

E/Affect Agropop: How Pop and Joke Made People Resonate in the 1980s

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Introduction

During what is often called the democratization period of the 1980s in Yugoslavia, punk rock and new wave music, as well as critical scholarship and the arts, are seen to have played a key role.¹ These cultural practices, discourses, styles, and approaches are often understood in Slovenian context as the cultural and political opposition or “the alternative”² and are attributed an essential role in the processes that led to the collapse of Yugoslavia and the formation of independent Slovenia. However, the focus on the “alternative,” also designating youth cultural production and various socio-political initiatives, tends to sidetrack the implications of mainstream/pop developments and the mechanisms of appropriating these initiatives and endeavors into the everyday political and media discourses of the late 1980s. Thus, it fails to grasp the effects and affects of the “translation” of themes and topics understood as a social critique (and the emergence of the peace movement, anti-militarism, environmentalism, and striving for gay and lesbian rights; see Spaskovska 2017) into the mainstream. Moreover, it obscures the wider mechanisms that allowed these topics to become interpreted and understood in the context of the collapse of socialism and Yugoslavia. The chapter intervenes at this very spot aiming to uncover the affective mechanisms behind the translation of fringe social, cultural, and political practices (often provocative but devoid of clear ambition to dismantle

1 This chapter is a result of the research conducted in the framework of the projects “Music and Politics in the Post-Yugoslav Space: Toward a New Paradigm of Politics of Music in the 21st Century” (J6-9365) and “The formation of new cultural field in 1980s Slovenia: Civil society between nationalist politics and intercultural cooperation” (J6-2576).

2 When referring to alternative in this sense, I use quotation marks.

socialism) into an affective “object of mass consumption,” epitomized by the mundanity of pop music, that participated in ascribing the period a teleological transformative mission.

To do so, I analyze the phenomenon of the pop band Agropop, which played with “fun and serious” ambiguity that unfolded, as I explain below, in playing with music genres and perverting socialist ideology. It thus gave the re-emergent Slovenian nationalism an affective voice and form, making it ordinary and banal (Billig 1995). I primarily focus on the band’s 1987 song “Samo milijon nas še živi” (Only a Million of Us Are Still Alive) from the album *Za domovino z Agropopom naprej!* (For the Homeland, with Agropop – Forwards!, Agropop 1987) and argue that the band rode the wave of rhetoric and content started by “the alternative” social critique. The later was in many ways also the result of youthful provocation rather than political agenda, but gave the critique a specific impetus translating it into the banal quotidian. Essentially, I argue that the band’s iconography and musical form catered to the emergence of affective resonance as a force that drove and nurtured Slovenian nationalist sentiment.

The main part of the chapter rests on discourse analysis of the “Only a Million” and its popular reception in newspapers and (social) media and video excerpts from the period found on YouTube. In the last section, I analyze the 2021 remake of the song (made to mark the 30th anniversary of independent Slovenia) to provide a historical-comparative perspective on the genealogy of the *ε*/affect of Agropop. The focus on the transformation of the original’s ambiguity and symbolic parody into nondescript pop facilitates insight into the dynamics of the emergence of the late 1980s nationalism as well as into the music-related genealogy of the formation and transformation of Slovenian nationalist mythology, and elucidates the issue of historicization of affect.

Theoretically, the analysis builds on recent debates on affect, politics, and music (Guilbault 2010; Hofman 2015, 2020; Desai-Stephens and Reissour 2020) that primarily emphasize music’s ability “to operate at the level of embodied intensity in ways that sometimes seem to bypass a cognizable sense of ‘the mind’ or even the self” and recognize that it “emerges fundamentally from social relationships and a socially configured sensorium”

(Desai-Stephens and Reissour 2020, 102). In addition, the discussion foregrounds how “different media engage senses and affects (emotions, feeling, passions) and, hence, have effects,” that is, how affects “pose questions about the links between the subjective and the cultural, individual and social, self and other, inside and outside” (Koivunen in Hillis et al. 2015, 3), but also between now and then. Specifically, I seek to discuss what Ana Hofman terms “the politics of the apolitical [theorizing] sensorial aspects of the experience of music and sound that are usually dismissed as invisible, mundane or hidden, yet which are able to make a rupture or open a possibility for new forms of political belonging and identifications” (2020, 304). The paper thus engages with popular music’s power that may appear apolitical and transient in its inducing of affective resonance (Mühlhoff 2015; Slaby 2016) yet, nevertheless, acts as a socio-political force.

Raw and Dirty? Pretty and Empty?

Yugoslavia of the 1980s saw the further diversification of youth and popular culture in terms of genres and subculture styles (music, fashion, cinema) through a combination of increasingly dominant Western consumerist popular culture and styles that were appropriated in the lively domestic music scene (Rasmussen 1995; Petrov 2016; see also *Punk pod Slovenci* 1985). The latter was grafted on a well-established popular music infrastructure that included “recording facilities, music festivals, broadcast media and press [that] yielded remarkably rich and diverse music scenes in the late 1970s and 1980s” (Beard and Rasmussen 2020, 2) along with institutional and material conditions (see *Punk pod Slovenci* 1985; Spaskovska 2017; Beard and Rasmussen 2020). This infrastructure proved crucial for the developing labels and producing records, festivals, and concerts. Importantly, it supported the proliferation and diversification of subcultures, initiatives, and genres (punk rock, new wave, fanzines, pamphlets, art) that thrived and survived not only in opposition to but also in cohabitation and overlap with the mainstream.

