

LJUBICA ANĐELKOVIĆ DŽAMBIĆ¹

THE BIRTH OF PERFORMANCE ART FROM THE SPIRIT OF NOISE

Punk and Performance Art in Croatia

ABSTRACT

By drawing on the difference between the avant-garde and the alternative forms of art, this paper deals with the beginnings of performance art in the realm of the alternative music community in Croatia. One of the first meeting points of performance art and music in Croatian avant-garde art can be found within the punk subculture, which rejects the traditional notion of 'melody' while favoring noise as the predominant and desired type of sound. In addition, the fact that punk puts little emphasis on musical virtuosity and highlights

amateurism as a legitimate artistic stance makes some artists prone to theatricality and performativity, either in the form of performative gestures or performative acts. The article illustrates these issues by focusing on the Croatian alternative punk scene and the New Wave music of the late 1970s and first half of the 1980s.

KEY WORDS: Croatian performance art, punk subculture, alternative culture, radical performance, body art

¹ Ljubica Anđelković Džambić holds a PhD from Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. Her research focuses on the performing arts and alternative culture. She works as a high school teacher of philosophy and a lecturer of theater studies at the Faculty of Textile Technology in Zagreb, Croatia.

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AVANT-GARDE VS. ALTERNATIVE MUSIC:

TWO DIRECTIONS TOWARD MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

When it comes to Croatia, musical performance stems from two different sources—alternative music, and the punk subculture of the late 1970s and first half of the 1980s.² It is then that certain punk artists entered the realm of performance art, thereby establishing a new understanding of alternative music with respect to its stage performance. In order to study these issues, it is first important to distinguish between two basic fields within which musical performance can be found,³ both defined primarily by their roots and the relationship of the musician-performer towards art. The basic distinction between practices that can be found in institutional art, and art that exists on its margins or even outside institutions (e.g., in different subcultures), can be drawn by deploying two terms—*avant-garde* and *alternative*. This means that some musical experiments belong to the realm of avant-garde music, while others belong to the realm of alternative music. The term *alternative* has been chosen here because of its affiliation with the so-called ‘alternative music,’ which comprises different variants of rock.⁴ Ever since the 1990s, the term is often equated with indie music, even though its scope remains limited and does not include earlier music forms, such as punk. While the terms alternative and avant-garde are in this paper used primarily to refer to music,⁵ it is important to stress that both concepts have broader application. The distinction

² This text focuses on this period, but some aspects of musical performance can be found by the end of the 1980s. It deals primarily with punk and New Wave in Croatia, but since Croatia was at that time closely linked to Slovenia, both being part of Yugoslavia, it includes some Slovenian musicians as well.

³ Musical performance goes back to ‘bruitism’ or the so-called ‘music of noise,’ conceived by the Futurist Luigi Russolo (*The Art of Noises*); experimental extra-disciplinary anti-musical practices were also authored by Erik Satie (his post-Cubist and proto-Dadaist music, *Parade* (1917), *Relâche* (1924), or Marcel Duchamp (*Erratum Musical*, 1913). In the following decades musical performance was established as a legitimate art genre by John Cage, who published the manifest *The Future of Music: Credo* in the year 1937. His work peaked with his 1952 concert action *The Untitled Event* (also known as *Theater Piece No. 1* or *Black Mountain Event*), performed at the Black Mountain College. His performance of *4’33”* also posits “a musical piece as a work of performance art,” as Miško Šuvaković says. See Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti* (Zagreb and Ghent: Horetzky and Vlees & Beton, 2005), 101. The experimental nature of Cage’s work inspired representatives of Fluxus across Europe, America and Japan: George Brecht, Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, George Maciunas, Ben Patterson, Takehisa Kosugi, Henry Flynt, Nam June Paik and many others. See Šuvaković, 101.

⁴ The term rock is used in this paper primarily to distinguish between alternative and popular music, and the so-called ‘classical’ or serious music, and functions as an umbrella term which includes diverse musical styles, such as punk.

