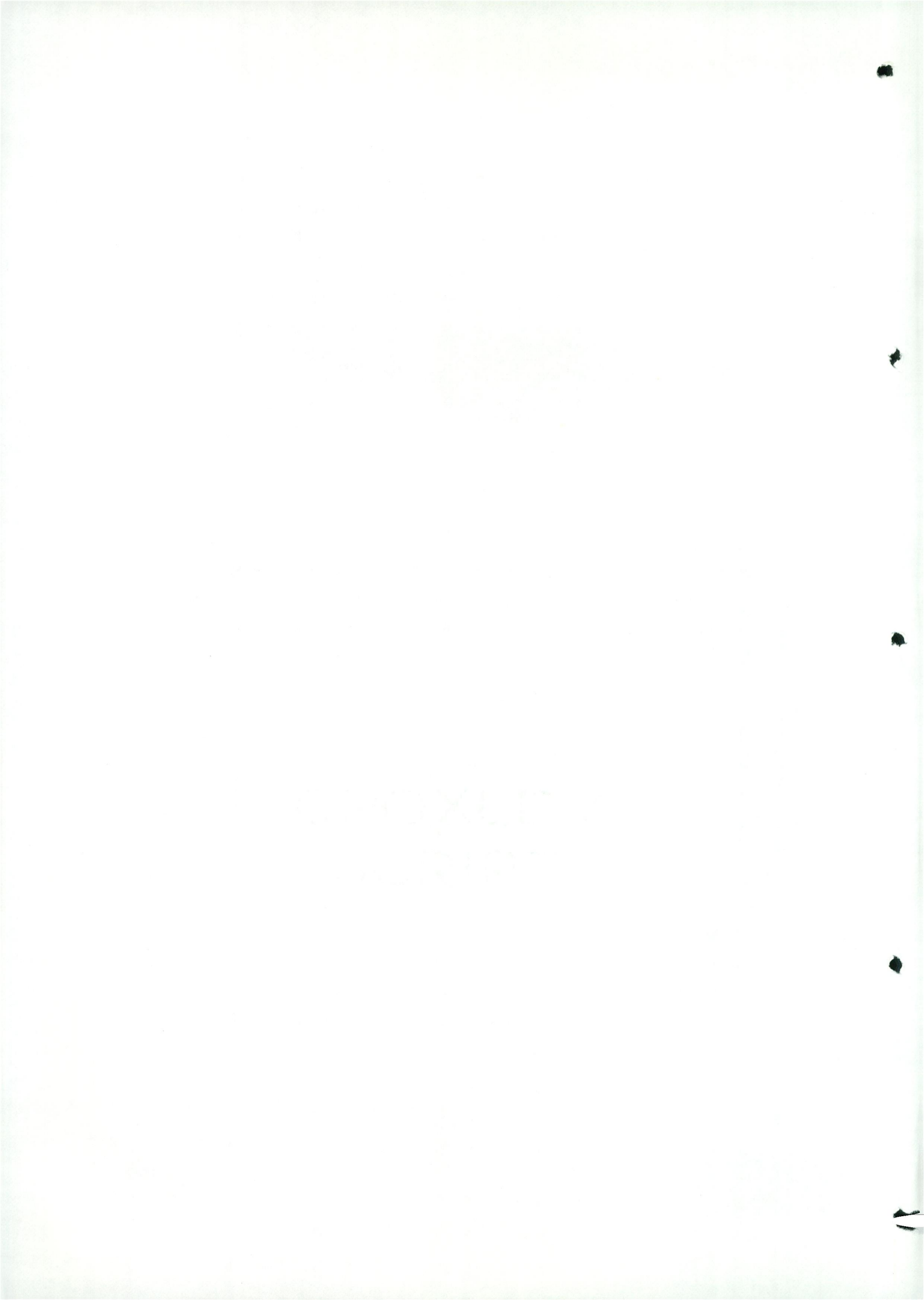
Concerning one's love for one's neighbour (one's friends, family, wife and neighbourhood), IBL exceptionally permits members of NSK to practice Christian relations, if these comply with the social system and its system of values, yet advises them to exercise caution in their good deeds.

17.

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

18.

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



19.

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

20.

Members are recommended to spend their spare time associating with those who co-operate with the organisation.

THE FIVE BASIC RULES OF FRIENDSHIP:

1. I shall lavish brotherly respect on you if I know you are worthy of it.
2. I shall risk danger and hardships to help you in your time of need, providing this does not harm me or the Organisation.
3. In my daily activities and when taking on special duties, I shall first mention your name and then mine.
4. I shall support you in your work and self-denial, and shall help you reach these goals as if I were in your place.
5. I shall never do unto you what I do not want you to do unto me, unless there is a common reason for that.

21.

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

NEUE SLOWENISCHE KUNST, 1985.

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