The 1980s are thus often seen as a dynamic and contradictory period. It rearticulates, on the one hand, the legacy of the 1968/71 liberalization and the party backlash and, on the other, the economic crisis of the late 1970s in the context of foregrounding nationalism that chipped at the symbolic structure and affected the country's politico-ideological edifice. The period saw the formation of various social movements and initiatives (Spaskovska 2017, 125) as well as the birth of Yugoslav punk in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a loud sonic outburst that redefined previous forms of nonconformity: "Rock musicians, who were once the symbol of the youth's nonconformity, suddenly became 'old rock farts' and a radically new criterion for evaluating music appeared out of the blue. If the quality of songs and performance used to be the decisive criterion in rock, punk cared more about social engagement, message and novelty" (Stanković 2014, 301). The music of a generation—which Laibach ambiguously described as "We're the children of the spirit and the brothers of strength/ whose promises are not fulfilled. We are the black ghosts of this world / we sing the mad image of woe. We are the first television generation" (LaibachKunst 2009a, 5:44)³—(re)articulated the societal, economic, ethnonational, and class fissures through provocation and revolt. For its performative excess, punk was ousted from the field of popular music at the time (Vidmar 1985 (1984), 191), although as Laibach member Srečko Bajda recalls in an interview, it was also perceived as "engaged entertainment" (2021, August 12). For this reason, also, it was scholarly thematized for its potential to voice and drive socio-political critique.

Later, punk (along with "the alternative") was fetishized as the critical driver of change, at that, obscuring the role and power of mainstream popular music (pop). What is more, in the said processes of socio-political instability in Yugoslavia, as I discuss below, it is often neglected that pop referenced and utilized the rough sounds/images/fashion of the fringes and translated it into a more "palatable" and more widely a/effective expression that tapped into the antagonisms

3 *Otroci duha smo in bratje moči/ katere obljuba se ne izvrši/ Smo črni duhovi od tega sveta/ opevamo noro podobo gorja/ Mi smo prva televizijska generacija* (unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Slovenian are mine).

of the 1980s socio-political context. The so-called “alternative” musical genres at the time (*Punk pod Slovenci* 1985; Lovšin et al. 2002) and throughout the post-1991 period (Tomc 2020; Stanković 2013; Pogačar 2008; Mišina 2010; Janjatović 1993; Kostelnik 2004) were thus often seen as an expression and manifestation of ideological transgression and openness, an energetic social and political critique (Stanković 2014, 301; Muršič 1995; Tomc 2002; Gržinič 2002).

Slovenian 1980s pop, on the other hand, bar few interventions (see Barber-Kersovan 2002; Velikonja 2014; Stanković 2013; Valetič 2018; Bobnič et al. 2022), remains understudied in the context of the period’s socio-political changes. At the same time, Yugoslav popular music studies have been a growing field diversifying conceptual and theoretical approaches to popular music: engaging with the histories of popular music and genres (Vuletić 2008; Beard and Rasmussen 2020; Petrov 2020), historiographic analysis of music and nationalism in the context of Yugoslav wars (Baker 2015), the analyses of production and recording industry, which was one of the strongest in 1980s Southeast Europe (Beard and Rasmussen 2020; Kostelnik 2020), as well as music labor (Hofman 2015) and technology (Pogačar 2015; see also 2022).

To approach the complexities of the 1980s Slovenian music scene, we ask: How to study music (genres) that instrumentalized and popularized “the alternative” and affectively engaged topics of nation, victim, cultural and economic superiority, exceptionalism, and the other? Looking at Agropop, I ask: How did the band’s music and iconography employ the affective power of political instability, and did it encode and amplify it in the lyrics, symbol-play, and live gigs? How, then, did the music and history in the 1980s intersect to create affective resonance in a time of political instability and rising nationalism? To approach these questions, I take a look beyond the perimeter of the engaged “alternative (music) scene” to investigate how Agropop—combining the antagonisms of the historical moment in a seemingly banal and naïve way—participated in the formation of affective resonance and how this resonance featured in nationalist, transformation-to-capitalism propagating, emerging socio-political processes of the 1980s.

Riding the Wave

The changing political climate of the early 1980s necessitated the formation or reformation of numerous cultural and media institutions. For example, Radio Študent and the magazine *Mladina* reshifted their focus and became increasingly perceived as critical or “alternative” media outlets. In addition, several venues became known as spaces for music gigs, new art forms experimenting and exhibition, such as the student cultural and artistic center known as ŠKUC, or Disko FV, which “combined fun, culture, and politics” (see nevenkorda 2010). These mostly youth venues, some with long histories (ŠKUC was formed in 1972 while *Mladina* traces its continuity since World War II), formed a broader platform that, in the context of the stalemate political and economic situation, hosted the production of new theoretical, artistic initiatives, ideas, practices (foregrounded by the peace movement, feminism, ecological initiatives, etc.).⁴

At the same time, as documented by Valetič (2020), a lively pop scene was developing, appropriating influences from abroad, including the well-established Western pop-rock tradition. It also sought links with domestic folk/ethno (singer-songwriters), *popevka* (equivalent to chanson, Italian *canzona*, or German *schlager*), as well *narodnozabavna* or folk-pop (see Stanković 2021; Bobnič et al. 2022). During the 1980s, particularly the latter became accepted as a national and traditional sound combining “rural linguistic, visual and sonic reference points and its essentially urban, studio-based production context” (Bobnič et al. 2022; see also Stanković 2021). Folk-pop, Bobnič et al. argue (2022), was indeed an invented tradition that was used to emphasize the distinction from other Yugoslavs, but was at the same time in Slovenia considered a lowly music thus emphasizing the urban/rural distinction and specifically playing into the emerging divisions between progressive urbanity and alleged backwardness of the countryside. This played an important role also in the reception of Agropop and in their self-promotion.

4 For a feeling of stalemateness, see Zemira Alajbegović’s short film “Tereza” from 1983.

The pop music scene at the time sourced from new genres (new wave, electro, industrial) and increasingly capitalized on employing socio-political emphases foregrounded by the alternative, “questioning some of the values embodied in contemporary politics and culture, but above all in an older generation which was seen to perpetuate inherited rituals and rhetoric without being able to respond to the contemporary challenges and crises” (Spaskovska 2017, 89).

And it was in such context that Agropop entered the scene. The band was formed in 1984 by Aleš Klinar (previously a member of the rock band Martin Krpan), Polde Poljanšek, Simon Pavlica, Urban Centa, Dragan Trivič, and Barbara Šerbec-Šerbi. In its career, the band recorded 15 albums before disintegrating in 2000. Agropop meshed rock and pop, made fun of some “national traits,” and managed to balance fun and transgression (political, sexual) with a feeling of ethno-exceptionalism and victimhood. As Mitja Velikonja notes, they “took on the role of alarm-bells and sang about the tragic fate of the Slovenian nation and the danger of its extinction; at that time, too, this discourse included self-victimization, self-pity and the necessity of resistance” (2014, 82).