⁵ The term ‘alternative’ music is used in this paper to stress its relationship with different subcultures. This was also noticed by Milena Dragičević Šešić, who distinguishes between alternative culture and subculture, but views the term ‘alternative’ as more inclusive: “Alternative culture is familiar with elite culture, which it explicitly rejects— subcultures do not know and do not want to know this culture, they feel it as completely alien . . . The overlapping of alternative culture and subculture cannot be denied and remains extremely important, regardless of their different starting points and foundations.” See Milena Dragičević Šešić, *Umetnost i alternativna* (Beograd: FDU, Clío, 2012), 223.

between avant-garde and alternative is therefore not limited to the field of music, but extends to include different artistic and cultural products. By studying the relationship between these two terms, we first detect their similarities: both are characterized by a desire to merge art and life, both establish a new relationship towards traditional artistic and cultural values, both use *montage* and have an intermedial and interdisciplinary approach to art. They also reject social norms and customs, favor extremes and provocation, and de(con)struct the existing reality whereby they challenge our everyday logic. In addition, the avant-garde and the alternative share a similar relationship towards the epoch in which they emerge: they are marked by a break with the past, initiate the beginning of a new period, criticize the existing world, and anticipate a future one. The difference between alternative and avant-garde practices is therefore contextual, and historically conditioned. While the diverse qualities of these projects and events account for the overlapping of their artistic fields,⁶ especially after the post-avant-garde and retro-avant-garde of the 1970s when artistic and cultural projects intertwined in the realm of performing arts, putting them in loose categories can facilitate our understanding of musical performance within a specific, alternative musical genre, such as punk.

The basic difference between avant-garde and alternative music can be established by looking at what they oppose. Avant-garde music is often understood as a criticism or subversion of traditional art practices within the realm of art, and this opposition is manifested in aesthetic categories. On the other hand, alternative music opposes dominant social practices (which already include culture and art), which is why it should be understood as primarily a social phenomenon characterized by (anti)aesthetic tendencies. Alternative phenomena should therefore be defined in terms of their cultural ‘otherness,’ and avant-garde music and art in terms of their aesthetic ‘otherness.’ Having this in mind, we could also tentatively define as avant-garde those individuals who belong primarily to the field of professional art and who remain within that field, while those who enter the creative sphere of art as amateurs

⁶ Miško Šuvaković, for example, uses the term ‘avant-garde’ to unite these different practices, which include: (1) radical innovation in music based on research and progressive development of highly aesthetic and technical-musical qualities, created within an autonomous musical field; (2) interdisciplinary and experimental musical practices which explore, destroy, deconstruct, and abandon the aesthetic and artistic autonomy of Western music as well as the autonomy of the medium; (3) extramusical or anti-musical practices in the form of different innovative, experimental artistic products that step outside the field of music and come close to anti-art (e.g., dada, neodada, fluxus); (4) post-avant-garde projects which have developed from 1970s onwards and also include the musical practices that subvert fixed boundaries between art music and popular, ‘mass-media’ music, as well as those which “deconstruct stable identities of popular music and *high art* music,” while being inclined towards alternative rock and experimental research in the field of performance art, spectacle, video art. As an example of this last type Šuvaković lists the Slovenian bands ‘Laibach’ and ‘Borghesia,’ which have positioned themselves at the very border between the avant-garde and alternative thanks to their artistic style and collaboration with other artists, which again testifies to the permeability of the boundary between avant-garde and alternative music. See Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti* (Zagreb and Ghent: Horetzky and Vlees & Beton, 2005), 99-101.

could be defined as alternative musicians. This division is extremely fragile since, in many cases, especially when it comes to rock music, this boundary is erased even in artists who have a formal musical education. Still, it is useful in defining different approaches in music when it comes to its opposition to *mainstream* values. For example, rock, or punk as rock's most radical form of resistance, is linked to three key ideas: 1) a self-taught artist who gets educated through practice, 2) the idea that the so-called 'three chords' and noise can achieve any musical effect, 3) the idea that everyone has the right to express themselves in music, no matter how they sound. Such an approach, not burdened by any musical rules, enabled more freedom in experimenting with sound, but also with other musical elements, such as instruments or stage performance. Alternative music stands in opposition to two basic tendencies—when it comes to musical-aesthetic issues, alternative music usually appears as part of a subculture that criticizes an already existent music style which has abandoned its original, marginal position, or stepped into the *mainstream* (popular, mass,⁷ or commercial music). This aspect of alternative music has been the most prominent until the early 1990s, which mark the end of large-scale subcultures with clearly defined boundaries (such as the hippie movement or punk), and signal the beginning of their fragmentation into many different styles that still belong to the realm of subcultural, alternative, and 'other,' rather than the *mainstream*. These new styles still define themselves against the existing *norms*, but this is familiar only to the representatives of the new music directions. Considering the broader value systems in which they emerge, these new groups define their *alternative* authenticity with respect to their stance on politics or gender. They also define themselves in opposition to older generations who had a different lifestyle.⁸ Alternative practices emerge within the existing cultural code—music and other forms of creativity are used to shape an alternative identity, based on expressing dissatisfaction with the dominant mechanisms in cultural life and criticism of current institutions and the mainstream.⁹ In different branches of alternative music, this is manifested in various forms of *otherness*, ranging from the destructiveness, radical poetics and marginal cultural position of punk, to the less extreme types of *otherness* nurtured by music genres such as the *New Wave*, which each in their own way subvert the codes of mass culture and *infiltrate* areas of popular music.

