# Art State, Art Activism and Expanded Concept of Art

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Abstract: Contemporary post-aesthetic art implies an expanded concept of the work of art that also includes political functions. Beuys's concept of social sculpture and Marcuse's idea of society as a work of art can be complemented by Abreu's project of a musical orchestra as a social ideal (the Venezuelan example of the music and education project El Sistema) and the Neue Slowenische Kunst transnational state formed from the core of art. These concepts are close to the views of Hakim Bey (Temporary Autonomous Zone), with D'Annunzio also touching upon them with his State of Fiume (1919–1920), for which he wrote the constitution and defined music as its central governing principle. Although the art state is a utopian project, art can serve a variety of emancipatory functions even in the dystopian present to intervene in and change the political. In this article, we also discuss the case of art activism in Slovenia, where culture (with many engaged artists) has become a central part of civil society oriented towards social change. Art activism contributes to an expanded concept of the political, which includes new subjects and new forms of antagonisms. Likewise, such repurposing of art emphasises its role in research.
Keywords: art state, art activism, utopia, expanded concept of politics, subversive affirmation, civil society, art as research,

## INTRODUCTION

In the age of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), McDonaldisation (Ritzer, 1993), Microsoftisation (Lin, 2002), and social media, people are facing an altered role of contemporary art intended for functions in non-artistic and hybrid domains. This is art as a cognitive service and research (Ai Weiwei, 2018; Strehovec, 2020) that intervenes in economics, science, everyday life, entertainment and, above all, politics. Such art is part of civil society (Edwards, 2009), which, as a vehicle of social change, also intervenes in contemporary politics and expands its boundaries. In this regard, art activism (Mouffe, 2007; Groys, 2014; Flynn, 2016) plays a special role, striving for change in the educational, political, social, environmental and cultural areas. A contemporary artist does not create work but a special sociability (Bourriaud, 2002) as well as politics, e.g. using

a process of subversive affirmation (Arns and Sasse, 2005). In this article, we are primarily interested in the interventions of art (as part of civil society) in the political, where we encounter three modalities, specifically:

1) intervention in the political in the sense of 'artification', which implies (usually utopian) demands for change of life following the example of art (exercising creativity, aesthetic and artistic procedures in the transformation of the social, economic and political);

2) intervention in the political with direct actions that go hand in hand with parliamentary parties (the application of artistic procedures gives way to purely political approaches; the dystopian doubt about the power of art abandons artistic utopias);

3) intervention in the political in a way that presupposes a hybridisation of the two previous interventions in the sense that the artist combines the use of artistic procedures and direct political action in a dystopian reality.

To examine examples from points one and two, we will also touch upon the domains of the culture, art and politics of Slovenia (formed in 1991, EU member state), which can serve as a touchstone as well as a laboratory for re-enacting various interactions between the above domains and also for their study. The Republic of Slovenia is essentially linked to culture and art, particularly literature. The literary nationalism during the Spring of Nations in the first half of the 19th century and the creation of a national literary language (the central role was played by the poet France Prešeren (1800–1849), a contemporary of the romantic poets Adam Mickiewicz and Karel H. Macha) had a significant impact on the Slovene national identity. The independence process in the 1980s was also associated with the activity of literary intellectuals; here, I should mention the 57th issue of *Nova revija*, with articles written by social scientists and literati for the Slovenian National Programme (1987) and the Slovenian Writers' Association, which supported the independence movement in the 1980s with a variety of activities.

The first example of artistic intervention in the social and the political is directed towards the concept known as the art state. People encounter utopian projects modelled on Marcuse's concept of society as a work of art and the total work of art as a social ideal (according to Groys's notion from his *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*, Stalin fulfilled the avant-garde's dream of organising reality into a total work of art). Also relevant in this example

are projects by European neo-avant-garde artists of the 1960s and 1970s, most notably Joseph Beuys's (1921–1986) social sculpture and Allan Kaprow's (1927–2006) lifelike art. For Beuys, art is understood as a universal creative principle that must also have a direct impact on economics, politics and education. As a forerunner of research in social implications of art and beauty I can mention Friedrich Schiller and his theory of aesthetic education. With Schiller, people encounter the entry of the aesthetic – which is also inherent in aesthetic art – into the realm of instincts, where play drive is of primary importance, as he expressed with the following words: 'Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays' (1967: 107). Aesthetic art presupposes the primacy of beauty as a universal tool – an interface, in today's language – that opens up the way to freedom, and such a path should also be essential for politics.