At first, Igor Vidmar notes, Agropop was a parody of “folk-pop form, of cliché music and cheesy texts” (in Menart 2012). Singing about “firefighters and farmers,” they were considered amusing for making fun of Slovenianness (inadvertently (re)constructing it along the way). The band played with musical and genre eclecticism, moving between polka and rock, ethno and pop, and between fun and serious. For example, a 1987 review in *Glasbena mladina* notes: “Agropop are not only making fun, they just take anything they get their hands on—be it a children’s song, a song they stole from the Sex Pistols and signed as their own, Slovenian folk-pop (*narodnozabavna*) music or something else. Of course, Agropop are eclectics, stealing the riffs and bits of melodies or entire songs like crazy. Despite this, they manage to give the songs a distinctly Agropopian, derogatory, cheeky feel” (Krokar 1987, 24). Several reviews from the time emphasize the band’s inventiveness and quality in musical (re)arrangements. A review of their 1987 album *Pesmi s Triglava* (Songs from the Triglav Mountain) notes: “Perhaps they also [as they did *narodnozabavna*] subvert and parody pop, but despite the cover art and some titles [...], despite their wittiness,

inventiveness and fun, the new record can hardly be seen as much more than a product aimed at a *typical Slovenian* [added emphasis] consumer of folk-pop music reading *Nedeljski dnevnik* [a Sunday newspaper bringing easy topics]" (Krokar 1987, 24).

The band developed their eclectic musical style built on “melodies to which one could dance to as well as texts and topics that set against the ‘No Future’ philosophy of the early eighties, [to express] the joy and [...] positive feelings” (Barber-Kersovan 2002; for a discussion on “no future” see also Berardi 2011). The desperate “no future” sentiment—expressed in the eponymous 1977 Sex Pistols’ number, or a similar disaffection expressed by the band *Lublanski psi*: “I still have hope, but I shit on it”⁵—can be read in stark opposition to the seemingly joyful, reckless-oblivion pop, sporting images of dancing, children’s voices, and uplifting accordion. Nevertheless, constituted through distancing from the fringe noise of punk and taking the “safe” mainstream position, Agropop developed their ideological subversiveness in clear resonance with the topics first, and in a much more precarious manner, addressed at the “alternative,” spiraling the question of freedom into questions of national belonging, exclusivity/superiority, nature/countryside. Thus, their music tapped into the unease, futility, and desperation detected and expressed by punkers. Yet unlike punk and the “alternative,” it managed, as I discuss below, to instrumentalize and channel these affects on a much different scale.

Agropop music was widely seen as valueless and cliché, made for “the uneducated masses,” and even horrible, as noted by Anja Rupel, the frontman’s partner and the former frontwoman of the electro band *Vidosex* (Klinc 2019). As such, it also provided the terrain to articulate and establish a class or social boundary between the masses and the elites, between dignity and profanity. But who was who? Both in their music and the responses in newspapers of the time, we can detect several divisions. For example, between urban and rural; educated and uneducated; working class and peasants; elites and working class

5 “Upanje še mam, a se poserjem nanj.”

and peasants; old and young; critical and conformist; alternative and mainstream. This interferes with clear-cut identifications or allegiances that *ex-post* might want to present as set and teleological, emphasizing the malleability and openness of the historical process instead.

In an increasingly mediatized culture of the 1980s, popular music aired on the radio (also car radios) as well as TV (now also in color, and seen by Laibach as the medium that “within the consciousness industry, in addition to the education system, [is] the prime designer of unified thinking” LaibachKunst 2009b, 5:43). It permeated the mundane as its “silent companion.” Thus, the mediated sounds and images contributed to the formation of a more unstructured, random and accidental listening/consumption of music that structured the space of commonality by employing the gaps in between the apparent choices of different genres, lyrics, fashions/styles as aired on TV and in live performances. The phenomenon of Agropop seems to have been able to thrive at this precise point.

In such mediated landscape, Agropop, or “newly-composed national pop,” was seen as a “reaction to the nihilistic noise of Punk, New Wave and Industrial Rock which touched with their sophisticated sound experiments the artistic vanguard on one side, and threatened to destroy the music as a branch of aesthetics on the other” (Barber-Kersovan 2002). Thus it was able to carve out its social relevance and popularity as funny, cheeky and innocent, managing to transgress and instrumentalize several of the divisions mentioned above. The mainstream or “consumerist masses,” despised by the loud and noisy and provocative social fringes, i.e., the “alternative,” were thus nevertheless exposed to the ideas of an “alternative” to the existing world order, if decidedly reshaped in the process of the translation into the banal and mundane ethno/nationalism.

Initially, however, Barber-Kersovan notes, Agropop lacked explicit expression of cultural identity, but as “stronger than the general orientation towards the homely tradition became, the more their own cultural heritage was taken into account, heaving ‘the Slovenian’ into an inexhaustible source of new (musical) impulses” (2002). Riding on ambiguity, the band was also considered at least somewhat provocative by the outlet for alternative musical genres such as Radio Študent. Leon Magdalenc, involved at the time with the radio, recounts

that the editorial board, hoping to withhold radio's "alternative" status, debated whether to air the band or not until "Someone said, 'Look, they're taking the piss out of it,' and then we aired two Agropop songs" (in Menart 2012). This shows an "alternative" outlet unsure of the band's positioning between irony, alternative, rock and pop, urbanity and countryside, not least that they regularly played gigs and sold record numbers of records (Matoz 2013). This ambiguous position for Radio Študent reveals the desire to keep up the image of an "alternative" outlet by justifying the airing of Agropop by the band's ironic approach. Airing the band, in the end, effectively contributed to its wider social legitimation and thus to a gradual normalization of nationalist, or rather, affective ethnonational discourse.

