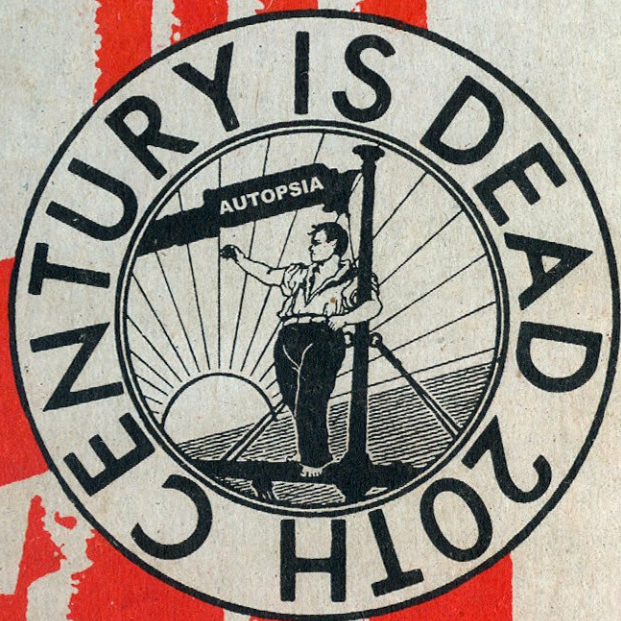


Autopsia



Alexei Monroe

THANATOPOLIS



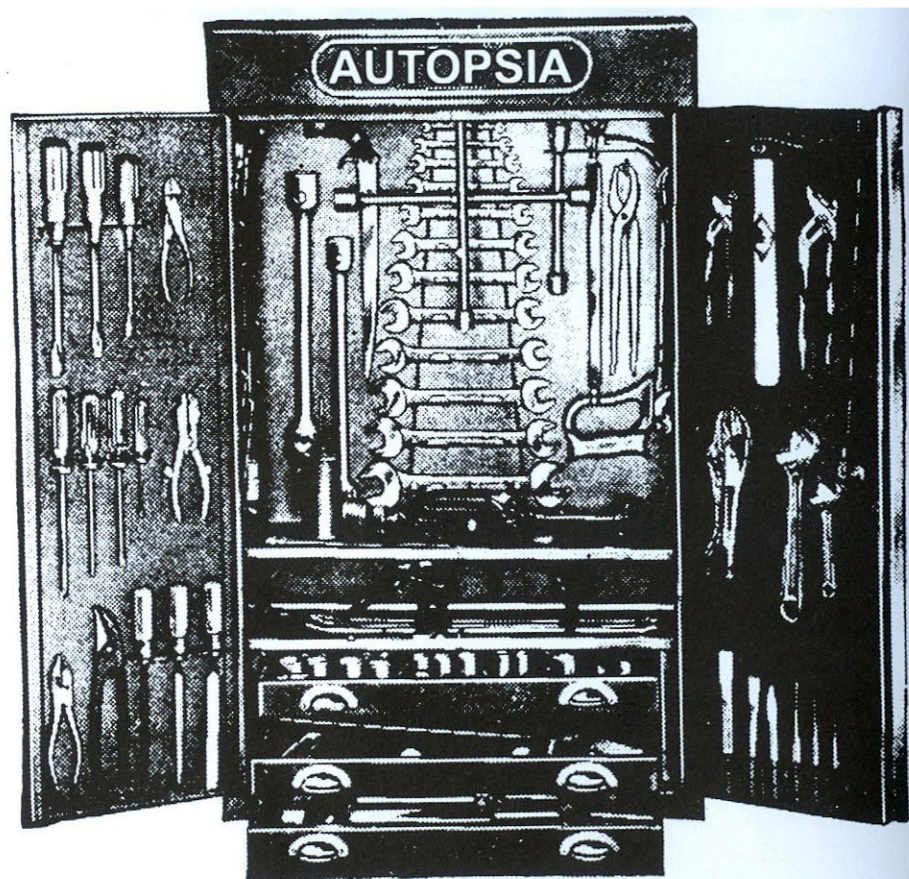
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AutopsiA

Alexei Monroe

THANATOPOLIS



↑ Autopsia Poster, 1980

Overture

How should a group that has its creative roots in London but which has never exhibited here be approached? British industrial culture provides clues. Throbbing Gristle, Cabaret Voltaire and later Test Dept. were all part of a wider movement with origins in Britain that attempted to critically examine and resist the brutal transition from industrial to post-industrial societies that was underway from the mid 1970s. With many reference points and inspirations in common, they all produced complex bodies of work that embraced different media and forms (sound, video, performance and more). This much then is familiar to many. The history of industrial is increasingly rediscovered and appreciated and this form of cultural production is more widely understood than ever, if not in the best of health. Many will be aware that in the 1980s this movement and its techniques spread across Europe and even entered Yugoslavia. The names Laibach and perhaps Borghesia will be known to a fair proportion of those aware of industrial history.

The name of Autopsia though, belongs to the domain of specialist, elite knowledge. The details of where it came from and how it operated are lesser known. This is partly a reflection of its self-imposed separation and one of the most militantly anonymous profiles of any group. Its work incorporates elements from a very wide historical period and a unique combination of styles and discourses. Some of its sources and references are clear, or have at least been discussed previously, but many remain unmentioned or unconnected until now. Some are analysed here, not in order to 'expose' them or those behind them, but to provide a fuller cultural and historical context for Autopsia's work. This is neither a history nor a conventional catalogue text. The agenda here is to explore some of the most powerful sources and themes in its work and to relate these to present day political and cultural conditions, both here in London and more generally. What happens if we hold Autopsia's self-defined "mirror of destruction" to our situation and to our assumptions about where the world is heading? I believe it reveals much, some unexpected and some unwelcome.

НОВИНЕ

БАНКРОТ

бр. 1

1980

BANKRUPT NEWS ® BALKAN SFRJ AUTOPS



From the Death of A State to A State of Death

One of the most mysterious post-Yugoslav art groups, Autopsia, is currently in its most artistically active phase since its cryptic and ominous interventions in the final decade of Yugoslavia's existence. Whilst the state out of which Autopsia emerged is long dead and the technoculture that it engaged with from the start has become both more dystopian and utopian than was imagined at that time, many of its principal themes, above all, that of death, have remained constant.

The group Autopsia was formally founded in Ruma, Vojvodina in 1979 (although founder member R. Milinković had begun preparatory work for the project in London in the late 1970s). At this stage in its history, young Yugoslavs were administratively and financially free enough to travel to and from London and other Western centres easily. Like its Slovene counterpart Laibach, it was formed in the year of Tito's death, which is now interpreted as the symbolic start of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

Before approaching Autopsia directly, it is important to understand the unique cultural context it emerged from and, in some senses, performed last rites for. Following the break with Stalin in 1948 and further liberalisation in the 1960s in advance of the final codification of Yugoslavia's unique self-management system in the 1970s, socialist realist theories of art were discarded and displaced. They were replaced by Yugoslavia's official modernist culture, seen for instance in some remarkably and ever-more experimental hyper-modernist architecture and design.

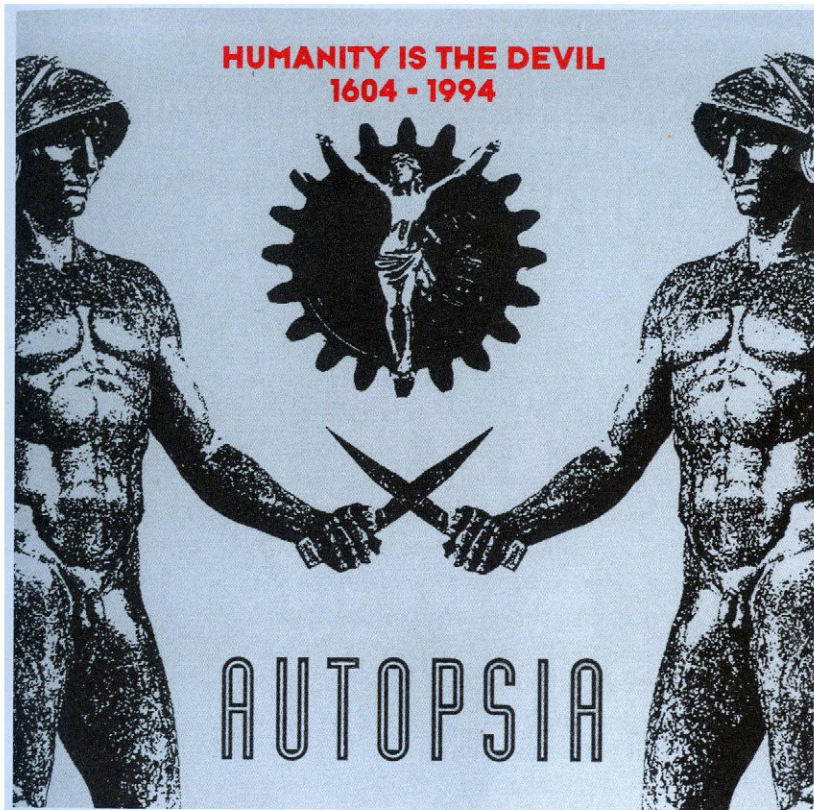
In fact, we can see Yugoslavia itself as a radical hyper-modernist project, an impossible-real piece of political architecture whose architects were constantly driven forward by an ideology of innovation and a need to distinguish itself from both its Eastern and Western neighbours. The *Spomeniki* war memorials of the 1970s and 1980s, which are now much photographed, celebrated and fetishized in the West, only acted as memorials

to the war for a short time before becoming self-memorials. Ever more radical mega-structures were built, but within two decades they gained the status of near-forgotten relics of the state whose ideals of Brotherhood and Unity they had attempted to make concrete.

One of the most symbolic of these is *Streljanim đacima* (Arrested Flight) by Miodrag Živković in the memorial park at Kragujevac, Serbia. A monumental concrete construction composed of two colossal wings, it seems to be simultaneously on the point of takeoff and about to enter free fall. Some of the post-mortems on Yugoslavia seem to imply that as a state and a culture it flew too close to the sun and (by implication) deservedly crashed back to earth in flames. It is almost as if these late-Yugoslav space-age/pagan memorials actually marked the system's burnout – a final flash of creativity before a catastrophic re-entry into the history they tried to escape from even while commemorating it.

In practice, they were so futuristic that they alienated themselves from the present and definitely alienated themselves from a large proportion of the Yugoslav population. Already at the turn of the 1970s there was ample evidence from Yugoslav and international sociological research that the majority of the population had a tendency to resist innovation and to feel that the pace of change was moving too quickly. The system claimed to have (or to have the potential to) banished the devils of ignorance, barbarism and reaction, but in fact its hyper-sophistication may have helped incubate them. The future shock it created combined with a growing popular awareness of systemic crisis, the causes of which are still fiercely debated today.¹ Its ever-sharpening contradictions were gradually coalescing into a catastrophic combination of hyper-modernism and immanent hyper-barbarism that the sensitively alienated could already perceive in Yugoslavia and upon which Autopsia gave its verdict in the title of its 1994 album, produced in exile: *"Humanity is The Devil"*²

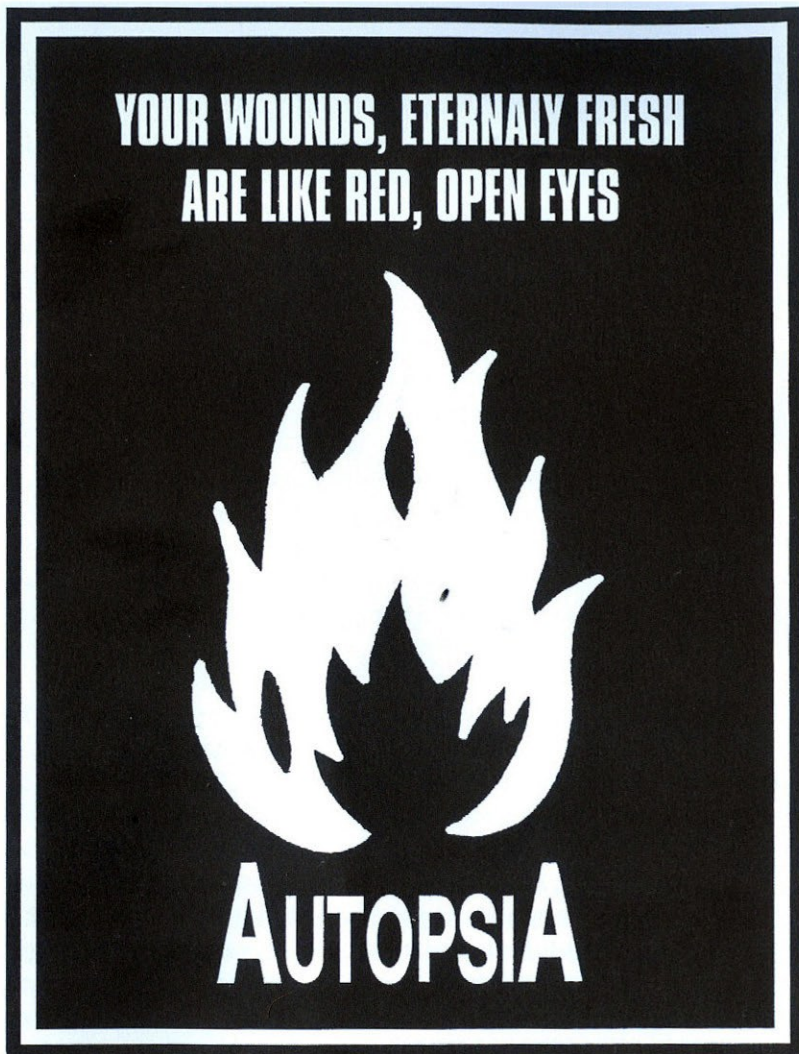
Even without increasingly grim portents of troubles to come, Yugoslav artists who had grown up in these unique hyper-modernist conditions faced the question of how to assume an "avant-garde" or radical stance within and against a built ideological environment that was already so futuristic, formally radical and (within limits) surprisingly indulgent. Artists starting their work just as Tito died could travel freely and had



↑ *Autopsia Humanity is The Devil, CD, 1995*

relatively easy access to Western books, music and media. They would be aware of post-1968 developments in Yugoslav conceptual art and the fact that all contemporary art trends and pop cultural rapidly manifested in Yugoslavia, including the most radical. In the 1970s there had been a lively counter-culture centred around the Student Cultural Centre (SKC). The Belgrade conceptualism associated with conceptual artists such as Marina Abramović and Raša Todosijević was internationally known and figures such as Joseph Beuys visited in this period. Younger artists needed to find a way to respond culturally that did not repeat the stances of the previous generations and which could comment (even cryptically) on the new conditions of the 1980s and its postmodern zeitgeist.

When discussing the Yugoslav alternative music groups of the 1980s it's necessary constantly to bear in mind the very



↑ Autopsia Poster 1982

specific Yugoslav context they operated within. Tito's ideologist Edvard Kardelj had decided to allow the development of an indigenous pop and even rock culture as an only partly-successful means of managing social pressures and demonstrating Yugoslavia's non-aligned and non-Stalinist nature. Of course, in practice both musicians and artists did come up against censorship and a degree of harassment, but nothing

like that experienced by their counterparts in the other state socialist systems.

A highly developed music industry flourished and Western trends (including Punk and New Wave were rapidly assimilated and localised). However, the advent of industrial music and culture inspired by the British groups Cabaret Voltaire, Throbbing Gristle and related artists was neither so rapid nor so smooth. Yugoslavs enjoyed a wide freedom to travel and members of the Slovene alternative scene Laibach emerged from and of Autopsia spent time in London, returning with reports of events, books and challenging new music, the most explosive being Punk and Industrial, forms which would prove acutely relevant to conditions in Yugoslavia and test the limits of the dying state's tolerance.

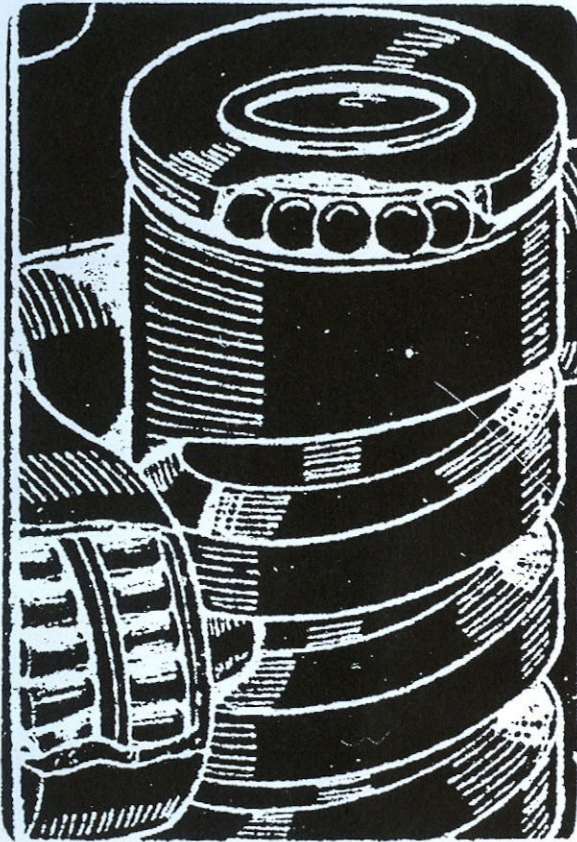
In both Slovenia and Serbia, local versions of industrial culture first appeared in provincial locations rather than in the republican centres. In Slovenia it appeared in Trbovlje, one of the main industrial centres of Yugoslavia, which also had a reputation for political extremism and a radical workers' culture. However, in Serbia it manifested in the very different context of the town of Ruma. A common factor between Trbovlje and Ruma was connections to German language and culture. The Trbovlje dialect still includes German-derived expressions, while Ruma had been home to a long-established German community which had been deported in 1945 and of which it was more or less taboo to speak. Nevertheless, there were still traces of their presence, not least in many tombs at the cemetery. Ruma was a suitably obscure location for a group that from the outset described itself in cryptic and hermetic ways that were quite distinct from those around them. By choosing industrial culture as its foundation, Autopsia was aligning itself with the (London) zeitgeist, but its music was always audibly separate and distinct from the musical trends active in Belgrade (even from the many Punk or new wave groups influenced by British music).

In some ways Autopsia's work (again like Laibach's) was closely connected in spirit to the more radical end of the Yugoslav conceptual art scene, especially to the provocative figure of Raša Todosijević, notorious for his use of the German language and provocative symbolism. Like Autopsia and especially Laibach, his work addressed the barbaric aspects of art and politics. During the Milošević regime he remained active

and uncompromising. Interestingly, Todosijević went on to successfully represent Serbia at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. So there was a clear precedent and infrastructure for radical cross-media practices in Belgrade. Thus as Autopsia's blend of graphics/installations/film/sound and even computer art (in the 1981 work *Ikkona*) emerged, it was into an at least partly receptive artistic and critical alternative art context, although Autopsia would not stage an exhibition until 1983, when it also self-released its first cassette. Applying techniques and lessons learnt during its time in London, Autopsia's first experiments used the Punk format of the fanzine, issuing small editions of the provocatively-titled *Bankrot* (bankruptcy) and forging links with British and other fanzines and mail art producers.

In many ways, Autopsia's work would typify and symbolically comment on the sophistication, radicalism and internationalism of the Yugoslav art scene and also its links with London and the West generally. However, unlike the metropolitan art of Belgrade, Autopsia deliberately remained provincial, both geographically and conceptually. It self-exiled itself in Ruma and chose to operate primarily in international rather than Yugoslav music and art networks.³ Its first exhibition, *Electric Totem* (1983), took place in the local museum and it was only subsequent to this that it began to exhibit in the urban centres of Belgrade (1985 and 1987), Osijek (1987) and Sarajevo (participating in the 1987 Yugoslav Documenta). Autopsia was within and against the industrial scene and within and against the contemporary art scene. Invitations to record and release in Yugoslavia followed Western releases (another point of difference to Laibach, who had already self-released cassettes in Slovenia by 1983 and had been invited to record as early as 1982, although the planned album was then cancelled by a nervous label). Autopsia didn't purge itself of the local, provincial histories that informed it in the way that so many post-war artists felt compelled to (or revelled in doing). The concept of an artistic 'year zero' is alien to Autopsia. When it finally returned to stage a retrospective in Belgrade in 2010, it was as a ghostly presence that originated in the dead state Belgrade was once capital of, which had now returned from a part-real, part-imaginary Prague, which it terms *Geistzentrale der Welt*. In post-Yugoslav Belgrade, full of Promethean ruins left by NATO bombing and economic collapse, it invited the public to gaze into a *Mirror of Destruction*, which we could

Autopsia

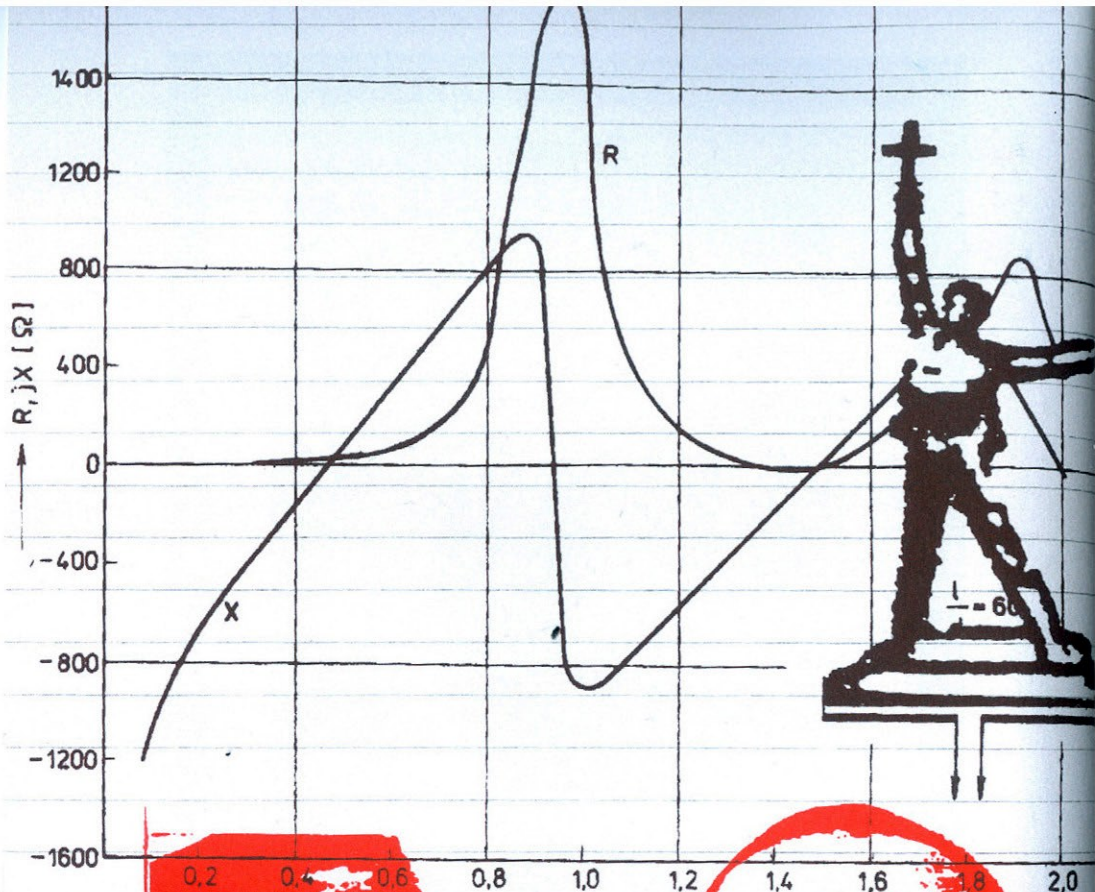


Wie Feuer brennt das Blut

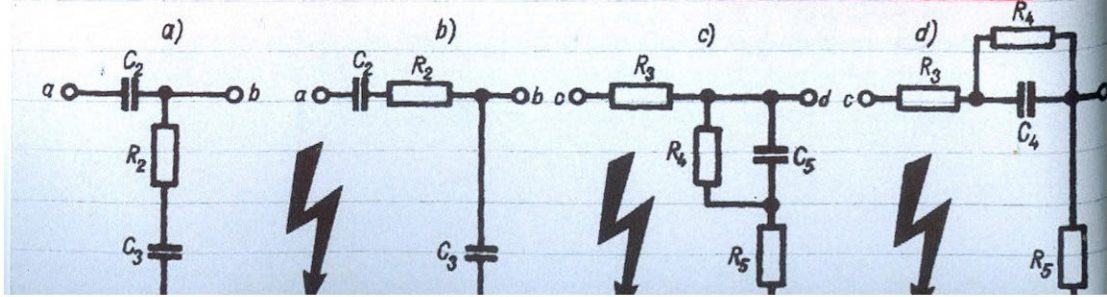
↑ Autopsia Poster 1983

→ Autopsia Notebook 1987

see as one of Autopsia's main tools.⁴ It holds up this mirror, oriented towards past, present and future, for all who care to look into it.



