

Peer Review

Review of: "The Politics of Literary Play: The Luddite in Ludism"

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Review of "Accelerated Development, Ludism, and the Machines of Ideology: Slovenian Modernism in the World-System"

This article offers a compelling and original analysis of Slovenian modernism, situating it within global theoretical debates on peripherality, decolonization, and ideological critique. Its central strength lies in its innovative comparative framework, which productively connects three distinct phenomena: the "accelerated development" (Georgi Gachev) of Slovenian culture, the neo-avant-garde literary movement of Ludism (1968), and the historical Luddite machine-breaking movement (xix).

The author convincingly argues that the OHO group, Tomaž Šalamun's "Ludism," (*ludizem*) and the Lacanian School of Ljubljana did not merely imitate metropolitan (primarily French) models. Instead, they achieved a pioneering global status through a unique "peripheral perspective." This perspective involved a critical, Marxist-inflected engagement with local socialist self-management, combined with avant-garde techniques, resulting in a revolutionary theoretical and artistic leap.

The article's most significant theoretical contribution is the extended metaphorical comparison between Luddism and Ludism. This is not a superficial linguistic parallel but a deep structural analogy: both movements are presented as forms of "machine-breaking." The 19th-century Luddites attacked the physical machinery of industrial capitalism, while the 20th-century Slovenian Ludists, using textual play, parody, and carnivalization, sought to dismantle the "machinery of ideological state apparatuses" (Althusser). This comparison brilliantly illuminates the political core of seemingly playful neo-avant-garde practices, framing them as a decolonial struggle for control over language, subjectivity, and the means of cultural production.

The analysis is well-supported by close readings of key texts (especially Šalamun's *Poker* and "Jonas") and is adeptly theorized using concepts from Althusser, Bakhtin, Trotsky (via "uneven and combined

development”), and Georgi Gachev. The exploration of the Ljubljana School’s synthesis of structuralist “form” with a peripheral “perspective” is particularly insightful.

Potential Weaknesses / Points for Discussion:

- a. The density of theoretical concepts (accelerated development, combined modernism, carnivalization, interpellation) could be challenging for readers not deeply versed in literary theory or Marxist critique. (*)
- b. While the Luddite/Ludist metaphor is powerful and generative, one might question its limits: to what extent can the destruction of physical, economic machinery be equated with the subversion of discursive and ideological structures?
- c. The article focuses heavily on the male figures of the Slovenian avant-garde and theory (Šalamun, Žižek, Kermauner). A brief consideration of gender dynamics within these movements could add another layer to the analysis. (I am not well versed in the subject, but through a brief Google search, I was able to find a few Slovenian women philosophers who I believe could be related to this movement. However, this is by no means mandatory and is offered more as a suggestion.)

Overall Evaluation:

This is a rigorous and theoretically sophisticated article. It offers a significant contribution to the fields of comparative literature, postcolonial studies, and critical theory by proposing a novel framework for understanding how peripheral cultures can engage with and critically challenge metropolitan centers. The extended analogy between Luddism and Ludism is a central and compelling component of its argument, effectively repositioning Slovenian modernism within global debates on decolonization and ideological critique. It will be of considerable interest to scholars working on the intersections of aesthetics, politics, and world-systems theory.

(*) 1) The article could integrate brief, concrete examples or clarifications within parentheses or in short explanatory sentences.

a) Original: “Their specific standpoint was informed by their Marxist interpretation of Heidegger...”

Suggestion: “...informed by their Marxist interpretation of Heidegger (e.g., re-framing his concepts of ‘being-in-the-world’ and ‘thrownness’ [*Geworfenheit*] within a materialist analysis of ideology and class).”

b) Original: “...the Slovenian ludists undermined the ideological state apparatuses...”

Suggestion: “...the Slovenian ludists undermined what Louis Althusser termed Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)—the non-coercive institutions like education, media, and literature that reproduce the dominant ideology and ensure consent.”

c) Original: “...a free play of signification inspired the metropolitan neo-avant-gardes...”

Suggestion: “...a free play of signification (where the relationship between a word/sign and its meaning is deliberately destabilized, challenging fixed ideological messages) inspired...”

d) Original: “...an autonomous, absolutely free subject-signifier...”

Suggestion: “...an autonomous, absolutely free subject-signifier (a Lacanian concept where the self is understood not as a stable ego, but as a position within language that is always shifting and incomplete).”

e) Original: “...the developmental breakthrough of Slovenian combined modernism is largely attributable to Yugoslav participation in the socialist path of decolonization.”

Suggestion: “This is understood as a ‘combined’ development because it did not follow the linear, ‘stage-by-stage’ model of Western modernity, but instead fused elements from different historical moments (e.g., pre-industrial traditions, socialist modernization, and metropolitan avant-garde theory) into a unique synthesis.”

2) *The Ljubljana School's Theoretical Synthesis*

Issue: Assumes the reader is familiar with Althusser, structuralism, and the nuances of Heideggerian-Marxist synthesis. The terms “form” and “perspective” are abstract.

Gachev's “Accelerated Development”

Issue: References two complex theories (“uneven and combined development” and “accelerated development”) without defining them, assuming the reader knows both and can compare them.

Althusser and the “Machine” Metaphor

Issue: This insightful digression into the history of the “machine” metaphor (La Mettrie, Deleuze & Guattari) risks derailing the main argument and adds another layer of theory.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.