Who's in a Million

The band reached a milestone in 1987 with the hit "Only a Million of Us are Still Alive". The song repurposed the title of Partisan poet Karel Destovnik Kajuh's poem, "Slovenska pesem" (A Slovenian Poem), written in the time of the Nazi-Fascist occupation and published in 1944.⁶ In the poem, Kajuh also took issue with the long history of German political, economic, and cultural domination in pre-war Yugoslavia in the context of Slovenian/Yugoslav anti-Fascist resistance.⁷ He encoded the force of resistance, the corporeal endurance and symbolic perseverance of Slovenian people in the face of imminent cultural and physical eradication by the occupying forces; during and after World War II,

6 Kajuh's poem: There are only one million of us,/ a million, with our death close by among the corpses,/ a million, with the gendarmes drinking our blood,/ just one single million,/ hard-pressed by tribulation,/ but never exterminated.// Never, no chance of that!// We are not feeble straws, that wither in the hale,/ we are not mere numbers,/ we are people! (translation of Destovnik Kajuh in Cox 2005, 47; second stanza my translation.)

7 The People's Liberation Struggle (NOB) in Slovenia was, from the start, framed in national terms, also due to the years of Italian rule following the end of World War I; see Godeša 2012, 2020; Mally et al. 2011.

this translated into ideologically and affectively potent emancipatory and victorious official narratives.

Agropop took the first line, “Only a Million of Us Are Still Alive”—and the poem’s historical charge with it—and musically and lyrically refurbished it into a different form in a different historical context. Musically, Agropop’s song starts slowly and develops a faster pace as it unfolds to support the song evolving into a powerful refrain, allowing, especially in live performances, a loud sing-and-jump-along. The lyrics affectively emphasize the land and the people, modesty and honesty: “That’s us!” Much like Kajuh, Agropop drew on the long history of perseverance, alluding to the struggle via the metaphor of the storm. However, unlike the poet’s head-up-high attitude that refutes the discourse of smallness (“Only serfs squeak meekly like dogs,/ and bark that we’re outnumbered, that we’d perish all rebelling”), Agropop brings in a feeling of self-victimization. The words implicitly invoke feelings of subordination and political-systemic ineptitude, presaging the nationalist superiority discourse that prevailed during the post-socialist transformation, also noted by Velikonja (2014, 82). To foreground the lyrics in full:

“I walked through our land,
 I met good people,
 humble, small, but honest,
 That’s us.
 We have lived here for centuries,
 we fought the storms,
 brothers, sisters,
 we mustn’t disappear.
 Only a million of us
 are still live on our land,
 only a million of us know well
 that we are good people.
 A small nation is always guilty,
 whoever is small is always to blame.

If you are small, be happy,
that you are alive.
Brothers and sisters,
now let's shake hands.
Let's prove how great we are.
Only a million, only a million,
only a million, only a million,
only a million, of us know
that we are good people.”

“Only a Million” was first performed just before the end of 1987 in Ljubljana, and a series of concerts followed later across Slovenia. A local newspaper reported about the gig in a small town outside Ljubljana:

First, they played several older hits. The enthusiastic audience applauded, screamed and sang with the band so loudly that it was a sight to see, both of them. An older person might say it was a madhouse [*norišnica*]. The band introduced their songs, made jokes and were constantly taking the piss out of the crowd. Šerbi [the singer] said: “Well, people of Domžale, do you know how many there are of us in the hall?” We all shouted: “A million!” And they played their new song, which is now topping the charts. [...] At the end, we greeted Šerbi with a new slogan that—lest it be forgotten—is also the title of their new record: For the Homeland, with Agropop - Forwards!. (Sivec and Rems 1987)

This written account transmits the affectivity of Agropop's live performance, fueled and powered by the audience singing and chanting as a collective body; it, in fact, shows, following Hofman, not only what music means to them but what it does to them (Hofman 2020, 5–6). This is crucial in mobilizing bodies as individuals into a collective (Waitt et al. in Hofman 2020, 7). The text reconstructs a shared space of commonality that emerges through an indiscriminately mixed union of words and voices. At the same time, visually, it is structured

by the band jumping on the stage to create interpretatively open “symbolic in-between-ness”: red T-shirts with the hammer and sickle, the red star, and a “proletariat flag” with the image of Lenin.

Immersed in the song’s rhythm, riffs and beats, the attending public (we are invited to imagine) partook in affective encounters between the band, audience, sound, lyrics, and historical moment. For it is, Alison Stone notes, the “rhythm [that] figures importantly in [...] how musical elements interlock, while also giving popular songs their highly rhythmic and energetic character such that they appeal to human bodies” (2016, 205). Moreover, it is music in general that facilitates affective resonance that Rainer Mühlhoff uses “to describe relational and processual aspects of emotional experience [...] processes of social interaction whose progression is dynamically shaped in an entanglement of moving and being-moved, affecting and being affected” (2015, 1001). Although this is most expressed in live settings, music also affects solitary listeners by inviting them into the imagined commonality of listeners, which can also be quite visceral, conveyed by and emerging from the combination of personal experience and visual stimuli permeating the performance.

The moment that generates resonance and intensity, however, is the intro to the song, with the singer managing to get the crowd (and it was a dense crowd) to shout in unison the song’s title and main verse: “Only a million of us are still alive!” This kickstarts both the formation of relational affect—which, Jan Slaby notes, does not mean “individual feeling states but affective interactions in relational scenes, either between two or more interactants or between an agent and aspects of her material environment”—and the process of its translation into affective resonance (2016, 15). In this, the metaphor of the *norišnica* (madhouse, mental hospital) functions as a descriptor of the feel of the event (dancing, shouting, drinking, sweat, heat) and a generational marker that further differentiates the new generations from the old. It alludes to the latter being unable to understand the band’s message or the new sentiment and co-structures the field for the reception in the precarious context of socio-political uncertainty.

