

Art and Revolt: From the Socialist Republic of Slovenia to Today

Daša Tepina

University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia

dasa.tepina@ung.si

Petja Grafenauer

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

petja.grafenauer@aluo.uni-lj.si

 © 2024 Daša Tepina and Petja Grafenauer

Abstract. This contribution takes a closer look at visual art and protest and develops a comparative analysis of activist aesthetics that will contextualize the images of art and revolt from the Socialist Republic of Slovenia in the 1960s to today. It will focus on the representation of counter-power images, not only as a supporting visual form but also as an interweaving that can function as an independent element in moments of social rupture. Beginning with the examples of the student movement from 1968 and the visual code of the student newspaper *Tribuna*, we follow the stories of the artist collective OHO and the art commune established by some of its members; from there, follow the examples of punk subculture and the legendary spaces of Disco FV and their visual codes; then we trace the anti-militarization movement and the stories of the occupation and transformation of army facilities into creative, cultural, social and political places, with the example of Autonomous Cultural Centre Metelkova City. The article concludes with the alter-globalization movement, the new wave of squatting, and other contemporary social movements occurring from the end of the 90's to the 2020/21 anti-governmental protests. With comparative narration of different social movements and their creative force, we try to comprehend the revolutionary aesthetic potential of the margins in revolt in different social contexts.

Key Words: visual code, protests, social movements, aesthetics, counter-power

Umetnost in upor: od Socialistične republike Slovenije do danes

Povzetek. Prispevek se podrobneje posveča vizualni umetnosti in protestom ter razvija primerjalno analizo aktivistične estetike, ki bo kontekstualizirala podobe umetnosti in upora od Socialistične republike

Slovenije šestdesetih let do danes. Osredotoča se na reprezentacijo protiblastnih podob, ki jo razumemo ne le kot podporno vizualno obliko, temveč tudi kot preplet estetskih elementov, ki lahko v trenutkih družbenih prelomov deluje kot samostojna politična praksa. Tako po primerih študentskega gibanja iz leta 1968 in vizualnega koda študentskega časopisa *Tribuna* sledijo zgodbe umetniške skupine OHO in umetniške komune, ki so jo ustanovili nekateri člani tega kolektiva; nato sledijo primeri subkulture punk in legendarni kraji Disco FV ter njihovi vizualni kodi; nato sledi gibanje proti militarizaciji in zgodbe zasedb ter preoblikovanja vojaških objektov v ustvarjalna, kulturna, socialna in politična stičišča na primeru Avtonomnega kulturnega centra Metelkova mesto. Članek se zaključuje z alterglobalizacijskim gibanjem, novim valom skvotiranja in drugimi sodobnimi družbenimi gibanji, ki se odvijajo od konca 90. let do protivladnih protestov med letoma 2020 in 2021. S primerjalno analizo različnih družbenih gibanj in njihove ustvarjalne moči skušamo razumeti revolucionarni estetski potencial obrobja v upori znotraj različnih družbenih kontekstov.

Ključne besede: vizualni kod, protesti, družbena gibanja, estetika, protimoč

Introduction

When the political breakthrough of art and the artistic praxes move beyond the artistic frameworks and intersect with wider social movements, it opens space for aesthetic revolutionary potential. Freedom and autonomy within art had been buried under the pressures of neoliberalism, and as Danko Grlić (1988, 146) wrote, ‘the absolute freedom of art was only freedom in individual spheres; thus, it came into conflict with the enduring state of non-freedom as a whole.’ Thus, art was already stuck in a desperate situation and, as Theodor Adorno (2002, 29) argued, ‘among the dangers faced by new art, the worst is the absence of danger.’

Social movements often bear the political character of a certain kind of vivid, living art, which has the potential to move beyond artistic frameworks. Within the diverse examples from the post-Yugoslavian context of Slovenia (former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia), the article examines aesthetic revolutionary potential and the recuperation practices of the power structures. We follow the student movement from 1968, the visual code of the student newspaper *Tribuna* and with it the works of the artist group OHO and the artist commune established by some of its members. After that, we focus on the examples of punk subculture and alternative spaces of Disco FV and ŠKUC and their visual codes. Besides

subculture, we track the anti-militarization movement and the stories of the occupation and the transformation of army facilities into creative, cultural, social, and political places just after the dispersion of Yugoslavia, with the example of Autonomous Cultural Centre Metelkova City. The article concludes with the alter-globalization movement, a new wave of squatting, and other contemporary social movements happening from the end of the 90s to the 2020/1 anti-governmental protests. With comparative narration of different social movements and their creative force, we try to comprehend the revolutionary aesthetic potentials of the margins in revolt in a different social context. In addition, we also examine the mechanisms of recuperation in the existing social order and how this potential is systematically neutralized through power structures and/or capitalist codification.

Slovene art critic Brane Kovič (1990, 13) stated that ‘the majority of avant-garde poetics were based on the global desire to change the world and use art to establish a different system of both values and relationships.’ The link between art and the political is especially prominent when it comes to the avant-garde movements, as politically and aesthetically progressive. However, their strength is continually decreased by different political processes (recuperation, cultural codification, institutionalization, etc.) by power structures that are making such movements a part of the existing social order. This, in turn, leads to a perpetual need for them to be redefined.

The avant-garde has always strived for autonomy, in which the expression of the individual becomes the measure of personal freedom and freedom in general. The concept of freedom and the attempts to define it bring art out of the realm of aesthetics and into the field of ethics no longer relegated to the private; art thus becomes public and social. Autonomy plays a key role in this. Adorno advocated for the autonomy of art, as art needs autonomy to open up an area of imagined freedom that is in opposition to the present and draws attention to its shortcomings. Samuel Beckett went a step further and proclaimed that art only becomes autonomous when it demands to become a world ‘unto itself’ rather than reflecting the world (Belting 2010, 12). A similar position was adopted by Jacques Rancière (2010, 117), who claimed that the question did not concern the autonomy of the work of art but rather the mode of experience. With such stipulations in mind, this article explores the need to question the notion of freedom, which cannot exist without sufficient space for one’s own expression.