⁷ Although similar, the labels 'popular' and 'mass' do not necessarily mean the same thing. While the term 'popular' refers to a song or musical genre which is widely accepted and liked, the term 'mass music' refers to an approach in musical production which is profit-aimed and strives at the creation of music that is governed primarily by market principles, rather than aesthetic ones.

⁸ This should however not be equated with the *culture of youth*. Although the concepts of alternative music and subculture are often linked to the *culture of youth*, the opposition young/old is not applicable to many alternative musical styles, many of which include members of older generations both as musical performers and audiences. As the past few decades have proven, alternative music is defined by a specific system of values that its representatives maintain regardless of lifestyle changes and biological aging. The problem in defining punk via biological age and generational differences has been addressed by Marijana Gržinić. See Marijana Gržinić, *Estetika kibersvijeta i učinci derealizacije* (Zagreb: Multimedijalni institut, 2005), 201.

⁹ Milena Dragičević Šešić, *Umetnost i alternativa* (Beograd: Clio, 2012), 15.

PERFORMATIVE *GESTS* AND PERFORMATIVE *ACTS*

When it comes to their performative quality, the overlapping of music and performing arts can be studied by analyzing the way they are included a specific art piece—in this way, we can define a *performative gest* as appearing *within* a musical event, and a *musical performance* as an art piece that stands on its own, or as an independent part of a musical event. A *performative gest* (1) appears as part of a music show, without disrupting its dominant musical quality. By being introduced only once or sometimes several times, often as an unpredictable and spontaneously motivated act which does not necessarily appear in other events, a performative gest only tentatively probes the boundaries of the music genre, opening it up to a different, richer musical expression. While in some cases it can also be planned, a performative gest is usually spontaneous, taking the form of a simple action on the stage which the audience recognizes as an *excess*, or an enriching addition to the concert. A performative gest often depends on the personality and performative affinity of the group frontman (or some other band member¹⁰) and often occurs spontaneously, without disrupting the impression that the audience is watching a musical show.

A *performative act* or *musical performance* (2) can be included in a music show (once or several times), that is, it can take the form of *performance within performance*, but it can also take the form of an independent performance which stands on its own. As opposed to the performative gest, the performative quality of a musical performance is more pronounced, and characterized by a greater degree of preparedness and planning. In addition, the repetition of a specific performative act within several events further strengthens the impression that it exists independently, as a permanent feature of a specific performer. Depending on the duration, structure, and other music elements, the performative act can become more similar either to a concert, or to a musical performance. In cases of independent performative acts (i.e., musical performance), they can remain within the formal bounds of a music concert, but they can also appear in theatre, or visual arts. Following this, a more precise term to identify performative acts that appear during a music concert would be *concert performance*.

THE BEGINNINGS OF MUSICAL AND PUNK PERFORMANCE IN CROATIA

When it comes to the beginnings of musical performance in Croatia, there are two ways to study it with respect to the artist's background. Some musical performances develop *from above*, with its artists coming from the realm of the so-called serious music and art, while some develop *from below*, with their performers coming from the alternative music scene. It should also be noted that this division is not entirely fixed, and this was

¹⁰ When it comes to the well-known punk band from the Croatian town of Rijeka called 'Let 3,' their concerts are often marked by performativity, and performative gests are mostly introduced and performed by the bass guitarist Damir Martinović—Mrle.

