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Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK (Short Circuits)

By Alexei Monroe



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NSK is considered by many to be the last true avant-garde of the twentieth century and the most consistently challenging artistic force in Eastern Europe today. The acronym refers to Neue Slowenische Kunst, a Slovene collective that emerged in the wake of Tito's death and was shaped by the breakup of Yugoslavia. Its complex and disturbing work -- in fields including experimental music and theater, painting, philosophy, writing, performance, and design -- has an international following but a powerful and specific cultural context. Within the NSK organization are a number of divisions, the best-known of which is Laibach, an alternative music group known for its blending of popular culture with subversive politics, high art with underground provocation -- reflecting the political and cultural chaos of its time.

In *Interrogation Machine*, Alexei Monroe offers the first critical appraisal of the entire NSK phenomenon, from its elaborate organizational structure and its internal logics to its controversial public actions. The result is a fascinating portrait not only of NSK but of the complex political and cultural context within which it operates. Monroe analyzes the paradoxes, perplexities, and traumas of NSK's work at its deepest levels. His investigation of the relationships between conceptual content, stylistic method, and ideological subtext demonstrates the relevance of NSK in general and Laibach in particular to current debates about culture, power, war, politics, globalization, the marketplace, and life itself. As Slavoj Žižek writes in his foreword, "Today, the lesson of Laibach is more pertinent than ever."

Monroe uses a variety of theoretical and historical approaches, as is appropriate to the shifting and elusive nature of his subject. The use of theory reflects NSK's own theoretical engagement; it is also a valuable way to read the issues raised by the work. Neither oversimplifying nor uncritically mystifying, Monroe leaves intact the "gaps, contradictions, and shadows" inherent in his subject, demonstrating that "it should still be possible to appreciate the work as art that moves, confuses, agitates, or fascinates."



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Editorial Review

Review

A real explosion of artistic and intellectual energy took place in Ljubljana during the 1980s, the impact of which reverberated throughout the global cultural landscape. Alexei Monroe not only describes this explosion but transmits its energy to the reader.

(Boris Groys, Professor of Philosophy and Art Theory, Academy of Design, Karlsruhe)

Among postcommunist states, Slovenia is widely known to have one of the most vibrant contemporary art scenes, at the center of which are Laibach and NSK. Alexei Monroe's book is a thoroughly researched and theoretically witty account of the strategies behind these well-known cultural brands.

(Konstantin Akinsha, art historian, contributing editor to *ARTnews*, and coauthor of *Beautiful Loot: The Soviet Plunder of Europe's Art Treasures*)

This book is for intelligent troublemakers everywhere and a must for those who would learn how to challenge any state hegemony through art. Following the story of NSK, we see how artists can open up the cracks in belief systems, whatever their political orientation, through a precise combination of pop culture and critical engagement.

(Charles Esche, Director, van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands, and Editor, Afterall Publishing, London)

Are you a totalitarian or do you just play one on TV? It's a question that's long plagued the NSK art collective. It's brilliantly answered by critic Alexei Monroe in *Interrogation Machine*, the first substantial English work on the collective.... Monroe's writing is accessible and potent, making for the best and most thought-provoking art book of the year so far.

(*Eye Weekly*)

Hitler, Stalin, Tito... art theorists? How have these icons of totalitarianism inspired the politically subversive aesthetic interventions of Laibach and the NSK art collective? *Interrogation Machine* offers what is to date the most historically detailed, factually accurate, and theoretically insightful account of what is arguably the most significant artistic phenomenon in Eastern Europe since the Soviet avant-garde.

(Dusan I. Bjelic, Professor of Sociology, University of Southern Maine, coeditor of *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*)

About the Author

Alexei Monroe received a PhD from the University of Kent. He has published many articles on

contemporary music, culture, and politics and is the author of the Plural Machine blog.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

April Hannah:

The knowledge that you get from Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK (Short Circuits) will be the more deep you rooting the information that hide within the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to know but Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK (Short Circuits) giving you joy feeling of reading. The article author conveys their point in selected way that can be understood by anyone who read it because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This kind of book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go along with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We propose you for having this kind of Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK (Short Circuits) instantly.

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Jamie Harper:

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