NEGATIVNO
TO JEST SLOBODA
TO JEST ZLOČIN





Yugoslavia was an interzone between the Eastern and Western blocs combining the best and worst of the two systems in increasingly polarised forms. Under self-management ideology and theory saturated the social and cultural environments and there were competing and contradictory strands of critical and Marxist theory vying for attention. In Autopsia's case it is possible to detect references to and even direct appropriations of, not only Jacques Attali's influential work *Noise*, but also the critical theories of Theodor Adorno in relation to music and mass culture. Yet alongside a critical Marxist-influenced political awareness there was a widely shared and increasingly catastrophic loss of faith in socialist modernity and contemporary technocratic society. There was an irreconcilable tension between official modernism and the ossifying state socialist structures. It was the desire of the more radical cultural officials and the so-called 'red bourgeoisie' to be seen as progressive and open that allowed Laibach to infiltrate the prestigious Zagreb Biennale in 1983 and Autopsia to record in the studios of Radio Novi Sad in 1989.

Autopsia's early works could possibly be seen as a kind of mourning in advance and at least in retrospect seem irradiated by an awareness of catastrophe before it was fully manifest. The emphasis on death perhaps also stands as a contrast to and commentary on the hyper-eroticised but ultimately death-fixated 'turbo' variant of popular culture that came to dominate Serbia from 1987 onwards. The officially enforced assaults and constant aggressive communication of what I call the "Balkan Hardcore" culture illustrated the need for complex and ambivalent art and music.⁵ In such a climate, Autopsia's self-imposed obscurity was both a commentary on and a defence against the forces it stood in ever-greater contrast to. Serbia was experiencing the type of culturecide described and foreseen by Pasolini in the Italian context and the videocratic terror tactics of the Berlusconi governments seemed increasingly reminiscent of the atmosphere in nationalist Serbia. At this point it's important to note that Milinković was in Prague at the outbreak of war in 1991 and chose to stay there, although his main partner in Autopsia remained in Belgrade throughout the final disintegration of the country.

In 1996 Autopsia symbolically buried and resurrected an icon of the second Yugoslavia. The monumental figure used in the Illuminating Technologies logo on the rear of the *Mystery*

Science CD, which might easily be taken to be a pre-modern or pagan one, was actually taken from a 1970 500 Dinar Yugoslav banknote. It was a representation of a statue of Nikola Tesla by Frano Kršinić and the structure behind him was one of Tesla's uncannily pagan-looking high-frequency transformers.⁶ In the *Mystery Science* image he is made strange(r) by becoming the bearer of Autopsia's iconic flame, which it has used from a very early stage and is visible in some of the works gathered here.⁷ What Thomas Lee Kelley has described as Tesla's "techno-religious ideals" and the way in which his work has inspired various pseudo-scientific and occult ideas made him an appropriate figure for Autopsia to incorporate into its art.⁸

While Yugoslavia itself has never the main subject of Autopsia's work, the numerous and unique Yugoslav influences and contradictions of the state it emerged in should be remembered, especially when we consider the sense of recent or imminent catastrophic loss and mourning that pervades so much of its work.



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Trace Elements and Hidden Components

“There are no authors, there are only processes of programming and – programmed programmers.”⁹ Autopsia

In its 2013 book *Apocrypha*, which we should see as part of its overall performance as much as a confession or explanation, a series of definitions of what and when *Autopsia* is not are provided. *Apocrypha* is not lengthy but is densely populated with the works and ideas of other artists, musicians, poets and writers, as well as *Autopsia*'s own detailed self-analyses. This set of books (for it also harbours passages of metaphysical, symbolist fiction, discussions of Czech meteorology, Croatian theology and more) would deserve an essay, if not a book in itself. It is not possible and perhaps not productive to follow all of its leads and trails, yet it can help to orientate us in the face of what can seem like an overwhelming mass of ideas and references.

In the book there is an emphasis on the project's nomadic nature – the way in which it passes through the epochs, zones and subjects out of which it forms its own response to the world – while trying not to be fully defined by any one of them. The book also marked a new level of openness about (some) of its many sources and references. It stresses that: “There is no hierarchy, no authority.”¹⁰

This implies that even if some are more useful or frequently used than others (and some reappear numerous times in different forms) and even if some are more openly admitted or intensively worked through, none of them should be seen as having greater value or authority than the others.

Autopsia uses or invokes philosophical or ideological schools and traditions, as well as the work of the ‘great’ figures associated with them. *Autopsia*'s is probably one of the only art projects in which we might encounter both critical theory such as the work of Foucault¹¹ and Biblical quotations, Gnosticism (publicly acknowledged) and late Yugoslav Marxist Aesthetics (detected and privately acknowledged). *Autopsia* claims

that its use of Gnosticism is not an origin but does affect the character of its work.¹² In relation to its acknowledged esoteric sources (primarily Gnosticism, Alchemy, and Rosicrucianism)

↓ Autopsia Poster 1985



and to others that are 'problematic' to contemporary liberal sensibilities, these are confessions not simply in the sense of an artist admitting to the use of a source. They are what we could paradoxically call unapologetic confessions of the use of impure elements to generate works that may not meet certain contemporary ideals of purity and which are quite likely to be seen as heretical, regardless of the producer's intentions.

At (apparently) the other end of the temporal-ideological spectrum, the influence of various strands of Marxist theory developed in the unique laboratory conditions of self-management can be detected. In stark contrast to the state-socialist systems of the Warsaw Pact, Yugoslavia's last decades were marked by an inherent ideological and theoretical cacophony. Competing institutions in different republics sponsored and inspired different schools of thought.¹³ There were radical (and to many in the system heretical) variants and sub-currents of Marxism, some associated with the (in)famous Korčula Summer School, which ran from 1966 to 1974, or with the frequently banned theoretical journal Praxis. In the last 15 years before the onset of war in Yugoslavia, this ideological cacophony only intensified and Autopsia would have been aware of these often esoteric and heretical debates. There is one theory from this milieu that is particularly relevant to Autopsia, Danko Grlić's ideas regarding "the death of the aesthetic", explored in his four volume series *Aesthetics* (1974 - 1979).¹⁴

By its own confession, the combination of elements that are seen to be either rational or irrational, subjective or objective is one of the central characteristics of Autopsia's work which we shall encounter repeatedly. The simultaneous (though not consistently proportionate) influence of Gnosticism and Radical Marxism, or Brechtian alienation and alchemical idealism, symbolises what Autopsia refers to as "the encounter of Chaos and Logos" in its work.¹⁵ This manifests in Autopsia's quietly heretical combinations of early 20th Century technical diagrams and schematics with emotionally charged feudal or religious symbolism.

There are numerous other sources waiting to be identified in Autopsia's work. Those listed here are given to expand awareness of the range of Autopsia references and influences, but not as an exercise in deconstruction or normalisation. No matter how many times a reference is repeated, or how standardised Autopsia production may seem, it remains con-

sciously exceptional and for ethical reasons I will discuss in the conclusion it is important to stress and preserve the value of this approach. Sometimes, in *Apocrypha* and in other texts and interviews, the role of a specific source in an Autopsia work will be acknowledged. So for instance the use of Pasolini's film *Porcile* as the conceptual basis and the source of a sample on the 2007 track of the same title is clearly signaled in *Apocrypha*.¹⁶ Other specific film, musical and artistic references in Autopsia's work will be discussed in detail later in this text, although there are too many to comprehensively document, even if that were desirable. Some of the sources Autopsia acknowledges that it draws on are often obscure or long-forgotten, recovered from far beyond the main streams of artistic or intellectual opinion. In this category we find Lewis Mumford's two volume techno-critical work *The Myth of The Machine*, which informs Autopsia's exploration of the conflict between the individual and technological societies.¹⁷

Apart from those explicitly confessed to, some of these elements are plainly visible. A title, text extract, sound or image from a work will be clear to anyone previously exposed to the originals. For instance, while the specific musical sources present in the work may not be obvious, anyone with a passing knowledge of the work of Joseph Beuys will recognise the allusion in the title of *The Secret Block For A Secret Person In Ireland*¹⁸ (1999). Detecting the sources of other elements though, such as the organ sounds improbably used in juxtaposition with this Beuysian motif, might take far longer, if they are ever detected and catalogued. While we will identify and analyse some of the specific elements Autopsia uses to seek to identify them all and to produce a definitive, linear narrative of when, why and how they are used would itself be a diversion leading us away from Autopsia's fundamental aspects.

"Impulses were looked for within the legacies of Schoenberg, Stockhausen and other avant-garde artists."¹⁹

AutopsiA

It should be stressed here that we are not discussing only the use of specific motifs, sounds or words that can be attributed to specific figures. More diffuse and intangible auras or traces can be taken from an artist's work. This does not necessarily mean that only small fragments are used. It means

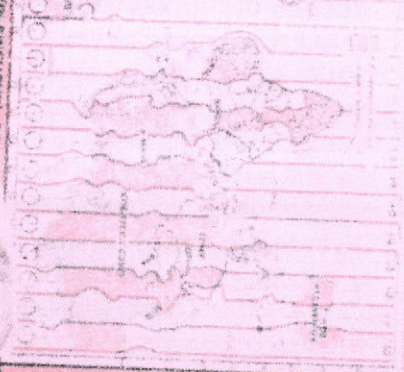
that Autopsia is also exploiting or harvesting the atmosphere or “impulses” that surround any of its sources. We shall see this more clearly with its use of the work (and also the historical memory) of Nikola Tesla. This is what it terms “the usage of cultural references”²⁰ surrounding great figures. In other words, the seductive or alarming spectres which the name of a ‘great’ historical figure can summon. Autopsia also refers to and works with the ways in which such reputations are consumed. In this category are those that Autopsia is happy to confess to, though without necessarily linking them to specific works. *Apocrypha* lists the works of figures including Lacan, Ferruccio Busoni and others, without necessarily discussing precisely when and where they are used.

There is also the question of the figures that others connect Autopsia to. While they may be quoted approvingly, the connection that is made to Autopsia reflects on their work and reputation, as well as that of Autopsia. To give a small example, a 2012 Serbian article by Sonja Jankov was entitled *Autopsia: John Cage of This Region*.²¹ On the surface, Cage is a flattering and respectable figure to be compared with (although Autopsia hasn’t specifically referred to him). The consensus myth of Cage is that of a humane, kindly innovator selflessly transmitting his insights and helping creators to break down the oppressive weight of established ways of thinking (including those of modernism and the early avant-garde). Yet was the Cage the man, as opposed to Cage the myth, such an unambiguously positive figure? His anti-state political views are quoted approvingly by American libertarians and he was close to the “individualist anarchist” figure of James J. Martin.²² In fact, contemporary pro-market and anti-state American libertarians are quite open to and even try to claim the work of many counter-cultural figures, from Cage through to 1980s alternative and industrial music and beyond. Another factor we could raise in relation to Cage is one of the ways in which his reputation is used – to argue for the superiority of the Anglo-American approach to experimental music.²³ So when such a figure is invoked they bring with them their mythic and historical associations and also the ways in which they have been used or abused by others. Autopsia is aware that the use or invocation of a canonical modernist figure

→ Bankruptcy Fanzine, 1980

FREE SPEECH-THE GLORY OF OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

The rights of free speech and assembly, while fundamental in our democratic society, still do not mean that everyone with opinions or beliefs to express may address a group at any public place and at any time. The constitutional guarantee of liberty implies the existence of an organized society maintaining public order, without which liberty itself would be lost in the excesses of ANARCHY. The control of travel on the streets is clear example of government responsibility to insure this necessary order. A restriction in the relation, designed to promote the public convenience in the interest of all, and not susceptible to abuses of discriminatory application cannot be disregarded by the attempted exercise of some civil right which, in other circumstances, would be entitled to protection. One would not be justified in ignoring the familiar red light because this was thought to be a means of social protest. Nor could one, contrary to traffic regulations, insist upon a street meeting in the middle of Times Square at rush hour as a form of freedom of speech or assembly. Governmental authorities have the duty and responsibility to keep their streets open and available for movement



AKHJHOB

such as Stockhausen or Walter Benjamin doesn't guarantee progressive intentions.

Autopsia seems to realise that in this sense there are no 'pure' or 'clean' sources. In fact, a degree of impurity or decay in its base materials may even assist its operations. This clear-sighted use of sources, free of idealizing or hagiographic illusions, challenges the self-congratulatory and complacent assumption that progress is a given and that history is always moving forward on an enlightened path (a theme we must return to at the conclusion of this text). A quotation or reference should not be seen as a qualitative or moral endorsement, but a recognition of the usefulness of some possibly repressed or excluded aspect that can productively serve a new poetic or reflective purpose. The same can be said of the range of languages that appear in its work. These include not just specific artistic, musical or textual "languages", but also German, English, Hebrew, French, Latin, Serbian and Czech amongst others. In each case, Autopsia allows a trace of their mythic-historical associations to endure and act alongside the other sources and traces within a work, even while refusing a definitive association with any of them.

Finally, the subversive but necessary presence of another element has to be acknowledged. Sometimes it is nothing more than a barely detectable background radiation, something that makes Autopsia's grim confrontations possible for itself. At other times it manifests subtly in the works themselves. Perhaps it is the work of the reader to self-diagnose its presence in Autopsia and in their responses to it, but we cannot entirely neglect the presence and role of humour. Whether mordant, absurdist or despairing, it is a force at work behind the scenes, perhaps more often than we might realise.



Process and Industry

“Above all, we are not concerned with music.
Our subject is death and the pity of death.
The music is in the pity.” Autopsia

At the start of 1981 Milinković wrote to the suitably obscure British fanzine *Wool City Rocker* describing the group's work and arguing “for an artistic/not only artistic offensive which in its own specific way should reduce to dust and ashes international cretinism and castrated culture”²⁴

✓ This aggressive stance expressed a desire to establish a position distinct both from the populist, anti-intellectual tendencies of Punk and popular culture and from the repressive tolerance of Yugoslavia's officially open culture. ✓

The group was one of the most obscure but respected protagonists of a Yugoslav tape and industrial underground culture, which is still only now being fully documented as seen in the recent compilation series *Ex Yu Electronica*.²⁵ In general, Autopsia retained some distance from fellow artists, but in 1983 Laibach arranged an Autopsia performance in Ljubljana and Autopsia actively promoted itself on and collaborated with the international scene, appearing on underground labels such as Belgium's Club Moral.²⁶ It also appeared on two compilations issued by the Slovene underground musician and activist Mario Marzidovšek, who also released widely on the international scene, but whose work has only begun to be rediscovered in the last half decade.²⁷

Yet Autopsia's overt elitism, esoteric sources and provincial location ensured that from the start it had sonic and conceptual qualities that differentiated it from both Western and Yugoslav contemporaries. As the Belgrade critic and authority on Autopsia Banimir Stojanović has pointed out, the group's early works represent a form of pre-digital sampling, a claim that has also been made in relation to Laibach. Autopsia's was a more purely sample-based studio music that wasn't augmented by 'real' instruments or voices, except as raw sound sources. Like Laibach in its early stages, its music was based on tape experiments, classical samples and what can

also be called "sampling without samplers", a processing of the background radiation of its cultural and political context.

✓ When it released its self-titled cassette in 1985, Autopsia was an obscure part of what the American-based writer Sabrina Petra Ramet was calling Yugoslavia's "apocalypse culture", a much wider set of diverse cultural tendencies including Punk, heavy metal, industrial and radical art that was challenging socialist normality and bringing to light, if not provoking, the catastrophic potentials it contained. ✓

✓ Autopsia went further even than Laibach by claiming that the artist must appear invisible, avoiding photographic representations of the members and deliberately remaining in the shadows rather than waging a full-frontal cultural assault. There is no 'leader' figure onto which the audience can project. Laibach denied artistic originality, whereas Autopsia have always claimed that 'plagiarism is necessary'. Its basic creative philosophy is that any element is usable and can bear new meaning in a new context. Autopsia produced skilled re-versions of Western sonic and intellectual trends, however some obscure specificity crept into it in the (re)-processing. *Himna* from 1981 already incorporates the organ sounds that would recur on many Autopsia works, but simply filters them as one part of a noise collage. Still, the choice of an organ sample was already a statement of intent and a point of difference between Autopsia and industrial contemporaries. *Anxiety* from the same year was a dark, abstract industrial/noise study.²⁸ Other early tracks such as 1983's *Fist Fuck*²⁹ were expressions of the same cluster of influences and references that animated Western industrial groups. Distorted, sampled voices, often American, are combined with primitive electronic sounds, producing a confrontational tone picture of alienation, but as yet showing little trace of a poetic sensibility. At this point here's no attempt to glamourise or fetishise the industrial sounds: they are often raw and primitive (partly a reflection of technical limitations and experience but also of a refusal of ultra-identification with technologized sounds). Yet it was the colder, uncanny mode of industrial exemplified in a track such as *The Cyclical Cross* (one of Autopsia's earliest apocalyptic/alchemical references)³⁰. From the release of the partly retrospective *In Vivo* in 1988, Autopsia's industrial sound

→ Autopsia Notebook, 1988



$$i_1 R_0 + h_{11} i_1 = U_{0\sim} - h_{12} u_2$$

$$i_2 [h_{11} + R_0 + (-h_{12} h_{21} + h_{11} h_{22} + h_{22} R_0) R_p] = h_{21} U_{0\sim}$$

20TH CENTURY DEAD

would increasingly shift towards the more classically-based martial /neoclassical mode that emerged fully on *Palladium* in 1991.

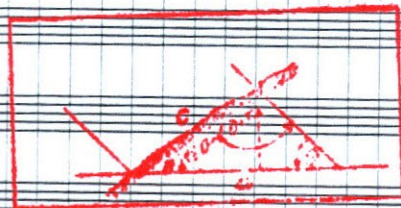
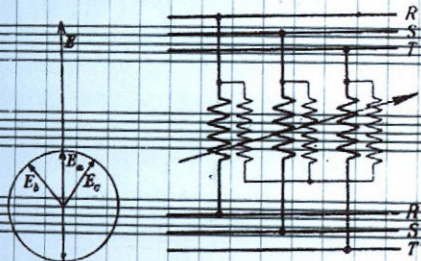
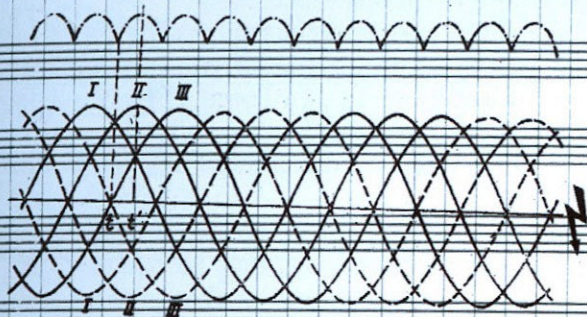
Autopsia's eventual approach to industrial as a form was increasingly distant from the more spectacular, agitational strategies of industrial groups like Test Dept or Die Krupps. Rather than relentless and well-oiled rhythms, Autopsia's "massified sensationalism" invokes ghostly machineries frozen in the service of arcane ends. Its non-physical, home studio-based sound represented what Vladimir Mattioni terms "pseudo-production"³¹, which alludes to the pointlessness of much industrial and cultural production both in Yugoslavia and in the real-capitalist countries of the former Western bloc. Its work is much less animated by the will to shock that some other post-industrial groups practice. There are certainly symbolisms and styles that some would prefer to permanently consign to the dustbin of history, but shock and transgression are not aims in themselves. Autopsia pursues its work more calmly and without particular interest in its effects. It follows its line till death, hermetically ignoring other factors.

Autopsia emphasises a de-naturalising mode of repetition and suggests industry as mode of repetition that produces its own uncanny excesses. This combination is also visible in numerous Autopsia visual works in which, for instance, 20th Century German³², Austrian and Yugoslav technical/military diagrams are juxtaposed with Rosicrucian³³, alchemical or Catholic symbolism. In terms of sound and film work, the *Factory Rituals* project illustrates this well. The sounds were originally created for a rare 1988 Autopsia installation in Belgrade.³⁴ The visual component of the project was a series of graphic scores that referred to the practice of Fluxus and other avant-garde composers. Yet the effect of these scores is quite different. They are not motivated by a desire to break down musical hierarchy, to render electronic music 'playable' or to encourage participation.

