

## **Borut Savski - HIPPIES AND ALTERNATIVES**

Selecting the sculptor Tomaž Kolarič as the central artistic figure of a month-long exhibition in Cirkulacija 2 in the Ajdovščina Ljubljana underpass in 2024 was not accidental. Kolarič has been actively following the activities of Cirkulacija 2 since 2008, when he organized a conceptually very defining event entitled *Melting the Art into an Event*. At that time, his statues were telescopic horns that blew the sounds while traveling on the Ljubljana river to Cirkulacija 2 place in the former Rog factory. It was the students of the Academy of Music that blew them. This example of expansion of the concept of artistic space beyond the usual framework of the gallery form and environment - into the context of a public space - is a typical way of a live art/ actionism, which brings the diverse practices of the 1970s very close to the current practices of Cirkulacija 2.

### **Tomaž Kolarič**

In the case of the overview exhibition of Tomaž Kolarič, we avoided mere history in the way of inter-generational collaboration of three authors. The vocabulary of works of art was Kolarič's, but the interpretation was a matter for all the three. In this way, a dialogue between two generations was established – generations which are not adjacent but rather separated by a whole generation. Father and sons in a way. From the artist's extensive oeuvre, we highlighted artifacts that have to do with some of his basic guidelines in creating works of art - and the collaboration principles in the approaches to public events.

Keywords in Kolarič's artistic approach are: live movement/ gestuality/ freezing of a dynamic (fluid) moment, mobility, dripping, melting, telescoping (e.g. from a scroll to an object). Transformation processes. This applies both to his sculptures, as well as to his approach to photography and drawing. He mentions the French conceptualist Ives Klein (1928-1962) as his role model, associated with the concepts of: minimalism, artistic performance, new reality and pop art. Kolarič used the word multimedia a long time ago, which for him is the rudimentary simultaneity of several artistic media. To describe live events ("happenings"), he uses the word quantum, which for him is the coexistence of different views of the viewer. This also outlines his approach to collaborations. The basis is dialogue, which first means an attempt to understand each other, and then a (fairly) coordinated action.

Tomaž Kolarič is an individual who, with his self-sacrificing and synergistic action, lent a hand to his fellow man and the community. Such an artist may remain active throughout his life, but his work remains without local symbolic landmarks, such as solo exhibitions in nationally important galleries. Nevertheless, in the minds of his colleagues, he belongs to that group of individuals who are known to have been active and of high dedication throughout, but remain less present on the national (symbolic) market. The same applies to the happenings/ events, which are the opposite to group exhibitions/ national selections/ competitions. In the absence of media amplification, such events remain increasingly fading photographs in the memories of participating individuals.

The contribution of the exhibition is to provide a bit more serious insight into the continuous development and interweaving of Kolarič's activity and influence that he and his colleagues had within the Slovenian cultural environment. That is: entering into a dialogue with a generation that explored new expressive and spiritual-living models. In addition to an extensive and interesting oeuvre, the artist also brings in extensive knowledge of his time, people, spaces and methods, which is definitely a valuable foundation for further research into past and present relationships within art.

With the exhibition, we symbolically drew a historical line from the end of the 70s, through the early 80s and into the 2000s - which means more than 40 years of production in the field of so-called live art. This is certainly not a completed story either. It probably goes back much further into the past, as it has to do with one of the general principles of interpersonal behavior. It is also not separated from artistic-aesthetic dictates, but always appears as a parallel line. Which should finally be taken into account.

## **Fathers and sons**

In the local historical artistic context, I want to point out a fairly straight and continuous line of specific modes of artistic productions that are not detected by stylistic analysis, or that official art historiography treats in an underestimating manner. The focus of these artistic practices is elsewhere: in the modes of production that are more socially (or societally...) aware - they develop through dialogues and often also within the limited time of individuals' openness to dialogue – often linked to their age and thus limited to generation. Most similar attempts of groups of artists usually take place in their early years, and later everyone stands on their own feet - and try to show how much they are worth (i.e. socialization into adulthood). A person becomes a marketable commodity or a national symbol – in any case: a product. This is a rather cynical reality and probably reflects a general societal view - more pathological than the views of the individuals who make up a society.

In the recent present, we can easily see many symbolic connections of active artists to individuals, initiatives and groups from the past: symbolic fathers. Dragan Živadinov goes back to the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century, where he finds representatives of the so-called Slovenian historical avant-garde (Srečko Kosovel, August Černigoj and others) - highlights constructivism as a principle that is still alive. The painting group Irwin and Tadej Pogačar go back to the sixties, where they found the group OHO (Marko Pogačnik, Iztok Geister, Tomaž Šalamun and others) who brought the principles of pop art, comic-books, happenings and installations into the local environment. The Photon Gallery (Dejan Sluga) finds its symbolic memory in the Group Junij (Stane Jagodič and others) in the 1970s - with their introduction of new painting and graphic approaches of caricature, photomontage, assemblage, etc. Maska magazine calls itself "a performing arts magazine with the longest tradition in Europe (published since 1920)" - but actually since 1985.