Freedom is neither final nor static. It does not exist without the desire or struggle for it, which makes it more of a guideline than an absolute state. Avant-garde movements are a part of aesthetic revolutions, for they criticize the current situation, seeking and formulating alternatives. Of course, this takes place at the crossroads between aesthetics and politics. According to Rancière (2010, 119), social revolutions are the daughters of aesthetic revolutions. Revolution's fundamental part originates from the emancipation of the individual in terms of the sensorium of which they are a part and which they can influence. Rancière sees art as a part of the struggle for space, for what we are allowed to show and what we are not, believing that it belongs in the same domain as aesthetics. The ultimate alternative to politics lies in aestheticization, the creation of a new collective ethos. This starts when art becomes life and life becomes art (pp. 119–123). Terry Eagleton (1990, 3) argued that aesthetics is an eminently contradictory phenomenon: on the one hand at the very heart of the middle class's struggle for political hegemony, while on the other providing an unusually powerful challenge to the dominant ideological forms.

The rise of broader social movements opens a space for diverse art practices and an advancement of new social relations in which we can follow the aesthetic revolutionary potential as the social movements or cultural scenes are ongoing. To highlight them we chose some of the most visible acts of revolt from below from the subculture movements in the former Yugoslavia's Republic of Slovenia to social movements after independence, and through them tried to show how visual practices are an inherent part of the social movements whatever the social context. Similarly, with the response of the power structures, with similar mechanisms from recuperation, and with appropriation to institutionalization, the aesthetic revolutionary potentials are normalized back to the dominant social order. As James C. Scott (1990, 111) says: '[A]ppropriation is, after all, largely the purpose of domination.'

This contribution is based on interviews and materials already issued by groups and individuals involved, newspaper articles, and secret service reports.

From the Student Revolts of 1968–1972 Forwards

The student movements which arose in 1968 all around Europe also emerged in socialist Yugoslavia, first in Belgrade in June 1968, and in parallel in Zagreb and Ljubljana. Students were addressing the social crisis and demanding better living conditions. One of the most important

achievements in Slovenia was the establishment of Radio Študent (Radio Student) which still exists today. In 1971 Filozofska fakulteta (Faculty of Arts) in Ljubljana was occupied by students and some professors and many students' manifestations took to the streets. Besides Radio Študent there was also another important propaganda and informative student newspaper called *Tribuna*, where the aforementioned group OHO also had a large visual input.

Besides the general social unrest in the 1970s, the first squatting actions influenced by the Dutch movement took place with the occupation of the villa at 29 Erjavčeva Street in Ljubljana, which lasted from October 28, 1977, to November 9, 1977. The occupation drew attention primarily to student and general housing problems but also had a symbolic purpose – to show the possibility of the functional use of unused spaces in general. The authorities evicted the squatters in a relatively short time under threat of coercive measures, and a kindergarten soon moved in.

At the same time, communes were established all over the world to put libertarian ideas and theories into practice. In Ljubljana, it was Komuna G7 (Commune G7), which was founded in the suburbs of Ljubljana called Tacen under the influence of the hippie (sub)culture and the student movement. Commune G7 was initially a small project, but it gained more public and international attention over time. The main ideas were self-organization, solidarity, and equality; in short, principles and methods derived from anarchism. They also became acquainted with anarchism, which was promoted by one of the most prominent figures of the Commune G7, Frane Adam. The second important commune, whose development and impact will be discussed below, was an artists' commune by the art collective OHO in the village of Šempas in 1970.

OHO Group

In 1965, socialist Yugoslavia underwent comprehensive economic and financial reform. For the first time, the issue of convertibility of the currency – the dinar, international competition, and trade with foreign countries – was raised. The state-sponsored increase in the production of consumer goods, industrial revenues, the development of a goods distribution system, the development of tourism, and port activity (also because of membership in the Non-Aligned Movement) led to an increase in the standard of living. Between 1965 and 1968, per capita income increased by 18 percent and consumption by 20 percent. The level of education also improved. The 'look' of Yugoslavia changed, especially in the urban cen-

tres. The country's borders were opened and the number of trips abroad increased. In daily life, there was the possibility of buying a car, new household appliances were introduced, more items were on the shelves, the advertising industry expanded, the presence of television, magazines, and photography was felt more strongly and links with Western European countries became stronger. The artist Kostja Gatnik, who had a significant influence on many branches of visual art (alternative as well as dominant) in the 1970s, says that he ordered many magazines to Ljubljana through the Mladinska knjiga bookshop chain, mainly those about art, culture, and alternative lifestyles, but also those that taught how to brew synthetic drugs in your own kitchen, and the delivery never got stuck.¹

In the 1960s, rock came to Slovenia, at first as a copy of foreign hits. Rock was not for Slovenian radio, but it was played in the youth clubs that were opening around the country, followed by the first discotheques and Radio Student (1969), and by the first student demonstrations and the bands of the Faculty of Arts (1968–1972). In the cultural sphere, students were still oscillating between elite and autonomous culture, drawing attention to social inequality and other pressing problems of the time. At the same time, the social climate was becoming more repressive in the 1970s. Some communes and broader family and friendship communities were established, with a distinctive look, sensitivity to ecological problems, emphasis on a healthy lifestyle in nature, the practice of yoga, the study of Eastern philosophies, the smoking of marijuana, etc. All these factors aroused the interest of artists.