Beauty as an attribute of free society is also addressed in Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation* and in his *Society as Work of Art*, where he argues that

the aesthetic is more than merely 'aesthetic.' It is the reason of sensibility, the form of the senses as pervaded by reason and as such the possible form of human existence. Beautiful form as the form of life is possible only as the totality of a potential free society and not merely in private, in one particular part or in the museum. (2007: 129)

The emphasis is on a beautiful form as a form of life and its potential for a free society, situated outside the museum.

The second example involves the intervention of art activists in political struggles following the example of the Slovenian group Janez Janša, which used the procedure of subversive affirmation and over-identification directed against the politician Janez Janša (1958), whose all three activists took. However, when one of the Janez Janša activists ran as a candidate on the list of the parliamentary party Levica in the 2018 elections, he supported the political-as-we-know-it, entering a real political struggle, the goal of which was not the art state but the state-as-we-know-it, with the party of the politician Janez Janša in the opposition. Such activism has a direct propaganda function, attempting to add something to the already well-established critique of Slovenian politician Janez Janša and right-wing populism, as expressed by parliamentary parties and non-governmental organisations, i.e. the left-wing segment of civil society in Slovenia. In this role, this movement differs from hashtag activism (2011), e.g. #MeToo,

which intervened in an area that had been ignored by mainstream media and party politics. The intervention of Janez Janša as a candidate of Levica for member of parliament accepted the language of the political party for which he stood, meaning that the art activists accepted the mechanisms of politics-as-we-know-it and directed their struggle towards its goals. Thus, this example represents citizen activism more than art activism.

The third example intervenes between the two previous modalities and directs us towards micro-utopias and activism that employ parody, prank, alienation and *détournement* (e.g. Situationists), which means that it still refers to art; however, these engagements no longer take place under the firmament of big narratives but are temporary projects, often involved in civil-society campaigns. The concept of 'everyday micro-utopias' was introduced by Bourriaud (2002: 31) to signify collective, relational and contextualised features of art. The collaboration of art activists in micro-utopias can expand the sphere of the political (and also the arts), while at the same time these activities are accompanied by an awareness of today's individuals entering an increasingly dystopian present in which universal demands inspired by movements from 1968 are no longer possible. The projects of micro-utopias certainly challenge the ossified, risk-averse concept of the political, where the horizontal distribution of power of equal political actors is difficult to enforce, which is the objective of P2P as a

mode of relationship that allows human beings to be connected and organised in networks, to collaborate, produce and share. The collaboration is often permissionless, meaning that one may not need the permission of another to contribute. The P2P system is, therefore, generally open to all contributors and contributions. ((Bauwens , Kostakis  and Pazaitis, 2019; 2)

Such a system, promoted by the P2P Foundation, can also loosen the rigidity of political institutions and generate economic and political innovations, and it is also important for participation of arts organisations.

## NSK STATE

Utopian art states also include the Neue Slowenische Kunst State (hereinafter: NSK State), founded by the NSK art collective in 1992. The NSK (1984) is composed of five units, specifically Laibach, IRWIN,

Noordung, New Collectivism and the Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy. The NSK State project, like the entire movement, borrows greatly from the (Russian) artistic avant-garde (Groys, 1992) as well as the European neo-avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. The influences of Joseph Beuys's social sculpture are particularly strong in the conception of the NSK State:

The NSK State is an abstract organism, a suprematist body, installed in a real social and political space as a sculpture comprising the concrete body warmth, spirit and work of its members. NSK confers the status of a state not to territory but to mind, whose borders are in a state of flux, in accordance with the movements and changes of its symbolic and physical collective body. The NSK State is a state in time, a state without territory and national borders, a sort of »spiritual state«. Besides the members of NSK, the right to NSK citizenship belongs to thousands around the world, to people of different religions, races, nationalities, sexes and beliefs. The right to citizenship is acquired through the ownership of an NSK passport. (1992).