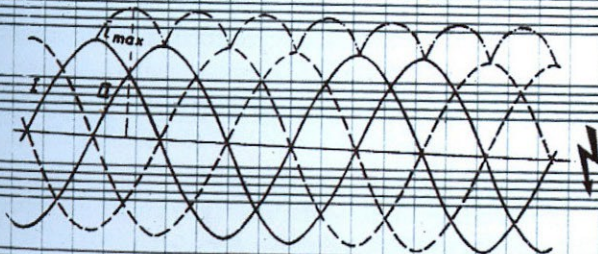
Their primary motivation is to intensify a certain mystical-technological aura which removes the viewer and the work from the present. In place of notes (or even of updated representations of notes) there are disconnected elements of circuit diagrams, plus semi-legible details from what seem to be

→ *Autopsia Factory Rituals, Score IV 1989*

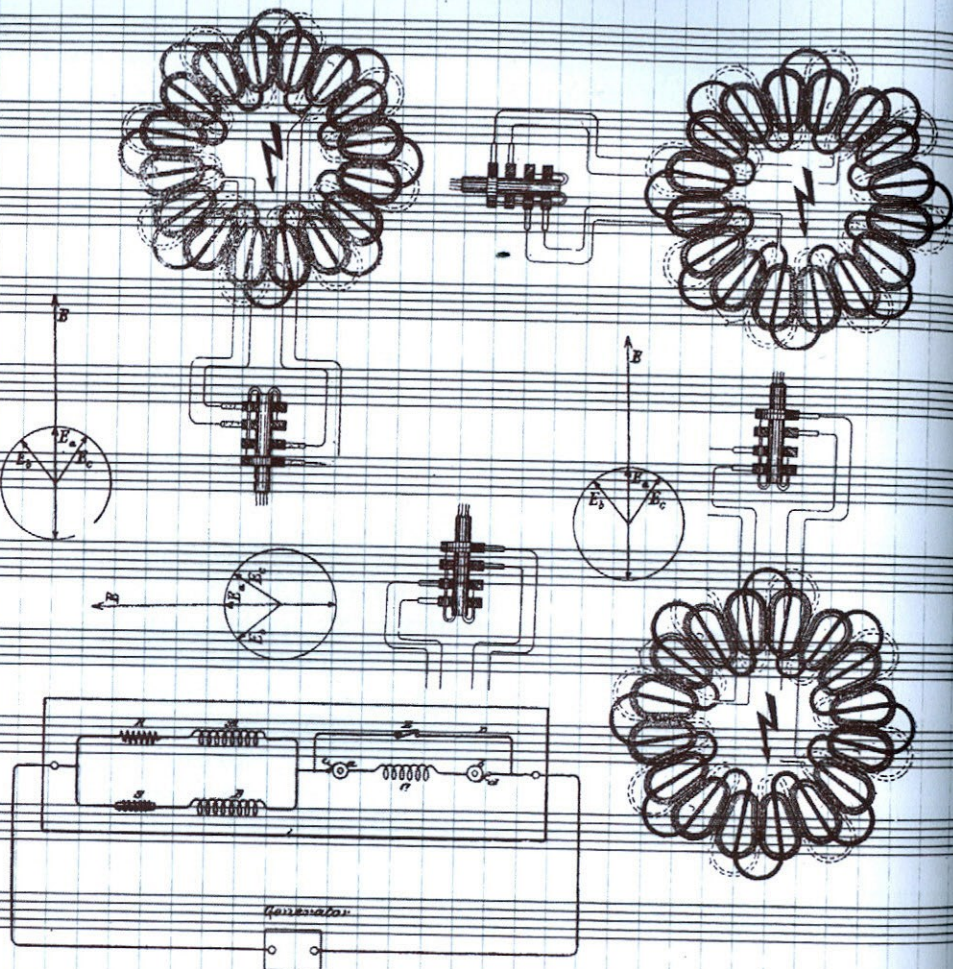
FACTORY RITUAL IV



Sl. 4 - korektny 2. na obratnem po-
bežu, manjši od enice



FACTORY RITUAL III



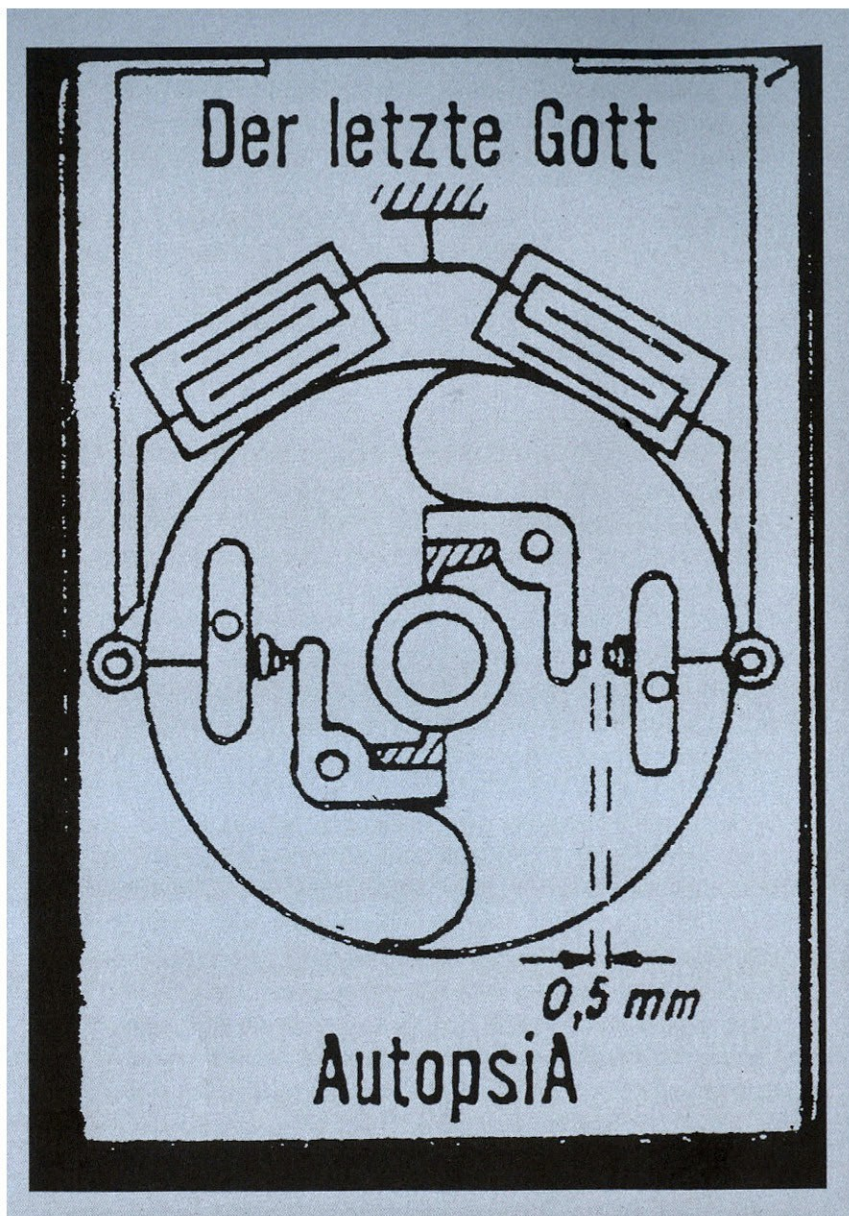
Sl. 3 - Kombinirano petljo pri obrabi vsakega pu-
sona



geology textbooks. Autopsia's lightning flash is also present, placed at the heart of a design from Nikola Tesla's late nineteenth century designs for an electrical transmission system. In Autopsia's words:

"The music notation preserves 'the audibility' of what is not yet played, and the diagrams of electric circuits preserve potential energy which will be produced by new electro-devices. In a certain sense they are one – the notes/documents of the possibility of 'bringing forth' into appearance – into the realm of sensibility."³⁵

These scores also symbolically exploit the mystical charge that now surrounds Tesla, which relates not just to his more philosophical speculations, but even to his implemented technical designs. The music and the subsequently produced videos represent a mystified phantasmal/mournful mode of production. The rituals are the result of obsessive 4 channel tape experiments and rather than Stakhanovite sonic assaults, they function more as ambivalent memorials for meaningful industrial production (and the illusion that such can exist without alienation). The very machineries it references are haunted and immortalised. Simple drones and metallic elements suggest obsessive and doomed labour. In the *Factory Rituals II* video³⁶ archive black and white footage of Yugoslav workers on what was once a state of the art production line is made strange by the ghostly soundtrack. The overall effect is to present the self-haunted modernist dreams of endless production and growth that still drive the Thanatine instincts of turbo-capitalism. This is not to say that all Autopsia music maintains a funereal pace. Work such as 1985's *In Vivo* is percussion driven and conveys far more urgency. Yet even these works have a ghostly undertow. The percussive base is soon under siege by endlessly decaying and shifting chords and repetitions, like an ideological project beset by its manifestation of its own unresolved contradictions. Seen with the benefit of hindsight, these clashes dialectically sabotage the apparent directness and intentions of the track (a clear point of distinction from the transparent aesthetics of linear force used by many industrial groups). As well as such sonic contradictions,



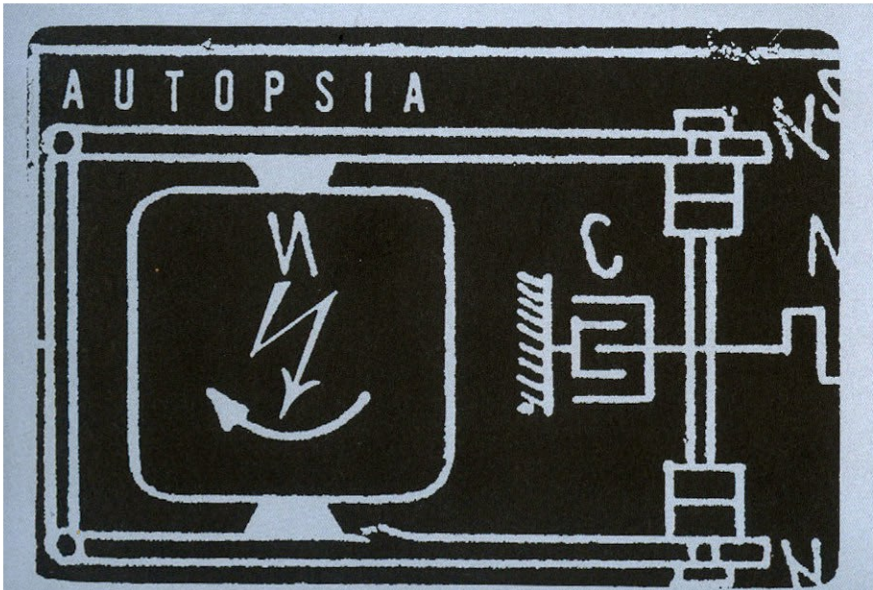
↑ Autopsia Poster 1983

the presence of the faster or more intensely dramatic works within Autopsia's overall (if deliberately un-totalised) death-saturated artwork affects them fatally - they are designed always to succumb to their own shadows.

The references in some of the other *Factory Rituals* make a link between technology and alchemy, implying perhaps that the technofascist pursuit of property is merely a contemporary instrumentalised and demystified form of alchemy. This funereal and apparently ritualistic atmosphere connects Autopsia more closely to the occult than to what I call the produktionist/Stakhanovite side of industrial. This is visible also in the visual symbolism used. Autopsia's use of a skull motif, often combined with its slogan *20th Century is Dead* (presciently used already in – or of –mid-1980s Yugoslavia) connected it to the apocalyptic pagan imaginary of Psychic TV and other post-industrial groups.³⁷ It is interesting to view this tendency in the context of the strategic-political conditions of the time. In the New Cold War of the first half of the 1980s nuclear war was seen as a threat that could materialise apocalypse at almost any moment (and almost did in November 1983 when the Warsaw Pact put its nuclear forces on full alert, fearing that NATO's Able Archer exercise was the cover for a first strike).

At this point it has to be stated clearly that while the apocalyptic imaginary of the time and its music has often been perceived to possess a 'martial' quality, Autopsia has stood apart

↓ Autopsia Flyer 1983





from many industrial groups in that it uses almost no military or para-military symbolism or aesthetics. There is no fetishism of military equipment or action in its work. Such a stance would fit uneasily within its practice, as would the use of state symbolism, another frequently-used and abused weapon in the industrial arsenal that Autopsia chose not to deploy.

Autopsia's lightning flash symbol, which refers to the widely used warning symbol for electronic (and so technological) hazards, was also a symptom of its location in the post-industrial context. The lightning flash became a canonical ur-industrial symbol from the moment of its adoption as a logo by Throbbing Gristle. Autopsia's version does not have the British political association of Throbbing Gristle's (which was a reference to the British Union of Fascists' logo) but has a similarly ambivalent – and to some sinister – if not suspect,

↑ Munja Factory Zagreb, Croatia

→ Autopsia Poster 1980

charge. It signifies technology and danger, progress and ob-
literation. Autopsia often re-used an archaic German warning
sign with the slogan: "Hochspannung! Lebensgefahr!" (high
voltage, danger to life).³⁸ It also frequently appears together
with the other ur-industrial symbol used by many groups – the
cog wheel or circular saw used in Autopsia objects³⁹. In both
cases, the uncanny artistic context in which it is deployed
(structurally overloaded with references to alchemy, pagan-
ism, apocalypse and numerous other esoteric themes) implies
but also moves away from a direct, militant understanding
of the symbol. In Autopsia's case it may (depending on the
perceptiveness of those encountering it) signify the flash of
illumination or the divine spark. It may be a symbol of vitality
and/or the flash representing the moment of technological
death. In this sense it also refers to the uncanny and unex-
pectedly mystical/magical aspects that emerge in the vicin-
ity of technologised production, control and killing systems,
a technological by-product or excess that many of the indus-
trial groups attempted to marshal and which Orwell alluded
to in 1984.



Requiem for Requiem

Mourning the Death of Death

“Isn't death no longer visible
because everything is dead?
Because we live in a civilization of death?”⁴⁰

Autopsia's work can be seen as 'unmasking the humanist facade of art', modernity and technical progress. However, this approach is realised through increasingly complex technical means and the Karl Rossmann project⁴¹ in particular is certainly not the expression of an anti-technological consciousness. Instead, Belgrade curator Dejan Sretenović speaks of an “artistic techno-consciousness”⁴², a term that illustrates that while some have (deliberately) mis-interpreted Autopsia's work as wholly conservative and anti-progress, the real picture is far more complex. Autopsia uses technology to see through the contradictions and fleeting nature, of technology and the systems it is based on. Even when referencing electro-acoustic music, advanced video mixing or dubstep, the awareness of mortality is a constant background presence. Autopsia constantly stresses the mortality and the fleeting nature not just of man, but of culture and politics. It is inspired by the industry and aesthetics of death and committed to the production of memento mori, even in advance. Asked to contribute to the 2007 Ukrainian space-themed compilation *Энергия*⁴³, Autopsia worked with composer Karl Rossmann (unknown outside of the Autopsia universe) to produce the track *Space Conqueror*. While the track is certainly heroic in tone, it is far from being a hymn to socialist technological progress. It's a self-haunted soundscape based on sinister organ sounds and icy drones. If this is the sound of conquest it appears to be a failing, even doomed conquest, perhaps a suitable memorial to the ending of the manned space conquests of the Cold War. It seems more like the soundtrack to an extended, Icarus-like descent than a Promethean ascent (which in Autopsia's worldview would in any case be bound eventually to fall back to earth).



↑ Autopsia Poster 1985

The verse used in the 2010 film for the 1994 piece *De Lamentatione* warns that "Ghostly Things Will Make Their Appearance" and there have been several times when Autopsia has

fulfilled this promise. In 2006 Autopsia also disrupted received narratives of progress, this time in relation to Berlin, the reunited techno-metropolis proudly hosting the World Cup. Though few in the city would have been aware of it, the appearance of the *Berlin Requiem* at that historical moment was perhaps a warning or an anticipatory *memento mori*, a *memento morieris*, signalling that the new Berlin may yet crash back to earth. It indicates that a Requiem may mourn that which is still to come, as well as that which has already passed (or is in the process of doing so). As Vladimir Mattioni wrote of the Brecht-inspired work:

“Perhaps it is the place where the change is the largest – one that cannot be uttered, such a large one that it cannot be recorded or comprehended.”⁴⁴

The album symbolically resurrected, though perhaps simultaneously buried, Brecht and Weill's *Das Berliner Requiem*. Key phrases from Brecht's poem *Großer Dankchoral*, which features in Brecht and Weill's work are used in the film *Autopsia* created for the final track of its own *Berlin Requiem*, the haunting *Sounds for Remembering Death*.⁴⁵

“Lobet von Herzen das Schlechte Gedachtnis des Himmels!
Lobet das Gras und Die Tiere, die neben
euch leben und sterben!
Lobet die Kälte, die Finsternis und das Verderben!”⁴⁶

These evocative phrases are given extra power by the wintry Central European landscape they are set against. Those unaware that the poetic fragments seen on the screen are actually the product of Brecht's alienated consciousness might imagine that they were Autopsia's own words, or those of a figure with much more culturally affirmative or romantic sentiments than Brecht expressed. The most disturbing aspect of these two Requiems, separated by 80 years, was precisely that they were uncalled for and estranged from the city they are dedicated to. Brecht and Weill were commissioned by a radio station in Frankfurt and Autopsia produced its work in Prague. At neither time was the city ready for a Requiem, yet at neither time could it afford to ignore the admonitory implications of these works.

“In the context of ‘The Berlin Requiem’, Brecht’s ‘Berliner Requiem’ might be seen as a quotation in its entirety. In the initial ground of Brecht’s poetics there is a concordance with the poetics of Autopsia. Otherwise ‘The Berlin Requiem’ wouldn’t have happened at all. However, every similarity ends with this initial ground. Everything that can be heard in the requiem is not a quotation. The use of verbal statements and the creation of compositions do not match. One does not illustrate the other. They are in a relationship of foreboding potentiality,

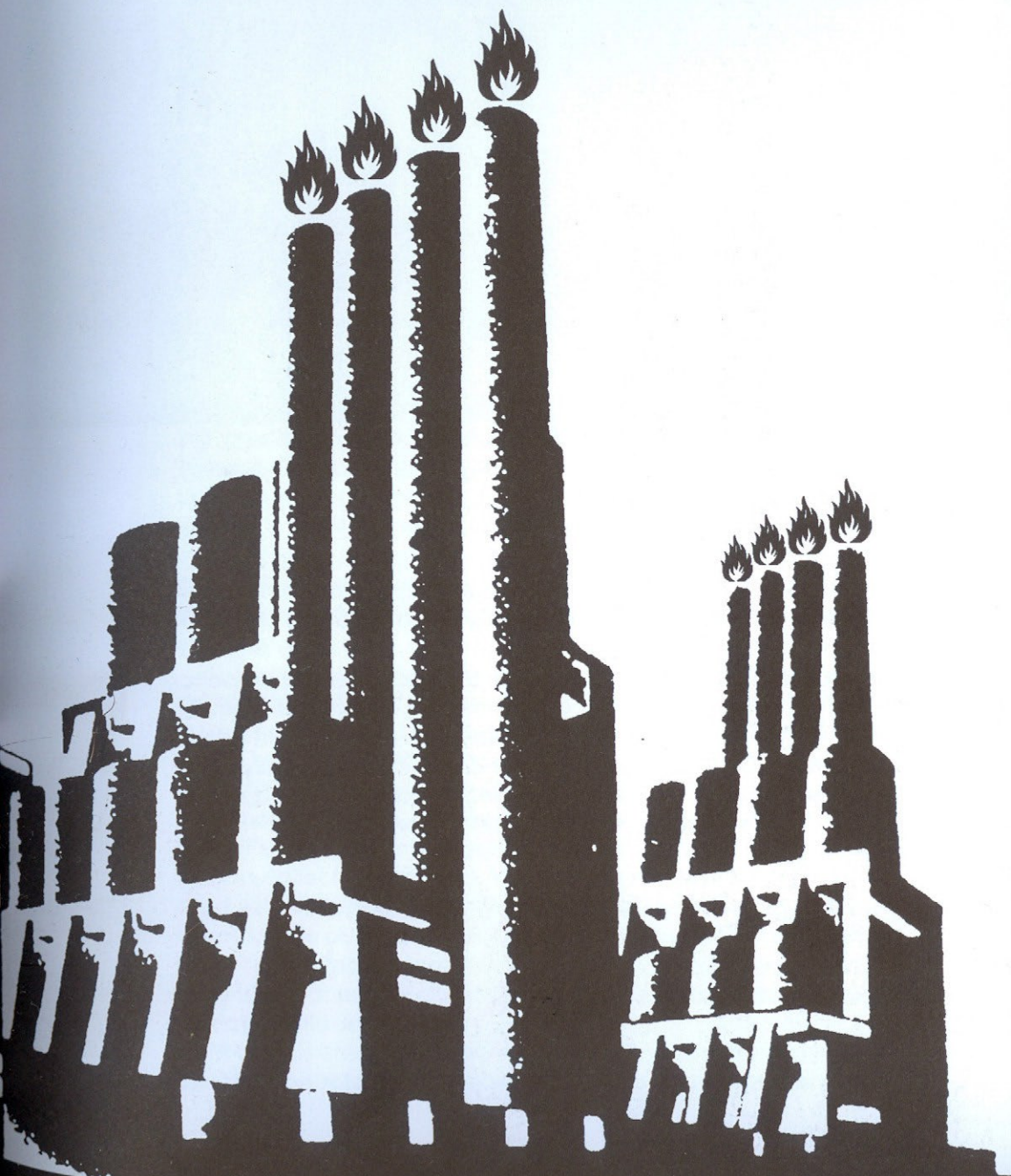


a kind of inclination of one toward the other in which the possibilities of ‘expanded’ meanings rest.”⁴⁷

The key conceptual connection between the composers of the two works was that Brecht and Weill’s work was one of several with themes of mortality. In Jean-François Trubert’s words “the concept of death permeates all these works.”⁴⁸ In this respect, these Brecht and Weill works were an important stylistic precedent for Autopsia’s work in general, not only for the Berlin project. Yet there is also an important difference.



← *Factory Rituals* video 2006
→ *Autopsia* street posters, Belgrade 2015





Whereas Brecht's poetry had a hard, realist approach to death, Autopsia aesthetically alienates Brecht's alienated realism. While the didactic/political intentions may (or may not) be similar, the aesthetic effect is quite different. The second requiem is wordless and frozen, on its icy surface it is more militantly funereal than conceptually militant, yet it is charged by a Brecht-derived critical consciousness. It must be stressed though that despite this there is also a genuine artistic-poetic vision at work, it is much more than a dry, theoretical deconstruction of its sources. Trubert's description of the way in which the "music draws the audience's attention to modernity itself and symbolizes a stance toward history"⁴⁹ can also be applied to Autopsia's *Requiem* and its practice generally.



“Death of The Individual”

“There is no longer any possibility for a rebirth of the individual ... A desire for hyper-centralization is the result of technology.”⁵⁰ Autopsia

The extent to which Autopsia remains relatively unknown is related to the almost unprecedented extent to which it has maintained anonymity over three and a half decades. This aspect of Autopsia's work is one of the most radical, valuable and now most strongly relevant parts of its practice. It marks it out very strongly from its peers and even from Laibach, which initially insisted on strict anonymity and depersonalisation, but has had to concede much to the star system it has infiltrated, so much so that the names of its (by now many) members are widely known and are even listed on CDs (see the writing credits on 2014's *Spectre*). Autopsia's spokesperson is 'Autopsia'. To paraphrase one of Laibach's most aggressively depersonalised statements, “not the individual, but Autopsia speaks.”⁵¹ While it does not take deep research to uncover the personal identities of the main members past and present, the spell the work creates seems to be sufficient that people refrain from using the names in a way that applies to Laibach much less often.

At its concerts, Autopsia members wander through the crowd discreetly observing while a collaborator controls the acousmatic sound from a hidden or peripheral position. Autopsia has gone further into anonymity and facelessness than all except most unknown/cryptic techno producers, some of whose identities are never released. Even the names of Detroit's militantly depersonalised Underground Resistance techno collective are used more frequently than those associated with Autopsia. Yet most such artists rely entirely on the sounds, titles or, in rare cases, visuals to transmit their aesthetic identities. Autopsia maintains this level of depersonalisation while simultaneously constructing a visually and symbolically rich aesthetic space.