Foreign publications travelled more easily to the Yugoslav art world and the number of international connections and exhibitions increased. The President of the country, Josip Broz Tito, publicly warned against negative influences from abroad and against modern, especially abstract, art from the West in a speech at the Seventh Congress of Yugoslav Youth in January 1963 and in four speeches in the winter of 1964. The attitude of politics towards modern art was ambivalent, not least because of the microphysics of power, which is not diffused from the top but circulates, and does not reproduce the general form of government at the lower levels and is therefore not a simple projection of central power. Federal policy itself had been ambivalent about the diminishing role of Western, espe-

¹ Interview with Kostja Gatnik by Petja Grafenauer, conducted on 15 June 2015 (kept in the authors' personal archive).

cially abstract art. Local politicians and bureaucrats, however, for various reasons – different views on art, personal ties, political connections, financial and other benefits – tolerated and supported such art, except when there were serious prohibitions from the top, of a kind that could threaten the whole structure. The art world operated relatively independently. It is of great importance that when Yugoslavia opened its doors to the capitalist west and its socialism became softer it opened a gap for new development in the then-marginal art.

In this situation, new possibilities also opened for counter-institutional culture and art. Now it could develop further and pose some anticonventional questions. Let us look at the example of the OHO group. Its core was already established in 1963 when, while still in high school in the city of Kranj, the students Marjan Ciglič, Iztok Geister, and Marko Pogačnik established a school bulletin called *Plamenica* that was provocative in its content with a demand of a ‘merciless destroying of fusty peace,’ as was written in the editorial by Pogačnik (Zabel 1994, 19). They demanded a living experience in the arts and a breaking down of the dusty conventions that ruled the Slovene art world. They were joining ‘hooliganism,’ a term in the mid-sixties used for young people who had long hair and unusual clothes and behaved in a way that broke the boundaries of the ‘normal’ socialist society: ‘Naturally, the “hooligan” movement involved a strong existentialist element of dissatisfaction with the developing consumer society and of protest of it,’ (p. 20). They wished to break the conventions of the art.

The OHO movement was born out of two groups. The first so-called Kranj group, which included Pogačnik, Geister, Ciglič, Naško Križnar, and Franci Zagoričnik, and had occasional contacts with Rudi Šeligo, who was a bit older and theoretically strong. They were influenced by the Slovene historical avant-garde magazine *TANK!*, some of the then-unpublished historical avant-garde poems *Kons's*² by the Slovene poet Srečko Kosovel, and other sources. When Geister and Pogačnik came to study in Ljubljana, they joined Ljubljana’s hooligans. They – Aleš Kermavner, Naško Križnar, Milenko Matanovič, Matjaž Hanžek, Vojin Kovač (Chubby), and Andraž Šalamun – were inspired by rock music and beatnik poetry and had a countercultural attitude. Pogačnik describes the sound of the reunited group as a mixture of Zen and Dada. OHO

² Constructivist poetry also involves collage and some of those were also done by Srečko Kosovel and the historical avant-garde artist Avgust Černigoj in the 1920s.

went through many phases, namely pop art, reism,³ conceptualism, arte povera, land art, programmatic art, and cosmic conceptualism, finally establishing a commune in Šempas in 1970 and renouncing active collaboration with the art world.

If you were to wander under the arcades at the corner of the Kazina building on a certain day in the spring of 1966, you would see a young man, a student with long hair, drawing anti-Vietnam protest comics on the walls to the sounds of the Rolling Stones. This was Marko Pogačnik [...] whose core parts and satellites expressed themselves in poetry, visual poetry, drawing, performances, and short films. They were students. They were hippies. Or as Pogačnik says: 'We listened to the Beatles, Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones, and the WHO. We wore long hair and necklaces made from discarded things, pinecones, or deer excrement. We were extremely peaceful.'

The three, Pogačnik, Iztok Geister Plamen, and Milenko Matanović, were part of the editorial board of the student magazine *Tribuna*, which had its premises in the building of Kazina in Ljubljana at the time. This led to various happenings in the neighboring Zvezda Park, such as tracing a person's shadow with chalk or blowing up transparent plastic tubes with a vacuum cleaner. The pages of *Tribuna* were populated by their drawings, poems, visual poetry, theoretical treatises, nonsense, and stunts. The movement initially wanted to focus on film, but the medium was not easily accessible, and visual poetry as typewriter art was cheap. They had their own stall under the arcades of the Casino, where they sold – matches. They bought boxes of matches, stuck their own batch of stickers on them, and resold them for the same price. Next to that, they sold DIY books, the so-called OHO Edition, hand-printed with a machine for printing partisan documents.

[Oleami 2019]

In the first half of 1970, the artists were preparing materials and later taking part in the exhibition *Information* (curated by Kynaston McShine

³ The starting point of Reism is an anti-anthropocentric stance, starting from the wholeness of being and unusually focused on things, i.e. 'the truth' – because the Oho saw them as the most submissive to man. It contrasts the hierarchical scale with the world of equivalent existent entities forming horizontal relations with each other. The equation of the previously higher and lower is done through 'reistic gazing,' as a mere obscuring of what is sensually present – to the eyes, to the ears, to the touch.

and held at MOMA in New York between 2 July and 20 September 1970). After that, they decided not to take part in the art world any longer, therefore four of them with their families and friends in April 1971 established a commune on an abandoned farm in a small village on the western side of Slovenia called Šempas (Zabel 1994, 134):

The Šempas Family, as it was called, was founded on ideas that had been developed during OHO's last period. The main idea was to discover a way of life based on balanced relations within the family and between the group and its immediate contexts. [...] Nor did they stop making art. [...] The Šempas Family may be considered the conclusion of OHO. The group's history came to an end when Matanović, Nez, and Šalamun left Šempas about a year after the community was established.

Disco FV and Škuc Gallery

Since the mid-1980s, social and political developments have also brought significant changes to the field of art. In 1976, Yugoslavia, by re-establishing self-management, attempted to establish direct democracy, still, of course, within the framework of the state's one-party system. Because of self-management, the communist bureaucracy flourished, with each of the social structures operating semi-independently and participating in the decision-making chain. When enterprises, which were still state-owned, were given the possibility of self-determination, they preferred to invest the resources they had acquired in wages rather than in reinvestment.

