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Research Article

The Politics of Literary Play: The Luddite in Ludism

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This article examines the concept of Slovenian "ludism," a modernist literary movement conceived by Taras Kermauner in the 1970s as a provocative play (*ludus*) inspired by French structuralist theory. In a period of accelerated literary development that coincided with the modernisation and relative liberalisation of the Yugoslav system of socialist self-management, ludism emerged as a reaction to the constraints of socialist and bourgeois aesthetics and as an attack on the Slovenian tradition of cultural nationalism, challenging literary norms through the open textuality of linguistic experimentation, irony and carnivalisation. The study highlights Tomaž Šalamun's seminal poetry collection *Poker*, the conceptualist OHO group, and the political engagement of the Slovenian neo-avant-garde during the student movement in order to establish a link between their subversive tendencies and the global trends of the long 1968. The article also draws a theoretical parallel between Slovenian ludism and English Luddism by looking at how both movements sought to disrupt the dominant socio-economic structures, be it through industrial sabotage or playful textual rebellion against ideological state apparatuses.

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Slovenian "Ludism," French Theory and Carnivalisation

Around 1970, the Slovenian theorist Taras Kermauner (1930–2008), who invented several descriptive terms to interpret contemporary literary production, introduced the term "ludism" (sl. *ludizem*) to characterise a modernist literary movement rooted in a form of provocative play (*ludus*).[1] Kermauner conceptualises ludism as a historical phase in the evolution of contemporary Slovenian literature, progressing from humanist and neo-romantic "intimism" to existentialist "self-destruction" and culminating in a playful mode of subject-signifier that subverts established norms and conventions

within the textual space of *ludus*. This movement, which Kermauner closely associated with the baby-boom generation, was primarily composed of young people active in the neo-avant-garde and student movement of the 1960s and early 1970s.[1] In his examination of Slovenian ludism, Kermauner draws extensively from contemporary French structuralist theory, particularly the works of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Philippe Sollers, Roger Caillois, and Julia Kristeva:

> The play emerged from the self-destructivist negation of the negation of the negation ad infinitum, except that ludism no longer sees in this methodical and unstoppable negation destruction ..., but only displacement, combination, substitution, constant metonymy (whereas the traditional megastructure was in search of a metaphor: condensation in the doubling, proclaimed as the foundation). The game itself is a metonymy: the constant passing of one signifier to another, the dance of signifiers, closed in on themselves and pointing to nothing but each other – to otherness ... Ludism cannot be interpreted without semiology, which has moved decisively from the analysis of 'contents,' of ideas, of the signified, to the analysis of the signifier, of the system, or of the elements that are determined by the system, by the form-play of this system ....[2]

As the above quote shows, the Slovenian essayist adopted current French (post) structuralist concepts such as *structure, différance, jeu libre, écriture,* and *texte*. While Roland Barthes' concept of "texte" and Kermauner's idea of "ludism" emphasise the uninhibited enjoyment of the free use of various semiotic materials, they also have a recognisable socio-political significance, as they question the literary canon and satirise bourgeois or socialist aesthetics, thereby undermining the authorities of the respective state power.

The current of ludism was introduced in 1966 with the publication of Tomaž Šalamun's (1941–2014) poetry collection, tellingly entitled *Poker*. This work is notable for its nonchalant play with the established conventions of the national language and literary institution, the prevailing tradition of romantic cultural nationalism, and the concurrent middle-class consumerism along with the official ideology disseminated by the apparatus of the Communist state.[2] In the first instance, the title metaphorises play as an idea, content, perspective and form of this pioneering collection: poker as an all-or-nothing game, one that results from the random mixing and distribution of elements (images, characters, signs, functions, values), and binds its participants by a chain of deliberate gestures that also imply risk-taking, and bluffing. By alluding to private anecdotes, concrete realia recalled, a mass of

personal names and phrases, *Poker* oscillates between the poet's belonging to his family, relatives, and friends from a middle-class urban milieu, and his distancing from these community and the national imagined community at large. Having grown "tired of the image of my tribe," the poet embarks on a journey to create a textual environment characterised by complete freedom.

