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Slovene independence never happened, or how to reconstruct the historical mode of politics?

Abstract: The main task of the article is to analyze two ruptures that suspended time and produced space. The article engages in the critical dialogue with the dominant conception of time and space via historical reconstruction of recent Slovene history. If in the 1980s the amalgam of politics (*new social movements*), art and theory appeared in and broke up with the dominant situation, the 1990s saw the *occupation of Metelkova*, which evolved into one of the biggest autonomous centres in Europe. With the help of Alain Badiou's theory, the author reaches the conclusion that the independence of Slovenia never took place.

Key words: spatial intervention, event, subject, Slovene independence

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Slovenska osamosvojitev se ni nikoli zgodila

Izvleček: Izhodišče članka je analiza dveh prelomov, ki sta globoko zaznamovala politično realnost. Z zgodovinsko rekonstrukcijo nedavne slovenske zgodovine vzpostavlja kritični dialog z dominantno recepcijo oziroma revizijo dominantne koncepcije časa in prostora. Medtem ko je bil v 80. letih 20. stoletja ključen ravno amalgam politike (nova družbena gibanja), umetnosti in teorije, ki je tudi prelomil z obstoječo situacijo, pa smo bili v 90. letih 20. stoletja priča zasedbi Metelkove, ki se je razvila v enega največjih avtonomnih centrov v Evropi. S teorijo Alaina Badiouja avtor zaključi, da se neodvisnost Slovenije ni nikoli zgodila.

Ključne besede: prostorska intervencija, dogodek, subjekt, slovenska neodvisnost

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Introduction

There are many ways of thinking about politics. Certain theories build on the assumption that politics basically resolves social problems (functionalist aspect) and regulates social relationships within a legal framework (legal aspect); other theories underline wealth redistribution problems (justice/welfare aspect) or question the acceptance of the *Other* (ethics and political philosophy), while, finally, some theories affirm that politics is like a football field where different interests do battle.[2] We will begin from a completely oppositional standpoint, to be precise, with the Rancierian-Badiouian perspective. This perspective takes the dominant "political philosophy" as its main target of critique. In spite of starting from an essentially *political* perspective, we will not be able to avoid a *historical materialistic* approach. Within this theoretical framework we will move between two intertwined fields: spatial intervention (space) and our intervention in the dominant historical account (time). There are two main goals to this article: In the first part we will try to reconstruct the recent history of Slovenia and try to answer to the question: did something really happen in the 1980s? In the second part of the article we will discuss whether and how spatial intervention and the constitution of the autonomous zone Metelkova can be conceived as a *political act*. This will show where political interventions took place and how they crystallised the *politics of emancipation*. This line of thinking about politics will enable us to draw parallels among different *breaks* that have occurred in recent years.

The Road to Slovene independence

By "recent history" we mean Slovenia's so-called "road to independence." Apart from the myth of the 1000-year-old dream coming true, there are just two, somewhat more serious, accounts of recent history: the first was written by the anticommunist "Right", while the "reformed" communist elite articulated the second one. The former version is advocated by the Roman Catholic Church and its subsidiary "intellectual" think-tanks, especially *Nova Revija* [*New Review*]. This historical interpretation is mainly centred around the master-signifier of "totalitarianism,"

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[2] Even though these theories come from various traditions and very different backgrounds, they have at least one common characteristic: the impossibility of radical change, or in other words, complete disappearance of a revolutionary project. The problem is poignantly articulated by J.C. Milner, who argues that after the fall of the Berlin Wall resistance has been yet again divorced from the thought (1992).

which comprises notions such as anticommunism, nationalism, "victimisation" of honest Slovenes by communists and Serbo-Croatians and, last but not least, the emancipatory role of enlightened "dissidents" and the civil society.[3] If this is a classical (Eastern-European) revisionist historical overview of the socialist epoch and its transition, the second account is somehow typical of Slovenia. It is represented by reformed communists that repented of their sins and showed that Slovene communists could change and participate in the establishing of the new Slovene state.[4] Nevertheless, their interpretation of the 1980s remains more or less the same. Let us sketch a simplified common version of both historical accounts.