best illustrated at the Music Biennale which took place in Zagreb in the year of 1981, and featured representatives of the current Yugoslav alternative music community, as well as the British punk band 'Gang of Four.' Furthermore, the Music Biennale of 1983 featured rock evenings showcasing representatives of the music *underground*.¹¹ It is interesting that both of the aforementioned types of musical performance emerged approximately at the same time. The first representatives of musical performance came from the sphere of the so-called serious music and visual arts. They include Ivan Ladislav Galeta and Fred Došek who performed the piece *Preparirani pianino (Prepared piano)* in 1977, which was staged at the Multimedia Center of the Zagreb Student Centre). Almost simultaneously, in 1978 the local music underground scene started to awake with the emergence of the Rijeka punk band 'Termiti',¹² which is considered to be the first alternative band to expand its concerts with elements of performance. It is also worth noticing that their scenic expression encouraged public discussion about rock-theatre and punk-performance and attracted much attention in the media.¹³ In the period of the late 1970s and throughout 1980s, a lively alternative music scene developed in Croatia too. It was characterized by the qualities that mark its music equivalents abroad, such as a dynamic relationship between the musical mainstream and the margins, and an inclusion of diverse experiments in stage performance. When it comes to the first instances of merging performance and music, it happened precisely in the realm of punk, as one of the musical genres within the broader alternative direction of the so-called *New Wave*. The influence of *punk* on the art of the 1980s is manifested in the development of hybrid projects, the rise of *amateurism* for the sake of achieving greater authenticity, and the spreading of the *do-it-yourself* principle which the artists used to forge their personal poetics. The permeability of boundaries between music and performance worked both ways, inspiring artists to explore the boundaries of the music show with the introduction of different stage elements and forms of artistic expression.

¹¹ Some of the bands included the punk group 'Trobecove krušne peći,' then the 'Trotakt Projekt,' 'Gustaph y njegovi dobri duhovi,' 'Pingvinovo potpalublje,' 'Anti Nowhere League,' 'Laibach' and others. For more information see Vinko Barić, *Hrvatski punk i novi val 1976–1987* (Solin: self-published, 2011), 166.

¹² Active from 1978 to 1982.

¹³ Considering the nature of the alternative music scene in which many concerts and events are organized in non-institutional settings, and therefore remain without proper documentation, we cannot say for sure whether similar attempts and approaches existed before the band 'Termiti.' The Rijeka 'Termiti' performed their piece in the Crystal Hall of the Kvarner Hotel in Opatija (21 September 1979) in front of a *mainstream* audience, which established a lasting impression in the collective memory. It is precisely the intrusion into a more conventional space that enabled that this event be perceived as a transgression, instigating first media writings on "punk performances" (Vinko Barić, qtd. in Suzana Marjanić, "Performativna glazba. Od bruitizma do lesionizma: kolažno o žanru glazbenog performansa na domaćim primjerima," *Život umjetnosti: časopis za suvremena likovna zbivanja* 91, no. 2 (2012): 28). The recording of the concert can be found here: Opatija 1987, "Prica o kulturnom rijeckom bendu 'Termiti,'" YouTube, May 14, 2007, video, 6:14 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUvot23PZjo>.

Punk emerged in opposition to the social mainstream, but it also resisted the separation of rock music from its roots. It produced an enormous amount of energy and passion that created a deafening sound which, if evaluated against the norms of popular music, can be understood only as chaotic noise. The new, *raw* sound appeared under the banner that “every scream in the right place is equally valuable as any verse.”¹⁴ This signified the shattering of the structured sounds that reflected an involuntary process of cultural assimilation, as Attali would say.¹⁵ By the brutality of sound but also image, punk music allowed noise to enter music once again after the early 20th century avant-garde. This time, however, it happens as a reaction to the influence of *repetitive* economy¹⁶ used in the production of popular music, which became an important social factor in centralization, the establishment of cultural norms, and disappearance of specific cultures.¹⁷ It also posits the act of listening as “an essential means of surveillance and social control,”¹⁸ which enables a successful social assimilation. When punk appeared, it had a subversive effect on the music industry. Based on this, punk can be regarded as an example of what Attali described as an activity that “opposes a new syntax to the existing syntax, from the point of view of which it is noise.”¹⁹ Having a subversive effect on rules that govern music, and positioning itself outside of socially established channels of music production (e.g., music education, record companies) punk has, for at least a brief period of time,²⁰ successfully avoided becoming affiliated to the music industry, and advocated the idea of enjoying music for personal pleasure. For Attali, this in itself is a subversive act of freedom. Pleasure achieved merely by ‘being’ rather than by owning is subversive, and should be seen as an act of freedom. It is a radically new way of “insertion of music into communication, one that is overturning all the concepts of political economy and giving new meaning to the political project.”²¹

The concept of authenticity in punk is based on the idea that literally everybody, regardless of their musical education or skill has both the ability and right to make music. Punk is the first music genre that introduced musical amateurism as a legitimate form of artistic expression. At the same time, the limitation of resources such as musical instruments and equipment, caused by dire socio-economic conditions in which punk originally appeared, demanded great resourcefulness from punk musicians. This is a

¹⁴ Dejan Šunjka and Dragan Pavlov, eds. *Pank u Jugoslaviji: 1980–1990* (Beograd: Dedalus, 1990), 2.