The emphasis of this state is not on territory and nationality, but on the mind, meaning that the state is spiritual and thus open to creativity. It is a state in time without leaders, professional politicians and a 'central committee'; however, it is linked to actual states by the need for a passport, and it is also present within the framework of global consulates and embassies. The emphasis on the mind also implies the conceptuality of the NSK movement, which includes a series of questions and deconstructions that accompany its actions, while time implies its nomadic nature, meaning that the NSK State is not sedentary, bound to a territory.

NSK works as a nomadic interrogation machine which mutates and proliferates to bring everything into its scope, interrogating the systems that interrogate and manipulate at every level, from the psychic to the national. It attempts to transcend alienation using the codes of the same alienation, and to create a line of flight away from the apparent inevitability of oppression. (Monroe, 2008)

The nomadic machine is constantly in motion and fluid self-definition; to stop would mean to freeze its utopian potentials and to weaken its impact. In every respect, however, this is a project whose mechanisms can be explained through the poetics of the NSK art collective, aimed at flux and self-examination.

Dissatisfaction with something and the absence of something desired (the fact that something is missing) are always the starting point for

utopias, i.e. the search for ideal social solutions in a generally imaginary context, which was one of the generators of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). Today, great utopias (like grand narratives in the views of postmodern theorists) seem to be coming to an end, which means that the 21st century, with its initial milestone of September 11 (Ground Zero), requires activity that directs artists and workers in creative industries towards action within the framework of civil society and also towards direct political activity on social networks. In the USA, Australia, Canada and also Western Europe, art is essentially linked to capital – it is art incorporated (Stallabrass, 2004). Therefore, Eastern European artists, familiar with confrontation with the state because of their dissident predecessors, are more suitable for political engagement (within and beyond the framework of civil society). Simply put, they are used to discussion and negotiations with the state. Arns and Sasse, the authors of the article on subversive affirmation, therefore place great emphasis on Eastern European artists, with the discussion of the projects of the American duo, the Yes Men, included only at the end of their article.

## ART ACTIVISM AS ART AT THE SERVICE OF SOCIAL LIFE

Contemporary art is a machine constantly shifting its boundaries, redefining itself with every movement and phenomenon, living on self-questioning, uncertainty and conflict; 'Was ist Kunst' (and 'art as a question') is the fuel for this machine, which is sometimes self-referencing (the notion of the 'art-like art' by the performer Alan Kaprow, 1983), and focusing on non-artistic reality and connecting intensely with its components at other times. A phenomenon arising from this second tendency is art activism (according to Kaprow's distinction, this activity is 'lifelike art' as the art at the service of life), which found stimulations for its new articulations (e.g. hacktivism) especially in new media, as the effectiveness and velocity of its actions are made possible primarily by the World Wide Web. Among the groups that intervened in this domain early, I should mention Critical Art Ensemble, Anonymous, the Yes Men, Radical Software Group, eToy and Electronic Disturbance Theatre, which developed the software tool FloodNet, intended for citizens' electronic civil disobedience (non-violent digital action in the form of sit-ins) and solidarity with the Zapatistas (1998).

Like contemporary art, art activism is not a self-evident phenomenon but must always redefine itself anew. Boris Groys argues that

art activists react to the increasing collapse of the modern social state and try to replace the social state and the NGOs that for different reasons cannot or will not fulfil their role. Art activists do want to be useful, to change the world, to make the world a better place – but at the same time, they do not want to cease being artists. (2014: n.p.)