After the death of Tito in 1980, Yugoslavia had to start paying off foreign debt. This process triggered an economic crisis that eventually deepened the political crisis. Confrontations and violence in Kosovo intensified, in 1988 the JBTZ affair[5] took place in Slovenia, and in the late 1980s the autonomy of the Vojvodina and Kosovo regions was revoked.[6] These events marked the first major steps towards the break-up of Yugoslavia. After the referendum in 1990, people declared their will for an independent Slovenia, and in 1991, this most important *event* took place; after the famous *10-day war*, Slovenia gained independence and the peaceful transition into a nation state as well as into a capitalist economic system could begin. The establishment of the nation state and the embrassing of a capitalist economy were political aspirations of both *blocs* at that time.[7] Both accounts dif-

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[3] A very important theoretical intervention in civil society as possible "totalitarianism from below" was formulated already in the 1980s by Tomaž Mastnak, 1987. Although this critique is important, we still have to be aware that the civil society functioned as a master-signifier at that time. As we will subsequently try to show, this was not without consequences.

[4] The accounts are divided only in one point, namely the attitude towards World War II. If the first account wants to rehabilitate the victims of the post-war period – collaborators with Fascism and Nazism – the second account still advocates the positive role of partisans and the national liberation struggle against Nazism.

[5] For basic information about the JBTZ and the influential "Committee for the Protection of Human Rights" see Ali H. Žerdin, 1997.

[6] The official account emphasizes the rise of Serbian nationalism. However, in this process of "nationalization" one must not forget that the nationalistic memorandums of Serb and Slovene intelligentsia were written almost simultaneously in 1987.

[7] The alliance between so called "Left" and "Right" was always re-actualised whenever one tried to confront the terrain of national interests and military-economic integrations (the NATO and EU joint campaigns of political parties).

fer only cosmetically; to be more precise, their *position of utterance* is different, but their *utterances* are virtually the same. We can thus argue that each represents a different side of the same coin. In other words, what poses itself as an alternative between the *rightist* and *leftist* perspectives is in fact immanent to the dominant ideological discourse, that is, the nationalistic discourse of Slovene independence. That being the case, we will try to reformulate historical interpretation towards emancipatory reading of the 1980s. Only through a radical break from the dominant perspective can we start thinking about *politics of emancipation*. Politics of emancipation strives to cut away from the dominant politics – "policy"[8] – while at the same time its task is to conceptualise a *break with the situation*.

With this operation we are already entering the terrain of the philosophy of Alain Badiou. We will "import" some of the key concepts of his political thought, while our interpretation will mainly rely on Peter Hallward's excellent book *Badiou: Subject to Truth* (2003). In the beginning we should elaborate on some main theses of the concept of *event*, which will make allow for our "historical reconstruction." As Hallward states: "the event – the uprising, the encounter, the invention – breaks fundamentally with the prevailing routine."[9] An event "is the unpredictable result of chance and chance alone."[10] If Badiou sees "situation" as structure, that is, something that provides us with repetition, "event" is something that is unexpected – it is only through event that "the void of situation" is encountered. Moreover, the event indicates, in principle, "a pure beginning."[11] If

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[8] Here the Rancierian distinction between "police" and "politique" proofs to be very productive. "Police" is a dominant existent order. If translated into Foucauldian terms: "police" is a biopolitical order that disciplines bodies and populations. "Police" is a law that determines the logic of counting, that is, it determines the (in)existence of parts in the society. Also, it defines the "distribution of the sensible". Even though Rancière constructs a somehow totalizing view of the existing "police" order, he insists that the task of contemporary political thought is to think the "break" (revolution or emancipatory politics). He suggests the term "*politique*", with which he articulates egalitarian practices that intervene in the order of "*police*". Basically, the logic of "*politique*" demonstrates that there is a miscounting in the normal functioning of the order. Rancière has developed these theses in his fascinating book *La Mésentente*, 1995. In our case, it is enough to be aware of the distinction between the order of "police" – in the middle of the 1980s this concept could be applied to the Yugoslav socialist state with its apparatuses on the one hand and the egalitarian politics of new political subjects on the other.

[9] Hallward, 2003, 107.

[10] Ibid., 114.