While this stance places Autopsia in connection with Laibach's most totalitarian phase of communication of the early

1980s, which it has now largely relinquished, there remain parallels with the larger NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) movement that Laibach co-founded. A black and white promotional photograph used in the 1990s portrayed a supposed Autopsia office. It was clearly taken, or made to look as if it had been taken, in the mid 20th Century.⁵² The figures pose earnestly and have the air of architects or engineers and Autopsia posters are visible on the walls of their atmospherically lit office. This consciously retro image, which could easily have been staged as based on a found image, is the only collective portrait of Autopsia. There is a similar 1990s photograph purporting to show the offices of the NSK design section New Collectivism at work. A later Illuminating Technologies montage enhances the facelessness of such scenes further, showing a Spartan, sterile office devoid of people and decorated with the Autopsia symbol of the Crucified Christ on an industrial Cog Wheel.⁵³

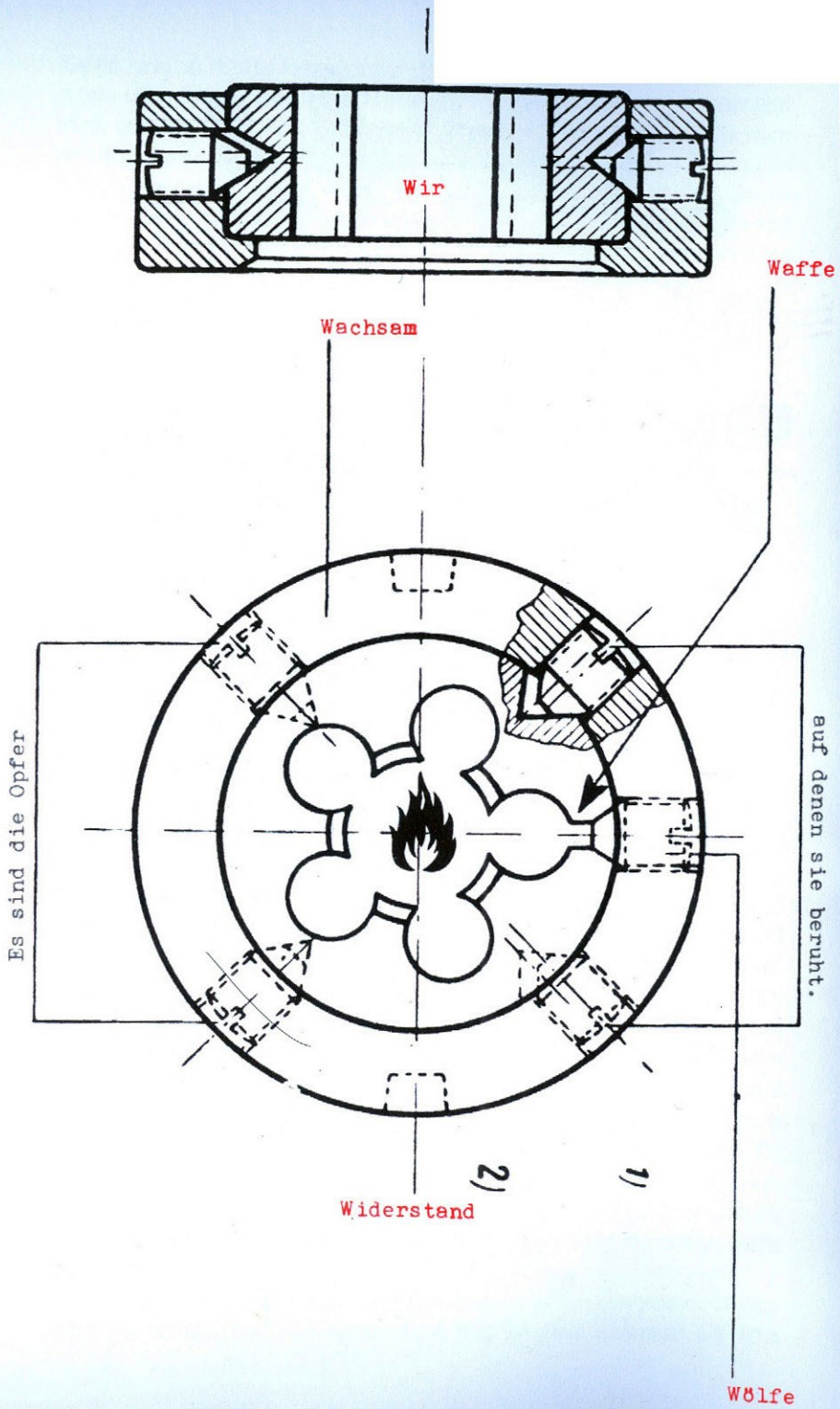
This pseudo-bureaucratic, (pseudo)-aesthetic is a clear point of similarity between the two formations. Indeed, Autopsia explicitly defines its work as “pseudo-propaganda”⁵⁴. Although on a smaller scale, Autopsia has followed a similar tendency towards pseudo-institutional proliferation and self-dispersal, albeit on a smaller scale that suggested by NSK’s organisational “organigramme”, which depicted what seemed to be a totalitarian-bureaucratic structure that led many to believe that NSK was an organisation much larger than it actually was.

While some of these NSK bodies were fictional, aspirational or simply poetic diversions, Autopsia’s cluster of (non)-identities do relate to specific outputs (designs, pieces of music, films), even if the different identities are sometimes used interchangeably. For instance, ‘Ikkona’ is used both to label Autopsia design work (primarily CD sleeves and posters), but also to label one of a cluster of YouTube channels that publish Autopsia material. The conceptual identity ‘Illuminating Technologies’ and its Illuminating Technologies Archives sub-label has been used since 1999 for Autopsia’s label, which it has used to release vinyl, several CDs, the multimedia CDR compilation *Le Chant De La Nuit* (2005)⁵⁵ and DVD-Rs.⁵⁶ In addition, ‘Illuminating Technologies’ is a powerful, if paradoxical, metaphor for Autopsia’s techniques, including its plays with (dis)-identification.

Other cryptic identities can be found in the context of Autopsia’s work. The first version of the EP *The Silence Of The*



↑ Autopsia Metal Object, 1983



*Lamb – Waldsinfonie*⁵⁷ includes a remix slightly implausibly credited to 'Gilles de Rais', the infamous 15th Century soldier and child killer.⁵⁸ The 1995 *Prager Kodex* compilation featured Autopsia alongside two other identities that have not recurred elsewhere.⁵⁹ The works of both Hussite (a reference to the Czech Christian movement) and Splendor Solis (named after the 16th Century German alchemical text) explore subtle variations on Autopsia's established musical techniques, yet still bear a relation to them. The album, which is one of the first explicit references to Autopsia's Prague context, also features the first known appearance of Karl Rossmann. In the 21st Century, perhaps especially in London and the disintegrating state it is part of, such anonymity is perhaps the Haeresis (heresy) that Hussite invoked on the opening track of the compilation.

④ "Technology appropriated divinity (TEchnOLOGY), so we don't need a person for that; anyone can avail themselves of this absolute power."⁶⁰

Autopsia

④ In short, Autopsia is a structurally dispersed cult of impersonality (and of mystery). While it re- and de-animates the works of great composers and spectral identities, Autopsia provides only a void in place of the standard art/music historical figure of the great genius. Although under the influence of postmodernism and critical theory we have allegedly moved away from hagiographic histories, the influence of the personality-obsessed tabloid zeitgeist in which individual creators are expected to provide as much personal and biographical detail as possible has prevented this shift. At the level of mass culture the cult of personality is entrenched as never before. This is useful not only as a marketing tool, but also a correlate of the self-surveillance, self-incrimination society within which we exist. Through its strict anonymity and facelessness, Autopsia stands apart from this zeitgeist, against the compulsion to unmask, to fetishize and to identify.

④ Perhaps it can even be said that Autopsia's emphasis on anonymity and depersonalisation, successfully defended for over 35 years⁶¹, represents an ethically valuable reversal of Warhol's statement that everyone will be famous for 15 minutes. Autopsia suggests that in the future everyone might aspire to be anonymous for 15 minutes, even if in practice to achieve this for 15 seconds may seem difficult, and to extend

and defend this anonymity over decades seems utopian. Here is an 'artist' symptom that Autopsia silently indicts, regardless of what its creators' actual political or ethical tendencies may be, Autopsia silently indicts an 'artist' symptom: the tendency or compulsion to be seen to act and to announce in advance your intentions and be seen to act. In place of this, Autopsia stands against the self-sabotaging reinforcement of spectacular culture in favour of working quietly in the shadows over long stretches of time. Autopsia recently emphasised that "Art is a call for mystery." Its "mystery science" (to borrow the title of its CD) is one that illuminates by preserving shadow and mystery as both ethics and aesthetics.

① "Since the number of images of Death is almost limitless, (it corresponds to the World itself), Autopsia takes, appropriates those images (let us not forget: language/writing is image is sound) which Autopsia considers worthy of becoming, not an (its) object (what is put against), but an objection (remark, comment, reproach) to the Great Oblivion, even denial, disavowal of the Death. Autopsia therefore, objectifies the objection."⁶² ①

Autopsia's anonymity is a symptom and benefit of its self-imposed isolation and apartness. Isolation permits the reproach that this text speaks of. Its reproach most often takes the form of a poetic judgement that will be more or less easy to detect or infer depending on the perceptiveness or alertness of those encountering it. One reproach that we can infer from Autopsia's work is the loss of a spirit of perceptiveness that distinguishes the endangered authentic individual from the self-focused but anonymised population of the de-individualised, happily trading individuality, perception and agency for hyper-visibility and hyper-participation.



Decomposition and Recomposition (Abfall und Aufstieg)

“Music is not a means for Autopsia. Music is neither an instrument nor a programmatic platform. Music is art. Autopsia does not stand for anything outside art. To be in art means to dwell in poetic discourse. There are no manifestoes. Autopsia’s iconographic messages should not be read directly. Autopsia operates with images as with a vocabulary of recycled cultural products. These images refer to manners of musical composition, but are not their illustration. The sound and image are linked only on the level of methodologies, not of meanings.”⁶³ AutopsiA

Due to its ambivalent stance in relation to modernity and its resurrection of ‘past’ sounds and signs, Autopsia’s position is heretical in relation to the modernist ideologies of constant and unforgiving musical progress, militantly advocated by figures such as Pierre Boulez. While it may have been influenced by and shared techniques with modernist and electronic composers in Yugoslavia, Autopsia did not share their absolute modernist faith in progress. Equally, its place in the postmodern zeitgeist of the time in which it emerged is problematic. It exercised some of the postmodern freedoms of eclecticism, but kept a distance from humanist ideals of progress that some postmodernists wanted to continue by postmodern means. It remained outside both the academy and not fully at home within the genres it’s generally associated with ((post)-industrial, neoclassical, dark ambient). Autopsia has no programmatic manifestoes (in contrast to Laibach and NSK) and no public, explicit doctrines, so that even when its work is most powerfully forceful, it cannot be doctrinaire in the modernist sense. Yet as we will see later, this does not mean a neo-conservative rejection of progress and innovation and is absolutely not a self-prohibition on the use of modernist or contemporary technologies and techniques.

① The monumental, pseudo-orchestral work *Palladium* was recorded entirely in the studios of Radio Novi Sad, equipped by the Yugoslav state with facilities far more generous than those of many provincial Western radio stations. In its home studio it used two Philips N4442 four track tape recorders – a then high-tech counterpoint to its resurrection of past modes of music and thoughts that modernist ideology considered (or wished to be) long dead. ↴

“Everything that is modernism Autopsia is not. But Autopsia makes use of modernism in order to show that it belongs to the history and that it gathers meanings from history which cannot be labelled in terms of historical periods.”⁶⁴ Autopsia

In common with the pioneers of musique concrète, William Burroughs (a canonical industrial influence), early Cabaret Voltaire and numerous other tape experimentalists, the tape loop is integral to the first, pre-computer phase of Autopsia's work. The technique is even ambivalently invoked in *Tape Loop Constitutes The Eternity Of Hell 1983-1989*, the epic finale of the 2016 *In Vivo* album, which at the time of writing is Autopsia's most recent release. Many works are based on extended loops of seemingly infinite durations, sometimes audibly out of synch and drifting away from their source sounds into noise. This loop-based disintegration was explored most intensively (or most obsessively) on the 1988 incarnation of *In Vivo*.

✓ “Destruction brings about the Death of the material. But the spirit renews, like before, the Life. Provided that the seed is putrified in the right soil – otherwise all labor, work, and art will be in vain.”⁶⁵ Daniel Stolcius, *Chemisches Lustgaertlein* (1625) ↴

While alchemical allusions are clearly apparent in Autopsia's visual work and textual references, alchemy is also a useful metaphor for at least one aspect of its musical processes. The 1988 *In Vivo* album includes the track *Aqua Permanens* – an explicit reference to the so-called mercurial water used in alchemy, an ambivalent substance that may be transformative or destructive, depending how it is used. *De Lamentatione*

→ Autopsia Poster, 1988

**UNSER ZIEL
IST DER TOD**



AUTOPSIA

from Humanity is The Devil 1604 – 1994 includes a poetic, incantation of alchemical transformation, voiced by a stern narrator: "... even as gold is dried in the fire."⁶⁶

Motifs and processes of decomposition and recomposition are highly relevant to Autopsia's approach to music. A musical, visual or textual source selected by Autopsia is often already in a state of decomposition: becoming (or able to be made) anachronistic, unfashionable or otherwise problematic. Once selected, decomposition is accelerated through the isolation of key phrases and loops that can then be recomposed into new unities. Autopsia's sound works are created through an industrial sampling practice that has evolved over time from reel to reel tape to the levels of microscopic analysis and assemblage that computers now allow. When combined with esoteric titles or imagery and other sounds taken from quite different compositional techniques or eras, the results may be quite at odds with the intentions of their creators.

From a purist modernist perspective, even to hint at the possibility of a technique of decomposition of modernist sources is heretical. To combine modernist elements with mediaeval, baroque or folk elements compounds the error. Vladimir Mattoni argues that "The meaning of such projects lies in the connection of the world of baroque and the world of avant-gardes with the useless technical experiments of the 20th century."⁶⁷

This transgressive crossing of temporal or stylistic boundaries was apparent from the appearance of Autopsia's first self-released cassette in 1985, the cover of which featured a mediaeval knight with the Autopsia lighting flash emblazoned on his shield.⁶⁸ However, it's precisely the making visible of such connections and the resurrection of past styles that might lead some to consider Autopsia's as a musical pseudo-science and treat it with the disdain with which a militantly secular scientist regards alchemy or astrology. Such suspicion actually feeds the aura of distance and separation that nourishes Autopsia and allows it to pursue its work without consideration for modernist or other cultural prohibitions.

Specifically, it is (necessarily) suspect in that it doesn't obey the prohibition on a poetic aesthetic; or the prohibition of any poetics which hints that theory, deconstruction or political/social motivation are not aesthetically sufficient in themselves. It decomposes and recomposes the post-war musical avant-garde and works from a strong theoretical understanding of

the techniques associated with it, but it does not allow itself to be limited by them. While the meticulous, austere, formal qualities underlying Karl Rossmann's intricate work or Autopsia's collaborations with Achar are undeniable, they do not preclude a deeper, technically and theoretically-informed musical poetics. Such qualities also provide a productively unresolved tension with the elements of musical romanticism in its work. Such tension is audible in *Radical Machine I* at the end of the *Radical Machines, Night Landscapes* album⁶⁹. It is announced by discordant, almost apocalyptic piano chords. These are then supplanted by a subdued but anthemic drone that seems to recall the darker atmospheres of the less-forbidding *Mystery Science* album. However, it refuses to allow an epic quality to emerge, or more precisely, it refuses to allow it to emerge without being simultaneously affected by contemporary electronic details that act differently. These fragments allude to and are present as frozen traces of electronica, dubstep and other forms that rely on microscopic computer editing made possible by our contemporary techno-culture. Neither the poetic power of the main theme nor the technical skills that underlie the electronic elements are in doubt and ultimately neither predominate.

Through such juxtapositions Autopsia rejects the false choice between Chaos and Logos⁷⁰, emotion and intellect and sees no reason why it should not draw simultaneously on monastic music and on impeccably modernist sources such as Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* and the wider work of the Frankfurt School. Using contemporary technology and techniques, it works with and through modernist sources, but does not accept musical, philosophical or ideological modernism as a total faith. It is aware of and works through and with its discontents. It searches as far back as mediaeval and as far forward as minimalism (e.g. Steve Reich) and dubstep/electronica (in its collaborative work with Achar). It claims that it is "... not interested in musical forms, but in their spiritual foundations."⁷¹ Autopsia operates in the tectonic interzones where temporal, stylistic and theoretical forces meet. Its most recent self-definition of its sound is "Dodecaphony dubstep industrial" – a summation of three of its currently most active musical elements. This represents an attempt to break away from externally imposed genres, consistent with its wider practice.



ILLUMINATING TECHNOLOGIES

A key means of this is juxtaposition of formally incompatible musical styles and techniques. In this way, Autopsia has from a very early stage been engaged in a project of self-decomposition and re-composition. As the size of its catalogue and the number of re-versions has accumulated, this process of constant self-re-composition is ever more evident. The version of 1988's *Death and Entertainment* used on 2016's *In Vivo* starts out with what we could term 'traditional' drones drawn yet again from *Der Reichtum Des Vielen Und Das Eine* but adds frenzied, industrialised Arabesque percussion, bringing in a totally different set of associations to the European/symphonic/martial tendencies of Palladium. It subjects its "own" musical past to the same rigour and severity that it has always subjected others to. De-composition and re-composition are artistic-musical principles that de-compose and re-compose Autopsia itself, preventing it falling definitively into ultra-identification with any fixed genre or any of its own potentials, whether these are catastrophic or creative.



Sonic War in Heaven

"Only with collectivity does death become an idea that turns into a weapon of self-destruction."⁷³ AutopsiA

The fact that Autopsia does not directly use military symbolism or references does not mean that it does not have a proven martial potential, most visible in the period between 1987 and 1994, but resurfacing even now in some of its most forceful, force-filled, regimented orchestrations. Autopsia deploys visual figureheads of ancient or feudal warfare (the armed knight, the archer), but nothing from the epoch of industrial warfare and (so far) theoretical Cold War "megadeaths". Yet it does not need to refer directly to these modes of war. It is capable of deploying powerful musical forces that imply war and destruction (and their recurrence throughout history).

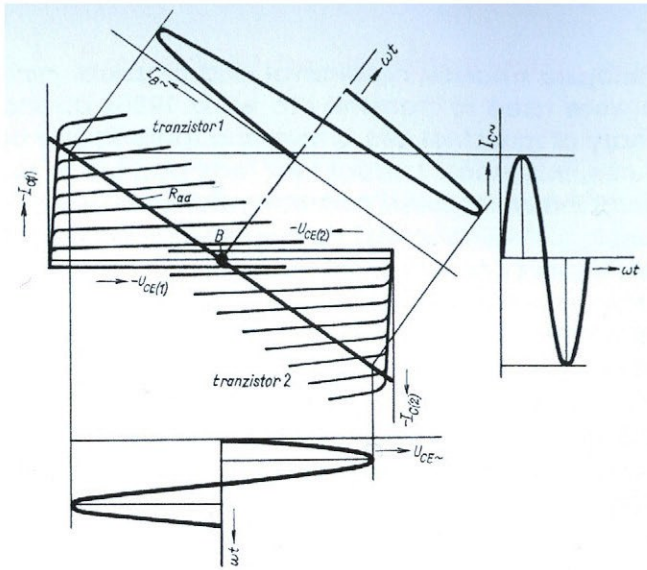
④ "Death is battlefield – plateau that exists from the beginning: who governs it, governs the human souls."⁷⁴ AutopsiA

This sonic and conceptual territory was already being reconnoitred from 1987 and became fully apparent in 1990 with the *Death is The Mother of Beauty* CD. The use of music as a signifier of past, present and future wars is mythologically appropriate, since as James Hillman points out, Mars is the God associated not just with war, but with tempo, key and staccato rhythms.⁷⁵ The martial atmosphere Autopsia created was often that of approaching or imminent war or catastrophe. More than the heat of battle it communicated the chill of battle and death, with war drums as its prima materia. The slow, implacable drums and horns and ritual chanting heard on *Scars of Europa* suggest an army on the march and the imminence of war and death.⁷⁶ Palladium made sense as a tragic soundtrack to NATO's 1999 assault on Yugoslavia because it is plausibly able to convey the force of what James Hillman calls a "titanic war-machine"⁷⁷, as well as the sorrow and the pity it brings. The orchestral and industrial sounds are marshalled in a way that suggests battle on a scale we can scarcely imagine.

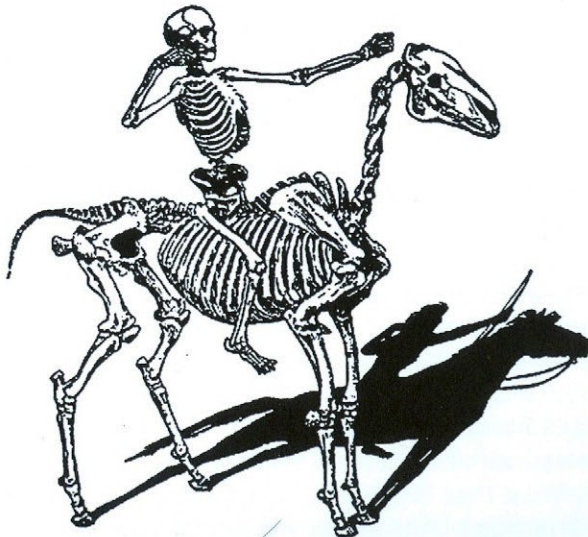
In Autopsia's hands, mediaeval and classical instrumentation were used to transmit the early 1980s apocalyptic imaginary of industrial into a new and more severe context. Of course, this 'neo-classical turn' was audible in the work of several industrial artists from the mid 1980s onwards, as if (im)pure industrial noise was no longer sufficient to create the greatest impact possible. In this category we can find (to give just a few examples), Laibach's *Krst pod Triglavom* (1988) and *Macbeth* (1990), some work by Marzidovšek, the French group Le Syndicat's epic *Romeo Ou Juliet* (1988 - an epic noise deconstruction of Prokofiev) and Test Dept's *Pax Britannica* (the only one of these works that features a specifically commissioned orchestra and composer and which isn't primarily sample-based).

Autopsia's orchestrations in the same period have a more sombre, funereal atmosphere than some of the more spectacular examples listed above. At times they have a paradoxical quality of monotonous, death(less) dynamism, charged by the tension generated by keeping both tendencies in check. Besides the martial drums there are cold, impassive voices, occult chants, lost hunting horns and other brass elements which are often more desolate than heroic. Many works begin relatively serenely with strings or drones prior to violent but controlled charges by regimented orchestral masses. As we advance further into this hostile territory it is useful to bear in mind Autopsia's classification of its work as "pseudo-propaganda."⁷⁸ Despite the 'battlefield' rhetoric and sonic bellicosity, Autopsia is not (unlike some other artists which came to be associated with martial industrial) propagandising for war or attempting to glamourise it. It extracts a tragic poetic potential from the theme of war, but refuses identification with it, just as other artists enter into an ultra-identification with it, feverishly re-imagining the heat of battle and the return of old new orders. In so doing, all but the most skilled tend to annihilate their own poetic potential in the process. While Autopsia is re-staging the timeless risk of war in the present and the re-emergence of past conflicts, they are re-enacting war sonically, some seemingly in the hope that others will heed their call and take up arms in a way they fortunately refuse to do themselves.

In Lacanian terms, what Autopsia is re-staging in its martial moments is a militarised *petit objet a*. It seems to be suggesting the possibility of an always tantalising, always receding



*Abb. 113. Sein Wort, sein Tauf, sein Nachtmahl
dient wider allen Unfall, der Heilige Geist
im Glauben lehrt uns darauf vertrauen.*



*Abb. 114. Wenn eure Sünde gleich blutrot
wäre, so soll sie doch schneeweiß werden.
Wenn sie gleich ist wie rosinfarb, soll sie doch
wie Wolle werden.*

ideal, whereas in fact it only has one clear goal, death itself. It is not interested in the re-conquest or re-storage of territory or peoples and refuses identification with any state, real or imaginary, beyond its poeticised state of death. Its music sometimes seems to provide the promise of direct access to the type of militarised sublime experience that some still long to re-enact, in music if not in reality.