Performed live, listened and danced to in public, the lyrics were clearly not read as a poem (as you and I do now) but were rather viscerally experienced

during the singing, shouting, and dancing at the gig. The singing and rhythmically moving bodies in a sweat-and-cigarette-smoke-intense environment further opened up an affective field for the song's words, particularly the refrain that stuck and structured the immediate space of experience. Through affective spillover, this contributes to the structuring of socio-political space as a field of expectation and open future (on the field of experience and expectation, see Koselleck 2004). At the same time, this was a field also defined by uncertainty in which the "one million" line interlocked the feeling/fears of national endangerment with a prospect of nationalized future (Slovenia had/has about two million inhabitants, the song implied only one million of them are "true" Slovenians). Chanting in an ad hoc collective, the audience was engulfed by the power of affective resonance induced by the relationality emerging out of the song, the historical context (marked by the inter-republican/nationalist conflicts, inflation and layoffs), as well as each individual's previous affective baggage (see Slaby 2016). The collective anticipation of a reversed hero-narrative could be grafted onto this, structurally re-coding "victim discourse" beyond "fun or serious."

The band, in their song, as well as the audience, clearly played with socialist and World War II iconography, the dominant referential and interpretative frameworks at the time, driving the public to accept the jocular narrative of endangered Slovenes within such a framework. For example, to mark the "arrival of new times," the old socialist Yugoslav salute: "For the homeland, with Tito – Forwards!" was refurbished into: "For the homeland, with Agropop – Forwards!" On the background of Laibach and their artistic interventions—resting on the maxim that "All art is subject to political manipulation (indirectly—consciousness; directly), except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation" (Laibach, "10 Items of the Covenant")—this could be seen as benign and even alleviating. Yet, precisely the space in the wake of Laibach's interventions might have given further impetus to ambiguous symbolic positions and enabled the audience to reframe their identity positions. Socio-political volatility of the moment thus "accepted" the play with relatable, well-known concepts by way of apparent over-identification with such concepts: this

allows to officially act out-of-system to define and target “new enemies,” be it in the existing political system, the army, and/or the “southerners” or *čefurji* (a derogatory term used for people from other Yugoslav republics, mainly for Bosnians, as well as Serbs and Croats). Such double-speak in the context of a live performance contributed to the structuring of affect by fueling ambiguity in ethnonational feelings of subjugation and superiority. Masked as jokes and fun, these nevertheless emphasized the politicization of the distinction between the westernmost Republic of Slovenia, the most economically advanced part of Yugoslavia, and the less-developed “south” of the country.

This discursive playfulness gave room to the existing ethno-exceptionalism: “We were sure we were special, that we were a few steps ahead, that we know what the west is,” commented Marcel Štefančič (in Menart 2012). The process of carving out a “new we,” based on the growing dissatisfaction with the state of things and the ambiguous discursive construction of superiority and victimhood, was also emphasized through the discursive and symbolic popularization of ecology and nature (the countryside, the Alps, mountaineering, skiing). In combination with pop music, this contributed to providing an environmental map of the social and political changes in the late 1980s.

The entrenchment of the ethno-exclusivity apparent also in Agropop music was fueled by the ordinary and banal innocence of joking, the ironic referencing of ethno-oddities, drinking, and firefighters that over several years transformed from a joke to a more widely effective affective resonance that could be harnessed in garnering support for the independence project as well as later on contributed to or legitimated a number of events and processes in post-1991 Slovenia.

Ambiguity and Affective Resonance

While the song can be read as a positive uniting mechanism, the focus on victimhood also revealed an ethnomythic, historical and political rupture in the society. Employing a mythistorical view of intrinsic goodness and perseverance

in the implied virtue of ethno:natural, guarded and symbolized by rivers and mountains, the rupture is constituted on the innocent, jocular music and lyrics: these serve as narrative and “affectively resonating” mechanism that delineates a collectivity, establishes and empowers the in-group of “sufferers,” and structures the slot for extra-national “perpetrators.” The song thus functions as a musical, discursive, and affective apparatus in which Kajuh’s Nazi-Fascist enemy is gradually repositioned as resentment towards, at the time still indistinct extra-national other: compatriots, the political system, and the Yugoslav army.

The latent military component may be read on the cover of the album *For the Homeland, with Agropop – Forwards!* It features a Ramboesque pig to denote a group of “small,” “fat,” “dirty,” and “peasantry anti-celebrities” (Barber-Kersovan 2002). A reference to Rambo, the global undefeatable pop-culture warrior icon,⁸ the Rambo-Pig, with a hammer and sickle tattoo on its chest, is thus not only a nod to the global pop culture but also an image of comedic belligerence aimed against the socio-political context of the 1980s that is driving “the ‘pigs’ alias normal citizens ‘to lose their nerves’” (Barber-Kersovan 2002).

Another song from the album, “Prašičem popuščajo živci” (The Pigs are Losing Their Nerves, Agropop 1987), identifies the enemy in capitalists, fascists, and terrorists, which opens up sometimes mutually exclusive identity positions and hence a “free” selection of appropriate enemies.⁹ While the “terrorists” might have been a matter of rhyme, both capitalists and fascists affectively resonate with Yugoslav World War II and post-war history. In the context of the remake of several well-known partisan songs on the album, the bond to the socialist regime appears intact. However, in the case of Agropop in general and “Only a Million” and its public performance and reception in particular, it can be argued that in their ambiguity, both songs were plucking the affective nationalist strings.

8 The Rambo films appeared in 1982, 1985, and 1988.

9 All enemies of the people,/ capitalists, fascists, terrorists!/ We’ve had it with your lies,/ enough of your promises,/ your time is over,/ it’s people’s turn to be drinking wine.// The pigs are losing their nerves.// ... // We’ve had it with your lies,/ enough of your promises,/ now we clench our fists,/ if wine is flowing, so should blood (“Prašičem popuščajo živci,” 1988).

Ambiguity as a tactic for stretching the boundaries of ideological recalibration thus incites further distinction: fun, mock, and ridicule, which brings them close to the “punk attitude” but in a different manner. Punk, although not necessarily always taking things seriously, was marked in the popular imagination as rogue and transgressive, which disallowed much wider public adoption: the fashion and appearance and the loud and rough sounds, voices, drums, guitars, as well as confrontation with the law and the police (see *Punk pod Slovenci* 1985) did not make for a widely desirable everyday companion. Pop and Agropop, on the other hand, managed to posit things as easy-going entertaining fun. Something to which the reviewer in *Primorski dnevnik* ascribed the band’s success: “Their songs, as they say themselves, are a bit for fun, and a bit serious. Precisely due to their wide repertoire and cheerful atmosphere that their songs create, Agropop has made it to the very top of the Slovenian music scene” (Dam 1988, 4).