International funds were spent by the Yugoslav republics on unproductive mega-projects. These included investment in infrastructure for the 1984 Sarajevo Olympics, which did not live its own life after the event. The international debt grew and an economic crisis with rising inflation set in. This, together with the death of President Tito, who had led the country since its liberation in 1945, and the escalation of national issues among the country's economically diverse nations and nationalities, led to new Serbian and Slovenian political programmes (*Memorandum*, Srpska akademija nauka i umjetnosti, Belgrade 1986 and *Nova Revija* 57, Ljubljana 1987). Both programmes envisaged finding solutions to the problems outside the borders of Yugoslavia, which Slovenia did with its independence in 1991.

Civil society was awakening in the Slovene national space, heralded by

the alternative and subcultural scene. This emerged as the first alternative mass movement in the history of the Slovene Republic (Borčič 2013). The episode of art that did not follow the traditional art world patterns and developed twofold outside of them, repeated itself in the late 70s. With its cores in the ŠKUC Gallery and Disco FV in Ljubljana, two groups, one established mostly from students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana and Faculty of Humanities in Ljubljana in ŠKUC and the other coming mostly from the Faculty of Social Sciences in Ljubljana and the established Borghesia group and Disco FV, fought the system again with a different kind of art related to the punk movement, that was at that time strongly sweeping over Slovenia.

In the early 1980s, the Ljubljana subcultural and alternative scene began to take shape, first within the student institutions that emerged because of the student movement in the 1970s, and then independently, at least in terms of content. Like the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde of OHO before it, it looked for inspiration mainly in alternative mass culture, which also came from the West. The poles of 1980s visuality – the world of canonized fine art and the subcultural scene – operated largely separately. There are many differences between them in their modes of organization, ideologies, and expression. These differences are manifested in visuality on an extrinsic as well as intrinsic level.

The alternative scene was established within institutional frameworks (ŠKD Forum, ŠKUC), but these were smaller, more flexible organizations that reacted more easily and quickly to the demands of alternative contemporaneity than the established galleries and museums, which were also more in the sights of the authorities. The subcultural and alternative scene was established in spaces that were not only dedicated to fine art, but were also linked to other art genres and, above all, to culture more broadly. Special emphasis was placed on popular bands, which also provided the scene with a more mass and different audience from that which frequented the 'mainstream' state and municipal galleries. The art part of the subcultural scene was initially deliberately working within the framework of mass culture and always reflected the socio-political everyday life in which it was produced (Zabel 2003, 20):

The visual language of the 1980s subculture and the alternative scene made a conscious decision to contrast itself with traditional fine art and its conception. [...] The visual language so conceived is aware of the social conditionality of painting, sculpture, etc. [...] The re-

jection of Pop Art and Hyperrealism was repeated in the 1980s, e.g., as a rejection of Neue Slowenische Kunst's perverse strategies.

Several factors are relevant for understanding the characteristics of the visual language of the alternative and subcultural scene of the 1980s and its causes. The visuality reflected and was based on the specific socio-political situation of the Slovene space, but it was also established as a reaction to the specific situation in Slovene visual art. The art system, in exhibition practice, art criticism, theory, and history, was, despite some exceptions, rather closed to other forms of thinking about art and culture. Artworks or discourses that radically linked art to everyday life, mass culture, humour, marginalized groups, politics, or the economic situation in the country were almost non-existent. Fine art institutions operated in a self-contained system that allowed for occasional exhibition 'excesses,' but the dominant discourse obscured the interconnectedness of art, society, politics, and capital by excluding certain issues. One of the purposes of subculture and alternative culture, which began to develop in Slovenia in the late 1970s, was precisely the link between artistic and socio-political goals.

It seems that the distinction between the production of the subcultural scene and established fine art is not so easily made by emphasizing the use of a particular medium. On the one hand, subculture and alternatives have produced works that can be placed within the (extended) notion of painting or printmaking (graffiti, graffiti painting, posters, etc.), while on the other hand, the medium of video has also been used by fine artists and has already entered art institutions. The 1979 survey exhibition of Slovenian art, Miha Vipotnik's video installation *Videogram 4*, was exhibited at the Jakopič Gallery, and Borghesia released its first videocassette *Tako mladi* in 1985 in co-production with the institution of Cankarjev dom, where the first public presentation of the project was also held. More important than the choice of medium for the analysis of the two scenes dealing with visuality is where and how the work was made, where it was shown, who watched it, and how and what ideology it served.

The alternative and subcultural scene was the first alternative in the then-socialist republic of Slovenia that grew into a social movement in the national space.⁴ In the second half of the 1970s, there was a collaboration between the visual art of ŠKUC Gallery and the Museum of Mod-

⁴ Barbara Borčič (1994, 51) has described 'FV, or the broader Ljubljana alternative and sub-cultural scene as the most massive cultural movement in Slovenia to date.'

ern Art, but with the departure of Taja Brejc in 1980, a new generation came to ŠKUC. Dušan Mandić began to run the gallery and introduced a programme of 'new conceptual practice,' but when the artist co-founded the Irwin group in 1983, he was replaced at ŠKUC by Barbara Borčič and Marina Gržinić. The alternative and subcultural scene evolved mostly around FV 112/15, better known as Disco FV:⁵

We chose the name by taking the Dictionary of Foreign Terms from France Verbinc and each person wrote 2 numbers on a piece of paper. Then we decided that the first number was the page, and the second number was the dictionary entry on that page. So, it came out 112 through 15, so 112 the page and 15 the dictionary entry, which was 'c'est la guerre.' But that is irrelevant. The important thing was that FV 112/15 was an acronym, which was a trend among the punk bands, and it didn't even really matter what it meant.

From 1981, a group of students, together with the new wave of the punk scene, created a plural and autonomous scene that included theatre activities, dances, concerts, video recordings, the formation of their own bands, and multimedia art actions. In the basement of the fourth block in the student housing, the scene developed around the Disco FV,⁶ while the second part was occupied by ŠKUC.⁷ Both spaces developed a large-scale multimedia production, which (especially in FV) was linked to popular band music. A 'second scene' emerged, where visual art was only one of the possible expressions and which, with its own institutions and its own way of working, lived a parallel life. It was only at the beginning of the new century, with artefacts and documentation, that this became part of the canon of visual art, something that the protagonists themselves did not want in the early days of the movement.