This implied promise is that the contradictions and banality of what we might stereotypically call the civilian life can be overcome in the heat of battle. Yet as a pseudo-propagandist force consciously and structurally self-alienated from its sources, Autopsia cannot ultimately provide this and has no interest in so doing. It is interested in the chill and the tragic, poetic aspects of battle, but not in its heat. Its mytho-maniacal martial deployments are tragic rather than heroic. It emphasises that "Our weakness is stronger than the executioner's heavy sword."⁷⁹

While it possesses great force and power, Autopsia's is a counter-heroic music that repeats a state of war only within its own territory. This aspect is emphasised in *One Day from Humanity is the Devil 1604 – 1994*.⁸⁰ While it has a resolute, martial spirit and could possibly be interpreted as simplistically heroic, incongruous or contradictory details are tactically and productively suspended on the brink of conflict with each other. In this case there is the pseudo-baroque element of the instrumentation and, above all, the admonitory phrase "One Day", which repeats until the music reaches its climax and delivers the second, distorted part of the phrase, bringing the dreams of glory crashing back to earth: " ... You Will Be Dead. You Are Only A Man."⁸¹ The same type of counter-affirmative technique is also apparent in the previous year's *Fortress Europa/Die Festung Europa*.⁸² The title seems like a 'signal' or an insinuation. A coded hint of where Autopsia might really stand. The steady martial drum and the resolute, sinister tone of the other elements initially seems to confirm this and provide a directly affirmative experience. Yet at 2.25 an increasingly incongruous spoken word passage emerges from under the weight of the music. The voice is odd and certainly not heroic. It is not fully decipherable and when it recedes back into the mix it could be taken as a sinister incantation. Yet what can be deciphered seems to address a lover or an object of desire, rather than the nation or army that the tone of the music might suggest.

In fact though, the situation is more complex. The English lyrics are a later translation of Friedrich Nietzsche's *A Dancing Song to the Mistral Wind* (1887).⁸³ Nietzsche, of course, is one of the most mythically-charged figures of his era and inevitably brings associations with him. Yet Autopsia draws no attention to its ambivalent source. Where others would have chosen a more overtly or stereotypically 'Nietzschean' and assertive extract, Autopsia uses Nietzsche subtly and implicitly. The unrestrained movement of the wind that Nietzsche celebrates is at odds with the ideal of the fortress and the solemn, ominous music seemingly at odds with the most joyful moments of the lyric. When the massively portentous drums eventually return, the atmosphere is not quite the same and the visions the music might have seemed to suggest cannot totally convincingly be re-assembled.

This is one of several moments when Autopsia resists the temptation to become over-literal or to fully conform to the expectations of a genre or a market. Sources are too obscure, timing is wrong, contradictions are too evident. There is no doubt that if Autopsia wished it could have focussed intensively on oppressive martial soundtracks or on beatific, neo-baroque ambience, which might have been highly profitable. Yet for a group dedicated to (re)-illuminating death in numerous styles and modes, to do so would have represented a type of creative death. Just as it is not (only) a mediaeval, baroque, renaissance, modernist or postmodernist project, it is not a 'martial' project, whereas some contemporary groups are only (no more than) over-literal, propagandist martial projects. The effect of all these subtle manipulations and self-de-compositions is to suggest that the poetic ideal shorn of its contradictions inevitably degrades itself aesthetically and ethically. Yet this is a hard lesson to learn and some don't wish to acknowledge Autopsia's silent, implied command to think and reflect. The rightist martial fantasy is to be commanded not to think, to be freed of the burdens of ambiguity or thought through the rhythms of obedience or the heat of battle. Autopsia works have appeared on martial industrial compilations alongside far less reflective or uncritically affirmative groups but have always sat apart from them. While there may be an overlap in the audience, a glance at the comments on YouTube videos by Autopsia and other artists reveals a difference in perception. In Autopsia's case there is no attempt to ap-

appropriate its work for political causes or beliefs. The comments express appreciation of the work. Yet in the case of contemporary martial industrial groups such as Legionarii, the comments express fascistic or nationalistic beliefs. The music is little discussed, it is simply a soundtrack used to trigger mobilisational statements.

④ "In 'Mirrors of Destruction' it is said that our world is founded on the idea of the centre, which has the attributes of the ori-



gin, the truth, the ideal form, the essence, and the god - the presence which guarantees meanings. Anything that is different from these notions is excluded. What interests Autopsia is exactly that which is 'excluded.'⁸⁴ Autopsia

When Autopsia transits the imaginary battlefields it invokes it is on a mission of mourning, and, by implication, warning. For those able to perceive such, it may serve to illustrate the danger of the type of ultra-identification that a superficial

assessment of its aesthetics might seem to invite. To extend the military metaphor to its limits, Autopsia could be classified as an artistic, cosmopolitan, foreign legion, composed of excluded, uprooted and marginalised elements assembled into a new artistic force. The signs of war it deploys are a language that it uses like any other, without endorsement or overt condemnation. Its 'soil' is a groundless, trans-national one, based in Central Europe, but not confined to it. It is aware of and allows itself to be contaminated and enriched by the fertile impurities of this and all 'soils', it carefully allows their contradictions to overspill and flow into each other without dissolving each other.

In 2013 Autopsia deployed in Tito's bunker (see the section *Art For Remembering Death*), but the previous year it performed in another, very different military-associated space. Its May 2012 Leipzig performance as part of the 20th *Wave Gotik Treffen* (Europe's largest festival for Gothic and dark/alternative musics) took place in the Völkerschlachtdenkmal monument. This uncanny, quasi-pagan, 1913 monument to the 1813 'Battle of the Nations' at which Napoleon's forces were defeated dominates the Leipzig skyline and has a suitably unworldly atmosphere. It is associated not just with a victory over Napoleon and Wilhelmine nationalism, but with the last stand of 150 SS troops bombarded into surrender by American forces in April 1945. Though long restored, the atmospheric circular crypt in which Autopsia performed suffered heavy damage in the fighting. The site was a battlefield in both 1813 and 1945 and a symbolically fertile location for Autopsia. In this context other groups might have been tempted to indulge in martial bombast or banal pathos. Autopsia's haunting re-composition of itself refused such traps, yet without repressing the vast, poetic force of its music. Though technically compromised, it remains perhaps its ultimate performance, played out at the site of catastrophe. In a sly gesture of protest and provocation it dispelled the post-concert atmosphere with loudly played dub.



Repetition as revelation and Concealment

“The key syllable in culture is the prefix re.”⁸⁵

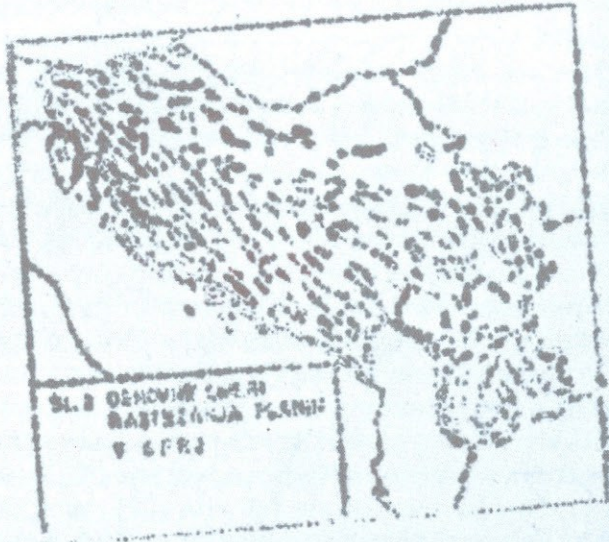
Whilst Autopsia's sonic raw materials and constructions may be monumental, timeless and sometimes near static, their identities and methodologies are fluid to a surprising extent. The same works recur under different names and works with the same names recur in different forms. Autopsia re-composes not just the samples and loops it derives from a wide range of composers, from the mediaeval to the minimal, but also its own work. This process has intensified on recent compilations such as *Weltuntergang* (2011), *Autopsia Re / Mixes Vol . 1* (2014), *Metal* (2015) and *In Vivo* (2016)⁸⁶. Date ranges are assigned to the works such as 1982-2006 (*Autopsia Re / Mixes Vol . 1*), which don't strictly match the original publication dates of the re- or re-re-mixed works. These self re-citations and self re-enactments were already proliferating even before the archival re-mixes and re-creations of the last 5 years.

In this context it is hard or even misleading to speak of the 'original' version of an Autopsia work. First documented appearances of titles or sounds can be noted but even this is not a wholly reliable method in the face of the release of previously unreleased 1980s works that may or not appear in their initial versions. A work entitled *Lebensherrgabe*, which Autopsia dates to 1982, appeared on three different cassette and one vinyl various artists compilation in the 1980s. A completely different version also appeared on the 1988 Autopsia compilation *In Vivo*⁸⁷. This longer work is one of the fastest in Autopsia's discography and is a noise based industrial piece. Tracks of the same name then recurred on the 1995 retrospective compilation *Requiem Pour Un Empire*⁸⁸ (of which there are three separate editions and with two different sleeves). In recent years, different versions have resurfaced on the *Weltuntergang* and *In Vivo* compilations. The first is attributed to 1982 and the second to 1983 and both contain differently-used elements of *Abfall und Aufstieg* and *Der Reichtum des Vielen Und Das*

$$R_{vst} = \frac{1}{\omega_d C_v}$$

$$R_{vst} = \frac{1}{2\pi f_d C_v}$$

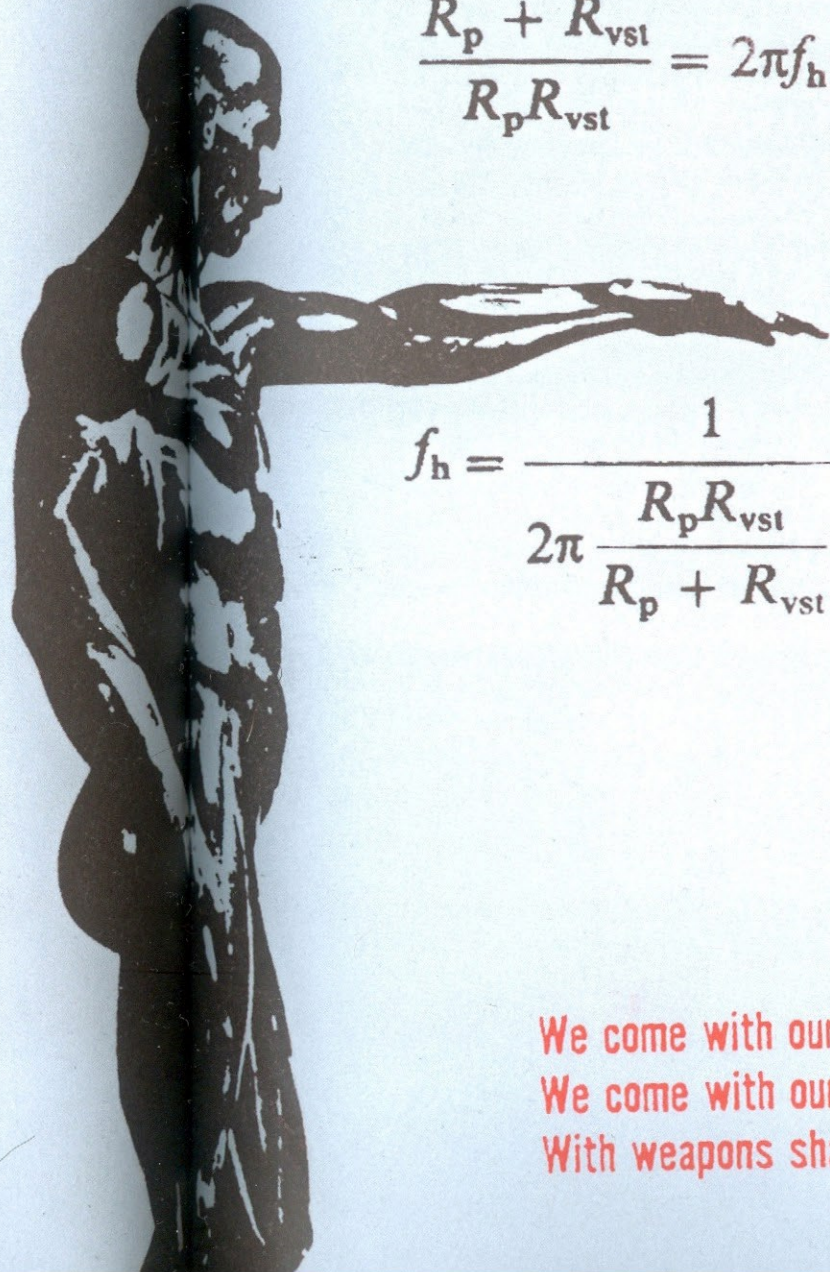
$$f_d = \frac{1}{2\pi R_{vst} C_v}$$



AUTOPSIA

Leuchtende Liebe, lachender Tod

$$\omega = 2\pi f$$



$$\frac{1}{R_p} + \frac{1}{R_{vst}} = \omega_h C_p$$

$$\frac{R_p + R_{vst}}{R_p R_{vst}} = 2\pi f_h C_p$$

$$f_h = \frac{1}{2\pi \frac{R_p R_{vst}}{R_p + R_{vst}} C_p}$$



We come with our arms.
 We come with our weapons
 With weapons sharp, with weapons of might.

Eine from 1991's *Palladium*. Both versions also use the distinctive, slow percussion pattern from *11th Enochian Key* on the 1988 *In Vivo* which recently recurred on the 2016 incarnation of *In Vivo*. This same set of sounds also features in other subtly different forms in live versions. Moreover, *Palladium* itself was a title that had already appeared on the 1987 cassette release *International Aeterna*. Here the sounds are different to those used on the *Palladium* album, but the title - *Palladium No. 8*⁸⁹ - implies (perhaps deceptively) a connection to the 1991 album. To add another (but not necessarily final) layer of complexity to the picture, a 1991 track entitled 'War in Heaven'⁹⁰, which appeared on the compilation *The Lamp Of The Invisible Light*⁹¹ is actually an only slightly different version of the *Palladium* album track *Trotz und Hingabe*.

These are certainly not the only examples of shared names for different works (or for different versions of different works). What they show is how Autopsia's work can be a torment to meticulously-minded archivists or discographers. Whether by design, neglect or both, the effect of such confusion reinforces the encrypting effects of Autopsia's strict depersonalisation. Biographical approaches to its work would be as un-productive as they would be inappropriate. The standard hagiographical

← *We Come*, 1987

↓ *K.R. Fragment No. 29*, video 2009



and biographical tendencies of music or art history are of far less use here. Analytical tools are blunted.

“What fearful power, what awesome divinity is repetition! It is the pull of the void that drags us deeper down like the ever-widening gullet of a whirlpool. ...

For we knew it all along: it was none other than the deep and sinful fall into a world where repetition drags one down lower at each step!”⁹²

This obsessive and even compulsive repetition and the resurrection of the same titles, concepts or motifs in radically different forms express not only the denial of originality, which Autopsia shares with Laibach and other artists of the same era, but also a denial or a dismissal of authenticity within the context of its own work. We can never say for sure that Autopsia has finished with a particular title and that it won't reappear in a new guise. Autopsia claims to be motivated by an understanding of “the impossibility of the work as a singular artifact”⁹³. Its constant revision and mutation is another expression of the rejection of traditional, canonical approaches to music history. Its effect is to intensify the uncanny atmospheres of Autopsia's music. It is very often half-familiar, phrases recur unexpectedly or break out violently, creating an effect that is part déjà vu and part alienation. A perpetually or always potentially unfinished work is harder to fetishise or to reify and this tendency can also be viewed as an expression of the (self)-critical/theoretical approach of Autopsia and even as the manifestation of a certain dry wit or playfulness and an exploration of what Vladimir Mattioni described as “the possibility to constantly renew the play of representation.”⁹⁴



The Sounds of Things to Pass

“Music is prophecy. Its style and economy organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code. It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible, that will impose itself and regulate the order of things: it is not only the image of things, but the transcending of the everyday, the herald of the future...”

“Autopsia does not deal with predictions. It deals with reality, which means – the Death.”⁹⁵

If it is possible to trace the geographical, historical and philosophical/artistic zones from which Autopsia has emerged and continues to operate, can we also trace the spiritual and temporal (rather than historical) zones in which it dwells? What makes the work as (un)timely as it is uncanny? From where or from what does it manifest and exploit what Dejan Sretenović terms “the historical pregnancy of the moment”?⁹⁶

“In the night of the mind, desire and reason co-exist in dialectical tumult as spirit attempts to develop a unity from its unconscious beginnings. For our purposes here, it becomes important to explore this fundamental relation between desire and reason first instantiated as a primal ground or abyss.”⁹⁷

Given the Marxist elements of its Yugoslav context and the ways in which these have been filtered through and into its work, perhaps a turn to Hegel is not inappropriate. Despite the numerous and sophisticated philosophical and ideological currents that inform it, perhaps Autopsia's zone⁹⁸ is what Hegel termed the “nightlike abyss within which a world of infinitely numerous images and presentations is preserved without being in consciousness”⁹⁹ Is the zone of Autopsia's work, to which it combines its juxtaposed visual and musical signals and from which it recovers or reconstitutes meaning not a Hegelian abyss of this type? Are Autopsia works not an artistic representation of such a spiritual and philosophical abyss? In



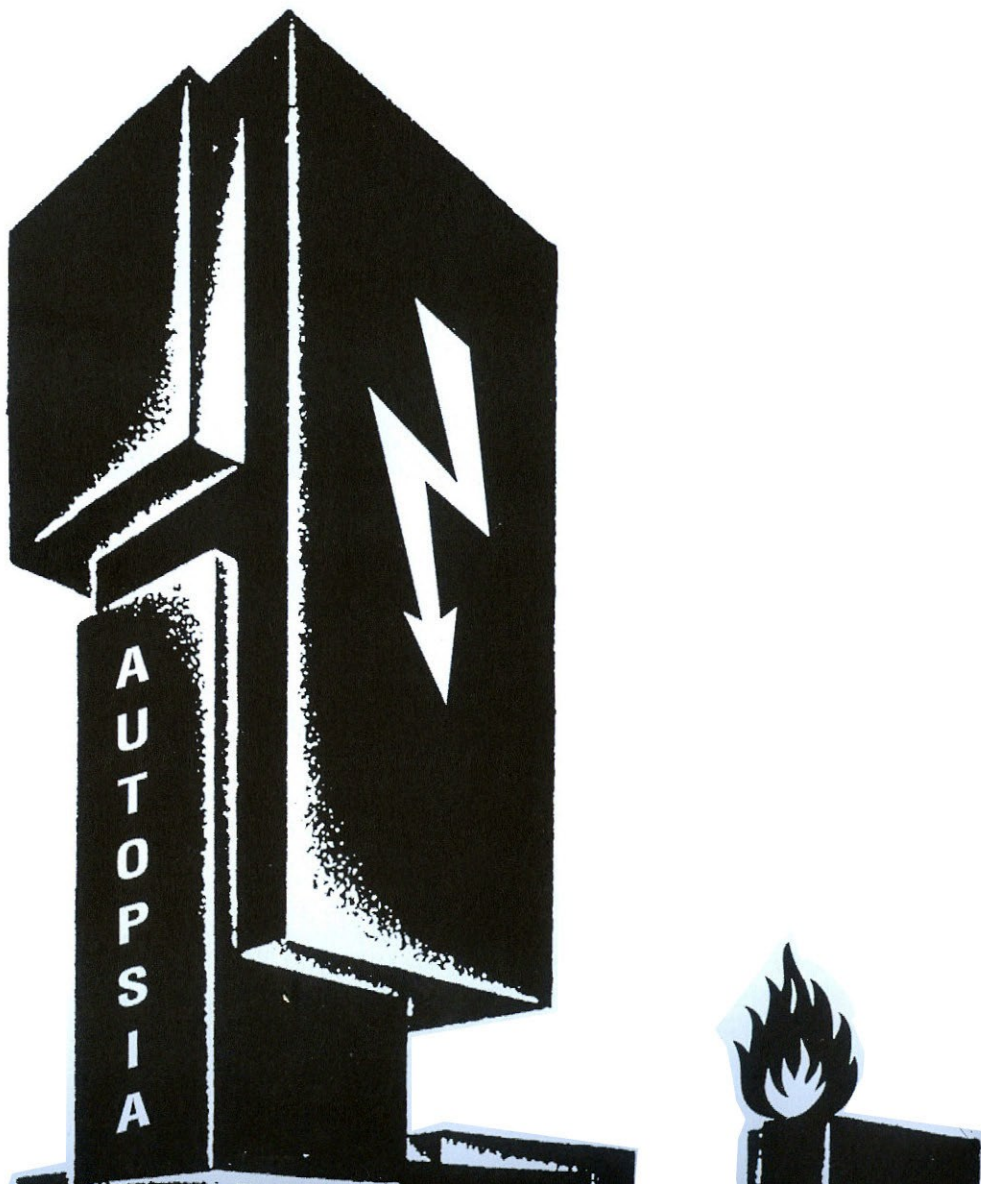
↑ *Palladium Cd* 1991

Hegel's model, the communal spirit, law and ultimately history emerges from such an abyss.

"... law proceeds in its living process from the divine, the law valid on earth from that of the nether world, the conscious from the unconscious, mediation from immediacy—and equally returns whence it came. The power of the nether world, on the other hand, has its actual existence on earth; through consciousness, it becomes existence and activity."¹⁰⁰

Is it possible that with an awareness of such power it is possible to produce not a literal prophecy (which a literal reading of Autopsia's esoteric references might lead some to expect), but an artistic manifestation of ideas and forces that are both immanent and imminent within the *zeitgeist*?

In *Apocrypha Autopsia* claimed explicitly that “‘Death is the Mother of Beauty’ is an omen of the world in becoming, or the world to come.”¹⁰¹ As well as the clearly tragic and martial elements in the texts used on the album and the tone of some of its music we can also see this “world to come” manifesting in its artistic mode of operation. The title track’s juxtaposition of postmodern minimalist music with Wagnerian romanticism and much older forms of European liturgical music symbolised



the eruption of the mediaeval into the hyper- or post-modern context that was becoming apparent as Yugoslavia headed back towards war at the end of the 1980s and rationalism was overwhelmed by "the power of the nether world."

By placing the sounds and images of different epochs in juxtaposition, Autopsia manages to materialise the imminent and the immanence of the unresolved past in the future. Can it be seen as an artistic actualization, not only of death as a notion, but of deaths to come: the death of one or many states and the state of death. Due to this shadowy quality, derived from the focus on the death and the movement between past and present, an encounter with Autopsia at a certain historical moment can also expose this mechanism in a way that Autopsia itself could not have 'foreseen'.

"Disaster will Come ..." ¹⁰²

My own experience of this came in March 1999. A few days before the NATO assault on Yugoslavia began I discovered a copy of Autopsia's *Palladium* in London. Its blend of industrial percussion with folk and classical motifs is inherently epic and tragic and one of the most powerful works in its long history. However, to be listening to the album at the particular moment enhanced its impact greatly. The scale and drama of the work revealed itself at a moment when titanic events were unfolding. For me it is indelibly associated with the events of that time and it also occurred to me then that at least retrospectively it could be seen as an apprehension of imminent tragedy, having been recorded in the critical period of 1990-91 immediately before the Yugoslav wars began.

Autopsia has never made direct or literal predictions but does seem capable of detecting and drawing attention to what Deleuze and Guattari term 'the diabolical forces of the future.'¹⁰³ One reason for this is the successful creation of new archetypes and mythologies from deathly archetypes which modernity is supposed to have rendered historical or irrelevant and also from the deathly archetypes of modernity (mass industrial production and warfare, death on an industrial scale).

If Laibach is as I have argued a form of demystifying mystification¹⁰⁴, Autopsia could be seen as a form of re-mystifying de-mystification. For instance, the mystical and alchemi-



cal elements function as a mirror of the mass technological irrationalisation in Serbia under Milošević or of the way in which the neo-liberal faith transmits and reproduces itself in the digital age. While the emphasis on death and elitism may seem alienating or disturbing, isn't what may seem to be no more than a deathly neo-feudal art an appropriate comment on our times?