## **And now Cirkulacija 2 with its hippies...**

The aforementioned symbolics of fathers naturally means primarily symbolic succession. In this way, all the mentioned children fit into the line (curve?) of previous events. Of course, these are subsequent appropriations of related approaches, even basic ideas, methods of operation - of course: intentionally superficially translated into much more comprehensible vocabularies of later (current) times. Still, there is not much direct contact between generations.

The hippies in this story are not always the same hippies. In general, we talk about the transfer of global dynamics to the local environment, which took more than a decade in the concrete hippie era. The early hippies were, to a large extent, the politically privileged children of the time, who were given the opportunity to travel to experience world trends in person. Later, trips became more and more popular, so that even the middle class (first the academic children, then others) also became familiar with the world's trends and ideas. The story of Šumi as a physical meeting place of the new intellectual elite in Ljubljana somehow belongs to this time. Tomaž Kolarič adds that there were few exceptions that did not belong to the elites: Ivan Volarič Feo and Vojin Kovač Chubby.

At the end of the so-called New Left and, consequently, the so-called Counterculture in the USA (both of which were the godfathers of hippieism), there is a fairly decisive break in the form of the so-called Ultra Left. This break may actually be the result of the global oil crisis, abandonment of the Roosevelt's New Deal, the introduction of neoliberal financial mechanisms, the beginnings of the globalization of capital and the accelerated migration of capital to more affordable parts of the world - as far as the labor force and tax burdens are concerned. The simultaneous suppression of mass protests in the United States and elsewhere in the West (Civil Rights Movement, New Left) did not take place without rebellions, but all of them in vain. Terrorist actions by far-left groups such as Weather Underground, Black Liberation Army and others (USA), RAF (Germany), Red Brigades (Italy), Direct Action (France) have been completely unproductive.

From the notions of a social and political empowerment, the population rather turned to mass consumption - consumerism. In this obliteration of the social equality moment, an important role was played by the relatively new cultural industries from the part of counterculture: music, film and media industries. The field of art also belongs here.

## Seventies

Most of the instant symbolic flow into our local environment took place in the field of music ("are you for the Beatles or the Rolling Stones...") - music channels were also the most effectively commercialized at the time. The other channels still needed a physical encounter with the world. But as mentioned, there was also a shift in the number of traveling passengers. It was possible to order records, books and other printed matter from abroad. In terms of earlier times, this period could perhaps be called a decadence - especially since it coincided perfectly with the global oil crisis, rising financial capital - and the consequences it had for the local over-indebted environment. Which came to its dramatic climax a good decade later. The ultra-leftism is mentioned locally after 1975 - and it already means a move away from the hippie counterculture and into a more consumerist fields.

On the social level, the stratification of the local population also began in 1975, as the educated middle class moved from block settlements to new suburban settlements with single houses (eg Murgle) within a few years. At that time, the writer of this text was in his teenage years in the gymnasium environment, where he also first heard the words "ultra-leftist" - and "čefur". Something was falling apart, something was changing, and something was resisting it.

Cultural events in the 1970s were far from boring. Boredom as definition for the 1970s was proposed many times by Peter Lovšin - the singer of punk band Pankrti. The imported "revolutionarily" trend of punk swept away many things that were dynamic and alive and rooted in the previously mentioned hippie actionist principles. Punk never wanted history ("rock and roll has no history", wrote Peter Barbarič a decade later). In this, punk, also as an exponent of (post-)ultra-leftism, differed from the previously mentioned children. Punk was a blatant anti-intellectual revolution. In a way, it transferred the focus from the (unsuccessful?) spiritual/ intellectual/ individual - to the concrete socio-political action. Probably the last gasp of the decadence of the time. But this is already the eighties. Let's go back.

From the moment Tito said: "the students are correct", new small production units, galleries and groups started to appear - mostly within student organizations. This is how the Student organisation Forum was created with printing facilities, Radio Študent, etc. Later, Disko Študent existed for a long time, and ŠKUC gallery. Of course, all of the aforementioned is systematically made possible by the holy desire to rejuvenate the stagnating ideological-economic system of Yugoslav socialism. If we remember

the somewhat later statement "Računajte na nas (you can count on us)", we could say that the opponents of the collapse of socialism were to a large extent also within that generation of artists and organizers.