The actors in the scene used a diverse range of visual media. What was produced in Disco FV was very much connected to the theatre and music scene, but also transcended it. A particularly important element of the

⁵ Interview with Neven Korda by Daša Tepina, conducted on 24 May, 2022 (kept in the authors' personal archive).

⁶ Zemira Alajbegović, Dragan Čolaković Šilja, Goran Devide, Sergej Hrvatin, Aldo Ivančić, Nerina Kocjančič, Neven Korda, Anita Lopojska, Mirela Miklavčič, Dario Seraval and others.

⁷ Video production manager Marijan Osole-Max, *Borders of Control* No. 4 (Barbara Borčič, Dušan Mandić, Marina Gržinić, and Aina Šmid), Keller (alias Andrej Lupinc), Peter Vezjak, Igor Virovac, Kollaps (Bojan Štokelj, Venko Cvetkov, and Darja Prelec), Emil Memon and others.

artistic aspect of FV was the space of the disco, which could be described in art historical terminology as a collective, holistic artwork (Vidmar 1983, 44):

A special component – and an unusual attraction – of the FV Disco is the walls of the corridor in the anteroom of non-dance communication: these walls, covered with a multitude of scribbled, spray-painted, painted, lacquered and xeroxed words, band names, meaningful and nonsensical phrases, ‘classic’ street and new anarcho-punk, even political calls, slogans, signs and texts, all this colourful chaos of FV walls is one of the most fascinating memorials of this space – it is similar to the famous spray-painted compositions of the New York Metro [...] with fewer aesthetics – and mythology, of course – and more ‘politics’: this gives the space an additional, symbolic meaning, which has been especially felt in the last year – after the police crackdown on street graffiti. [...] The Student disco is a spatial-visual variant of punk as a ‘symptom that has spoken’ – or rather, has drawn itself, painted itself on the wall in an elemental, emotional, often polarized desire to mark its presence.

Already towards the end of the 1970s, the first graffiti had appeared on the walls of Ljubljana. These were mainly slogans, names of punk bands, and signs. When the city authorities carried out a campaign to clean the walls and act against graffiti writers, graffiti inhabited the walls of Disco FV. In this ‘ghetto,’ the artists were safe from persecution and the FV corridor became a substitute for urban space (Bavčar 1984, 103–463).

In 1982, graffiti painting appeared. With the screening of the video *Icons of Glamour – Echoes of the Death* of the group Borders of Control No. 4 and an evening of selected music in December 1982, Dušan Mandić, as a member of the group, decorated the corridor of Disko FV with photocopies of graffiti, 5 × 2 m, drawn on paper, based on a photograph of a graffiti image of four homosexuals, taken from the *Art Press* magazine. Also, on the occasion of another project, *Borders of Control No. 4*, a graffiti image appears with the stencil-painted text ‘Hey you man watch me, you might be right I am a tool, but why don’t you tell me, if you know a better tool’ (Gržinić 2003, 170).

Mandić exhibited the graffiti with the image of homosexuals during a sexual act again in August 1983 at the FV in Šiška, and in November of the same year, he exhibited a photocopy of the graffiti and a graffiti image of a red male sexual organ made with stencils as part of the symposium.

sium *What Is the Alternative on the Dance Floor*. This was also a time of homosexuality outspokenly stepping into the world. In the same month, Roman Uranjek, Marko Kovačič, Andrej Savski, and Dušan Mandić organized an exhibition of Sv. Urh graffiti on the FV dance floor. The graffiti, which depicted partisans being brutally tortured and shot, were based on templates – photographs from a book containing documentary material about the events at Sv. Urh during the Second World War. In a text for Radio Študent, two of the authors mentioned the connection between the exhibition and the ritual of dancing on the same premises. It was therefore a way of thinking about visual art that went beyond the visual and considered the specificity of the space in which the work is presented.

The Kollaps group also produced graffiti, which was on display at the FV in November and December 1983; in 1984, the R Irwin S group (Borut Vogeltnik, Roman Uranjek, Dušan Mandić, Andrej Savski, Marko Kovačič) organized the exhibition *Erotic Graffiti with Pornographic Motives*. These finally established the pornographic content that was present in the postcards of Soldier D. M. (Dušan Mandić), The placement of pornography in the image, and thus in the field of ideology, was a radical intervention that represented the specificity of Ljubljana's subcultural production at the time in relation to the market-regulated divide between pornographic and artistic production in the West (Španjol 2003, 87).

In FV and ŠKUC, the content and visibility, the way of production and presentation have definitively erased the difference between popular and high culture. Subcultural and alternative art production was aimed at an audience very different from that attracted by gallery exhibitions. Those who came to Disko FV and ŠKUC were those who liked to listen to different music – mainly punk, hardcore, and new wave, but also those who did not feel at home in the established cultural institutions and who wanted different, critical thinking and a different cultural offer. The proverbially closed world of fine art was opened for a few years in the framework of FV Disco precisely because of the mixing of expressive forms, even to those who would otherwise have remained outside the world of those 'initiated' into fine art.