The fine line between fun and serious is crucial in the production of the conditions of affective resonance as it opens up a field of identification on the fly (e.g., at a concert: the crowd, bodily proximity, warmth, loudness, scents, alcohol) and conditions the emergence of an unstable space of transgression. Understood as an entanglement of relational forces, Mühlhoff notes, affective resonance brings about the processuality and, in turn, gives rise to relatedness (2015, 1010, 1017). In this context, Agropop’s performances can be seen as a space and practice where a listening or dancing subject is always positioned in relation to existing political and mediated infrastructures, or, as Jan Slaby notes, as a domain “in which affect works as an ongoing forceful dynamic that draws in, captures, enthralls and binds together a number of interactants” (2016, 18). Unstructured listening over the radio or at a gig, for example, provides an opportunity for symbolic in-betweenness and indeterminacy. In its elusiveness, this mobilizes affective resonance by referring to the World War II resistance, a historically and symbolically powerful element used in playful transgression to frame a different narrative. What is more, when music is played back on stereo or record player, and even more so when aired over the radio, it becomes a banal part of the everyday: the joke, the transgression, the affect become part

of everyday soundscapes, permeating lives and minds of listeners (who may just hum along a tune, learn the lyrics, and internalize content).

Interpretative indeterminacy, or an open process “shaped by potentials arising continuously within the relational configuration itself” (Mühlhoff 2015, 1002), is further enhanced by the very act of the listener’s knowing-not-knowing what the “true” performer’s position is: fun or serious. This is constituted what Rajko Muršič calls a double feedback loop of presumptions: “The musicians are presuming that the music they play is the music that the audience wants to listen to, and the members of the audience presume that the musicians will express their own attitudes, which individuals in the audience cannot express themselves” (1995, 278). “Mutually reinforcing expectations” at live performances enhance affective resonance and open up the field for the inscription of on-the-fly identification via “planned (mis)interpretation.” In this case, the experiential space is constituted first through relational affect, which according to Jan Slaby, “is a matter of socially implemented patterns of intra-actional dynamics within practical domains [...] regardless of—or even contrary to—what individuals would deem significant for themselves or what they would feel if left on their own or within other such normative domains” (2016, 15), and has wider societal consequences.

Affective resonance thus envelopes non-binding, on/off identification that does not prevent one from singing along and participating in an audience that collectively sings verses that make fun of them. The fine line that Agropop was treading appealed across class and aesthetic boundaries to an increasingly ethno-nationally structured community, disaffected from the community of brethren. As another review from 1987 states: “Agropop is making fun of people’s naivete and thickheadedness [and] the record lacks any identity [...] Agropop is a band of spectacle, mass entertainment and occasional ingenious parodying. But taken seriously, it is a bland contemporary variant of subalpine hiking-boot music” (MAO 1987-1988, 24). This response further explicates the band’s elusive positioning between fun (parody) and seriousness, reinforcing the class distinction between proverbial masses and elites: the boundary “became blurred. We’d play at *veselice* [local community celebrations], and we’d

be taking the piss out of people, and folk-pop [*narodnozabavni*] bands would play after us. But they [the audience] weren't thinking about that ... if we sang 'polka is the queen, waltz is our king' for fun, they'd take it at face value, and then this'd be a total mental leap for us" (Klinar in Menart 2012).

The jocular space of identification, constituted through parodying the countryside and rurality, as well as socialist symbols, was thus contextually reinforced for the articulation of and identification with Slovenian nationalism ("It's nothing serious, I'm just kidding"). Such an approach to the parodic performance of patriotism-as-fun enabled more unreflected acceptance and, later, the introduction of ethnonational othering. Nevertheless, another review in *Glasbena mladina* states: "Instead of new partisans,¹⁰ we can see here Slovenian patriotism, sneering at immigrants from other [Yugoslav] republics, and also ideas that are getting close to extreme patriotism—and we know what that means" (Krokar 1987, 24). Agropop was thus not just a reaction to the alternative no-future-sentiment, but it readily seized the opportunity in mainstream and political reaction to punk and the "alternative": while punk foregrounded social critique and creative expression at least for fringe social and artistic individuals and movements, Agropop vulgarized it and tuned it to the ethnonational sentiment by offering an ethno-nationalist imaginary of fun and easy-going sing-alongs.

FFWD_30yrs: From Ambiguous to Odd

In this section, I shift the temporal perspective by some 30 years to investigate the remake of "Samo milijon," the "making of" documentary, and YouTube comments to trace the resonances of the affectively charged 1980s in the present. The remake was made in early 2021 by a group of older and younger Slovenian

¹⁰ New partisans was a short-lived musical trend that amidst punk and nationalising pop aimed at reviving the partisan legacy as a critique of the then socialism (Mišina 2010).

musicians and singers led by Agropop's former frontman Aleš Klinar.¹¹ They formed an ad hoc band Slo Band Aid, like the charity/awareness performance form popularized by Bob Geldof's Band Aid at the end of the 1980s and the Yugoslav contribution to the Live Aid, the band Yu Rock misija, in 1985.¹²

The "Only a Million" remake copied the 1980s Band Aid format and implied references to solidarity and empathy. It thus attempted to form a symbolic link with the period and reconstruct the collectiveness or the spirit of the times. This intention is made clear by the rather anachronistic—in terms of musical and the suggested understanding of the historical and political changes—remake itself that failed, as I discuss below, to "re-empower" the original's affective resonance. The 2021 remake was introduced by a "making of" documentary in which Aleš Klinar notes: "Slovenians [females and males addressed specifically], we have made for you a new, totally fresh, version of the legendary 'waking-up' song that has *always* raised Slovenian consciousness and our identity/independence" (Partyzani Bunker 2021, 0:07; added emphasis). This retrospective assessment overwrites history with the teleological "we've always known" and obscures the fact that the 1980s—despite Yugoslavia's structural and politico-economic problems—were ripe with ambiguity and contradiction. What is more, such statements diverge from the Agropop fun approach. Still, in 2013, Klinar noted: "After the fun, which was *always* a constitutive part of Agropop, came a period of the awakening of national consciousness. We never planned what happened after the "Samo milijon." It was unthinkable that an ironic band could importantly contribute to popularizing independence" (Matoz 2013, added emphasis).