In the poem "Gobice VI" (Mushrooms VI), for instance, Šalamun deconstructs the hierarchies of European culture. Following the quotation from T. S. Eliot's "The Hippopotamus," the author juxtaposes metonymic elements of European master discourses with slices of a living, ongoing present, bringing together kitchen chat, a French lament for old Europe ("Je regrette l'Europe aux anciens parapets"), and a phrase from progressive ideology ("zgodovino delajo napredni" [history is made by progressives]). Here, Hegel, a name that connotes the phenomenology of the spirit, finds itself next to gymnastic parallel bars ("bradlja Hegel rožice v naravi"), and Moses, who has fallen out of diapers into history, awaits Spengler's fall of the West amidst images of healthy life, nature, and liberal values.[3]

The cycle "Mrk" (Eclipse) is significant in Šalamun's development as a poet, marking his transition from the poetics of his "dark modernist" predecessors to the free play of ludism. The initial poem in this sequence is widely regarded by literary critics as a pivotal element in comprehending Šalamun's poetic universe. Despite the poem's first-person poetic voice, the lyrical ego adopts a god-like power of creation, evoking archetypal images of tribalism and nomadism. The poet recounts a myth of self-creation that transcends both collective identities and human limitations, portraying a grotesque creature composed of nails, aged rags, carrion, swamp, and putrid plates of disgust. This creature's world is characterized by sharp edges, a state of being "krut in večen" (cruel and everlasting):[4]

> I grew tired of the image of my tribe
>
> and moved away
>
> From long nails
>
> I weld limbs for my new body.
>
> From old rags, entrails.
>
> A rotten coat of carrion
>
> will be the coat of my solitude.
>
> I pull my eye from the depths of the swamp.
>
> From devoured plates of disgust
>
> I will build a hut.

My world will be a world of sharp edges.

Cruel and everlasting.[3]

For Šalamun, the creative speaking thus becomes grotesque. Not only because the sublimity of creation is desecrated when the poet-bricoleur assembles his body and his displaced individual universe from all kinds of waste and disgusting materials. Not only because the psyche of this self-created creature is imbued with the nihilistic and existentialist vocabulary of dark modernism (loneliness, disgust). Šalamun's mythopoetic diction is grotesque precisely in the Bakhtinian sense: new (poetic) life emerges from the lifeless, the outmoded and the marginal. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, this happens in a discourse that is carnivalised.[4] In "Eclipse I," ludism lurks in the allegory and mythopoetic pathos of dark modernism.

Kermauner pointed out that Šalamun radicalised the nihilism and self-destruction of his predecessor Dane Zajc (1929–2005), the representative of "dark modernism" by ironically and parodistically distancing himself from his vocabulary.[5] Zajc's blasphemy and mockery were always suffering, serious and passionate, while "Šalamun's programmatic anti-poetic irony is a blasphemy against Zajc's poetic tragedy."[5] Šalamun's "Eclipse II" is based on lines that could also have been written by Zajc, as they grotesquely subvert the Christian symbolism of nails being hammered into the body together with the archetype of being burnt in fire. The interlude, however, signals an ironic distancing from the language of suffering by mixing rational planning, perverse masochism and apoetic colloquialisms:

I'll take nails,

long nails

and drive them into my body.

Quite gently,

quite slowly,

so that it takes longer.

I'll make a detailed plan.

I'll upholster myself every day

for example some ten square centimeters.

Then I'll set fire to everything.

It'll burn a long time,

it'll burn for seven days.

Only the nails will remain,

soldered, all rusty.

So I'll remain.

So I'll survive everything.[3]

The ludism in this poem arises from what Bakhtin called a "hybrid construction." [6] A hybrid construction occurs in an utterance when two different sociolects, styles or two value horizons meet, merge and overlap. In the above quotation, Šalamun's poetic ego doubles: the nihilistic standpoint and its gloomy, pathetic language interfere with an external, unaffected point of view inscribed in the stylisation of colloquial language. With his prosaism (see craft terms, units of measurement and casual approximations) he relativises the absoluteness of poetic utterance. He opens it up to the contingency of contemporary everyday life, to aspects that both the traditional and the monological lyrical discourse of modernism consider banal. Such a relativisation of language, subject and perspective paved the way for ludism at the level of style and form.

Šalamun's prototype of ludism can thus be seen as a particular historical variety of carnivalisation, the term Bakhtin used to describe literary devices that map onto language the carnivalesque practice of temporarily inverting the relations between high and low, power and the subordinate, the central and the peripheral, the spiritual and the corporeal, the respectable and the disreputable, in a joyous grotesque laughter.[4] The literary carnivalisation in ludism resonates with the carnivalesque character of the emerging protest culture of the long year of 1968 and continues to do so today.