In the 1980s, the subcultural and alternative movement in Ljubljana involved projects that combined several media. Often, painting and video, photography, and installation were exhibited to the accompaniment of punk, hardcore, or new wave. FV mixed gallery culture, mass culture, and what was coming from the street. The subculture offered motifs, themes, and the use of media that were still largely unacceptable in the context of

fine art as it was presented in gallery spaces at the time. It introduced the previously taboo themes of crude sexuality, marginalized social groups, violence, different humour, lifestyles, and images. A new aesthetic was established – an aesthetic of the ugly, the dilettante, the marginal, the crude, the collaged, and the mass. The material and ideological possibilities gave rise to the DIY Principle, which is the main principle of self-organization as a core principle for establishing counter-power relations which provoke the hierarchical relations in the established order. This has led to a crude look in which, in conjunction with direct, often political messages, and with technological possibilities – the use of the photocopier and of pre-existing images whose meaning is perverted by their transfer into a new context – photographs and images from the mass media have been welcomed with open arms. We can speak of a key principle of creation: the principle of collaging pre-existing images. Posters, graffiti, videos, etc. are jigsaw puzzles of parts taken out of their original context and inserted into new contexts. Changing the context in which an image appears adds a new way of reading it, and this is often used by subcultures to criticize existing social reality. The principle of collage has been brought to its peak by Borghesia's multimedia projects, which are themselves collages. They consist of pre-existing independent video works, inserts of theatre performances, samples of music, pre-existing visual material, etc.

The motives of the visual material produced by the alternative and subculture are highly explicit and include political images, images of violence, catastrophes, or pornography; the latter was itself a political statement in this period, as it spoke of political bondage that forbids and represses and does not allow, for example, images of different sexuality even in the field of mass culture. The scene constantly points to a repressed but existing society of prohibition. The message is often on the surface and easy to read, but the materials, in addition to the original clarity, often offer details that the art material uses to further reinforce, and sometimes subvert, the original statement. In his essay *Come, Close Close to Me, I Tell You Man You Will See ...* Dušan Mandić (1983, 38–39) enumerated the characteristics of video in the descent from high to mass culture. Many of them can be applied to the entire visual expressiveness of alternative and subcultural art of the 1980s. This artistic production was interested in 'entertainment rather than hermetic seriousness,' yet it cannot be accused of not expressing important political and social ideas. Mandić goes on to say that in the works 'political action rather than political rhetoric is evident and inherent.' The visuals of subcultural production 'are comic

(mocking) rather than tragic.’ Many of them are characterized by humour, which ranges from the momentary quirks of early posters to the subtle statements with which punk ‘subverts the cynical workings of ideology’ (Žižek 1984, 122–129).

The creator of the art material can be anyone, a trained artist editing a video or a disco-goer with an incomplete primary school degree who writes graffiti on the wall. Both are equal, both works were – at least in the early phase of the FV Disco – equally on display to the visitor. It is also true that many of the protagonists of the scene, especially those who trained as artists, later entered the art system. This abandoned another ideal – the ideal of the creativity of the individual, which was only possible within the framework of subculture and alternative culture as a broader social movement. In the mid-1980s, more prominent names emerged within the subculture, notably the NSK, and within the Irwin group, which soon after its foundation crossed over into the field of ‘high art.’

Anti-Militarism and Squatting of Metelkova

The end of the 1980s and the early 1990s were a period of great tension and drastic social changes, from the socialist transition to capitalism to the growing nationalist tendencies that fuelled the Yugoslav wars. As mentioned above, in the early 1980s, the subculture was very pronounced and was further strengthened by the new wave of punk and hardcore scenes in Ljubljana. In addition to the scene in Ljubljana, the alternative scene also developed in Maribor, where it formed in circles around the Radio Marš initiative, the *Katedra* newspaper, MKC, AGD Gustaf, Front Rock, and so on. These subcultures often overlapped in their practice of anti-authoritarian ideology ranging from systemically promoted self-organization to more autonomous practices such as critique of institutionalization, assembly decision-making, etc. A 1982 Analytical report of RSNZ (Republican Secretariat for Internal Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia) stated, ‘It is no accident that in this world of thought, full of naiveté and speculation, punk is used as a synonym for the true progressive youth who reject all organized political action because it excludes human freedom, rejects authority, and accepts an “anarchism that has never compromised itself in social practice”. Punk is currently the most vital part of the youth subculture that represents a resistance to real socialism and young Stalinism’ (Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 1931, MA-701_108, 9).

Under these conditions, there were very strong pacifist and anti-militaristic tendencies inside of these subcultures, which came to the forefront, especially in the 1990s, when they focused on the struggle to turn mil-

itary facilities into cultural ones which would be autonomous. One of the most widely known was the 1993 occupation of Metelkova in Ljubljana, a former military barracks that remained in the centre of Ljubljana after independence as an empty reminder of militarization and the tragedy of the Yugoslav wars. A diverse multitude of associations, groups, and individuals, united in a common association, the Network for Metelkova, decided to use the occupation to draw attention to the strong anti-militarist agenda of the time and to demand that military facilities be transformed into spaces for culture and art (more in Bibič 2003; Pavlišič 2013). At the same time, various collectives were formed. These were mainly concerned with anti-militarism and ecology, partly because of the war in the former Yugoslavia (e.g. Kolektiv anarho-pacifistične akcije (The Collective of Anarchist Pacifist Action) (K.A.P.A.), the punk collective T.O.T.A.L.I.T.A.R., Škrati (The Elves collective), and the Ecological Anarchist Initiative) (Crnkić and Tepina 2014, 25).⁸ The occupation of the former military bakery in Maribor is also worth mentioning here. Like the occupation of Metelkova, the protagonists of the occupation founded an informal organization, the Magdalena Network, which tried to acquire premises and organize the individual actors into a whole.⁹

In the 1990s the anarcho-punk subculture was based on DIY culture. This had a significant impact not only on the aesthetics of the subculture but also on self-publishing, where a strong culture of fanzine publishing developed alongside the proliferation of music production.¹⁰ The

⁸ Their actions include critical fairs and demonstrations against McDonald's greed, nuclear weapons, and GMO products. The opening of the first anarchist info point, Škratova čitalnica (the Dwarf Reading Room), was a co-production between K.A.P.A. and the Dwarfs, who founded the KUD Anarhiv in 1999, organizing discussions, meetings, and presentations, while Škratova čitalnica was responsible for the distribution of radical, libertarian and anarchist literature (Crnkić and Tepina 2014, 25).