The essential emphasis for the argument in this essay is that activists do not want to cut ties with their artistic affiliation. This applies to artistic interventions in the political (art state), which is the case of the NSK, but such behaviour is less self-evident when it comes to the second example, namely the pure political engagement of the Slovenian activists of the Janez Janša group. The power of the artistic-political is to question the political-as-we-know-it, to apply the self-questioning logic of art to the political, to establish antagonisms in the political. Chantall Mouffe believes that art activism can still serve a function as 'counter-hegemonic interventions' in order to 'disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread' (2007: 5). Such interventions, like subversive affirmation and over-identification, however, also challenge art and encourage its re-purposing. 'Literature begins at the moment when literature becomes a question', noted Blanchot (1995: 300), and similar reasoning applies to contemporary art. Blurring the boundaries is an imperative of art, which should at present be reasonably applied to other domains as well. Similarly, the power of citizen science as a domain of involvement of the general public in research (Trouille, Lintott and Fortson, 2019) lies in redefining the domain of science and beginning to conduct research with new subjects beyond science-as-we-know-it.

Participation, interaction and collaboration have been the conceptual starting points for much art of the 20th century, from Dadaism to Fluxus, from mail art to hacker art. However, since the emergence of Web 2.0, networking has become not only an everyday practice, but also a pervasive business strategy. (Bazzicheli, 2013: 5)

Stock exchanges, cryptocurrencies, derivative financial instruments, advertisements, commercial video games and Hollywood films have begun to use artistic (also avant-garde) procedures and thus contribute to business innovations. Fringe practices of artistic and hacker online

communities have begun to intertwine with the mainstream in the areas of business and innovation as well, meaning that social media, business and the arts today interact with each other.

Art activism coexists with broader citizen activism, which is based on the social and political activities of engaged individuals. In the present, hashtag activism (Dowson, 2020) is particularly noticeable, involving decentralised social and political movements, which are essentially characterised by the promotion of horizontal integration of participants, social disobedience, and drawing attention to social inequality and abuse. One of the more influential is the yellow vests movement (Fr. *mouvement des gilets jaunes*), which began in October 2018 and at demonstrations demanded an end economic inequality and social violations. In 2020, global attention was drawn to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) social movement, which had launched in 2013 and is aimed at racially motivated violence against black people, especially violence perpetrated by police officers. George Floyd's violent death sparked numerous protests, including riots, across the U.S. and resonated around the world. The conviction of film producer Harvey Weinstein does not represent the end of the #MeToo movement founded by Tarana Burke (2006); on the contrary, it was relaunched by the American actor and activist Alyssa Milano's tweet sent on 15 October 2017.

With activities aimed against racial and sexual discrimination (the aforementioned Black Lives Matter and #MeToo), new media-based initiatives – drawing attention to social inequality and the role of corruption in this regard – have gained importance. Two examples are the website ipaidabribe.com in India and Malaysiakini.com in Malaysia; the latter has been criticising corruption in the country and media censorship for two decades (and was fined in 2021), while the Indian portal urges users to report cases of bribe solicitation when seeking employment in government administration.

## ACTIVISTS OF THE JANEZ JANŠA GROUP: DIRECT COLLABORATION WITH A PARLAMENTARY PARTY

An example of the direct political engagement of artists is the practice of the three Slovenian activists Janez Janša, who took on the process of subversive affirmation and over-identification to confront the political

orientations espoused by politician Janez Janša, either as prime minister or as opposition leader. Subversive affirmation carries out rebellion and criticism through over-identifications, repetitions, and appropriations of the procedures and strategies of its opponents.

Subversive affirmation and over-identification are tactics – if we are to follow Michel de Certeau's definition – that allow artists to take part in certain social, ideological, political, or economic discourses, and affirm, appropriate, or consume them while simultaneously undermining them. On the Western art scene, these phenomena appeared here and there among the Lettrists and the Situationist International (Arns and Sasse, 2005: 452).

The authors of this definition consider the application of this procedure mainly in Eastern European art, which has a complex relationship with state institutions and their ideology. They therefore also focus on the NSK, particularly on the iconography and performance of the Laibach band in Belgrade in March 1989, during the rise of Greater Serbian nationalism under Slobodan Milošević (1941–2006), *who was in 1999* charged by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (*ICTY*) with war crimes. Before the concert, Peter Mlakar, a collaborator with the band, gave a speech in Serbian in the manner of Milošević, saying what the audience had listened to every day at the time, in a way that was more pathetically Milošević-like than if Milošević had spoken himself, i.e. in a manner of overemphasising the opponent's gestures and appropriating his style. However, he suddenly abandoned Serbian and switched to German, a language that was considered the language of the aggressor nation in Tito's former Yugoslavia. With that insert in German, he broke the over-identification and established defamiliarisation, causing the listeners to suddenly become uncertain – the impact of the German language made them think, thus making Laibach's intervention hit its mark.