Some years ago, Neven Korda did a research on the immediate predecessors of Disko FV112/15. It was created in 1981 on the basis of the Disko Študent discoteque started by Student organization Forum in the Student Village - in which Tomaž Kolarič was also very active. Over 100 individuals worked simultaneously in various fields in the Forum. Kolarič says: dancers, five musical bands practiced, Štirka had a printing press, Desetka had offices, and Osemka had Radio Študent. Within this poorly chronicled period, there are also names: Dušan Pirih Hup, Jani Osojnik, Iztok Osojnik, Smiljan Šiška and many others.

Since the mid-seventies, almost monthly concerts of the world's most progressive jazz protagonists have been held in the Cinema Union, organized by Stane Sušnik, who was significantly connected to Radio Študent. Marko Košnik mentions the very active local Music Youth of Slovenia, which was part of the Music Youth at the Yugoslav level. In this way, a more extreme musical aesthetic, which was certainly intellectual, was implemented into the urban consciousness. At that time, comic book aesthetics also moved towards intellectual forms of socially engaged author comics, for which models were primarily European. On the literary level, there was Section for Speculative Art, which tried to implement thoughtful science fiction in the local environment. The poetry evenings had large young audiences. A less artistic but very popular scene was climbing - free-climbing (mountain association Akademik) – again an import from the West.

In the late seventies I also remember an extremely agile sonic (not musical) theater project of the brothers Osojnik and Saksida. Within this a bit later Papa Kinjal band, very close to it still a bit later was also D'Pravda band. The multitude of street actions drew from the then global aesthetics of improvisation and performance. And often in public space. Always based on collective approaches, physical situations - no desire to enchant the audience with (non-existent) virtuosity on any level. At most, the desire to create a living moment. With plenty of humor: Iztok Saksida, Iztok Osojnik, Žiga Saksida, Andrej Rozman. Also Dušan Pirih Hup and others. Although it would be hard to label some of the aforementioned as hippies, they probably wouldn't mind it. In a way, they were a rebellion against traditionalism (such as musical virtuosity, expertise, academically educated or museum institutions), who were readily taking over the existing newly created art forms - without understanding the basic concepts. The humor of these late hippies also did not allow for already a rather fluffy hippie spirituality of that time. However, they opened the space for cooperation with different colleagues and also with the previous generation.

It was interesting that all these scenes overlapped a lot. The last mentioned - more than the others – already wanted to implement their own dynamism - liveliness - into the local environment.

From the Forum circle comes a very important reference for Cirkulacija 2: Hidrogizma - a water machine from 1978, which is a collectively played musical instrument - actually a sculpture of people and sound - a social installation. Tomaž Kolarič, who also performed as a part of this instrument, mentions a previous idea by Pigl - Tomaž Pengov: sound recording of water drops. Among the builders of Hidrogizma we find very different creators: psychologist Jani Osojnik, photographer Dušan Pirih Hup, poet Iztok Osojnik and others. In 2005, a reconstruction of the Hidrogizma was presented in the Modern Gallery in Ljubljana, and my memory preserved mainly the way of collective management of the machine - and less the other (socio-philosophical) meanings of the Hidrogizma. A physical platform

served by several people to make it sound. Even at the time of the reconstruction there was non direct reference of the current art scene to this creation.

With Hidrogizma as a group platform, it is worth mentioning the concept of artistic social sculpture, which also dates back to the hippie decade: in 1972, when Joseph Beuys connected the concepts of "art as a political productive force", "social organism as a work of art" and "social sculpture/ social architecture" and "every living being will become a creator, sculptor or architect of a social organism".

Cirkulacija 2 much later proposed its own potential conceptual successors to the idea of social sculpture: the sequels World Improvement Machine, Total Art Platform and Disruptive Arts. Our quote from 2010: A platform is an art-piece.

It is necessary to add that people do not change with the periods. Periods are constructs, and artists usually continue with their own explorations – with their own artistic vocabulary. These vocabularies are often no longer completely understandable to new generations. The connection exists at some very fundamental level of understanding. For example: the word "dripping" is just another painting technique for me, but the word "fluidity" still gives me a lot of ideas - the metaphors are rich. This means that these words still describe the concepts that are alive.

All those mentioned and those not mentioned did not stop their work for the most part. There was parallelism, which often mixed with actualism. I made a personal and artistic contact with the singer Bogdana Herman (the "slovene" Joan Baez) in 2007, around that time also with Tomaž Kolarič. I only noticed his group of hippies around 2000 when Kolarič, Smiljan Šiška and others set up a group installation with projections and sculptures (Kolarič with mobiles) in the then club B51 - and Radio Študent (little me) broadcast the combined music-exhibition event.