⁹ Later, in 1996, the organization was formalized as the Pekarna Institute of the Magdalena Network. For more information on Pekarna and its structure, principles, etc. see their webpage (Pekarna Magdalenske mreže Maribor n. d.).

¹⁰ This led to the publication of numerous magazines and fanzines, such as *Svojtok* and *13. brat* (13th brother). Also worth mentioning is the Kolektiv nenasilnega delovanja (Collective for Nonviolent Action) (K.N.D.), which was active from 1989 to 1998, during which time it disseminated anarchist ideas and was involved in the publication of the newsletter *Preporod – časopis slovenskih anarhistov za svobodno družbo* (Preporod – Newspaper of Slovenian Anarchists for a Free Society) as well as numerous leaflets and other propaganda materials on topics such as antimilitarism, ecology, antifascism, criticism of parliamentary democracy, sexism, etc. (Federation for Anarchist Organising 2009, 8).

late 1990s are particularly important for the emergence of a new wave of squatting, which was also linked to the emergence of new social movements. For example, in 1999 the Cukrarna squat took place in Ljubljana, which was followed by social, political, and cultural squats known as Vila Mara, AC Molotov, and Galicia. Similar autonomous spaces began to emerge in other parts of Slovenia.¹¹ The squatting movement was on many levels always interconnected with the wider social and political struggles, from the participation in the alter-globalization movements and No-NATO campaign to demonstrations against the war in Iraq, which was followed by student revolts (2006–2007, 2009–2010), solidarity with workers and syndicalist struggles, and many others.

Autonomous spaces and squatting had an important interconnection with art and revolutionary aesthetics. In the history of social movements, we can observe the strong relationship between the strength of the movements and the development of their own cultural base – the development of the counterculture, which is characterized by a spirit of resistance. The creation of its own cultural base was a starting point and an agency of counter-power for building diverse social movements. One of the most important crossroads was creating autonomous social and cultural centres, which were a consequence of direct actions of occupations of empty buildings, called squatting. In squatted spaces art and visual image had an important or even focal role. We could emphasize three points: art has a central role in the creation of the aesthetics of the place, and autonomous places are laboratories for experimenting with utopian social activity and relationships that are built beyond existing norms and values. Secondly, also consequently, art and autonomy are focal points as aesthetics becomes a way of life. And the third important role is the preservation of the spaces; as we can see in the example of ACC Metelkova, it played an important role as the buildings have been preserved with recognition of the place as one of significant cultural value.

Autonomous Factory Rog and Contemporary Social Movements

In 2006, the project TEMP was also the basis for the occupation of the old, abandoned bicycle factory Rog in Ljubljana, which was established

¹¹ Izbruhov kulturni bazen in Kranj and later TrainStation Squat, Mostovna and Ideal bar in Nova Gorica, Ambasada Štefana Kovača Marka (Štefan Kovač Marko's Embassy) in Beltinci, Sokolc (the Sokol House) in Novo Mesto, Inde in Koper, Argo in Izola, and others.

on the anarchist ideas of Hakim Bey and the concept of a Temporary Autonomous Zone. A temporarily occupied space of freedom, creativity, and action was created and was used for various projects, concerts, artistic activities, a social centre, etc. under the common name Avtonomna tovarna Rog (the Autonomous Factory Rog) – AT Rog. Rog also became an important meeting point for political struggles, from Nevidni delavci sveta (the Invisible Workers of the World, IWW) to Izbrisani (the Erased), who eventually found a space for community and resistance in the Rog Social Centre. The autonomous spaces, AKC Metelkova and AT Rog, played an important role in struggles rising from the broader social ruptures, as did the global economic crisis, which was countered by the local mass movement 150. This was followed by widespread uprisings that took place in all major Slovenian cities between 2012 and 2013. After this period another rupture followed one of the biggest social crises that emerged on the borders of the European Union in 2015. One of the central spaces for the struggle against the racist migration policies at that time was AT Rog, which also hosted many gatherings of the broader coalition of social movements and initiatives united in the Anti-Racist Front that was active in 2015–2016. This front brought together various anti-authoritarian collectives and individuals who were working on migration and refugee issues at the time with information sharing, fieldwork, community events, etc. After this very intense momentum, an attempt to evict of the entire Rog area followed in 2016, but the eviction was halted, and a court case began between the municipality and the community of AT Rog. With its numerous collectives, activities, and political-social actions, Autonomous Factory Rog also represented the struggle against gentrification until January 19, 2021, when the municipality evicted the area after fifteen years of existence, despite strong resistance. The eviction coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and a high level of social disintegration due to strict and rigid government health measures. When there was the first COVID-19 lockdown in May 2020, diverse anti-authoritarian collectives, activists, and artists started bicycle protests in front of the governmental buildings, which led to regular protests, sit-ins, protest assemblies, and themed actions (actions of Aktiv kulturnih delavk in delavcev – ADDK (Active of Cultural Workers) in front of the Ministry of Culture; a coalition of ecological initiatives carried out many diverse actions by the rivers, outside of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning and other institutions), etc. (Grafenauer and Tepina 2022, 409–428).

Conclusion

As can be deduced from this short overview and series of visual examples from different periods in the context of the area of one of the post-Yugoslavian republics, there has been a strong connection between art, autonomous spaces, and social movements reacting to political developments. This tangle created a space for the development of critical political culture, both through the broader intertwining of the art scene with social movements and through the strong presence of visual and performative images in the movements. At certain historical moments (e.g. *Komuna 7*, *Šempas*, *Disko FV*, *ACC Metelkova*, *AT Rog*) we can also speak of the counterculture, when it goes beyond the artistic frameworks such as cultural institutions, galleries, etc., and establishes its own, based on non-dominant discourse and self-organization principles.