This deathly, ominous atmosphere is created through the sacral and mystical sounds and symbols Autopsia uses. A technical, theoretically-informed and secular use is made of organs, liturgical and monastic chants, drones, Catholic symbolism and other non-specific sonic elements that help to create an other-worldly effect that simulates some nameless funeral or other ancient rites and ceremonies. Similar types of mystical excess permeated the work of many (post)-industrial and dark ambient artists of the 1980s and 1990s, although it was often intended to invoke a specific spirit or deity, sometimes explicitly.¹⁰⁵

Autopsia's music can be seen as more serious anticipation of the clumsy, Derrida-derived concept 'hauntological' music that has been much used in Britain in the last few years.¹⁰⁶ This often celebrates or invokes 'lost' technological futures that didn't quite materialise and they also mourn the loss of a belief in a utopian future. Of course, such newly labelled trends are sometimes discussed in a way that contributes to the further marginalization of industrial and other artists who had already conjured such atmospheres in their work, helping to write them out of history.¹⁰⁷ The work of Autopsia and also the work of (amongst others) Czech-based American death industrial producer Schloss Tegal and dark ambient pioneer Lustmord already embodied a mode of ghostly production long before the term came to be applied to the often more

superficial (and hence more saleable) contemporary producers. In Autopsia's case, the music is also haunted by imminent possible futures that its work materialises or warns against. Over time, the incessant re-versions of earlier works come to haunt themselves, intensifying their haunted ambience and that of the work in general.

This sense of haunted (and aesthetically haunting) imminence and immanence permeates a work such as *The Time of Pain and Time of Waiting*.¹⁰⁸ The looped, layered strings create a sense of monumental, inexorable tragedy, which can neither be escaped from nor embraced (even if the work also needs to contain the illusion of the possibility of both). While its second half appears more idealistic it still ultimately falls back into dischord. Writing of Autopsia's work in 2010, the Belgrade musicologist and critic Ksenija Stevanović emphasised the 'thanatological' aspects of Autopsia.¹⁰⁹ On *Radical Machines*, *Night Landscapes* or *The Berlin Requiem* this derives more from slowness, frozen textures and atonality, but on *Palladium* and other works of the 1988 – 1994 period it is associated with titanic orchestral force or martial drum loops announcing the advent of armies that never quite arrive; a glorious future locked in a perpetual pre-dawn or twilight state, its mobilising energies frozen but still able to point eloquently to what may be to come. A work such as *Kristal* confronts us with seemingly endless ranks of catastrophic string loops, an infernal orchestral tumult on the edge of a night-like abyss. Such intensive repetition of intensely dramatic phrases can potentially act as revelation (rather than as concealment or concussion). In this nightmarish, hyper-real space it is easy to lose trace of "what" and "why", "where" and, above all, "when". If it is possible to reflect in the midst of such drama, questions will inevitably arise. When do the scenarios they conjure take place? Are we certain that they belong safely in the past? Is there not a possibility (or even a fantasy) that these supposedly dead but actively ghostly things will reappear?



“Electronic Frescoes”

“With its short films Autopsia attempted to do something similar to what it did with music. It was an old dream but only with the new technology did the realization of new projects become possible. It is as if a new laboratory for experimenting with sound and image was finally found.”¹¹⁰

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The processes of continual revision of Autopsia’s music have been accompanied and augmented by a literal re-vision. Since its return to intensive production in 2006 Autopsia has moved into film work intensively, establishing the conceptual film label Ikkona and (re)-produced visuals to accompany music dating as far back as 1982’s *Warmwood*,¹¹¹ introducing new interpretations and allusions that may not have been detected or even have been present when the music first appeared without visual support. This newest phase of Autopsia’s work retrospectively fills in gaps or corrects certain lacks in the original aesthetic vision, perhaps visible only to Autopsia and only in retrospect.

Autopsia strives to maintain control not only over its mode of production, but over its interpretation. It insists that these are not music videos¹¹² but “films are created from other films.”¹¹³ Found footage and Autopsia graphics are often added to the film fragments used, as well as relevant texts. Just as the constant re-versions of title and tracks introduces different meanings and associations, the introduction of images and of texts that weren’t previously associated with the music alters our perceptions of the music’s meaning (though we have to be wary of believing that a ‘final’ or stable interpretation can be built on this basis”).

The 2009 film for *Technolust* from 1996’s *Mystery Science* subtly adjusts the perception of those already familiar with the music, which is built around an unresolved conflict between more ominous strings, bells and drones and a more idyllic, romantic central theme. The main screen of the black and white film shows pristine summer scenes of lakes, forests and snow-capped mountains. Arranged in a horizontal strip across

the top of the screen are four sub-screens. The second left screen also shows this landscape but the others show disconnected imageries: including technical equipment being operated, a glamorous couple in a summer landscape and, most disturbingly, scenes of a South Vietnamese monk who has set himself alight. The images all have the same dimensions and monochromatic colour treatment but remain (dis)integrated fragments. The soundtrack includes a male voice saying repeatedly "That is forbidden" and it is as if Autopsia obeys a self-imposed prohibition here. It would have been possible to construct a far more romantic narrative by integrating the



↑ *Factory Rituals* video 2006

couple and the landscape more closely but they are kept in parallel rather than being integrated. Technique and romance remain separate and the main summer scenes, that would otherwise have been idyllic carry a slightly chilling undertone created by the darker scenes above and the tension in the music. The same scene of self-immolation is placed at the centre of 2011's *Weltuntergang* film¹⁴, used to promote the album

of the same name and an accompanying installation at the Divus exhibition space in Prague. Here the figure of the burning monk is doubled, with each version of the flaming figure facing outwards. It's an appropriately nightmarish scene for the theme of the exhibition but again its cinematic aspiration is also thwarted – scenes from the installation and Autopsia graphics appear in the centre of the image, complicating the effect of the main scene. A second film shows footage of the video installation. Again, the burning monk is central, appearing on the second of three screens, the first showing advancing tanks and the third fragments from a film of an officer in a prison corridor.¹¹⁵ The conclusion is a slyly humorous one, a quote from Franz Kafka:



**“Unser Rettung ist der Tod,
Aber Nicht Dieser”
(Our Salvation is Death, But Not This One).**

A similar sense of detachment and subtle poetic alienation to that which animates its art and music is apparent in the films. The visual sources run alongside and into each other but are not fully fused. The protagonists of the films Autopsia uses tend to be visually or emotionally disassociated, an effect heightened by the gap that is left between the music and the image fragments.

“... on a flat wall as on a church wall, there appear figures each in their own perspective – there is no shared vantage point. Thus the figures are at once integrated and separated. Each segment of the screen with its own particular frame has its own time of projection.”¹¹⁶

Autopsia describes these films as “electronic frescoes”.¹¹⁷ The use of a formal, specialist art historical term is characteristically hermetic, if not elitist. While un-fashionability is not always an inherent virtue in itself, it can often be a good sign in terms of what it implies and its semiotic potential to sign(post) a new or (re)new(ed) direction.

“The operator is a composer of (hi)storical time, he transforms it into chords ... he can transform the linearity of historical time into spirals, labyrinths, circles.”¹¹⁸

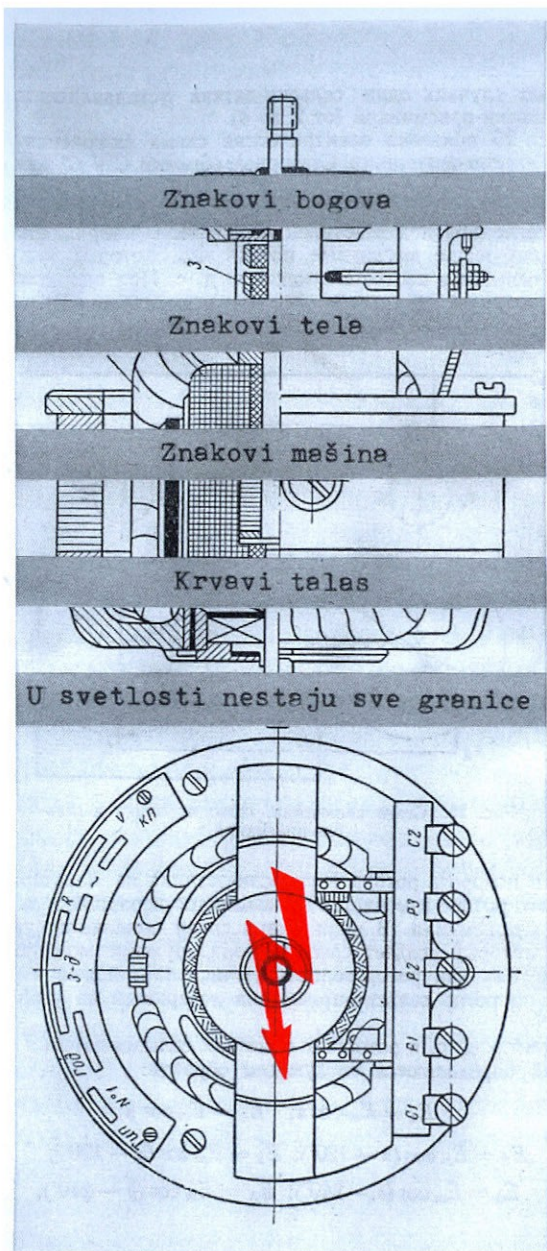
The 2007 *Sounds for Remembering Death* film is accompanied by a description of some of Autopsia's film sources and inspirations. "We make ghostly films - haunted by great cinematic models: Hans-J. Syberberg (an extremely unfashionable and controversial reference), Chris Marker, Akira Kurosawa, and anti-models: Hollywood, MTV."¹¹⁹ The reference to "anti-models" is important as it contextualises some of the visually jarring or incongruous elements that prevent complete romantic totalisation of an Autopsia film. Further influences and sources are confessed to in *Apocrypha*, including Bergmann's *Persona* and especially the work of Russian visionary Tarkovsky. Autopsia emphasises Tarkovsky's manipulation of time in cinema. Autopsia's use of time in music already had parallels with Tarkovsky's approach and in both media many of Autopsia's works are frozen, artificially extended, self-haunted and self-haunting works. Or perhaps we should say that they have been made to haunt themselves so that the original films, some less than two decades old, are made to seem as distant as the 1920s graphics or baroque motifs we encounter elsewhere in Autopsia's work.

The coldness or chill permeating many of Autopsia's films is given literal form in several of the films. *Sounds for Remembering Death* shows scenes of ice, water and pine trees under heavy snow. These are all romantic, even Friedrich-ian subjects but the treatment of them is too cool and clinical to be fully romantic. The screen is horizontally split into three and a narrow central strip displays scrolling German text. Here there is a closer integration (yet still not a synthesis) between the music from the Berlin Requiem and Brecht's unsettling, ambivalent poetry. Similar wintry landscape scenes are also used in the films for pieces from the *Secret Christmas History* EP. The simple font used is plain and un- or anti-aesthetic, creating a slight sense of visual interference. Versions of these winter scenes were used again for 2014's film interpretation of

*Je Suis La Resurrection / Ich Bin Die Auferstehung*¹²⁰ from *Humanity Is The Devil 1604 - 1994*. Lonely rail tracks and forest scenes are shown in heavy snow but the wintry aesthetic is complicated by the appearance of Autopsia flags and posters. This refusal of full cinematic indulgence is especially interesting given that the music was the Autopsia piece selected by Peter Greenaway for use in *The Pillow Book* - an early recognition of the still to be realized cinematic potential of Au-



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topsia's vision. The promotional film for the *Berlin Requiem* CD is in colour, but shows only slow panning shots and close-ups of another wintry, snow-laden forest.¹²¹ The repeated returns to these wintry landscapes can be seen as a materialization or use of what Gilles Deleuze terms "the iciness of imagination".¹²² While it isn't the dominant component of Autopsia's filmic aesthetic, it is one of the most frequent and does symbolise a necessary or positive iciness in Autopsia's aesthetic world-view that stands in opposition to uncontrolled global cultural warming.¹²³

Although almost entirely in black and white, there is a much wider range of motifs and subjects in Autopsia films. Trains feature frequently, but while the motion is steady, it is unresolved. One particular sequence of train tracks at night, taken from the opening scene of Lars Von Trier's *Europa* is often used, including in the film element of the 2010 *Mirror of Destruction* exhibition. It appears as a framing device in the film created for *Silentium Post Clamores from Death is The Mother of Beauty*.¹²⁴ This is combined with an atmospheric sequence from Bela Tarr's *Satantango*. Although produced many years apart, Tarr's monochrome, Panonnian/Central European aesthetic functions productively alongside Autopsia's music.

If there are some recognisable, recurrent film fragments present in Autopsia films, usually taken from European art films (Von Trier, Tarkovsky, Bergman etc.), there is also a much wider range of styles and textures. Some are heavily text-based (*Karl Rossmann Fragment (Intro)*)¹²⁵, others are simply found photographic scenes (*Autopsia Funeral Music I*)¹²⁶ or scenes of weather, landscapes or seascapes (*Autopsia & Achtar Night Landscape XVII*)¹²⁷ Some are more formal, or even cinematically classical, some have a naïve quality and others are unresolved hybrids in which Autopsia attempts to work through and with the contradictions of film and the application of it to its existing music. There is less of the production-line visual consistency of the art works and more space for variation and inconsistency, which it is left to the viewer to re- or de-code.



Art for Remembering Death

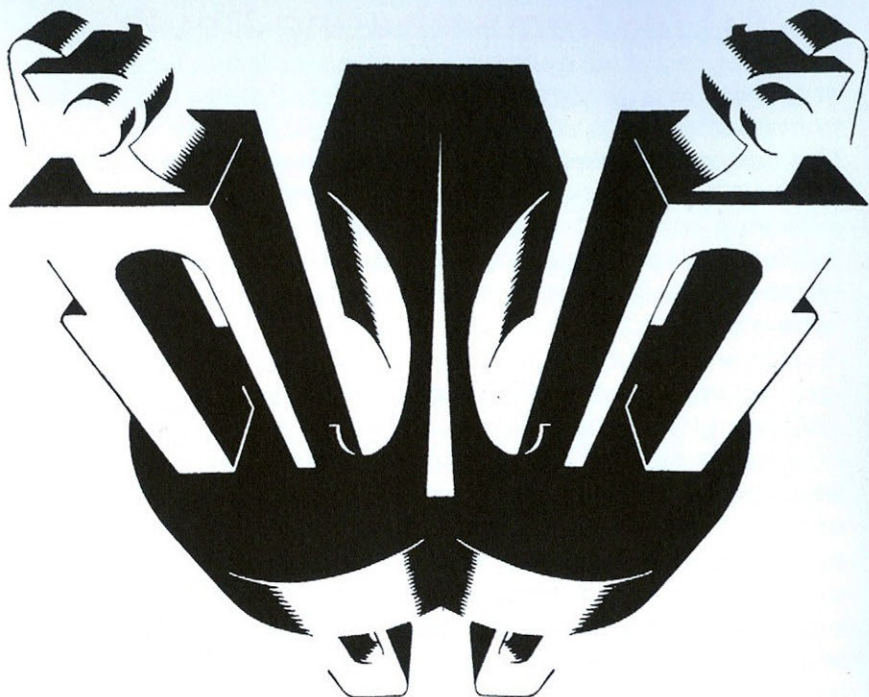
“For the past few decades, the study of the avant-garde has persistently circled around the question of its death.”¹²⁸

“From the very beginning Autopsia didn’t belong to any state system. Its history is a nomadic one. Autopsia begins where avant-gardes end. ‘Avant-garde is today a historical relic with which Autopsia deals in a kind of laboratory manner, but never ‘belonged’ to.”¹²⁹

AutopsiA

Whilst the state out of which Autopsia emerged is long dead and the technoculture that it confronted from the start has become both more dystopian and utopian than was generally imagined at that time, even by those with an apocalyptic worldview, many of its principle themes, above all that of death, have remained. Death is the basis of a kind of archetypal engineering that Autopsia carries out as an integral part of its operations. It is pervasive and energising, oppressive to some, uplifting to others.

One technique that it uses powerfully is to try and remove an audience from its own time, if only for a moment, or alternatively to make them aware of the thin veils separating their own hyper-contemporary reality from other epochs. The 1980 screen print *Autopsia Letak*¹³⁰, features the declamatory German-language text *Confesio Autopsiae*, with the signature “Autopsia 980”. The visual component of the image is a heraldic shield featuring two lions and a central crown and shield, the latter bearing an early version of the Autopsia lightning flash. One instance of this might have been taken as a printing error but a similar dating style is used on the track-list for the 1987 *International Aeterna* cassette. Here the tracks are attributed to other years in the 980s from 982 to 985. Of course, it should be clear that in the context of Autopsia the attribution of dates is driven more by a performative/aesthetic agenda than a temporally faithful or informative one, but this temporal trick is a small but significant statement. Through it, Autopsia suggests that in the context of its work a millennium here or there is not a great issue and implies that the beliefs



and practices of the 980s are not as remote from us as we would like to imagine. In the light of the nationalist rediscovery and reinvention of culture and mythology from earlier epochs seen in Serbia during the 1990s this small gesture now seems to have a prophetic quality.

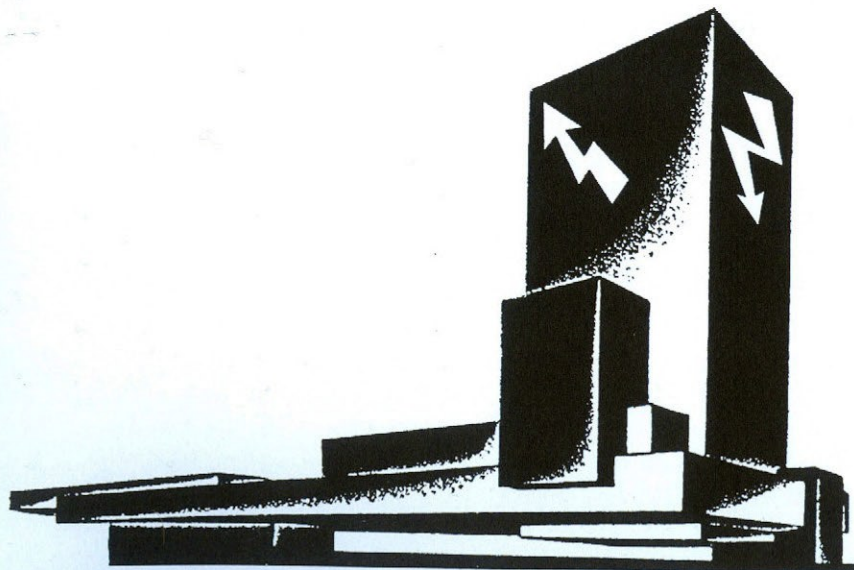
“Death has no history; the whole of history is one great representation of Death.”¹³¹

When Autopsia works materialise in a gallery context they inevitably bring the traces and mythologies of the past into our present. Through these Autopsia haunts these spaces with a spirit quite distant from self-consciously critical, progressive or commercial art forms. It re- and de-animates the potentially dead(ening) spaces of the gallery through a ‘production strategy’ that necessarily alienates or distances itself from them. It is (at least to the uninitiated) uncommunicative, elitist, hermetic, consciously against or indifferent to the norms of contemporary art. To use an Orwellian metaphor, such

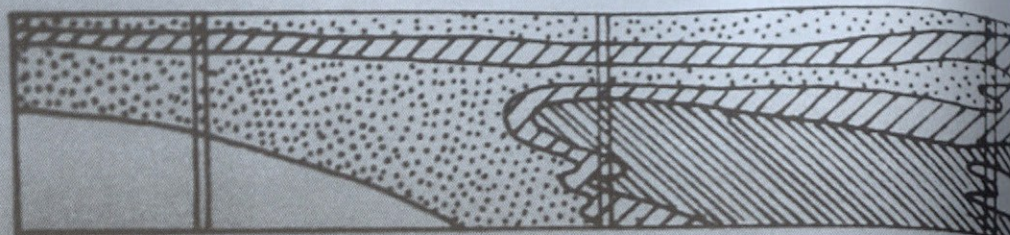
thoughtcrime can only lead to artcrime. Yet crime retains a certain mystique, attracting elements of the communities that view them as crimes.

These are not acts of demonstrative, spectacular rebellion, but an expression of Autopsia's insistence on its own artistic authenticity, which requires its apartness. It is ex-surgent, motivated by the need to go beyond rather than infiltrate established systems and networks. As with its sources, its appearance does not necessarily imply endorsement or a recognition of authority, merely a functional acceptance of the need to appear in certain contexts. Rather than critical or peer approval, social practice or other fashionable bases for contemporary artistic production, it claims that "Industrial exhibitions and department stores represent the "secret schema of construction" of the Autopsia museum.¹³²

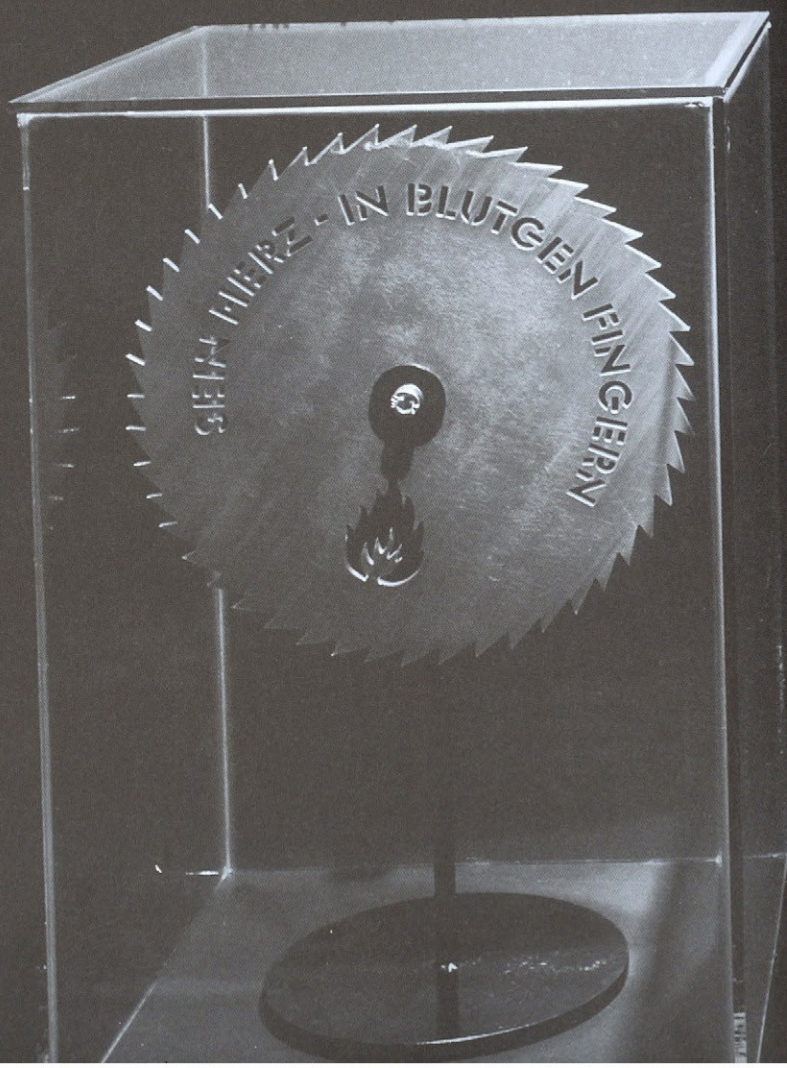
Of course, Autopsia's are "industrial exhibitions" in more sense than one. The ways in which Autopsia is presented to the public still draw on its industrial past and its status as a specialised and nearly mythical of "industrial culture" which in the last decade has been comprehensively rediscovered, reassessed, reproduced and reissued. Yet they are also "indus-