[11] Ibid., 115.

Hallward goes on to argue that event is a creation *ex nihilo*, we would insist that event does not have anything transcendental in itself. It is true that event is "outside the law," but it is always "inside" the situation. Thus, event is immanent to the situation while it, at the same time does not belong to it. As Peter Klepec suggests, event has the same status as the *Real* in the psychoanalytical theory of Jacques Lacan (2004). This *un-representability* of event and the (ontological) impossibility of its counting makes an event extremely difficult to acknowledge. Moreover, for an event to take place (will have taken place), it needs a decision that brings into light the fidelity to that event. This fidelity is crucial – it makes the event appear and functions as the *trauma* of that situation.

Event or simulacrum?

> His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make a whole of what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.
>
> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

If historical "progress" is always a matter of necessity we will now focus on the *Real* of the situation, something that radically breaks with progress. In the Yugoslavian situation, what could be conceived as the *Real*, the impossible, the ultimate trauma of the situation, something that could not be imagined? Undoubtedly, if the nationalistic historical account operated within Badiou's theory, it would proclaim independence as event *par excellence*. The break-up of Yugoslavia could not even be imagined and the first serious reflections on Slovene independence came no sooner than in the late 1980s. One could thus say: the existence of a democratic Slovene nation state was impossible; therefore, we can proclaim it was the *event*. It is now on us, Slovenes, to remain *faithful* to this event … However, this line of interpretation is extremely misleading. We must not forget that the formation of the subject "Slovenes" would not qual-

ify as the subject in Badiou's sense. Let us adopt Hallward's line of argumentation: "The event of the revolution takes place as that imperceptible moment of transition after which the groups of people involved conceive themselves precisely no longer as members of this or that group but as so many subjects of the revolution itself."[12]

As the reader may observe, the concept of event presupposes the concept of subject. Badiou's subject is not substance and it cannot be conceived as origin or as a "seat of meaning." We must bear in mind that the subject of the event is always collective, as Badiou puts it:

"An event is political if the subject of this event is collective, or if the event is not attributable to anything other than the multiplicity of a collective. 'Collective' is not a numerical concept here. We say that the event is ontologically collective inasmuch as this event conveys a virtual requirement of the all."[13]

Hallward provides a very synthesised definition of the Badiouian subject: "the subject as "local configuration of a generic procedure" will be the connection, through the insignificant void of a proper name (Paul, Lenin, Cantor, Shoenberg) of an intervention (that imposed the name of event) with an operator of fidelity (that makes its implications stick)."[14] To give an example, Lenin as subject is both: the October Revolution and Leninism as fidelity. Here, the connection between event and subject is made apparent.[15] From this argumentation we can conclude that Slovenes in the case of Yugoslavia would not qualify as a Badiouian subject.[16] The community of Slovenes already existed before – it had

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[12] Ibid., 111.

[13] Badiou, 2005, 141.

[14] Hallward, 2003, 140.

[15] "What an event exposes is the void of a situation S, that is, the pure being of what it presents (that it counts as one), in the suspension of all re-presentation. The subject is, first and foremost, a response to this exposure, an attempt to articulate its implications." (Ibid., 141.)

[16] Furthermore, Slovenes would not qualify as a political subject in the Rancierian sense either. *Political subject* comes into play ONLY when it disidentifies itself. The elaboration of political subject and the logic of *disidentification* were demonstrated by Jacques Rancière in his *La Mésentente,* 1995. Political subjectivation appears when the part of a certain group disidentifies itself. That does not mean that it is created *ex nihilo*, quite the contrary, the existing identity (being Slovene, being a woman …) is transformed. Simultaneously with this subtle process of disidentification, new identification is at work. At that precise moment this group that was not counted by the "police" could be seen and heard after the political *sub-*

the same civil rights as all other national groups within Yugoslavia. Therefore, if we adhered to "nationalistic" logic, that would mean that the subject is substantial, that it has specific meaning and that it can be identified with specific characteristics that are particular and not universal. There was no political subjectivation at work, there was no event! In Badiouian theory one might think of this subject as reactionary. Alain Badiou suggested that nothing really happened in the 1980s with the fall of real existing socialisms. But let us contextualize our task: we want to set a clear *demarcation line* between the history of the politics of emancipation and the two national historical accounts mentioned at the outset. We will try to conceptualise the *third way* – not the third way that sits on the fence, but the third way that makes no compromises with the past or the present "situation." If the author of this article pretentiously desires to be read as a part of a much larger task, this task could be called "rewriting the recent history" from the viewpoint of the people – "collectives in struggle."