¹⁵ Jacques Attali, *Noise. The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

¹⁶ The term is used by Attali, *Noise*, 151.

¹⁷ Even when it is shaped into an “idealized form of the Beatles’ docile pseudorevolt,” as Attali says. See Attali, 150.

¹⁸ Attali, 122.

¹⁹ Attali, 34.

²⁰ Soon after it appeared, punk became part of the commercial industry, especially in the Western countries, and this can best be seen in the fashion industry. Still, it has made an everlasting influence on numerous bands and members of different subcultures who will never become commercial. This makes different locations at the margins in which this type of music exists even today important as symbols of resistance and subversive potential of music.

²¹ Attali, 146.

major reason why they often resorted to *do-it-yourself* solutions when it comes to their stage performance and record-making. Many renowned punk musicians talk about their amateur approach to music, and their creativity in the design of instruments. In the documentary film *Ritam rock plemena—od Uragana do Urbana* (*The Rhythm of the Rock Tribe—from 'Uragan' to 'Urban'*)²² Zoran Štajduhar—Zoff, the lead singer of the band 'Grč,' explains that it was all about “the beat, rather than technique.” He describes the original discussion about the coming together of the band with the following words: “I have no clue about music, he doesn't either, you know a bit, so we can make something happen.” Talking about the first days of the band 'Pogreb X,' Vladimir Adolf Soldo from Vinkovci says that the drummer Željko Mikulić—Koroziija²³ practiced playing drums using a wooden ladle and some pot lids, making his own drumsticks from plum-tree branches.²⁴ One of the ways in which they dealt with the lack of resources was by focusing on noise, the essential element of punk music. At the same time, abandoning the idea of virtuosity and moving away from music itself made room for new forms of creativity that was by some musicians filled with elements of theatricality. This included everything from simple performance gestic and stage designs or costumes to more complex performative and/ or theatrical elements.

THE PERFORMING BODY IN PUNK—STRONG EXPRESSION AS A SHIFT TO PERFORMANCE

Given the force, rhythm, strength and noise which punk made use of to make itself heard, “liberate energy in its unmediated, pure form,”²⁵ and enable artists to express themselves “from the stomach,”²⁶ it comes as no surprise that these performances included elements that are not essentially musical. The powerful bodily expression of the performers is in some cases comparable to what performance theory calls the ‘ritual’ and ‘transgressive’ body. Amelia Jones would call this the probing of the limits of the body.²⁷ The link between the body and music-making is based on the idea of creating

²² *Ritam rock plemena—od Uragana do Urbana*, directed by Bernardin Modrić (2005; Istra Film, Rijeka), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEHRujlQB1M>.

²³ Later, he became member of one of the greatest rock bands in the region, 'Majke.'

²⁴ Marko Doleš and Andraž Magajna, “Iza zida—spominske naracije o Ivici Čuljku, Kečerju II in Satanu Panonskemu,” June 6, 2017, Radio Študent, Ljubljana, Slovenia, radio, 00:01:19, <https://radiostudent.si/kultura/mtr%C5%A1/iza-zida>.

²⁵ Šunjka and Pavlov, *Pank u Jugoslaviji*, 1.

²⁶ Šunjka and Pavlov, 1.

²⁷ In their book *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon, 2006) Amelia Jones and Tracey Warr identified seven major topics of *body art* through decades, distinguishing between the following types: *painted/ painting bodies*, which are interested in leaving a trace, mark, smudge or print of the body while painting on canvass; *gesturing bodies* as *body art* in which everyday behavior and activity is transformed into an artistic act; *ritualistic and transgressive bodies* as *body art* in which the body is used in order to provoke a social interpretation of the body, often in the form of a ritual with a cathartic effect; *body boundaries* which question the boundary between an individual body and its social

from within and the concept of *raw* sound, purified of everything that is superfluous and decorative, and accompanied by an equally aggressive and excessive bodily gesture that seems to be performed without control. The goal is to *make bare* and reach the *essence* of being, or an authentic *truth* of existence, which is not contaminated by any enforced values. The body in punk thus becomes a *territory* of absolute freedom, liberated from the pressure of social conditioning and the inscription of power. In addition to authenticity and energy liberation, one also needs to mention provocation as one of the elements that have influenced early performances and performance gestures that appear in Croatian punk musicians.