## **The Alternatives**

The label hippie was not significantly present throughout the 1990s and 2000s, so it was quite a surprise when it reappeared two decades later. My writing at that time goes like this: Lately, the label hippies appears more and more often and with different motives - even with hatred: recently a fashionably dressed young man with a "kill the hippies" t-shirt walked a dog in the streets of Ljubljana. Apart from that, the label hippies appeared during my performance with a colleague from Vienna, Klaus Filip, when we played "sounds" in the spring of 2007 in Menza at Metelkova. The two members of Laibach (Jani and Milan) talked to each other: "Well, you see, these are hippies".

What does this new definition of a hippie contain? Obviously, not much of what Laibach represents, because it is basic distancing at the level of a designating label. Shortly before that, the former singer of band Lačni Franz, Zoran Predin, uttered the following phrase: "This is not a band, this is a project!". I don't believe it was intended for Laibach, maybe for the Sisters, but I would borrow the phrase for the former. If the New Collectivism (Neue Slowenische Kunst; NSK) was a project, so maybe the old collectivism (hippies) was a band? People who socialize differently than according to the corporativistic logic of precisely defined and appropriately financially valued roles/ copyrights? Which do not produce marketable products? Compared to the projects, therefore, a little naive individuals who still believe in some ideological values/ social justice?

The second time the label hippies appeared at the exhibition in Kapelica (June 2008), when the Finnish artist Minna Henriksonn unfolded a map of Ljubljana's contemporary art scene, where she labeled the Cirkulacija 2 initiative as "hippies", which then gave me the impetus to question whether we really are

hippies and what does that even mean in these times. Of course, the artist had a management in Slovenia: the Irwin group. Can this latest label still be seen as problematic at all - or is it merely a label of operating methods? In the case of hippies: relative non-hierarchy, more or less collectivism and orientation to the process – more than the product. The label band also appeared in the description of Cirkulacija 2, but we threw it away with disgust - ours are temporary and one-off projects. So the vocabulary has been reversed: a band is a project these days – no one in a band lives and breathes together for the same thing anymore. Musicians are hired.

## **The Collectivisms**

The history of collective approaches and collaborations in Slovenia seems to have started in the old days of the hippies, i.e. the late sixties and early seventies. OHO entered the historical record quite recently, since their commune/ family, during the five years of its active operation, gradually disintegrated, until it became exactly what it called itself - a family (Družina).

The second wave took place already in the second half of the seventies, with initiatives around the ŠKD Forum and the old Student Disco. During this time, some very interesting productions were created, all of which stemmed from the intellectual attitude of individuals towards late socialism. But then insults like hippies and nirvanists began to appear. And soon after that - the coup.

The cultural revolution came to Slovenia with punk. The scene was completely renewed and in the next few years it blossomed even more creatively and numerically. In addition, I add a view based on testimonies collected by video artist Neven Korda - for a slightly more collective (historical) view. His sources include Dušan Pirih Hup and Jani Osojnik, who were heavily involved in the artistic initiatives of the second half of the 1970s.

Neven Korda talks about subculture and then about alternative culture - which is already an institutionalized culture. An example of the first is FV and all their discos, and an example of the second is a band Borghesia. This is the mid 1980s. As for the formations of that time: the model of Neue Slowenische Kunst NSK (Laibach, Irwin and others) appears as the main organizational concept. There is no doubt why: with these collectives, from the very beginning, it is about a project – this means also the constructing their history as a means of defining their artistic period.

After the energy discharge of NSK there was a long period of vacuum - the first half of the 1990s. In a way, it seems that the vacuum was caused by NSK's extraordinary expansion. The question that arises is why collectives like Laibach and Irwin never got successors, or why they did not renew themselves, as happens with social amplifiers that the collectives are. The answer could be: because these collectives were not really collectives, but projects - designed creations that only used the principles of communality and cooperation on the aesthetic level - and emptied them energetically - not only for themselves - but also for others. Funny enough, it was the (garage) bands that overcome the vacuum.

Collective approaches, non-hierarchical social structures, overcoming the limited generational time window of such projects, communal approaches, the principles of improvisation, performance, amateurism, non-genre, constant research and recombination. These are all still modern principles.

Cirkulacija 2 is therefore clearly connected with (late) hippies by some basic concepts/ principles. Socially civilized behavior - connecting in temporary hybrid and/or modular groups - also between generations, which might not so inevitably turn participants into artists-individuals - market goods on a competitive local symbolic public+private art market.

Interesting: Barbara Borčič some time ago called Cirkulacija 2 the last remnant of the alternative art/culture of the 1980s. In view of the above reasoning this might not be correct. Non-institutional and non-corporativistic rather means subcultural.