In their confrontation with Janez Janša and right-wing populism (Traverso, 2019), the three already-mentioned Slovenian artists in 2007 renamed themselves Janez Janša and joined his party, the Slovenian Democratic Party. It is an activist project named 'The Janez Janša,' which is the name of a Slovenian right-wing politician who was the prime minister of the Republic of Slovenia from 2004 to 2008, while before and after that term he was the leader of the Slovenian opposition and leader

of the Slovenian SDS party (he was the prime minister again for a very short period in 2012–13, and in 2020–21). In recent years, the named party has been the strongest party in Slovenia, which is usually dominated by centre-left parties, while the right-wing opposition is extremely intellectually undernourished and weak in terms of social theory. The renaming of these artists was definitive for two of them (only painter Žiga Kariž abandoned the common name Janša in 2012) and not an occasional assuming of identities in confrontation with corporations and transnational organisations (e.g. the WTO), which is what the American Yes Men do.

In Janša, the renamed artists are preoccupied with this name; they pronounce it on various occasions and also refer to it in their other projects, and they try to interest other individuals in the ritual repetition of this name. The artistic Janez Janšas are obsessed with constantly rotating 'Janša drive'; in doing so they try to demonstrate that there is something wrong with this politician. By exaggerating Janša, by being demonstratively occupied with him, they direct the public opinion toward the critique of Janša. What is more, the intention of this engine is that when all become Janez Janša, this person becomes a nobody in his exclusive visibility; then the politician Janša will lose his recognisability, meaning that he will have to rename himself or even leave the territory in which he established himself with this name. These artists therefore strive for a purely political goal – the weakening of the right-wing politician and his real and symbolic erasure. Whereas American activists' collective the Yes Men deploy some artistic features and devices that enable cynical, satirical, ironic, humorous, and to a certain extent ambivalent effects, the Janez Janša group behaves 100 percent seriously and politically persuasively.

The activists of the Yes Men group introduced disruption to the World Wide Web by setting up fake and parody websites of corporations and politicians that were very similar to the original ones. One such website was the fake WTO site (1999), which, however, convinced users to start asking questions pertaining to WTO activity. Consequently, the WTO invited representatives of the Yes Men to attend a conference and present their views, which means that the two activists of this group acted on behalf of the institution they actually opposed. The duo also used sophisticated effects in their critique of the former US President Donald

Trump by printing 10,000 copies of *The Washington Post* with the hard-hitting title *Unpresidented.* The headline of the issue, published on 16 January 2019, was about the resignation of then-US President Trump, which he had written himself on a handkerchief in the White House oval office before leaving by helicopter.

Today, we are entering a reality in which the dominant political and economic system easily appropriates and absorbs the practices and tactics of resistance (neoliberal capitalism is so powerful that it can choose its enemies and sometimes even fund them). The corporation as a machine also feeds on its own criticism. Critical distance no longer means anything. Therefore, the authors of the article on subversive affirmation and over-identification reject critical distance in this process; they see its argument only in an emphasised simulation of the experience of what is being criticised. These are affirmative tactics that overemphasise and repeat what is being criticised. Although subversive affirmation emerged from art activism, it is today becoming a tactic of citizen activism.

In the Janez Janša project, we are actually encountering citizen activism, which does not stem from procedures derived from the core of art (typical of Beuys) but is a civil society initiative aimed at maintaining a political community profiled in accordance with their wishes. In fact, we are seeing activities undertaken in coordination with the Slovenian parliamentary party Levica and intended to take on the politician Janez Janša, his right-wing populism and his efforts to bring the Republic of Slovenia closer to the Visegrád Group.