If we follow Badiou's formulation that nothing happened – we can at first sight unhesitatingly agree that the result of the so-called *democratic revolution* was indeed a certain regression, or in other words just a *simulacrum* of event. If Slovenes wanted freedom of expression (and of press) they received "auto-censorship" and capitalist regulation of media.[17] If they wanted a free and just state that would count everyone (be opened to minorities and Roma people), soon after the independence the "erasure"[18] happened. If they wanted freedom and

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jectivation. If it practices equality, the "politics" can be labelled as universal. Only here can we start speaking about political subject. Although we are aware of some important differences between Badiou's and Rancière's subject, we will not enter into this discussion here.

[17] At the moment of my writing (June 2006), the situation borders at the "state of exception". It is not merely that the media are regulated by capital. With the new media law, leading political parties have gained new authorization to intervene directly in the editorial policies of daily newspapers, public television and radio etc. – for an interesting and detailed analysis see the new issue of *Mediawatch Journal*, especially Sandra Bašič-Hrvatin's contribution (2006).

[18] *The erased* are a group of people coming from former Yugoslav republics. Their fundamental right for residence was illegitimately and also illegally taken from them. All of their documents were destroyed and so they in fact did not even exist. In many cases, the lives of the erased were destroyed. A decade later, the Constitutional court demanded that the Slovene Parliament settle their status, but for years the issue of the erased has been put under the carpet or manipulated in nationalistic propaganda. The issue of "the erased" is presented in the 2003 book *The erased: organized innocence and the politics of exclusion*.

entrepreneurial spirit, they gained privatisation and high unemployment. But bear in mind that everyone could earn enough money to buy his own car on cred-it! The process resulted in what we could call *postmodern* bourgeois revolution. Slovenia became a nation state and was introduced to the capitalist market.

Yet is this really what political agents of the 1980s were fighting for? At this point the conceptualization of politics by Sylvain Lazarus might prove helpful. He conceptualizes *politics as thought* and advocates the thesis that politics should not be measured by its failure. For Lazarus politics is precarious and the mode of politics begins and ends. Therefore we can never despair that nothing happened in the 1980s, not just in Slovenia but across the whole socialist bloc.[19] The even-tual "failure" of this mode of politics (a sequence of the 1980s) does not mean that nothing happened. Let us give the word to Lazarus for a moment:

> "The problematic of failure does not permit factual verification; instead of treating the fact as a unit, it carves it out in its own way. The termination of a politics is not enough to identify it. On the contrary, it is essential to think the termination of all politics. Termination, then, is no longer a litmus test, but rather that which comes about at the end of the sequence and constitutes the idea of sequence."[20]

Politics is not a matter of efficiency and of verification. Its termination must be thought and only in this way can we discern the *sequence* of politics. This stake is also present in Riha's analysis:

> "The practising of politics by a part, at least, of the social and political move-ments in Eastern Europe by the end of the 80s, that fought actually existing socialism not on the basis of the regulative idea of the restoration of 'parlia-mentary capitalism' and the nation-state, but rather, starting with the assumption that we are dealing with a regime that needs to be radically, the-oretically and practically problematized. /…/ Hence, the way out of socialism was understood, not as an entrance into capitalism, but, on the contrary, as a (partial) victory in the political process of emancipation."[21]

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[19] This line of argument is put forward by Alain Badiou, 1998.

[20] Lazarus, 1996, 156.

[21] Riha, 2003, 40.