11 The initiative was a clear homage to the Slovenski Band Aid and their recording of "Svobodno sonce / Freedom Sun" (which the same crew also re-made), co-written by Agropop's Klinar and Dušan Velkaverh, one of the prominent Slovenian composers of *pop evka*. Recorded in 1991, this song had a pronounced anti-war message but was in the context of the wars after the collapse of Yugoslavia, nevertheless seen in nationalist terms. At the time, there were several similar interventions in the former republics of Yugoslavia in the aftermath of its dissolution (see Hamer 2017).

12 For a look and feel, see Live Aid 2020.

Having in mind the original's playfulness, this begs the question: how can fun and joke, as well as making money and fame, be interpreted as *always* nationally aware or rather, how can a national element be uncritically inscribed into the fun and joke as *always* there? Klinar aims to constitute the song's nationalizing effect as an *always-there* teleological historical fact. Although clearly serving promotional ambitions, in consolidating and making teleological the past events, the statement attenuates the original's ambiguity, deemphasizing the element of fun and unexpected future that permeated Agropop in the late 1980s.

True, the remake was made in a radically different time: Slovenia has been an independent country for over 30 years, and Yugoslavia has been gone for the same amount of time, at least politically, if not emotionally, symbolically, and culturally. Slovenian geopolitical standing has changed from the north-westernmost, popularly seen as the most developed Yugoslav republic, to one of the smallest, southern-to-eastern, economically peripheralized, diplomatically disoriented, and culturally insignificant EU countries. One user commented below the remake video: "Encouraging! Well done, all of you who took part! Particularly at a time when we have stalls seats" (Ildija Dolenc, 2022), which can be read as an ironic description of the Slovenian geopolitical situation after independence. This is one crucial differential aspect: a shift in geopolitical, ethnonationalist sentiment and perspective that affects, as I discuss below, the context of the remake's reception and effect.

As shown in the discussion on the emergence of affective resonance above, the song's affective power and its role in the ethnonationalist processes could not have been anticipated at the time. Neither could the development of Slovenian nationalism nor its growing political currency have been anticipated when the song was first made. One user retrospectively commented below the "making of" documentary: "Yes, back then Slovenian nationalism was not related to skinheads, hrvards [a nationalist association], voters of SLS and SNS [nationalist conservative parties]" (Aschmodei 2009) showing that the country has changed in the meantime. In retrospect, the seemingly innocent and jocular Agropopian 1980s ethnonationalism seems benign in the face of organized, right-wing nationalist and racist, even neo-Nazi movements flourishing in the

past 30 years (Valenčič 2014). Have the jokes about the good and hard-working Slovenian nation and other Yugoslavs misfired, or were they merely shot too far?

The original arguably co-structured the national sentiment by playing the “funserious” ambiguity-seeking effect that resulted in affective resonance. In the remake and contemporary reception of the original, however, affect and ambiguity run somewhat differently. For example, some comments on the video of the remake express nationalist and xenophobic sentiments, “Slovenia to the Slovenes!! Foreigners out! Love it or leave it!! SLOVENIA 4.EVER” (Tadei17 2010). Some commentators appear to be very serious in expressing national allegiance, referencing the red star (both a symbol of “communist Yugoslavia” and anti-Fascist resistance) that lost its 1980s Agropopian ambiguity, evolving into a polarizing symbol in contemporary media and political discourses. The 2021 remake reverses the ambiguity ambition: if the original’s unplanned consequence was the nationalist waking up, the remake and nationalist responses demonstrate the desire for “taking it seriously,” for the remake to have intended national/ist consequence. In other words, if the band of the 1980s used jokes and fun and irony and subversion that, looking in retrospect, led to serious effects, the remake, on the other hand, appears radically disconnected not only from the past and its complex legacies, but—in “taking things seriously”—also from the present and its dissonances.

To illustrate, the remake and its “making of” story offer several interesting interpretative aspects. The “Making of” video is introduced by Aleš Klinar, his wife Anja Rupel and their daughter Karmen Klinc, whose words, voices, and gestures appear overacted, unnatural, and lacking spontaneity; this is only reinforced against the backdrop of the VHS recording of Agropop TV performance from the late 1980s. Behind the veil of 30 years of media history, with overlays of meanings, memories, and interpretations, the power of the old over the new (always pluripotential) is revealed. This discrepancy is enhanced by the fact that the remake was recorded *per partes*, i.e., the musicians recorded their parts separately, and the singers sang “solo” to pre-recorded music. Not only does playing separately prevent randomness and intuitive leaps, but it also takes away the spontaneity and the element of fun that can be seen in the old

recording; it prevents the conditions for relational affect from emerging. The absence of connection between the musicians in the present and the lost opportunity to encourage their reflection on the song and (its) history thus emphasizes the symbolic rift between the present and the past.

The listeners' responses to the 2021 remake show a variation in topics ranging from nationalism to cultural openness, in addition to the appreciation of the song and assessments of its quality. The comments—as an instance of “public sphere [that] has disintegrated into public sphericules, and ‘the audience’ into differentiated individual strata of preferences” (Lagerkvist 2014, 206)—suggest that the homogeneity often implied in popular assessments of the past (also seen above) needs to be read as fragmented: due to technological affordances and the often fleeting engagement with content online, such interventions do not contribute to the formation of a coherent narrative, nor relational affect, but rather point out or emphasize the very instability, openness, indeed un-totalizing presentness of the engagement with content and the emerging sphericules of communication.