For instance, in his 1968 avant-garde patchwork "Slovenian Apocalypse," the poet Ivo Svetina (b. 1948), one of the leading student protesters, desecrates the mythology spun by the "monumental history" (to use Nietzsche's term) of the national liberation struggle and the communist revolution during the Second World War as a model for the present. In this carnivalesque poem, written in a mixture of metrical quotations and free verse, Svetina blends the biblical story of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse with imagery from children's literature, folklore and the national classics. He uses parodic quotations to pervert the songs of the partisans and plays with fragments from the war of liberation and the post-war construction of a socialist society. He places the sacred images of nationalism and communism in the erotic perspective of the relaxed and rebellious individual who has embarked on a different kind of revolution – the sexual one.[7] Svetina's ludistic derision elicited a harsh reaction from the regime's prominent cultural figures, headlined "Democracy yes – degeneration no!" ("Demokracija da – razkroj

ne!").[6] As Kaitlyn Tucker Sorenson has shown, this title, expressing shock at a transgressive textual play, resembles President de Gaulle's indignant cry of "*La réforme oui, la chienlit non*" in response to what he perceived as the dangerous "chaos," "circus" or "carnival" of May '68.[8]

The Slovenian and French conservatives had a point. Revolutionary uprisings, especially those of a grassroots nature and without a revolutionary party or a leader, tend to assume a carnivalesque, playful dimension. In this sense, the situationist Raoul Vaneigem argued that "revolutionary moments are carnivals in which individual life celebrates its union with a reborn society."[9] In accordance with this concept, Slovenian ludism, in its capacity as a component of the global student movement, pursued a subversive engagement with literary tradition and contemporary society that was comparable to Bakhtin's concept of carnivalisation.

Student Revolution and Literature: Combined Development and the Revival of Modernism

According to Giovanni Arrighi, Terrence Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, the international student movement in the "long year 1968" represented a world revolution which, despite the failure of its utopian goals, brought about profound changes in politics, economics and culture.[10] On the one hand, these changes resulted from the transformative energy of the movement, but on the other, they were also a counter-reaction to its emancipatory potential. One of the transformative effects of the movement's revolutionary drive was to energise modernist literature, which was on the verge of losing its original anti-systemic transgressiveness.

Western anti-traditional art, which had been largely marginalised since the turn of the century, was academised and commercialised in the late 1950s and 1960s. The newly coined critical concept of modernism served to bridge the cognitive-evaluative gap between the idiosyncratic nature of artworks and the common sense of the cultured class. What Fredric Jameson aptly terms "the ideology of modernism"(See [11][12]) facilitated the elevation of even the most radical, controversial, and bizarre fruits of the artistic imagination to the level of international acclaim and recognition through art institutions and awards. These works also found favour with the self-styled progressive bourgeoisie and promised to sell well on the world market. Such a development seems to contradict the radicalism that characterized the initial tenets of modernism. It arose as an anti-systemic aesthetic response to the historical conjuncture between the Paris Commune and the October Revolution, in which artistic creativity sought

to map the unknown in the face of what Perry Anderson refers to as "the imaginative proximity of social revolution." This endeavour overcame both 19th-century academicism and contemporary mass culture. [11]

Despite Franco Moretti's assertion that European modernist literature experienced a "last creative drive" in the interwar period, subsequently followed by a phase of mere repetition, devoid of its original transgressiveness (as evidenced by the postcolonial literatures that emerged after World War II, which appeared to bring a breath of fresh air),[13] it is essential to acknowledge the manner in which the moribund modernism absorbed the revolutionary energies of the "long '68" in an effort to rejuvenate itself. Indeed, several European modernists, especially within the neo-avant-garde movements, strove to participate in the transformative politics of the time, if only through what was then called "textual practice." In Paris and France, the iconic epicentre of the world student revolt, modernist writers and intellectuals – from the older surrealists, the existentialists, and neo-Marxists to the structuralists and situationists – not only had to rethink their position and the role of their literature in the wake of the revolution (as Boris Gobille observes),[14] but also felt compelled – at least some of them – to intervene in the global event by creating aesthetic structures that seemed equally transformative or even crucial for the overall transformation of the self, society, culture and politics.