New political subject

Where to search for the radical break, for the politics of emancipation in the 1980s? Where was the *evental site*? We believe that the radical break with the situation is to be looked for, as Riha's quotation suggests, in parts of the *new social movements*.[22] The *climate* in the 1980s was somewhat favourable; as the situation is described by Močnik: it was (de)structured as *anti-systemic* movement in the *anti-systemic* state (2000). Also, this movement had strong ties with artistic and theoretical production. As the author has helped to show in another paper, political agents were: "'New Social Movements' [that] consisted of various groups such as ecologists, pacifists, cultural intelligentsia, students, artistic groups, feminists and others. They articulated many different social fields but their battles were somehow accumulated in the popular struggle against the Yugoslav Army at the end of the 1980s."[23] Indeed, "political subjects" ranged from more militant ones that fought "communism with communism", to other parts that confronted the reigning ideology of "self-management", the process of bureaucratisation and the rise of technocrats in the late 1970s. Despite the fact that the socialistic political apparatus tended to include all parts of society in the *democratic* process, there were still many issues that were either not discussed or excluded from the political agenda of the Communist party and its subsidiary powers.

The most important example can be observed concerning one of the major political actors in Yugoslavia, namely the Yugoslav people's army (JLA). The Yugoslav Army and its role in the Yugoslav society were never questioned. One had to keep one's eyes and mouth shut. We must not forget that the Yugoslav army was at that time the third strongest army in Europe. Matters concerning the army remained very strict, and nobody could afford any kind of critical attitude. It was only in the 1980s that the *peace movement* started raising crucial questions and demanding the demilitarisation of Yugoslavia. This sacred field of the State now became open for discussion and the movement started demanding

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[22] The other line of interpretation has been taken by Ozren Pupovac, 2005. If there is an event in Yugoslav history, it undoubtedly has to be seen in the national liberation struggle against Nazism. If we simplify his argument we could say: *Yugoslavness* existed along the rupture where class came before nation, as a principle of societal organisation. Breaking the deadlock of nationalisms in the late 1980s suited the rigorous insistence of socialism and Yugoslaveness.

[23] Kirn et all., 2002, V.

something that had previously been unimaginable: the invention of demili-tarised communities. If every state is in the last instance guaranteed by the repressive apparatuses generally, and military institutions concretely, these polit-ical demands were the traumatic point that could not be discussed. At the same time, feminists were starting to build cross-national ties with other feminist groups across Yugoslavia[24] – they opened question of domestic unpaid work and articulated the slogan "private is political." These political movements organized massive political actions during the 1980s. Simultaneously, a strong artistic scene developed in Slovenia. Not only did the avant-garde group *Laibach*[25] appear at that time, but there was a veritable explosion of musical production; undoubt-edly we must not underestimate the role of punk which proved to be of immense importance. As Breznik observes:

> "In retrospect, we see that punk actually was a detonator of the democratic revolution of the eighties, since the political transformation only supervened the social transformation where punk had such a central role. When the nationalist and separatist political forces which democratically took the power, arrested, at least temporarily, the transformation by diverging it into the nation-building and the restoration of capitalism on neo-liberal premises, the alternative artistic production oriented itself towards more ambitious 'artism', perfectionism and even elitism."[26]

This powerful amalgam of art, politics and theory[27] was a constitutive part of the *evental* site – in other words, it appeared from *nothing* within that situation. It cer-tainly cut off all ties with the dominant *police* order. Empirically, these politi-cal/artistic actions were met with excessive state violence, ranging from ideologi-

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[24] See Jalušič, 2002.

[25] Although the artistic practices were indeed extremely important in those years and artis-tic procedure is also one of the generic procedures of truth according to Badiou, we will not be able to elaborate on this thesis, since it would drive us too far from our current the-sis. For an interesting analysis of punk see *Punk under Slovenes,* 1985; for detailed work on Laibach and NSK, see Alexei Monroe, 2005.

[26] Breznik, 1995, 79.

[27] We must not forget that the theoretical school in Ljubljana flourished during the 1980s, These were heroic times when many intellectuals thought out the impossible encounter between historical materialism and psychoanalysis. Above all, the theory was engaged in the movement.

cal/political attacks and harassment to more repressive measures. This culminated in two points: in 1988, four people were arrested by the military police and were brought before the military tribunal (the JBTZ affair) because they had supposedly published military secrets. They were all convicted, a fact which triggered a massive uprising; indeed the movement of the masses was unleashed. This was the moment of *condensation* of the struggle in Slovenia. Not much later, ongoing violence in Kosovo provoked the famous miner strike, during which miners occupied the mine also to show their disapproval of changes to the Federal Constitution. The popular movement in Slovenia began to protest against the repression in Kosovo, against the police and the Yugoslav army, in order to show solidarity with the workers.