PUNK AND NEW WAVE PERFORMANCE ARTISTS IN CROATIA AFTER THE BAND 'TERMITI'

In concerts that overlap with performance art and appear within the realm of alternative music in the era of punk and New Wave, one can notice different degrees of performance preparation and complexity. Among punk groups, the performative aspect of a musical event depends on the current inspiration, stage presence and charisma of the frontman. This means that some bands will become famous for using a certain type of stage intervention and performative gesture, or for including specific forms of behavior art. For example, the band 'Protest' from Rijeka became famous for its "wild and crazy frontman Miha who became a legend due to his commitment to rampaging and rioting on the stage, and his orthodox and androgenous make-up and early punk look,"²⁸ accompanied by burning *ready-made* stage props. A taste for performative gestures can be found in other musicians too. For example, there is the Split punk artist *Fon Biskich*²⁹ who dressed in his own creative interpretation of the Austrian-Hungarian uniform, and threw talc powder and flour at the audience while holding a *Hajduk* flintlock adorned with a flower. Another example includes the cult band from Zagreb called 'Sexa,' affiliated to the theatrical group 'Kugla glumište.' 'Sexa' belong to the pioneers of Croatian multimedia performance due to their use of video-projections, and their creation of improvised video-performances. Elements of performance were also introduced, although more spontaneously, by members of the band 'Trobecove krušne peći,' whose loud and wild shows mark the beginnings of the noise subgenre.³⁰ According to Barić, they used a sink and steel bars for drumming, and included the

environment, as well as between the exterior and interior body; *performing body* which poses the question of representing identity; *absent bodies* which question the absence and mortality of the body—often through forms in which the body is substituted by photography, documents of previous performance, i.e., in which the body is reproduced by different techniques, and *extended and prosthetic bodies*, which includes the body as intermeshed with new technology and cyberspace, or marked by alternative states of consciousness, etc.

²⁸ Vinko Barić, *Hrvatski punk i novi val 1976–1987* (Solin: self-published, 2011), 51.

²⁹ Born as Marinko Biškić, he formed the punk band 'Fon Biskich i Narodno Blago' in 1979. See Barić, *Hrvatski punk i novi val*, 79.

³⁰ Barić, 167.

sounds of pigs being slaughtered in their stage performance, which amplified the activist impulse of their politically *inappropriate* lyrics.³¹

Along with such spontaneous performance gestures,³² a more elaborate performative component can be found in the work of the punk artist Ivica Čuljak from Vinkovci, and bands 'Termiti' and 'Grč' from Rijeka. As already mentioned, it is precisely the members of the band 'Termiti' that can be regarded as the first performance artists among *punkers*. They reaffirmed their status with a memorable show on 21 November 1979 in the Crystal Hall of the 'Hotel Kvarner' in Opatija. In a mildly destructive, humorous and parodic performance, the singer Predrag Kraljević Kralj appeared wearing underwear, and had a ceramic toilet bowl on his head. The toilet bowl was later on used as a stage prop, and Kralj threw large quantities of feather on the stage and at the audience. The act of feather-throwing was later on repeated by members of the band 'Let 3' as an *hommage* to this seminal event in the history of rock in Rijeka. This testifies to the strong connection between all the members of the Rijeka music scene, and their awareness of the role of performing in music. The powerful effect of this concert performance stems from the unusual merging of the elegant and sophisticated concert setting with *inappropriate* stage actions performed in front of the audience, which gave this event a cult status.

In addition to parody and dark humor, the aggressive sound of punk also included performances that were marked by destruction or self-destruction. In this context, the most important representatives of a planned and continually performed musical/concert performance were Zoran Štajduhar Zoff from the Rijeka band 'Grč',³³ and Ivica Čuljak (first as a member of the band 'Pogreb X' under the name 'Kečer II,' and later on as the artist 'Satan Panonski'). Although both of these two punk musicians are characterized by authenticity, raw energy and destruction on the stage, and aim to shock the audience with their lyrics and bodies, their brutal stage actions have different effects: while Ivica Čuljak uses this destructive force (aggression) on his own body, performing numerous acts of self-mutilation in dramaturgically planned performances,³⁴ Štajduhar directs this force towards the *outside*, most often in instances of chopping animal flesh, or pouring animal blood on his body.³⁵ They also have different sources of inspiration: while Čuljak for the most part deals with his

³¹ Barić, 167.

³² Such gestures were certainly more frequent, but they were often left undocumented and therefore forgotten.

³³ The band 'Grč' was founded in Rijeka in the year 1982 (See Barić, 197), and is active even now. This makes the band one of the longest punk/post-punk/New Wave bands in Croatia.