Surrealists, situationists, and the left-structuralist theoretical-literary circle of *Tel Quel* believed, each in their own way, that art and literature possessed the potential to function as the revolutionary avant-garde. This belief was predicated on the radical self-transformations of art and literature, as well as their experimental exploration of signification that transcended the established understanding of art and literature. The surrealist subversion of consciousness, which served as a medium for capitalist-bourgeois rationality, the situationist experiments in liberating the spatio-temporal constraints of the subjects of capitalism, together with the parodic and satiric *détournements* of the dominant ideologemes, and Tel Quel's conception of the open performativity of writing – all these facets converged to substantiate the conviction that the aesthetics of transformative modernism paved the way for the transformation of the entire social sphere. (See, e. g.,[15][16][17][18])

The worldwide student revolt also shook Yugoslavia, which, under the communist rule of Josip Broz – Tito, broke with Stalin's socialist bloc in 1948, co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement and introduced a political experiment called socialist self-management, a supposed alternative to the capitalist West and the communist East. However, society and the economy remained under the control of the League of Communists. Towards the end of the 1960s, the reformist current – parallel to the Prague Spring –

became stronger in Slovenian communist politics. Liberalism introduced an amalgam of capitalism and socialism under the label "socialist market economy" and at the same time loosened the ideological restrictions. Such a combination of different stages of development is typical of peripheral and semi-peripheral zones of the world-system. (See [19][20][21])

Leo Trotsky, who introduced the concept of uneven and combined development in 1930 to explain how a proletarian revolution could take place in backward Russia rather than in an industrially advanced society in the West, argued that the combination of the new structure imposed by the advanced economies (e.g. the industrialization of Russia) and the retrograde indigenous tradition (Russian agricultural production) created a tension that could lead to a leap in development. Through such a combination, the underdeveloped environment can catch up with and sometimes even overtake the centre in a particular sector.[22] In the case of Yugoslavia in the 1960s, the liberal fusion of capitalism and egalitarian socialism led to an outbreak of social inequality similar to that of capitalism. This specific Yugoslav contradiction gave the student movement momentum and substance. It shocked the Communist old left with a decentralized grassroots movement of the new left, i.e. with anarchist, Trotskyist and Maoist demands for direct democracy and socialist welfare.

In his 1924 book on *Literature and Revolution*, Trotsky noted that "the backward countries which were without any special degree of spiritual culture, reflected in their ideology the achievements of the advanced countries more brilliantly and strongly [...]. In the same way, Futurism obtained its most brilliant expression, not in America and not in Germany, but in Italy and in Russia."[23] The American art critic Clement Greenberg made a similar point with regard to American artists: "The strenuous effort you make to catch up sends you ahead in the end; you don't just catch up, you overtake."[7] In other words, the combined developments in the world literary system do not necessarily imply a belated adoption of models from the centres by the peripheries, resulting in a compromise of these models through the amalgamation with their own outdated materials and forms, as Moretti's theoretical framework suggests.[13] The tension between imported and indigenous literary repertoires can also materialise in a unique structure not yet known to the centres, and the explosive mixture of different temporalities can trigger a local acceleration of development.

Recent efforts to conceptualise modernism as a pluralistic and polycentric phenomenon that challenges the conventional narrow canon of French and Anglo-American metropolitan writers have revealed the limits of the Eurocentric perspective. This perspective, which assumes that the peripheries are destined for belated emulation, has become untenable. Susan Stanford Friedman, for instance, proposes the

conceptualization of modernism as a "cultural parataxis," within which disparate locations engender their own modernities and modernisms at distinct temporal junctures.[24][25] Fredric Jameson also counters the assumption of a single norm of modernism, or "some master evolutionary line from which each of these national developments can be grasped as a kind of deviation."[12] As he argues, modernism lacks a singular centre or a uniform chronology based on it: "Modernism must thus be seen as uniquely corresponding to an uneven moment of social development, or to what Ernst Bloch called the 'simultaniety of the nonsimultaneous' [...]: the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history – handicrafts alongside the great cartels, peasant fields with the Krupp factories or the Ford plant in the distance."[26]

After the interwar period with the constructivism of Srečko Kosovel (1904–1926), the poetry of the "disenchanted world" of Božo Vodušek (1905–1978) and the personalist symbolism of Edvard Kocbek (1904–1981), Slovenian literature saw a stronger influx of international modernism towards the end of the 1950s, half a century after its supposedly metropolitan origins. At this point, however, Slovenian literature accelerated its development and broke away from the framework created in the long nineteenth century, [8] in which literature as an esthetic linguistic practice served to promote the social cohesion of a nation that until 1918 had no statehood, to interpret its past and present, and to glimpse its prospects. As Boris Paternu once remarked, more literary changes accumulated in just twenty years (from about 1948 to 1975) than in the entire two centuries from the Enlightenment to Kosovel.[9]