However, this was paradoxically the time of the downfall of new social movements. Faced with ever stronger nationalisms they were not up to the task of analyzing the concrete situation and defining new strategies for the struggle. The moment came when the real antagonism, antagonism of the "socialistic" development (underdevelopment of some parts of Yugoslavia, Kosovo being the most obvious case) – the economic class struggle, the political struggle inside the party, the impossibility of thinking in terms of post-Titoist politics – was *displaced*. This antagonism was being replaced by national hysteria and an overwhelming feeling due to the fall of Berlin wall. In those years, Slovenia witnessed fast nationalisation of *civil society*. In fact all the troubles of the civil society came to the light. Formation of political parties could be seen just as a normal way of enhancing the civil society. Therefore, the development towards the democratic nation state seemed to be a "natural" stage in this process. If Slovenia is always presented as the *success story* of the Balkans, the other side of the coin was not so positive. This coin includes everyday phenomena such as: identity politics, racism and nationalism. We need not stress the obvious example of the tragic wars that took place in the 1990s in ex-Yugoslavia and that *eternally* marked the break-up. Although we assigned an important role to the new social movements, we must pose the traumatic question for the movement: how could the radical rupture with the State result in nothing more than nationalisms and war?

Metelkova – spatial intervention as continuous discontinuity?

Our theoretical position unquestionably relates dialogically with the theory of historical materialism. The first part was mostly oriented towards the issues of *poli-*

tics and *history*, but it treated time in a specific way. Since we took the concept of *event* as the most important "tool" for our analysis, we stressed the importance of the mode of "time" that is invented by Badiou. He conceptualizes time in terms of the "*futur antérieur*," the verb form that in English would be formulated as: the event *will have taken place*. Event has no present and it leaves no durable trace, so it can be affirmed only by the subjective decision (future) and the declaration that this event indeed took place (past). Afterwards only subjective fidelity to the event can yet again affirm it. This conception of time radically opposes the dominant conception of time; it can be said that it suspends the dimension of time.[28] Thus, by introducing the event we tended to articulate the category of anti-historicist time. In the second part of the article we will make another important shift; to be more precise, we will advocate the rupture that was made within the tradition of historical materialism itself. It was Henri Lefebvre (1974) that introduced the concept *production of the space* in the historical tradition where time always *overdetermined* the theoretical field. In this light, David Harvey lucidly observes:

> "The social theory has always focused on processes of social change, modernization, and revolution (technical, social, political). Progress is its theoretical object, and historical time its primary dimension. Indeed, progress entails the conquest of space, the tearing down of all spatial barriers, and the ultimate annihilation of space through time."[29]

Since Lefebvre's theoretical intervention, *space* has become equally important in the discernment of *social formations* if we remain inside the horizon of historical materialism, and also equally important for the analysis of *singular subjectivities* as *places* if we switch the perspective towards Lazarus (1996). In our analysis we will follow the former approach.

Our "investigation" continues with the radical discontinuity in the 1990s. If we saw that the rupture, the break in the 1980s is ascribed to the new social

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[28] Let us mention that the project of the *abolishment of time* is of tremendous importance for Sylvain Lazarus, who in his book *Anthropologie du nom,* 1996, makes a thorough critique of Hegelian time, of the relationship between subjective and objective – in other words of the circulation of the mental and the material. Lazarus suggests that a shift has to be made from the hidden presupposed unit of "society" towards a *prescriptive singularity*. It is the only way to arrive at the *historical mode of politics*, the one that is *interior*. That means that it is not connected with the mode of state (*exterior* historical mode of politics).