³⁴ Today, Ivica Čuljak is considered to be the founder of the genre of self-destructive body art in Croatia. Although not the first one to introduce a performative gesture in the Croatian punk scene (this is credited to Predrag Kraljević Kralj who has performed an act of self-mutilation only once, in 1978), he is the only one among Croatian punk performers who has developed the self-destructive body art in a concert setting with the potential to be performed independently of the music events. With this in mind, the first self-destructive act performed by Kraljević a single time, can be described as a performative *gest*, while Čuljak's self-destruction can be described as a performative *act*.

³⁵ These two types of expressive aggression have been described by Suzana Marjanić (2012) as different forms of 'lesionism.' One is centripetal (with aggression aimed towards inside), and the other one is centrifugal (where aggression is aimed toward the outside).

internal struggles, using self-destruction as a form of catharsis for his personal traumas, the thematic obsessions of the band 'Grč' are "evil, murder, war slaughter" and "socialist politics,"³⁶ and a typical 'fight the system' agenda. Zoran Štajduhar Zoff describes the tearing apart of animal flesh in his performances as a symbolic act that stands for the permanent presence of injustice and evil. At the same time, he sees himself as a "cruel but just executor of human filth and criminals."³⁷ In these explanations, Zoran Štajduhar Zoff reveals the key idea behind his performances, which echo the ideology of punk as a movement.

If we look at the broader New Wave circle of performers whose music is characterized by different stylistic variants,³⁸ we can find some elements of performance in their concerts too. For example, the Istrian band 'Gustaph y njegovi dobri duhovi' collaborated with the performance artist Josip Pino Ivančić, and the performativity of the Osijek dark/industrial band 'Roderick' can be found in the special attention they pay to the visual, black-and-white element of their costumes. In Rijeka, a more elaborate approach to the musical/concert performance can be found in the "multimedia project for theatrical performance" called 'Strukturne ptice,' which can be regarded as an extension of the Rijeka punk and alternative community.³⁹ It was established by Damir Martinović—Mrle, who also worked with other Rijeka bands at the same time. As a collective without a fixed permanent set-up and with many members, 'Strukturne ptice'⁴⁰ explored the different possibilities of music by avoiding to focus on rhythm, melody and refrain in their experimental and unconventional musical expression. Their projects such as *Ptičji izrezak 2*, *Oratorij* or *Krug* are characterized by a multimedia approach and an eclectic style (they used simulated sound effects, music, dance, video, speech, pre-recorded music that was later on performed live), experiments with stage time, and the inclusion of sound objects/ installations (e.g., the so-called 'mountain lyre,' a giant string instrument).⁴¹ Active primarily within the alternative music scene, the band/project 'Strukturne ptice' is the most innovative representative of a multimedia approach to music, and directly influenced the work of the bands 'Let 2' and 'Let 3' (established in 1987), which are credited as being among the most important performing artists in the realm of alternative music in Croatia.

³⁶ Barić, 197.

³⁷ Barić, 197.

³⁸ Many different labels are used to describe different stylistic features of the New Wave music scene: *post punk*, *dark pop*, *dark disco*, *dark industrial*, *industrial-noise*, *electro dark*, *power pop*, *newromantics*, *electronic music*, *poppunk*, etc. This testifies to a lack of uniformity when it comes to terminology, but also to the difference in styles and personal approaches of the artists, which undermines straightforward labels. Generally speaking, the directions within the *New Wave* are determined with respect to experiments with new technology (synthesizers, electronic music, drum machines, multimedia), a *raw*/ radical/ darker sound, or the similarity to pop music and its melody.

³⁹ Barić, 182.

⁴⁰ 'Strukturne ptice' were formed in 1982, and their members were also part of the bands 'Termiti,' 'Paraf,' 'Let 2' etc.

⁴¹ Goran Lisica, "Damir Marinković i Strukturne ptice. Konceptualni rock koncert. 'Krug' (Adriatik, 1987)." *Yugopapir*, published May 1987, accessed June, 12, 2022, <http://www.yugopapir.com/2015/06/damir-martinovic-i-strukturne-ptice.html>.