Such a role of art activists is legal and legitimate, but it is not important for the development of the art state and the artistic profiling of politics. It is a conformist expression, mimicking the activities of the political and media mainstream (from parties to mainstream media and left-wing civil society) in art. The situation is similar to that of an artist working in science (e.g. bioart) being satisfied only with the role of an illustrator of the achievements of others, giving up his or her more active role in artistic collaboration with scientists and his or her own independent research in terms of citizen science. What the Janez Janša group did (they are no longer active in 2021) was just participate in the political marketing of the parliamentary party Levica, without investing any noticeable political and artistic surplus and without showing any non-conformist courage. With such orientation, The Janez Janša group differs from hashtag activism, e.g.

#MeToo, which initially intervened in an area that had been ignored by mainstream media and party politics; it also differs from Beuys, who took political actions through art. The Laibach (NSK) concert in Belgrade was also more radical, closer to the artistic agenda, as was the activity of the American duo the Yes Men and Electronic Disturbance Theatre (e.g. with the Transborder Immigrant Tool, 2007).

## MICRO-UTOPIAS, ISLANDS OF DIVERSITY

The classic work by Hakim Bey, *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (hereinafter abbreviated: TAZ), has already innovatively intervened in the domain of marginal hacking and artistic practices that operate beyond the Utopia (with a capital U), the state and great narratives. Such a zone is not nowhere, but somewhere; however, even this concept – which the author describes as an essay, suggestion and poetic fancy – is fairly utopian.

The TAZ is at odds with history, time, the principle of revolution, isms and the state (as an empire of spectacle and simulation). It is an uprising (Latin: insurrection) as a misguided revolution, as something not leading to something great. 'If History IS "Time", as it claims to be, then the uprising is a moment that springs up and out of Time, violates the "law" of History' (*Bey,* 1985: 98). Revolution requires permanence (i.e. permanent revolution), while an uprising is temporary. Opposing Revolution with a capital R is one of the incentives for the TAZ project, which has found a great opportunity on the World Wide Web for its temporary articulations in terms of islands. Bey argued that

the TAZ has a temporary but actual location in time and a temporary but actual location in space. But clearly it must also have 'location' in the Web, and this location is of a different sort, not actual but virtual, not immediate but instantaneous. The Web not only provides logistical support for the TAZ, it also helps to bring it into being; crudely speaking one might say that the TAZ 'exists' in information-space as well as in the 'real world'. (1985: 102)

The TAZ is not conceived as only a temporary island that allows hacking activities and alternative lifestyles, but it is also an authentic place where art is articulated, specifically art that escapes the art world (the market) – where it is perceived as a commodity – and is re-directed towards creative games. 'In the TAZ art as a commodity will simply

become impossible; it will instead be a condition of life' (1985: 116). By defining art as a condition of life, as opposed to a commodity, Bey drew closer to Alan Kaprow's concept of lifelike art, as well as Beuys's concept of social sculpture. Bey's concept is also useful for understanding more contemporary artistic and social phenomena, linking Bey to Bourriaud's views on micro-utopias. Bourriaud follows in Bey's footsteps by expanding the understanding of art as a condition of life to a way of living where 'the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and Utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale chosen by the artist' (2002: 5).

In Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, micro-utopias – which imply micro-communities, meaning that they generate micro-sociability – take the place of great utopias. With the concept of 'everyday micro-utopia' (2002: 31), Bourriaud refers to a contextualised project that, by its collective and relational nature, promotes interactivity between artists and audiences. Certainly, there is also a great emphasis on the performative, the processual, the eventful and meetings, which was already popular among the Viennese actionists (for example, their predecessor Hermann Nitsch with Orgien-Mysterien-Theater). There is only a small step from micro-utopias to micro-protests, such as those carried out by artistic hacktivism (for example, the actions of the Anonymous group, which allow an anonymous individual to take part in large protest activities).

John Wood (2007) also touched upon this subject, understanding micro-utopias connected in networks as substitutes for singular and monolithic utopias. Micro-utopias are either temporary centres of meetings or digital platforms for collective political decision-making. They need to be designed (this presents an opportunity for artists and designers) as spaces that encourage interactions between individuals and guide them towards creativity.