[29] Harvey, 2005, 201.

movements (and not to Slovene independence), we would like to focus on another event, the only political *event* worth mentioning in the 1990s. There is nothing to be mentioned regarding the official politics in the 1990s, because the order of police is of no direct interest to us. However, what we have in mind is the spatial intervention, namely the *occupation* of Metelkova. Our thesis is somehow paradoxical: if it is true that every event founds itself in its un-foundability and that it stands "alone", there is nevertheless an interesting continuity between the rupture of the 1980s and the rupture of the 1990s. How can we explain this continuous discontinuity?

Metelkova was the barrack of the Yugoslav army until 1991. The Yugoslav Army was obliged to leave Slovenia the same year and Metelkova remained a deserted island in the middle of Ljubljana's landscape. In September of 1993, when the first hole was made in the walls of Metelkova, masses of people started to organize in order to prevent this repressive intervention. Gržinič describes the process as follows: "the City Council secretly planned to tear down the barracks and put a commercial business centre in their place. Therefore, the city's activists, intellectuals and artists began to squat the building that is still a battle site of the independent art and culture scene and the Ljubljana City Council today."[30] The place started to be run by the Network for Metelkova[31] (1990–96) "whose operations united several hundred group and individual actors of various statuses from heterogeneous fields of art, culture and socially *engagé* movements."[32] These were heroic times for Metelkova, as often there was no water and electricity. In the meantime the people of Metelkova organized a year-long festival. Moreover, if we want to draw a continuous alternative line between the 1980s and the 1990s, we need to present more concise historical background:[33]

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[30] Gržinič, 2001, http://www.artmargins.com.

[31] See also an interesting account Agora Metelkova (1999), compendium of articles of different activists who were deeply involved in the constitution of Metelkova city.

[32] Bibič, 2003, 215.

[33] As Bibič explains: "By resorting to radical destruction implied in the demolition of the buildings on Metelkova, which had by a previous political decision of both the town and state authorities been allocated to the Network for Metelkova, the first post-socialist (executive) municipal authorities opted for a brutal and antagonistic advancement of their narrow/reductive ideological, political and, in terms of real-estate, speculative interests. This forced also the other side to take more radical action for a "other image" of the city; by counter-seizing and actively using (in terms of program and production) the partly demolished

Metelkova could not be imagined without the peace movement (and artist groups) that was particularly strong at the end of 1980's in Slovenia.

It is true that Metelkova has to be thought alone, as a singular event, but at the same time it *disidentified* already existing alternative groups (new subject) that had remained active from the 1980s. In the beginning of the 1990s, the situation has been again quilted by police order (the Slovene state). The Network for Metelkova "was the strongest element of the 'utopian campaign' of SOVA (Slovenija odpravi vojaški aparat – Slovenia Abolishes the Military Apparatus). The project of demilitarizing Slovenia, instigated by the (new social) peace movement, enjoyed widespread public and political support in the late 1980's."[34] This campaign was soon over, but last protagonists of the new social movements were to launch their final campaign, one that radically differed from their previous demands and projects. The campaign for Metelkova was obviously more "successful" because it remains largely autonomous today and it has gained many supporters during the 1990s. What these political agents demonstrated is that *spatial practices* are never neutral in social affairs, but are always the focus of intense social struggle.

During the 1990s *Metelkova City* became first *Autonomous Cultural Centre*, where many new collectives began their activities, which were from the beginning completely non-profitable. With its radical critique of contemporary society and massive cultural production, the place was condemned to a path that was by no means one strewn with flowers. In Bibič's lucid description of the situation:

> "It became 'a nightmare of the municipal authorities in Ljubljana', acquiring and never again shaking off the reputation of being dangerous, because it has never been under any (in)direct control of the structures of authority and capital, because it still is an autonomous field of urban artistic, cultural, social, (sub)political public life and creative production."[35]

We can thus affirm the thesis that the Metelkova space was conquered through the *production of space*. This production of new space came along with massive intellectual and cultural inventiveness.[36]

buildings and the open spaces and by itself doing construction work to "rebuild" the premises, it offered resistance – directly in space – to the ruthless abuse of power." (Ibid., 218.)

[34] Ibid., 216.

[35] Ibid., 218.