Some people thus report goosebumps, while others think the song “sounds quite good on mute” (Blood Borne 2022). Some express the need for the song's remake and a desire for apparently lost national unity or homogeneity: “Slovenia is lacking patriotism. So we needed this [song]. And we still do” (Tilen # 2022). Some also take issue with nationalist comments: “Some comments are appalling. Guys, this song is about patriotism and solidarity and equality. It is a song in which Slovenes can read our pride and respect for other nations. Never underestimate and denigrate others, but be aware of our own value” (wajdowc333 2012). These comments reverberate the ethnomyth of the “good Slovenian” that was professed alongside the jocular, drink-loving hedonists of the 1980s.

More importantly, the media lives of the song today show lines of fissure in the imagined community. Despite Slo Band Aid's expectations about the uniting effect of the remake, the comments show a great deal of division and little fun. In the contemporary context of increasing toleration of neo-Nazism and historical revisionism, fun and banal nationalism are no longer at stake. Instead, neighborly animosity depicts a departure from the positive ethnomyth of

benign Subalpines towards a disappointment with the present state of things, marked by media-amplified polarization: “Do they think they’re reds? Lefties? Partisans? Hasn’t this time already passed? No song of the old guard with such thematic fits into today. Fckit! As a BAND-AID, keep to the center, no less. But anyway, what do I care” (o O 2022).

This illustrates present-day contradictions in understanding the Slovenian 1980s in the context of substantial changes in geopolitical, socio-historical, and media contexts. It also foregrounds the paradox of a totalizing, medially conflated (see Pogačar 2020) understanding of the past, despite and because of the affective aspects of digitally mediated communication. The comparison here is useful as it foregrounds a conflating of the past and then conforming that past to the present, leaving little room to understand the complexity and inherent contradictoriness of the past, its indeterminacy and the pluripotentiality of the futures it harbors. It could be said that this is the effect of the ossification of affective resonance, which, having lost its openness to the progress of time (as apparent in the remake’s story), questions the mythistorical gaze that sees the past as a uniform, always already predetermined harbinger of a predetermined future. In such view, the past will always lose its inherent contradictoriness and ambiguity to the (present) political and practical need to totalize it into a coherent narrative. In turn, such desire aims to eliminate the inherent inability to know in the present how things (serious or fun) will turn out in the future.

And it seems that things are serious enough today. Matjaž Zupan states in the “Making of” video: “Thirty years ago, this song apparently did not do what it should have. If we must bring it back to life, it means we are not fully aware that there’s only a million of us left” (Partyzani Bunker 2021, 9:45). Here the past seems to have held a promise that the future failed to deliver. In a newspaper interview, Klinar stated: “We’re living in a time when freedom and democratic society are again endangered, so we wanted to remind Slovenes of what we can achieve if we’re united, tolerant, solidary and seek what binds us and not what divides us” (in Tušek 2021). His words provide another line of distinction between the interplay of serious and fun: admitting to the gravity of the times runs against Agropop’s approach and conduct in the 1980s: each

present disallows in its indeterminacy the “we always knew,” which necessarily only gains traction in retrospect. However, as alluded to above, there is a significant difference between then and now, demonstrating memory’s malleability. It shows how easily the past conforms to its future needs: the 1980s Agropop’s affective resonance was the matter of having fun in serious times (with unpremeditated consequences), and it emerged out of relational affect that formed at live performances, gigs, and parties. Today the likewise serious times solicit “merely” serious responses.

In addition, the relation between the original and the remake, and the comparison of historical periods that both songs invite, expose the problem of making affective resonance historically reproducible. The failure to re-energize or harness the playfulness, the potentiality of open-ended possibilities and non-teleological “now” demonstrates that affect cannot be programmed or ordered. In its uncontrollability (historical or individual or collective), it needs to be largely a matter of chance and randomness, unplanned and unpremeditated action.

Conclusion

This excursion into the past and present lives of the song—now available simultaneously in original and remake, on YouTube and elsewhere—shows that Agropop and their song played a part in the formation of the relational affect in the 1980s. This space-time section of Slovenian history saw Yugoslav, socialist and anti-Fascist iconography and narratives slowly debased until they were politically dismissed as obsolete, yet often used in daily politics throughout the past 30 years. The present attempt, however, is only a scratch on the complexity of the process of the formation of affective resonance in pop music, yet it nevertheless shows the power that the multi-layered repurposing of the past (Kajuh>Agropop>remake) can have in music. It shows how relational affect (as a precursor to affective resonance) was constitutive of collective sentiment and how it contributed to directing the openness of the moment towards fleshing

out ethnonational identification by relegating the other from one historical context (World War II) into another (post-Yugoslav).

Operating through music as the pervasive mediated cultural phenomenon, affective resonance is critically powered by contextual, even if contradictory socio-historical forces, phenomena, events, and expectations. In addition, these are constituted by the interactions between co-present people and their affects and emotions, histories and expectations. However, while open in the moment of engagement, affective resonance often evaporates in the totalizing retro-gaze, which does not mean it is devoid of socio-political or historical consequences. In this case, the dominant view of the “alternative” as the most radically and loudly cutting through the stalemate social and political climate should be complemented by the impetus it gave, collaterally, to mainstream musical interventions, as well as to other cultural and political appropriations. In this respect, it could be said that Agropop amplified the ripples of the opening up of social space to the affective resonance of nationalist identification employed later in the process of independence. If we say that “affective encounters are given the capacity of making a rupture in traditional political communities and opening new forms of connections / socialities / collectives that bring alternative social relations to life” (Hofman 2020, 306), it is then clear how Agropop and “Only a Million” channeled a particular sentiment of the late 1980s into creating and revealing a rupture in the symbolic make-up.

At the same time, then, it can be said that affective resonance played a part in the empowering of Slovenian nationalism, and that over time it has become ossified or rather worn out, as the analysis of the remake and the responses on social media make clear. This futile feat to repurpose and re-presence affective resonance demonstrates that affect can only be of its time; it is uncontrollable and historically unsustainable. It can only ever be reinvented with different means and for different ends. Its conditions, the context, the people, the geopolitics, and social structures have changed and must always be affected anew.

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