

LAIBACH 1982– 1984 by JANE ŠTRAVS

Photographic folder

Jane Štravs, Slovenian photographer and a pioneer of the new wave movement in photography that began within the subcultural or alternative Ljubljana scene in the 1980s, has published a photographic folder, each consisting of 10 photographs, that covers the revolutionary appearance of Laibach in the context of former Yugoslav socialism.

These 10 photographs present Laibach's historical musical performances, performative actions, and solo music interventions from 1982-1984 taken by Štravs in powerful black and white granulation. Some of Štravs's photographs were (re)published extensively, while his others photographs in the folder are known only to insiders or to those who are portrayed in them.

The exclusivity of each photographic folder is not voyeurism, but an exclusive aesthetic and political look at what Simon Bell defines as Laibach's interrogation and representation of Central and Eastern European cultural memory in the context of (post)socialism.

Laibach appeared in the context of the Slovenian/ex-Yugoslavian post punk movement in the 1980s in Ljubljana and was immediately connected with specific artistic actions defined as totalitarian because the group's first lead singer (figured in the photographs by Jane Štravs) played with cut lips and blooded face, in line with his insistence on adopting the costume and pose of Mussolini (wearing a pseudo-military uniform). Contrary to the standard musical performance in the 1980s in the Western world, where chaos is transformed into money, and the satisfaction of the audience into the phrase, "We'll come again," the ultra-ideological posture of Laibach's live performances in socialism reached all the way to the destruction of a music setting in a classical way.

The suspense in the 1980s was achieved by a total immersion of Laibach into itself, establishing a line of radical distance between the public (that in the photograph in Štravs's folder is captured historically, as all of us are portrayed as rigid, severe and grim) and the musical performance. This situation of two "autistic," fully alienated sides at the musical performance in socialism is intensely empowering. The aim was to destroy the very concept of a rock (band's) performance. The essential element of each Laibach concert was the form of its performance, in which our expectations, as far as "content" was concerned, were not fulfilled. This is extremely important to clarify, as today the so called repetition of a past act, situation or event, seems to be a main (and a victorious) strategy in neoliberal global capitalism.

But what decides where in this (over)identification with power, ideology, alienation, totalitarianism, theater, one truly stands? I proposed a thesis that, in the 1980s, what decided where one truly stands, was for sure the deep relation and rooted position of Laibach music within the industrial music movement of the 1980s, the most radical and avant-garde rock'n'roll research after punk music of that time. This is the point of absolute Laibach radicality and not, beyond the repetition of the totalitarian populist ritual, and identification with any popular-populist music movement, what would have resulted (instead) in an absolute obfuscation of the traces of the void around which both, the (post)socialist totalitarian system and (neo)liberal bloody capitalism, rotated in the 1980s.

Marina Gržinić