RADICAL BODIES AND THE PARODY OF TOTALITARIANISM
—SLOVENIAN ALTERNATIVE SCENE

The musical/concert performance scene in former Yugoslavia in the 1980s also included artists from Slovenia, which formed a unique music scene along with the Croatian bands in Rijeka and Zagreb.⁴² The bands 'Borghesia' and 'Laibach' stand out due to their multimedia and theatrical approach, both taking as their thematic preoccupation the critique of the (late) socialist system, which they saw as characterized by a totalitarian ideology that restricted individual freedom. As opposed to the *do-it-yourself* approach of most of the bands active at that time, which often resulted in an aesthetic awkwardness of their stage performances, both 'Borghesia' and 'Laibach' treat their work with a significant degree of awareness of the media. In addition to being a reflection of a much greater artistic ambition, this quality brings them closer to the field of the avant-garde. Although closer to industrial or early electronic music, they retain some of the characteristics of raw punk: a pronounced rhythm, repetitiveness, loud, aggressive and memorable vocal performances, etc. Their work is also characterized by an aesthetics of shock and provocation, which are similar to the ones nurtured by punk. Experimenting with the video, 'Borghesia' used video performances (in their stage shows as well), flirting with the poetics of trash, and painted the radical bodies of the punk poetics from a *queer* perspective by their references to sado-masochism, as a critique of the repressive methods of the state apparatuses. While 'Borghesia' produced shock with their homoerotic *fantasms*, and transformed the human body into a site of resistance to institutional power, 'Laibach' cast a parodic glance at the repressive machine of totalitarianism by imitating the same kind of power structures on stage. Through an organized creative activity within the so-called *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK),⁴³ an umbrella organization which gathered artists and creative individuals from different areas,⁴⁴ 'Laibach' imposed high standards for musical performance at the beginning of the 1980s, tightly linking the avant-garde practice and the artistic approach to alter-rock concerts.

⁴² In addition to the stylistic similarities, musical collaboration and *recognition* by their common audience, it is also worth mentioning that many important albums of punk and post punk musicians were made in Slovenia. One can talk about a unique music scene in the early years (end of 1970s to mid-1980s) when music is most intensively produced within the 'punk triangle' of Rijeka-Zagreb-Ljubljana.

⁴³ In Croatia, artists from Osijek included in the so-called *Neue Slavonische Kunst* were active in a similar way. The similarity with the Slovenian 'NSK' is intentional, since they were their role-models.

⁴⁴ The collective 'IRWIN' (painting and fine arts), 'Gledališče Sester Scipion Nasice,' 'Rdeči Pilot' and the theatre director redatelj Dragan Živadinov (drama), 'Retrovizija' (video, TV), 'Novi kolektivizam' (design), 'Odelek za čisto in praktično filozofijo pri NSK' (theory).

THE HERITAGE OF FIRST PUNK PERFORMANCES

In the beginnings of musical performance within the alternative practices of the late 1970s and 1980s, the key music centers included Rijeka, Zagreb and Ljubljana, but also the Croatian region of Slavonija. In Slavonija, the music scene developed at the margins of society and culture, and with little media attention. The intense energy created by punk subculture was not long-lasting, but punk's challenging of the concert form, and its formation of hybrid forms which overlap with performance art, had a more lasting influence. It remains something for which the representatives of punk can fully take credit. The importance of these aspects of punk can be seen in the punk musical performance, which appeared later on, and was initiated by the admirers of punk subculture. Some of them include the members of the performance art/theatre group and punk collective 'Schmrtz Teatar'⁴⁵ (which performed the gothic-punk opera *Hieronimus*⁴⁶ in the 1990s), or the musical-stage events of the punk art bands such as 'Ilija i zrno žita' and 'Ausländer,' which were formed during the early 2000s by the established performance artist Marko Marković. While the aforementioned examples include performers with a much greater degree of artistic awareness, in which the alternative poetics and punk aesthetics remain subordinated to the artistic goal, they still nurture the legacy of *raw* sound and the performative *habitus* and spirit of *noise* that was born in late 1970s in the punk subculture in Croatia. ▣

⁴⁵ The collective was formed in 1995 by Mario Kovač, who later got a degree in theatre directing. They were active as a band, theatre group and performance artists. They stopped being active in the year 2000, when they put an end to themselves, as they say. See Josipa Bubaš, "Out Demons Out," *This is a Domino Project*, published May, 27, 1999, accessed August, 19, 2022, <https://thisisadominoproject.org/schmrtz-teatar-out-demons-out-1999/>.

⁴⁶ This is one of the more complex works of the group, based on the fictional biography of Hieronymus Bosch. For more information see: Mario Kovač, "Dodana vrijednost civilnom sektoru," interview by Vatroslav Miloš and Antonija Letinić, *Kulturpunkt*, September 14, 2010, <https://www.kulturpunkt.hr/content/dodana-vrijednost-civilnom-sektoru>.

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