Nowadays, Bourriaud's micro-utopias can be relativised by the intrusion of dystopian content into current narratives as well as social and cultural paradigms. However, the challenges of artistic, generally utopian interventions within the framework of civil society remain relevant because civil society is at present becoming a factor that can relativise the established concept of the political. In modern society and politics, civil society plays an active role in social change; it is considered as a public

sphere of political struggle and contestation over ideas, concepts and beliefs (Gramsci, 1971).

A number of non-governmental organisations (including cultural and artistic organisations) and critical individuals participate in activist movements, among which the aforementioned hashtag activism stands out. Civil society as a domain separate from and in opposition to the state (Khilnani, 2001; Berglund, 2009) has changed significantly with new media, e.g. the electronic civil disobedience movement (Critical Art Ensemble, 1996), but at the same time represents a domain through which the deep state can operate and threaten the primary democratic nature of activist projects.

The segment of civil society which is important today is the one that puts realistic demands at the forefront and seeks to change reality in accordance with ethics and the rule of law. In this situation, art is no longer the main drive of social change but works (often hand in hand) with other domains, such as the creative industry and citizen science, which presuppose participation of the general public. These phenomena are motivated by global social inequality and segregation, which have already been pointed out by the Occupy Wall Street movement (2011) with the political slogan 'We are the 99%', which also involved artists and art groups such as the Illuminators. In 2012, Occupy activists gathered in Kassel, Germany, to take part in Documenta 13 (9 June to 16 September) and in Berlin, Germany, to participate in the Berlin Biennale 7 (27 April to 1 July). During the Documenta 13 exhibition in Kassel, the activists, considering themselves an 'evolutionary art work', camped in front of the Museum Fridericianum (the main Documenta venue). In doing so, they ran into a contradiction, as they did not direct their protest towards the art institution and the museum they had temporarily occupied; much of the political message was thus lost, the reference to Beuys sounding empty. The movement that had been conceived as political after its political function became perceived as a work of art and was accepted into the art archives (Loewe, 2015). It again became apparent (as with most activist phenomena) that art institutions in particular accept marginal artistic-political phenomena (and exhibit and musealise them), while artistic activism shows far too little interest in political theory and its archives.

The intervention of the artistic-political in the political, carried out by the artistic segment of civil society in terms of counter-hegemonic

interventions (Mouffe, 2007), may lead to the situation where the political (which is currently full of contradictions) can be said – like literature, according to Blanchot – to begin at the moment when it becomes a question. In this respect, everything that revolves around the concepts that we have in this article termed as an art state and where it is still worth noting Beuys's radical views today, is also important for the study of the political today. Art activism will not cease and become lost in citizen activism only if it insists on the artistic, which today is synonymous with uncertainty, disturbance, innovation, self-questioning, blurring the boundaries and performativity, as well as unconventional creativity, inventing new tactical devices and an excess of imagination. It was on creativity as a universal principle that Joseph Beuys, the founder of the Free International University in Düsseldorf (dedicated to fostering creativity and interdisciplinary research), built his artistic, political and artistic-political projects, meaning that it presupposed the collaboration of artists, scientists and politicians. Every domain of an individual's activity can be understood through art. Everyone has the opportunity to become an artist, Beuys pointed out. Life is a social sculpture that every individual helps shape, while society is conceived as a total work of art (e.g. the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk).

## CONCLUSIONS

Following breaking news and Wall Street indices, including the movement of cryptocurrency rates, is today no longer enough; people should direct their attention to new publications on the book market, for example to those that focus on understanding new scientific, social and humanistic paradigms. Along with the technical innovations and artistic events, the social implications of Covid-19, Google, and the philosophy of the Anthropocene, the new scientific image of the world, with discoveries in particle physics, nanotechnology and black hole astrophysics, also presents a challenge. We should also pay attention to the marginal production of the new political, shaped by contributions of the contemporary civil society and art as an important part of it.

The concept of the art state discussed in this essay is a touchstone for understanding contemporary art and new concepts of the political, civil society and art activism (Rudakoff, 2021). Repurposing art goes hand in

hand with repurposing in other domains. The destabilisation and deconstruction of the traditional image of the world were carried out simultaneously at the beginning of the 20th century by artists, philosophers and natural scientists (e.g. quantum physics, relativity theory, the discovery of the unconscious); similarly, active citizens from various domains today participate in redefining the political.