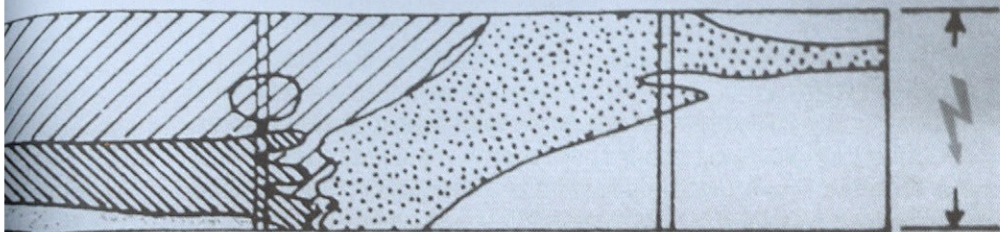


ILLUMINATING TECHNOLOGIES

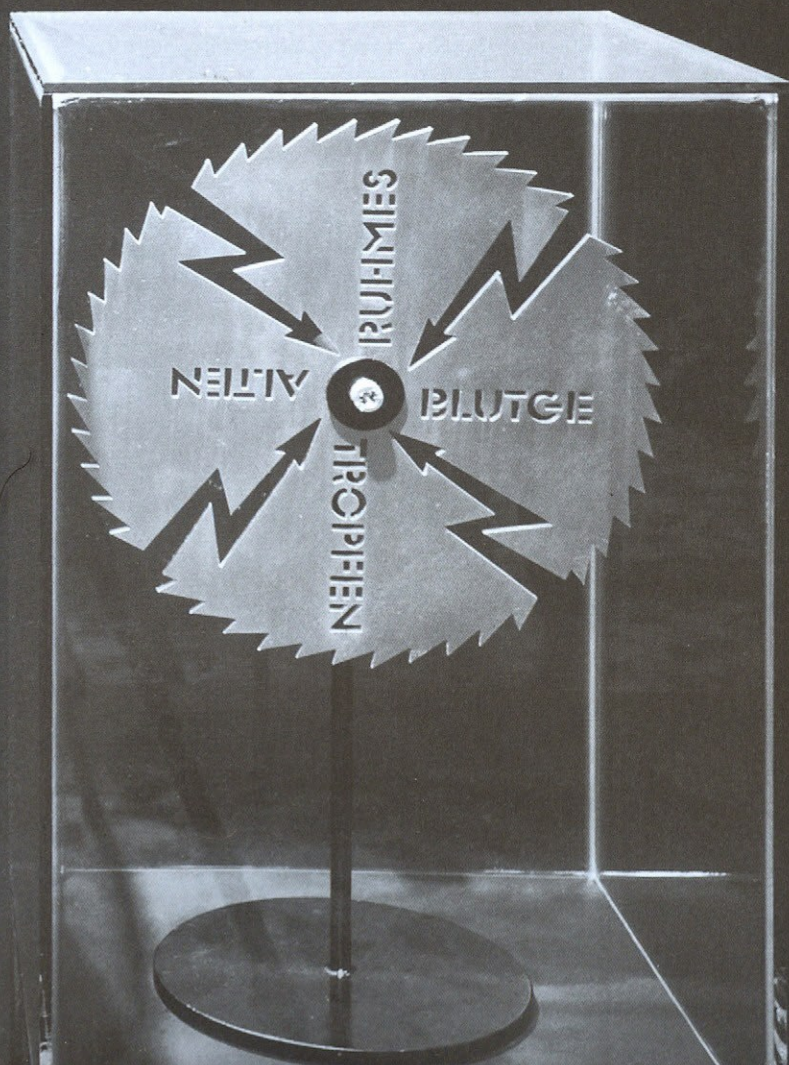


← Wie drohend die Stille ist... →





Ein geschlossnes Gebetbuch Ruht der Horizont - verschweigen.

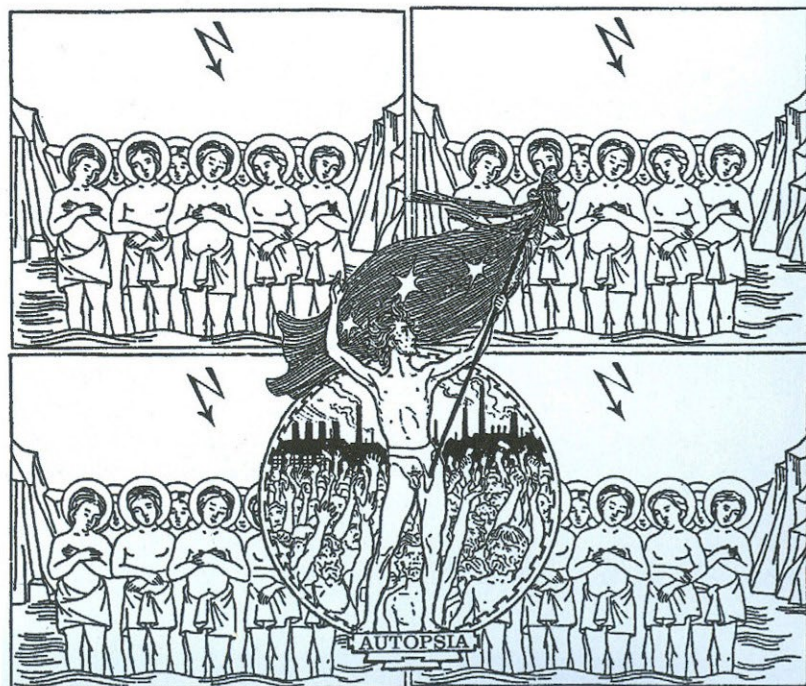


trial" in terms of their visual contents. Besides the ubiquitous lightning flash/high voltage warning sign, Tesla's designs (and all that comes with them) there are anvils, technical blueprints, technical adverts and parts catalogues, assembly diagrams and metallic components which are identifiable only to long dead engineers or specialist industrial historians. Almost all of these are drawn from the period between the late 19th century and the 1940s, bringing their historical associations with them. Their archaic but timeless status, conferred by Autopsia's poeticization of them, can also be seen as another reproach. Treated with care and respect, the types of components now used only artistically by Autopsia would have seen decades of intensive service without needing replacement. Yet under the system of "post-industrial fascism"¹³³ that Autopsia diagnoses, one of the guiding principles is "designed obsolescence". Components are built to fail and need replacing as soon as possible. They are also built not to be serviceable, or,

← Autopsia Atomic War Command (Object ARK)

→ Autopsia Atomic War Command (Object ARK)

↓ Autopsia Poster 1983

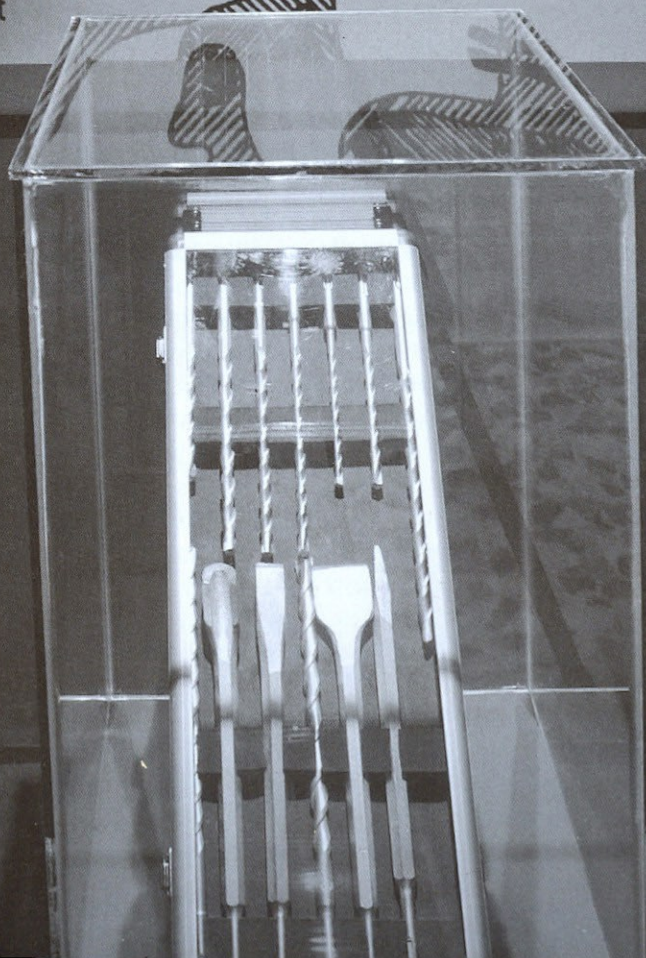


(in America under threat of legal sanction) to be serviceable only by an authorised, monopolistic elite. Autopsia operates in an economic context in which technical failure and death is engineered in advance and consciously accelerated and a cultural context in which death as a cultural symbol is repressed and eliminated as far as possible. Autopsia then is commenting on both the artificial death of technology and the technology of (cultural) death. As Thomas Lee Kelley reminds us, technology and the ways in which it is treated and used, “ ... creates the socio-climate”.¹³⁴

It is in this light that Autopsia's *Monument to the Unknown Worker* should be understood. The gold plated drill bits arranged in a moulded case are both practical and useless. The antique print depicting a Roman scene on the inner lid suggests they are archaic, but this is not a cynical deconstruction. The work seems animated by an ambivalent sense of respect for a lost of age of industrial production and its labourers, despite Autopsia's awareness of the spiritual crises associated with industrial society. The metal objects created for Autopsia's participation in the *2nd Project Biennial of Contemporary Art, D-0 ARK Underground* (2013) bear a similar charge that was radically intensified by being placed in Yugoslavia's most secret and most expensive monument, designed to protect Tito and 300 members of the Yugoslav elite for up to six months after a nuclear war. In this context Autopsia's work illuminated the relation between nuclear chaos and technical logos that this structure embodied in its never-tested attempt to defy and outlive mass death. Their forms (sharp toothed cog wheels emblazoned with poetic inscriptions and the Autopsia lightning flash) suggest dynamism but it is a frozen dynamism: these are wheels that will never turn accompanied by blades that will never cut set within a Yugoslav mega-structure that didn't and perhaps never could have fulfilled its intended use. Like many Autopsia visual and musical works they seem to be perpetually poised “on the brink” of death, catastrophe, collapse and chaos but the craft and spirit that (de)-animates never allows a final descent into the abyss to take place. Their elements must always be “on alert” for future re-mobilisation.

Due to the uncanny context in which they are presented (juxtaposed with poetic Autopsia statements or other incongruous textual or visual elements such as a stylised, archaic music stave) they also carry the suggestion of other, occulted

sch groß - dräut er hinab
herzensdunkle Nacht



purposes, and invite us to speculate on what these might be.¹³⁵ Some of these visual details are primarily decorative and are used for the evocative nature of their forms or as an embellishment of the overall atmosphere. Others (and other interpretations of them, perhaps including this one) are illusory veils that recede on approach. With care and perception though, others can be grasped. Here again is the encounter or the exchange between Chaos and Logos that Autopsia engineers in its work.

There are other fundamental Autopsia visual elements which were established in its first decade and which still re-manifest in the present, erasing the distance between the 1980s and the present. Given the extent to which our current decade is heavily marked by the erasure of this distance, Autopsia's collapsing of these temporal boundaries is acutely symptomatic.

We have already encountered the lightning flash, the skull, the knight, heraldic mottos and industrial components but there are others we cannot ignore. Amongst the most explicitly deathly there are two related and frequently used ones with a strong poetic charge. Firstly there is a skeletal horse and mounted archer, frozen in time but retaining a martial posture. This featured in the 1987 work *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment)¹³⁶ and (in its most widely known version) on the cover of the *Death is The Mother of Beauty* CD.¹³⁷

In *Thanatopolis* and throughout Autopsia's works we see other skeletal forms from the colonial era alongside early modern anatomical diagrams and cross-sections. These initially look out of place and out of time but through repetition they come to be, if not exactly homely then less overtly uncanny. They are visual trademarks or guarantees of consistency for those already familiar with Autopsia's visual language. However this is constantly shifting and these visual death markers can still recur in unexpected contexts and forms, made strange again.

"Cipher, do not decipher. Work over the illusion. Create illusion to create an event. Make enigmatic what is clear, render unintelligible what is only too intelligible. Illusion as the only true democratic principle."¹³⁸

Finally, as well as the objects and icons present in Autopsia work there are the languages that it uses and their implications. A core set of intensively repeated slogans accompany Autopsia's visual vocabulary – “*Our Goal is Death/Unser Ziel ist Der Tod*”, “*20th Century is Dead*”, “*Death is the Mother of Beauty*”, “*Let us Die*”, “*Lebensgefahr*”. For the duration of an exhibition and for far longer for those able to allow the work to leave a lasting trace, the art compels its audience to remember death. We should remember the title of its 2011 retrospective in Novi Sad, *Specus Oblivionis* (the cave/abyss of oblivion) and the conclusion of *Apocrypha*:

“Autopsia is a work of art which throws itself through the work of art into the abyss of Plenitude”¹³⁹ AutopsiA

Deployed in gallery and museum spaces, this combination of images, objects and words and all their multiple associations and dis-associations accumulate symbolic and reflective power, becoming quietly efficient artistic analogues of Tesla-like energy accumulators. The American depth psychologist James Hillman described the way in which the ancient world was structured by what he calls “mythical grids”¹⁴⁰ that enabled the world and cosmos to be read and navigated. While religious and occult metaphors are not productive in relation to Autopsia's practice or motivations (despite its use of such symbolism), Hillman's concept is one that can help us understand and navigate its nature and its work. While many of its core conceptual and visual archetypes were established at an early stage, over time and through constant re-contextualisation Autopsia has autonomously created its own mythical grids. To a certain extent these can be followed and listed as a means of orientation, interpretation and illumination, although ultimately its art's cryptic motivation may mean that it always leads back to itself.



Thanatocalypse Now

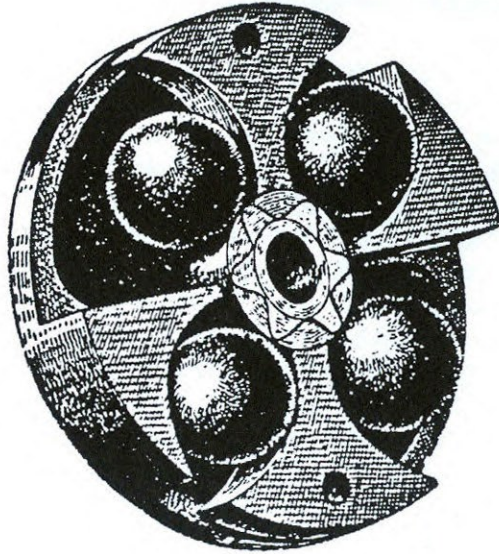
“Autopsia doesn’t speak about ‘the fear of death’; Autopsia speaks about OBLIVION of death, about an attempt to build the Selfhood on ‘credit cards’, in an indirect way, on permanently postponed responsibilities.”¹⁴¹ AutopsiA

If the “20th Century is Dead”, is the 21st Century (Living) Death? The thanatine city is shaken by post-factual politics and the link between technical artefacts and technical knowledge is breaking. Knowledge is suspect and blind automation is innocent. Are Autopsia’s frozen visual techno-archetypes now more potent than they were? At this moment are they not a quaint, admonitory commentary on Yugoslavia’s terminal hyper-modernism, but also on our own, designed-in, always-already obsolescent culture and its simultaneous attempts to induce and to defeat death.

Autopsia continues to work with and through a range of unfashionable philosophical, musical, artistic, literary and poetic knowledge that is now almost transgressive per se, not least because several of the sources used no longer meet contemporary standards. They could face charges of being (amongst others) ‘anti-market’, ‘elitist’, ‘privileged’ or ‘Eurocentric’. If the work seems distant or remote, it has to be borne in mind that Autopsia’s work began in London, in reaction to trends here. *Thanatopolis* is Autopsia’s first incursion into the (former) Western Bloc and those exposed to it will need to determine its significance. For all its Central European qualities it is not as distant from us as some might wish to think. From Autopsia’s contemporary perspective the impression of distance is partly illusory, a reassuring conceit to deny the erasure of difference and individual identity via ever-accelerating standardization, which is as active in the cultural sphere as in high-technology markets determined by algorithms and robo-advisers. In this context, Autopsia’s statement that the “... will to autonomy is the key to get away from cultural and political conformity”¹⁴² is extremely timely.

In the past weeks there have been announcements that Artificial Intelligence has ‘written’ a simulated Beatles song¹⁴³ and,

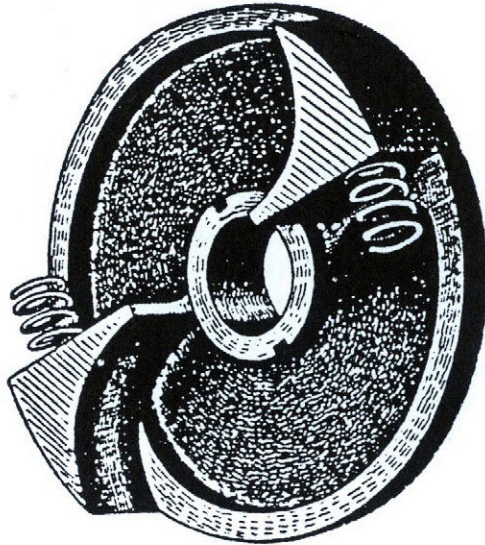
OUR GOAL IS DEATH



AUTOPSIA

most significantly in the context of Autopsia's work, that death can be virtually abolished by harvesting the traces of the deceased from Facebook.¹⁴⁴ When it is possible to "interact" with the dead at will via such systems, death will be relegated culturally even further. The quiet, silent killers of precariousness and austerity will steadily increase the hosts of the newly

LET US DIE



AUTOPSIA

↖↑ Autopsia Poster 1981

virtualized dead. While they await their own, often premature deaths, those still physically living will have the consolation of being able to converse with those who have already 'passed over'. Work also continues on the old 'extropian' ideal of downloadable consciousness. Over time these tendencies

may make a corporate, virtual after-life seem like a desirable, glamorous alternative to physical life.

“There is a kind of scientific delirium. ... science has become a race to the death. Technology has become the last art.”¹⁴⁵

Autopsia

As Artificial Intelligence develops and mutates it is likely to become able to produce ever more realistic simulations of the works of physical artists, the living as well as the dead. If they are persuasive enough can we really count on the public rejecting “new” Beatles or even Sex Pistols releases simply because they are the products of AI? To produce such simulations AI has to decode and interpret the works to be emulated. This capacity will also grow and algorithmically-based art histories may emerge. Thanatopolis presents an opportunity for human intelligence to assess and engage with Autopsia, but it is interesting to speculate on how emerging AI might seek to understand or even to simulate multi-temporal, multi-layered, multi-associational work such as Autopsia’s. Will it metaphorically short-circuit when attempting the total mapping of such work? The techniques discussed here and Autopsia’s conscious orientation towards “the thwarting of perfection” are especially relevant in the current context. Will it be able to understand, or to tolerate, such levels of complexity and ambiguity? Will it be lost without the personal/biographical cues it has been trained to mimic (and perhaps to worship?). Might it not experience alienation in this encounter? Could it not haunt them as it haunts viewers and itself?

In such senses, Autopsia’s pseudo-production may stand in the way of totalising, privatised digital pseudo-utopias. Autopsia’s ‘program’, consciously built on flawed code, can function as a destabilising virus against technologies of total illumination that allow no space for shadow or ambiguity. Even now, at what may turn out to be the dawn of a new hyper-technological dark age, the re-representation of propagandist mechanisms can be a reminder of how invisible contemporary modes of increasingly machine-generated propaganda are. Its “Illuminating Technologies” are deployed against the ideologies of perpetual and total progress, illumination and surveillance. The presence of these works in London, transported from

a dead state to a dying one can help challenge complacent and falsely humanistic illusions. While it suggests that contemporary technological, economic and cultural tendencies accelerate and hasten the trajectory towards cultural death and the triumph of post-rational discourses, it also suggests the possibility of defence and restoration, precisely through what it calls "a needed dose of hermeticism and mystification"¹⁴⁶, commodities we need to hoard and use wisely in a time of intellectual and cultural austerity that may turn to famine. It has to be stressed again that Autopsia's work is not the expression of a post-apocalyptic or a pro-apocalyptic mysticism. It is aware of the dangers and complexities of mystification¹⁴⁷ but consistently displays awareness of the cultural, ethical and spiritual value of a complex mystification directed against the cultural tendencies of algorithmic neo-feudalism.

"... After domination of an all-encompassing simplified modernism, the world that could have been different was presaged, the world which, throughout the channels of its networks, will not reproduce the same. It could have been only the world aware of its history, the world of an individual which was known to such a history. Unfortunately, this didn't happen. Entire project of the new spirit slipped into a globalized network of technological modernism, while the only things that remained after particular histories were only images, appearances and illusions that were poured on us by media in order to cover the real condition – FLOW OF MONEY."¹⁴⁸

AutopsiA

Re-viewed now, Autopsia works can be seen to express a critique of the Western (and Yugoslav) logic of the centre and act as a constant memento mori, commenting on the transitory and incomplete nature of grand projects and narratives while sampling them extensively. Although it is not the best known feature of its work and is rarely visible explicitly, this political consciousness does surface in Autopsia's recent collaborations with Achtar and in particular in the video for the track *XIV*¹⁴⁹, which provides a directly critical commentary on neoliberal domination and the contemporary alienation caused by hyper-consumerism and neo-feudalism, forces that are also strongly present in Autopsia's adopted hometown of Prague.



↑ Autopsia, *Silently The Wolves Are Watching*, 7" vinyl 2007
→ Autopsia, *Weltuntergang*, CD, 2011

Sometimes the Autopsian worldview is close to that of Slavoj Žižek, Laibach and other ex-Yugoslav critics of the post-1989, former Western-dominated world:



"MASS CULTURE IS THE CENTRAL IDEOLOGICAL BATTLEFIELD TODAY!"

In contrast to the notion that new media turns into passive consumers who just stare numbly at the screen, the real threat of new media is that they deprive us of our passivity, of our authentic passive experience, and thus prepare us for mindless frenetic activity: FOR ENDLESS WORK."¹⁵⁰



It shares and expresses elements of Marxist critique but works with rather than represses the artistic sources and tendencies that seem to contradict this stance. It is for emancipation but also for autonomy and the preservation of individuality in the face of standardisation and in London we do not have to look far to see that such threats are not confined to the right of the political spectrum. Autopsia necessarily allows the interplay of a multiplicity of sources and influences, some of which are inherently unacceptable to more puritanical forms of leftism. In the interest of autonomous expression and critique it runs the risk of trying to harness a vortex of contradictory forces, just as Yugoslav self-management did to a very radical (and possibly fatal) extent. The aesthetic coldness and distance, the pseudo-bombastic music, the elitist hermeticism might appear out of time and place, very distant from relational aesthetics, activism and some of the more performatively moralistic forms of opposition. The troubling, ghostly forms in Autopsia's work are a reminder of the constant potential for catastrophe and collapse. This is a reminder that is ever more needed and ever less welcome within our actually-existing, privatised technological utopias.