Art in social movements has an enormous potential for revolutionizing aesthetics, which is also one of the essential elements of achieving fundamental social change. Together with other elements such as anti-authoritarian politics, which has a wider social impact, values, autonomous spaces, music, fashion, etc., it forms the basis for the formation of a counter-power. However, if the field of aesthetics is not completely decoded from the existing social codes, no fundamental change takes place. Hierarchical power relations easily integrate inside of art and activist movements and influence their dynamics to the extent that they become subordinated to systems of power and capital. As we observe the period of transition to capitalism, we can recognize that always when there is a gap, the code of capital inscribes it and takes control of the dynamics. These mechanisms of recuperation of anti-authoritarian politics and aesthetics allow capitalism to become an all-embracing system integrated in every pore of political and social life.

We can follow the changes in the methods and modes of pressure by the authorities and institutions, and the response to it, which is reminiscent of that shown by avant-garde movements in the past (with manifestos, rebranding/detournement, street art, and performative actions as a form of protest and art as a demand for a different collective life). We can also observe the attempt to invent alternative social relationships, which have been addressed by this protest movement on several occasions, but which have failed to find roots in the broader social dynamics. The main obstacles can be found in the repetition of the protests, normalization of radical actions, and recuperation of artists and rebellious actions in the system of

power structures. When they become a repetitive routine, they lose their potential counter-power and their strength to think beyond the imaginable. With the reduction of the protests to only demands, the protests became predictable, and the creative political space begins to shrink.

The capitalist recuperation of praxis is one of the strongest elements of contemporary suppression of revolutionary aesthetic potential and the building of political counter-power from below. It is also one of the key elements of capitalist flexibility, thus it is important to differentiate between the alternative praxis decodified through alternative social relations (horizontality, solidarity, mutual aid, etc.) and those praxes that are not or are mere simulacrum of the first (Baudrillard 1999). Numerous art projects with socially critical and aesthetically conspicuous content have their recognition or/and popularity incorporated by economic value, with which they are easily re-appropriated into the existing social order.

The aesthetic revolutionary potential achieves dispersion momentum but is closed by reduced demand. Capitalism has an intensely flexible spectrum that can, through constant crisis, adapt to new social circumstances. However, it is possible to observe the point at which capitalism needs to brutally adapt to the new realm. The older and more sophisticated methods of recuperation and reification of every aspect of the individual's life are no longer sufficient, thus we are facing the more autocratic phase, which is on the rise.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W. 2002. *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. London and New York: Continuum.
- Bavčar, Igor, ed. 1984. *Punk pod Slovenci*. Ljubljana: Republiška konferenca ZSMS, Univerzitetna konferenca ZSMS.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1999. *Simulaker in simulacija; Popoln zločin*. Translated by Anja Kosjek in Stojan Pelko. Ljubljana: šou, študentska založba.
- Belting, Hans. 2010. 'Absolutna umetnost kot utopija.' *Likovne besede* (92): 12–21.
- Bibič, Bratko. 2003. *Hrup z Metelkove: tranzicije prostorov in kulture v Ljubljani*. Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut.
- Borčič, Barbara. 2013. *Celostna umetnina Laibach: fragmentarni pogled*. Ljubljana: /*cf.
- Crnkič, Adin, and Daša Tepina. 2014. 'Misliti anarhizem v slovenskem prostoru: kronologija in zgodovinski razvoj.' *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 42 (257): 13–29.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1990. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 'Federation for Anarchist Organising.' 2009. *Autonomija* 1:8.

- Grafenauer, Petja, and Daša Tepina. 2022. 'Art and Rebellion: The Struggle for Freedom and Autonomy at the Ljubljana 2020/2021 Protests.' *Third Text* 36 (5): 409–428.
- Grlić, Danko. 1988. *Izazov negativnog*. Zagreb: Naprijed; Belgrade: Nolit.
- Gržinić, Marina. 2003. 'Galerija šKUC Ljubljana 1978–1987.' In *Do roba in naprej: slovenska umetnost 1975–1985*, edited by Igor Španjol and Igor Zabel, 164–182. Ljubljana: Moderna galerija.
- Kovič, Brane. 1990. 'Irwin – konec utopije.' *Sinteza* (83–86): 13–17.
- Mandić, Dušan. 1983. *Come, Close Close to Me, I Tell You Man You Will See ...* Ljubljana: Self-published.
- Oleami, Samo. 2019. 'Edicija OHO.' Aired on 27 October on Radio Študent. <https://radiostudent.si/kultura/objekt-meseca/edicija-oho>.
- Pavlišič, Andrej, ed. 2013. *Metelkova mesto*. Ljubljana: Študentska založba.
- Pekarna Magdalenske mreže Maribor. N. d. 'O nas.' <https://pekarnamm.org/o-nas>
- Rancière, Jacques. 2010. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Scott, C. James. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press.
- Španjol, Igor. 2003. 'Veliki pok: multimedijska umetnost in alternativna scena v prvi polovici osemdesetih let.' In *Do roba in naprej: slovenska umetnost 1975–1985*, edited by Igor Španjol and Igor Zabel, 80–92. Ljubljana: Moderna galerija.
- Vidmar, Igor. 1983. 'Dossier Disco Študent.' *Mladina*, 26. maj.
- Zabel, Igor. 1994. 'OHO – od reizma do konceptualizma.' In *OHO: retrospektiva/Eine Retrospektive/A Retrospective*, edited by Igor Španjol, 18–105. Ljubljana: Moderna galerija.
- . 2003. 'Slovenska umetnost 1975–85: koncepti in konteksti.' In *Do roba in naprej: slovenska umetnost 1975–1985*, edited by Igor Španjol and Igor Zabel, 10–28. Ljubljana: Moderna galerija.
- Žižek, Slavoj, ed. 1984. *Ideologija, cinizem, punk*. Filozofija skozi psihoanalizo 1. Ljubljana: Univerzum.

Archival Sources

- Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 1931 Republiški sekretariat za notranje zadeve Socialistične republike Slovenije (RSNZ SRS), Uprava za analitiko 1982, MA-701_108, Aktivnost slovenske politične emigracije.