[36] We would not dare to enumerate all those whose social work and political action has made possible the working of the Autonomous Centre Metelkova, as the list would be too

However, since its turbulent beginning and with all its amazing history of the cultural production and the political activism, Metelkova has changed drastically. In a positive respect it has acquired a kind of continuity in the cultural production, while at the same time it serves as the only accessible infrastructure for autonomous groups and events.[37] Their way of functioning could still be labelled as anti-etatistic. They do not make compromises with the government: the groups have been deliberately avoiding government taxation. Since the late 1990s the groups have also been self-organized in the new collective network: *Forum for Metelkova*. This forum is an independent political body that is composed of all users of Metelkova and it usually engages in negotiation processes with the city of Ljubljana and in the communication-process with the media. Gradually, Metelkova has negotiated for certain concessions and made compromises. The legal status is the following: the local municipality of Ljubljana is the formal owner of Metelkova, while people and groups in Metelkova are regarded as the users of the space. Many places have started paying symbolic rents and also bills for the water and electricity. It is business as usual: recuperation, legalisation and privatisation of social relations in autonomous centres across the globe. Metelkova is no exception here.

We have to stress an even more negative aspect of the development of Metelkova. Apart from the ongoing repression and never-ending threat of eviction, plans for the future of Metelkova represent the biggest problem. People are tired of struggling with municipalities, of the deterioration of basic infrastructure and of the low level of the living standard. Due to the impossible circumstances, many clubs in Metelkova have introduced "commercial" entrance fees. Moreover, the main activities focus on night life. One can still listen to independent groups and see alternative artistic performances, but the main problem lies in the way these activities are organized. Not many events happen during the day, so the social component of the centre is being exhausted. The autonomous centre may not live long, because pressures from the state and from the local municipalities are mounting. At the same time, space in Metelkova is being reduced and recuperated year by year. The circumstances

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long. We should at least direct readers to the internet page where one can find basic information about groups, collectives and news about the centre: www.metelkova.org.

[37] One must not forget certain Youth Centres around Slovenia, which also participate in the alternative cultural production.

have matured, and people in Metelkova should pose Lenin's famous question "what is to be done?"[38]

From a Badiouian perspective there is just one possible "way-out". Metelkova needs to remain faithful to its original rupture. That means they need to open up the place and produce new relationships that are collective. If places are being privatised and atomized on the one hand and some of the services are becoming profit-oriented, the agents should start with immediate fluctuation, de-privatization and the continuation of the production of new spaces. The internal struggle operates productively as long as there is a strong and consistent politics that is addressed to the city council. Staying faithful to the "hole" – to the edge of the void – might prove essential politically. Metelkova must not be filled with "certain" defined content. On the contrary it has to insist in its open form, the form of autonomy and collective spaces, where everyone can be equal, speak with everyone and where everyone is faithful to the rupture with the "police" order. This emptiness of content is the best presented in the hole, the hole that is materialized on/in Metelkova itself. Let us conclude with the excellent remainder of this hole, Bratko Bibič:

> "The holes in the facade of the Stable symbolize a given moment, the incident of demolition, and at the same time also the occupation of Metelkova as a (still) continuing act of civil disobedience which at a certain point put a stop to the demolition. With the takeover of the complex there opened up, and was gradually realized, the possibility of the appearance of a different, parallel counterspace of Ljubljana. The transformation of the damaged building into a public architectural installation by preserving and exploiting the holes 'froze' the act of demolition into a 'reminder', i.e. that dimension of a 'memorial' which activates the memory of exactly – though not solely – that act."[39]

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[38] This year another important intervention in the space occurred. We could argue that it occurred also as the answer to the troubles with Metelkova. The former Rog factory was taken over by group of activists and artists, who named themselves users of the Factory Rog. We could formulate somehow daring question: can the interference between politics, art and new space produce another powerful amalgam?

[39] Bibič, 2003, 221. For the final act of this article we should provide more precise definition of this act. It cannot be conceived more eloquently than by Slavoj Žižek: "an act disturbs the symbolic field into which it intervenes not out of nowhere, but precisely *from the standpoint of this inherent impossibility, stumbling block, which is its hidden, disavowed structuring principle*" (125). Metelkova disturbs the order of "police" and with the insistence on the political act of establishment and preservation of the autonomy – the fidelity to Metelkova could live on …

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