"This is the era of the rule of thanaticism: the mode of production of non-life."¹⁵¹



Autopsia informs us that its 1989 work *Death is The Mother of Beauty* (which won one of the last Yugoslav prizes for contemporary composition before the onset of war), was oriented " ... toward an understanding of the un-homeliness ('not-being-at-home; not-being-in-the-homeland') which occurs in the catastrophic age of groundless faith."¹⁵² How much more groundless is our faith in progress now and how much greater is the capacity for catastrophe? Catastrophe does not always arrive on a black horse. It sneaks in slowly, even attempts



to befriend and seduce us. Too often in history it has to be felt, tasted and suffered before it is confronted and there is no guarantee that any response will not be too late. *Scars of Europa* from the same album, which received a prize for works commemorating the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution is more in its time now than it was then. The scars that began to become visible in the agonies of extended death

are ever more visible. Europe is besieged from within and without, compulsively self-harming and importing and exporting death. The 2014 film created to accompany it dramatizes our historical moment powerfully. The endless, nocturnal train journeys across Von Trier's *Europa* are visible again, framing poetically bleak and portentous scenes of crows and the digging of graves. There is no trace of the city or of culture, only an unforgiving nature.¹⁵³

Autopsia's body of work contains the temptation or the incitement to use it as a memorial or a tombstone to dreams of human progress, to surrender to a fetishized ideal of death, just as others will surrender to a fetishized ideal of an immaculate, digital after-life. Now that a time has been reached when death is undergoing abolition and privatisation, Autopsia's work might seem to be done, its point made, its options exhausted. If this were the case, it might be hoped that survivors of what may be to come could gather and harvest the implications of Autopsia's work.

Even though its goal is death, it is not (yet) passivity or resignation. It continues to work and to develop new techniques and forms. It displays and feeds on its own wounds and contradictions, refusing to surrender into a fixed ideal of a final endpoint, even while it seems to offer this as an ambivalent consolation. Tension, catastrophe and alienation are never entirely absent from the work but they are rarely entirely dominant. Its mystery science still moves forward and contains moments of great poetic intensity and contemplation, often derived from the re-combination of the building blocks of its mythical grid with the possibilities of new techniques as well as with grim realities. Is it possible that the tolling bells heard so often in its music also animate the spirit that they seem to mourn? The work goes on in full awareness of what may be to come, it draws inspiration and even comfort from it. As horizons contract and darken a complex poetry is a light in the darkness "for those who are still capable of seeing."¹⁵⁴





Naš cilj je smrt

Autopsia

capable of making its own food; — opposed to *saprophyte*.

au/to-plas'tic (-plás'tík); *adj.* 1. Of or pertaining to autoplásty. 2. Adaptable to one's environment.

au/to-plas'ty (ô'tô-plás'tŷ), *n.* [*auto-* + *-plasty*.] *Surg.* The repairing of lesions with tissue from the same body.

au/top-sy (ô'tôp-sŷ; ô'tŷp-), *n.*; *pl.* -SIES (-sŷz). [*Gr. autopsia*, fr. *autoptos* seen by oneself, fr. *autos* self + *optos* seen.] 1. Personal observation; ocular view. 2. Inspection, and partial dissection, of a dead body to learn the cause of death, nature and extent of disease, etc.; post-mortem examination.

au/to-sta-bil'i-ty (ô'tô-stá-bŷl'ŷ.tŷ), *n.* *Mech.* Stability due to automatic action of self-operative mechanism; also, stability due to inherent qualities, as shape.

chair; go; sing; then, thin; nature, verdure (118); 1
Numbers refer to §§ in Guide to Pronunciation. Explanations

Notes

1. See Sharon Zukin, *Beyond Marx and Tito: Theory and Practice in Yugoslav Socialism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 213.
2. Autopsia *Humanity is The Devil 1604 – 1994*, Compact Disc, Hypnobeat, Germany, CD 3429-2, 1995. See <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-Humanity-Is-The-Devil-1604-1994/release/10934>
3. Autopsia interview with Nicolas Ballet, unpublished, 2015. This interview is part of ongoing research for a PhD in Art History on visual culture in industrial music of the 1970s and 1980s at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.
4. Video footage of the exhibition can be seen here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AKQ-CRh4eE>
5. Monroe, Alexei, *Balkan Hardcore*, Central Europe Review, 19th June 2000. <http://www.ce-review.org/00/24/monroe24.html>
6. In 1992, during the hyper-inflation caused by sanctions, a portrait of Tesla appeared on a 10,000,000,000 dinar banknote and he was also present on the 100 dinar note issued in 1992, the final series of currency issued by the National Bank of Yugoslavia. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banknotes_of_the_Yugoslav_dinar
7. See <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-Mystery-Science/release/8078>
8. See Thomas Lee Kelley *The Enigma of Nikola Tesla: A Cultural Studies Analysis of his Legacy*, M.A. Thesis, Arizona State University, 1997, p. 20.
9. Ballet, interview transcript.
10. Autopsia, *Apocrypha*, Zagreb: UPI2M PLUS, 2013, p. 47.
11. I am grateful to Zach Palmer for pointing out Autopsia's use of certain passages from Foucault.
12. *Apocrypha*, p. 16
13. Monroe, Alexei, *Interrogation Machine* Laibach and NSK, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005, p. 65-66.
14. Grlić, Danko. *Estetika I – IV*. (Aesthetics I. – IV.). Zagreb: Naprijed, 1974 – 1979. For an English language discussion of his work and its wider context see Kreft, Lev, *Aesthetic Marxism: Yugoslavia and After*, 2016. https://www.academia.edu/27468925/Aesthetic_Marxism_Yugoslavia_and_after
15. *Apocrypha*, p. 21.
16. *Apocrypha*, p. 50
17. Discussed in Ballet, interview transcript.
18. Autopsia, *The Secret Block For A Secret Person In Ireland*, 12", Illuminating Technologies IT001 12", 1999. <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-The-Secret-Block-For-A-Secret-Person-In-Ireland/release/1272539>
19. *Apocrypha*, p. 37
20. *Apocrypha*, p. 18

21. Sonja Jankov, *Autopsia: Džon Kejdž ovih prostora*, 5 November 2012, b92.net. http://www.b92.net/kultura/vesti.php?nav_category=1087&yyyy=2012&mm=11&dd=05&nav_id=657747 A version of the text also appears in a 2014 collection of essays by Jankov on contemporary Serbian art: prlozi o vizuelnoj umetnosti. See <https://issuu.com/crnizec/docs/visuals>

22. See <https://reason.com/archives/2016/01/16/the-gut-anarchism-of-john-cage> The article also points out that Cage went through a Maoist phase, another aspect of his political life that contradicts his myth as a kind of secular saint of contemporary music.

23. See the work of the British musicologist Ian Pace on this subject, which within the context of the Anglo-American academy has an inherently heretical quality: <http://ianpace.com/?event=lecture-ideological-constructions-of-experimental-music-and-anglo-american-nationalism-in-the-historiography-of-post-1945-music>

24. *Wool City Rocker*, 10 January 1981, 13. I am grateful to Zach Palmer for unearthing this document.

25. Autopsia's *Red Nights* appears on the third compilation in this Slovene compilation series, *Ex-Yu Electronica, Vol IV: Bilo Jednom Na Balkanu* (2013).

26. See <https://www.discogs.com/Various-19-Keys-19-Bands/release/256449>

27. Autopsia appeared twice on the Marzidovshek Minimal Laboratorium tape label compilations *The Second Slovene Wave* and *Yugoslavian Sound Poetry* (both 1987). For the label's extensive and much sought after discography see: <https://www.discogs.com/label/108302-Marzidovshek-Minimal-Laboratorium>

28. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mvXdKRiitg&index=5&list=PLmjuFIXLMCmcq5uDgG7V3wmOLVdp-TxmD>

29. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgsYrbS37Qg>

30. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DsWXfE_BDA The Cyclical Cross refers to the Great Cross At Hendaye, a visual symbolisation of the apocalypse associated with some strands of Christianity, Alchemy and Rosicrucianism. A slightly longer version of the track entitled *The Cyclic Cross Of Hendaye* appears on the 1991 compilation *Wound* co-released by the British label Gymanstic and the German Hypnobeat, with which Autopsia remained until 1996. Many of these early tracks also featured on the tape release *Autopsia Oscularum Infame* Produkcija Slovenija – K-009, Cassette, C40, Yugoslavia, 1987. <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-In-Vivo/release/2678451>

31. Vladimir Mattioni *Autopsia*, Muzej savremene umetnosti Vojvodine, Novi Sad, 2012, p. 89.

32. See the series *Die Aussicht*, 1988. Examples in Mattioni, *ibid*, pp. 20-22.

33. *Silentium Post Clamores* from the *Death Is The Mother Of Beauty* CD, Staalplaat, Holland 1990 refers to a Rosicrucian text by Michael Maier, *Silentium post clamores*, published in Frankfurt am Main 1617.

34. See <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-Factory-Rituals/release/4810911>
35. Email interview with the author, October 2016.
36. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6r8T4BXrks>
37. Emerging from the same post-industrial milieu but at the other end of the political and artistic spectrum, Death in June's use of the SS Totenkopf skull also reflected this tendency.
38. Used in the work *Autopsia*, *Autopsia letak*, 1985. See Mattioni, op. cit., 14. Also visible in the image is another recurrent motif: Chris crucified on a cog wheel.
39. See the 1988 work *Objekt* – a circular saw emblazoned with *Autopsia*'s name and a heraldic motif in Mattioni, *Autopsia*, op. cit., p.40.
40. *Autopsia* interview with Nicolas Ballet, unpublished, 2015.
41. See *Autopsia Karl Rossmann Fragments CD* (Illuminating Technologies 2008). The album purports to be a series of re-workings of the largely unknown Czech experimental composer and artist Karl Rossmann, of whom almost no records exist.
42. Dejan Sretenović, *Autopsia or On Death and Salvation*, Umělec magazine 2010/2 <http://divus.cc/london/en/article/Autopsia-or-on-death-and-salvation>
43. Various, *Энергия*, OMS Records, 2007. See <https://www.discogs.com/Variouss-Энергия/master/3434>
44. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Requiem
45. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcEYu28yGak>
46. See <https://freie-referate.de/deutsch/grosser-dankchoral-bertold-brecht>
47. *Apocrypha*, p. 49.
48. Jean-François Trubert, "Das Berliner Requium (Requiem) und Vom Tod im Wald: music and lyrics fusion around the idea of death" in Hillesheim, Jürgen; Brockmann, Stephen; Mayer, Mathias (ed.) / *Brecht und der Tod = Brecht and Death* (2007), see <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/German/German-idx?type=turn&entity=German.BrechtYearbook032.p0327&id=German.BrechtYearbook032&size=text>
49. *ibid.*
50. *Autopsia* interview with Nicolas Ballet, unpublished, 2015.
51. Laibach, 10 Items of the Covenant. See <http://www.laibach.org/data/10-items-of-the-covenant/>
52. The image can be seen at: <https://www.discogs.com/artist/6177-Autopsia>
53. See the online catalogue *Autopsia Images of the Silent Past* (Illuminating Technologies 2009) at https://issuu.com/Autopsiaarchive/docs/Autopsia_book_ii
54. *Apocrypha*, p. 15
55. *Autopsia, Le Chant De La Nuit*, Illuminating Technologies – IT005, CDr, 2005. <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-Le-Chant-De-La-Nuit/release/522962>

56. Full discography at: <https://www.discogs.com/label/48372-Illuminating-Technologies>
57. Autopsia, *The Silence Of The Lamb – Waldsinfonie*, Hypnobeat – CD 21040, Germany, 1993 <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-The-Silence-Of-The-Lamb-Waldsinfonie/release/211199>
58. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilles_de_Rais
59. Various, *Prager Kodex, Discordia – DISC 050 CD*, Germany, 1995.
60. Interview with Nicolas Ballet, op. cit.
61. It has been subtly self-violated in Nicolas Ballet's previously mentioned 2016 Autopsia interview.
62. *Apocrypha*, p. 79.
63. *Apocrypha*, p. 47.
64. *Apocrypha*, p. 42.
65. See http://www.azothalchemy.org/azoth_ritual.htm
66. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkVqUW1eHw>
67. Mattioni, op. cit., 92.
68. See Autopsia, self-titled, self-released cassette, 1985. <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-Autopsia/release/841751>
69. Autopsia and Achtar, *Radical Machines, Night Landscapes*, CD, Illuminating Technologies – IT 0010, 2008. See <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-Radical-Machines-Night-Landscapes/release/1438596>
70. *Apocrypha*, p. 20.
71. *Apocrypha*, p. 48
72. *Apocrypha*, p. 21
73. *Apocrypha*, p. 44
74. Extract from the sleevenotes of the *Death Is The Mother Of Beauty* CD, 1990.
75. James Hillman, *Kinds of Power A Guide to Its Intelligent Uses*, New York: Currency Doubleday, 1995, p. 221.
76. See <https://youtu.be/qEtvCu8FyDY?list=PLZISgwgMgCCUjVETHyANb069M3eUTEHI2>
77. James Hillman, *A Terrible Love of War*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2004, p. 52.
78. Interview with Nicolas Ballet, op. cit.
79. These lines are spoken at the conclusion Infortunium (from Autopsia, *Kristallmacht*, CD, Hypnobeat, Germany, 1993) and are visible in the 2011 video for *Monster and Mad Point* from *Weltuntergang*. <https://youtu.be/25Nidqx9zCc?list=PLZISgwgMgCCUjVETHyANb069M3eUTEHI2>
80. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVEiMaE7Tzk>
81. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVEiMaE7Tzk> A shorter version without the vocal element appeared as Little Drummer Boy on the (*White Christmas* EP, Hypnobeat CD, 1994) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRz2790dFSY&index=44&list=PLZISgwgMgCCUjVETHyANb069M3eUTEHI2> The EP also features a noisier alternate version of the main theme listed by Ikkona as *Autopsia Christmas + Weihnachten bei Autopsia* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_igZZHoYJs
82. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKiLZrmB5Y8>

83. See https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Dancing_Song_to_the_Mistral_Wind
84. *Apocrypha*, pp. 47-48
85. James Hillman, in Thomas Moore (Ed.) *The Essential James Hillman A Blue Fire*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 163.
86. This compilation presents re-recorded and/or unreleased tracks and versions. Confusingly, it has the same title as a cassette compilation that was released in Holland and America in 1988 and re-released on CD in 1999.
87. *Autopsia In Vivo* 1988.
88. See <https://www.discogs.com/Autopsia-Requiem-Pour-Un-Empire/release/116122>
89. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dPnuBKEH48>
90. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwcAueypoqE&app=desktop>
91. Various – *The Lamp Of The Invisible Light*, Cthulhu Records – CR 11 CD, Compilation, Germany, 1991. See <https://www.discogs.com/Variou-The-Lamp-Of-The-Invisible-Light/release/185734>
92. Cited in Deleuze, Gilles, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p. 114.
93. Mattioni, op. cit., p. 89
94. *ibid.*
95. From a former version of the Autopsia website, accessed March 2011: http://autopsia.net/Autopsia_pdf/Autopsia_Interview_08EN.pdf
96. Sretenović, *Autopsia or On Death and Salvation*, op. cit.
97. See Mills, Jon (2000). *Hegel on the Unconscious Soul*. *Science et Esprit*, 52(3), pp. 321-340. Available at: <http://www.processpsychology.com/new-articles/Science-Espirit.htm>
98. The Zone in Tarkovsky's *Stalker* is a tempting metaphor to apply to Autopsia, especially given its own use of Tarkovsky.
99. Mills, op. cit.
100. *ibid.*
101. *Apocrypha*, p. 45
102. Taken from a Chinese Alchemical text used in the video for *Factory Rituals V*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8JeVxfr-qEM> See Lu-Chiang Wu, Tenney L. Davis, Wei Po-Yang, "An Ancient Chinese Treatise on Alchemy Entitled Ts'an T'ung Ch'i", *Isis*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Oct., 1932), pp. 210-289, The University of Chicago Press on behalf of The History of Science Society, p. 238. I am grateful to Dušan Đorđević Mileusnić for this information.
103. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka, Towards A Minor Literature*, London: Athlone Press, 1986, p. 57.
104. Monroe, *Interrogation Machine*, p. 11.
105. Two polarised examples can be given here of groups who invoked similar ritualistic atmosphere to Autopsia but were consciously invocative. The neo-Byzantine Macedonian project Aporea used certain industrial and experimental techniques to produce an overtly

Orthodox work full of biblical references and motivated by genuine belief. In the case of Italian act Die Sonne Satan's 1993 album *Fac-Totum* the spirit being invoked is diametrically opposed. This is a superior example of Satanically-themed dark ambient which avoids cliché and absurdity more convincingly than some other artists dabbling with such forces (whether motivated by personal belief or simply the desire to communicate an infernal atmosphere).

106. See <http://strangeattractor.co.uk/events/hauntology-now-may-12th/>

107. Chris and Cosey, Coil and Throbbing Gristle are generally mentioned in music historiography and until very recently many other pioneering industrial artists have been left out of the picture and industrial is often only mentioned reluctantly, if at all.

108. From *Weltuntergang*. The piece is attributed to 1990.

109. Ksenija Stevanović 'Autopsia or On Erasing the Musicality' in *Autopsia Mirror of Destruction*, Belgrade: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010.

110. *Apocrypha*, p. 60.

111. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUkpShnyvco>

112. *Apocrypha*, p.39

113. *Apocrypha*, p. 60 - 61.

114. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdGthFB9sck>

115. *ibid*

116. *Apocrypha*, p. 61.

117. *Apocrypha*, p. 61

118. Interview with Nicolas Ballet, *op. cit.*

119. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcEYu28yGak&list=PLA08A3E39E9E3BB40&index=5>

120. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0Bdjk6F8PQ>

121. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jte2Yacs1A>

122. Deleuze, *op. cit.*, 128.

123. For more on this concept see Monroe, Alexei, *Ice on the Circuits/Coldness as Crisis: The Re-subordination of Laptop Sound*, Contemporary Music Review, Volume 22, Number 4, December 2003 2003, pp. 35-43(9).

124. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-Sbvs8SEDI>

125. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jvPi2CFs0E>

126. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbDAi5kjjfI>

127. See <https://youtu.be/EzJG9TZPFL0?list=PLZISgwgMgCCVqwsKrBH4d0IBqqRNwWfSq>

128. Introduction: Jonathan P. Eburne and Rita Felski *New Literary History*, Vol 41 No 4, Autumn 2010.: What is an avant-garde?, vi

129. *Apocrypha*, p. 44.

130. See Mattioni, *Autopsia*, *op. cit.*, p.6.

131. *Apocrypha*, p. 67.

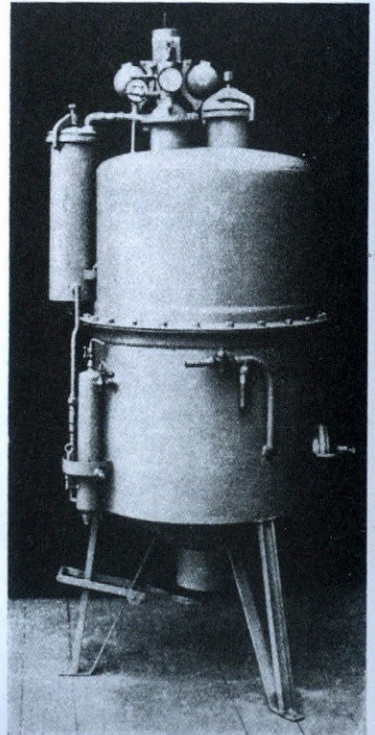
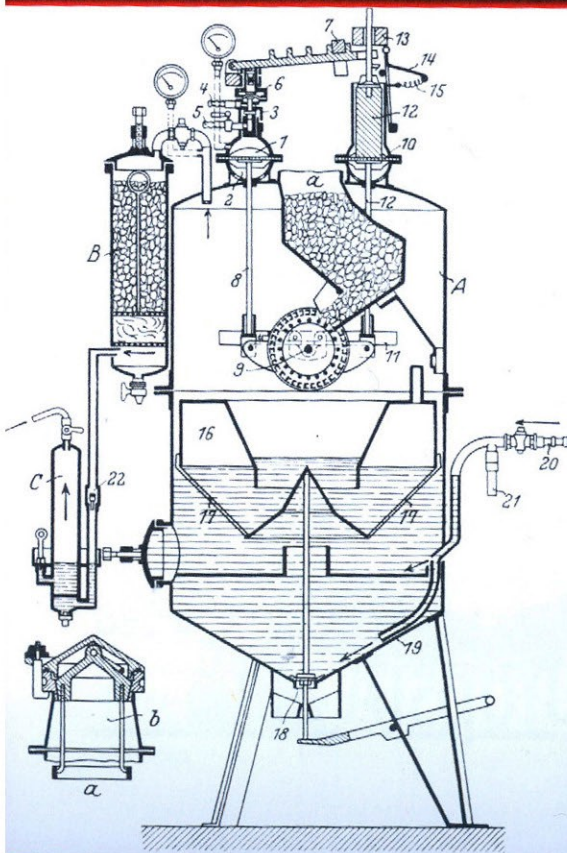
132. Interview with Nicolas Ballet, *op. cit.*

133. *ibid.*

134. Kelley, op. cit., p. 40
135. See examples in the 2009 Illuminating Technologies catalogue *Autopsia Images of The Silent Past Works 1980 – 1989*, p. 24.
136. From the series *Dokumenti* (Documents) See Mattioni, op. cit., 63.
137. See *Apocrypha*, illustration XVIII for an alternative version.
138. Interview with Nicolas Ballet, op. cit.
139. *Apocrypha*, p. 85.
140. Hillman, op. cit., p. 220.
141. *ibid.*, p. 24.
142. Interview with Nicolas Ballet, op. cit.
143. See <http://www.openculture.com/2016/09/artificial-intelligence-program-tries-to-write-a-beatles-song-listen-to-daddys-car.html>
144. See <https://www.fastcoexist.com/3026132/a-creepy-new-startup-wants-to-create-living-avatars-for-dead-people>
145. Interview with Nicolas Ballet, op. cit.
146. *ibid.*
147. Autopsia's full awareness of and engagement with the Frankfurt School and other Marxist analyses of processes of mystification have to be remembered here. This strand of its work is a strong counterweight to its own tendencies.
148. Retrieved from http://Autopsia.net/Autopsia_pdf/Autopsia_Interview_08EN.pdf in March 2011. The content is no longer available on the site.
149. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myH_AamhGYw
150. Text from the multimedia Autopsia CDR *Le Chant De La Nuit*, Illuminating Technologies IT005, 2005.
151. Wark, McKenzie, *Birth of Thanaticism*, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/04/birth-of-thanaticism/#.WADKwLS4mi4>
152. *Apocrypha*, p. 46.
153. See <https://youtu.be/qEtvCu8FyDY?list=PLZISgwgMgCCUjVETHyANb069M3eUTEHI2>
154. Interview with Nicolas Ballet, op. cit.



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AutopsiA
THANATOPOLIS
by
Alexei Monroe

Illustrations and artworks by AutopsiA
Design by Ivan Mečl

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“Níl luibh ná leigheas an aghaidh an bháis.”

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Aesthetic coldness and distance, pseudo-bombastic music, elitist hermeticism. The characteristics and elements of Autopsia's fascinating and troubling works might appear out of time and place in the 21st Century. Are they any more than reminders of distant, foreign nightmares that we can safely forget? In fact, the troubling, ghostly forms in Autopsia's work bear witness to the constant potential for catastrophe and collapse. Such reminders are ever more needed and ever less welcome within our actually-existing, privatised, technological utopias. If the "20th Century is Dead", is the 21st Century (Living) Death? What does Autopsia, the most cryptic of industrial art projects, with its origins in London, its formative years in ex-Yugoslavia and more than two decades of work in Prague, contribute to 21st culture? *Thanatopolis* is the first book in English to analyse the work of the secretive entity known as Autopsia. Why does such deliberately uncommunicative work matter at this time? The West is shaken by post-factual politics and the link between technical artefacts and technical knowledge is breaking. Knowledge is suspect and blind automation is innocent. Are Autopsia's frozen visual techno-archetypes now more potent than they were? Perhaps now they are not some quaint, admonitory commentary on Yugoslavia's terminal hyper-modernism, but also on our own, designed-in, always-already obsolescent culture and its simultaneous attempts to induce and to defeat death. *Thanatopolis*.

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