Art activism is interesting in terms of the art it contains in the sense that there is imagination at work, at least partial openness to utopian projects, unconventionality, creativity, use of artistic procedures (defamiliarization, irony, satire). If such activism is completely lost in political actions, we are immediately left with something 'less', as we found in the discussion of the Janez Janša group, which in a very limited scope represents artistic activism, and mostly citizen and political activism. Art activism is an artistic invention, but its developed mechanisms and achievements also represent a significant contribution to social and political theory. For the time being, it seems that the art apparatus (criticism, theory) in particular follows these achievements, although they should be of interest to political theory and other social sciences as well. As a productive feature of art, we mentioned the expansion of boundaries, which presupposes flux, a rhizome-like structure, and rejection of stability, sedentarity and confined locations. Above all, contemporary art implies processes, which also applies to the nature of artistic utopias. These exist in time, without a defined location (as in the example of the NSK State); however, if they exist in a difficult-to-determine, marginal and networked location, they are there temporarily (as in the example of Bey's TAZ). In philosophical terms, utopianism implies the primacy of 'not-yet' over 'no-longer' – i.e. prospects, new dawns and expectations. Here, we should mention the philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), who did not discover the expectations and announcements of successful worlds in politics, but in literature, art and mass culture (e.g. in film and design), i.e. in domains close to the art state. From a philosophical point of view, he directed us to the 'not-yet' and to the expectations associated with it.

Art is a dynamic part of civil society; it draws attention to contradictions and criticises the undemocratic tendencies of the state (for example, the dissident part of civil society in real-socialist countries). Since this article examines art as a domain that is not subordinate to and less valuable than to politics, in the Slovenian case of the Janez Janša activist group, the

Levica party should reach out to the art activists and borrow something from their tactics, devices and procedures, not vice versa. That is why we draw attention to the efforts in pursuit of the art state, which means more creativity, non-conformism and blurring of boundaries. This turn can also be expressed in words: the point of art activism must be in challenging the state to draw closer to art by itself, to become more artistic (this is what the NSK collective strives for) and less policing and militaristic.

The art state, however, is not only a challenge for politics, but also for art, specifically for art as a cognitive research practice and art that helps people. The contemporary artist explores, as evidenced by Ai Weiwei, a Chinese dissident artist who used the *Remembering* project to commemorate the thousands of children (pupils, students) who died during the Sichuan earthquake (2008). In collecting data on this tragedy, he used the internet to organise a citizen investigation team consisting of 100 volunteers (Weiwei, 2018), who travelled to the location of the earthquake and asked relatives about the names of missing children. After almost a year of research, they collected 5,219 names.

The understanding of art as research is also promoted by the CERN Science Centre in Geneva with its Collide Residency Award, which is used to sponsor joint research of artists and CERN scientists.

Nowadays, the artist thus conducts research in a sophisticated fashion, designing as well as organising research; in Ai Weiwei's case, the citizen investigation team also falls under the category of art, which is distinctly performative and political, and for which the final artistic artifact is considered as secondary:

I cannot imagine I'd still be making art if I wasn't reflecting my political views. I am interested in ideas, how to conceptualise them, create a language and find possibilities. Those matter to me more than the final object. (Weiwei, 2018)

The contemporary art as research implies the specificity of art in terms of art service. The introduction of art service enables a novel understanding of art as a cognitive, high-skilled and performative practice oriented towards tasks, research, knowledge-making and problem-solving activities. As a cognitive practice, art works hand in hand with other fields of the knowledge society and brings competitive knowledge to the world, knowledge that differs from the knowledge produced by science-as-we-know-it and is set in the nearness of the knowledge produced by the

activities of citizen science and civil society. The contemporary art service can also be applied to political tasks; such service is more subtle than traditional political devices and can be used as a significant tool in art activism. The devices of art activism mentioned in this article, such as subversive affirmation, making strange (efamiliarization) and detournement (introduced by the French Situationist movement), can be deployed in civil society and its social media–shaped political struggles.

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