In the 1950s, the literary movement that Kermauner calls "intimism" emerged, replacing a brief period of socialist realism after the Second World War.[27] This movement was caught in a temporal contradiction: while its language relied primarily on indigenous postromantic literary models, it aimed to articulate the modern experience of the individual in a socialist society. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia's association with the Soviet bloc in 1948, the country found itself economically dependent on Western capital. This change in economic orientation coincided with a period of social transformation characterised by the collapse of the post-revolutionary community. The country embarked on a course of socialist modernisation, characterised by considerable investment in industrialisation, the expansion of transport infrastructure, the establishment of universities, research institutions and the public health system. However, this social change was accompanied by the rise of a ruling communist bureaucracy and a technocracy that alienated itself from workers, who in turn became a kind of consumerist middle class that was poorer than its Western counterpart. In response, and to resolve the incongruence between aesthetic and political temporality, the intimists sought to overcome the limitations of outdated literary

models by incorporating contemporary themes, a sense of alienation and an updated vocabulary. They modernised their literary language by combining references to non–literary discourses and popular culture.

Kermauner's term "the self–destruction of humanism" refers to the ensuing accelerated modification of modernist literature in the 1950s and 1960s,[27] which paralleled the beginning of the Yugoslav version of socialism, the so–called workers' self–management. This literary current introduced a radical de–romanticisation of the prevailing romantic tone of intimism, thereby establishing a foundation for the subsequent adoption of international modernism. At the same time, the repertoires of Slovenian pre–war symbolism and expressionism were revived. At this particular juncture, the uneven development of Slovenian literature underwent a crucial metamorphosis that led to a combined development recognisable in works in which criticism of socialist society is fused with existentialist themes and surrealist images. This amalgamation stands as a distinctive and unparalleled phenomenon within the global literary landscape, as exemplified by the singular oeuvre of the poet and dramatist Gregor Strniša (1930–1987). Strniša's artistic approach is characterized by a meticulous adherence to disciplined forms, cyclical narrative structures, fractal compositions, interdiscursive relations with contemporary physics, and imagery that invokes medievalism, Greek mythology, Slovenian folklore, and science fiction.

The "long '68" period, as scholars refer to the global student movement from the mid–1960s to the mid–1970s, [28] initiated a new stage of combined development. The participation of the global student movement served to equalize the temporal and developmental lag experienced by Slovenian literature, which, prior to this period, occupied a peripheral position within the literary world system. The student movement's proponents and their colleagues in the literary and theoretical domains recognized the imperative to maintain congruence with global intellectual advancements. Consequently, strategies of synchronization with global centres reached their zenith. (See also [29])

Among the Slovenian modernist movements that flourished in the 1960s and early 1970s, such as concrete and visual poetry, experimental theatre, the nouveau roman or political metafiction, the conceptualism of the OHO group stands out with its performances, readymades, concrete poetry, drawings, comics, land art and life in the commune (1966–71).[30] This group, whose name OHO is an interjection expressing astonishment or surprise, while combining the words for the sensory organs (*uho* 'ear' and *oko* 'eye'), is emblematic of the above–mentioned synchronisation. The well–informed artists of OHO kept abreast of the pioneering trends, transferred the forms of the neo–avant–garde to their socialist milieu and grafted them onto the local theoretical repertoire, in particular the philosophy of Heidegger,

as developed by the comparatist Dušan Pirjevec (1921–1977), and Kermauner's original concept of "reism" (Kermauner's twin phenomenon of ludism), which designates a movement centred on the world of things (lat. *res, rei*).[5] OHO's unique and eclectic combination resulted in an innovation that, relatively early on, found its way from the periphery to a global art centre. In 1970, the group was the subject of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where its artists were exhibited alongside renowned figures such as Sol LeWitt, Barry Flanagan, Joseph Beuys, and Yoko Ono.[31]

During this period, Slovenian student periodicals established connections with contemporary discourses in major global cities such as Paris, London, Berlin, Prague, New York, and Beijing. The student newspaper *Tribuna* reported on hot political topics, including student demonstrations, college reform, police repression, the American invasion of Vietnam, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, the publication featured translations of contemporary Western intellectuals, including guests of the summer school of the Yugoslav journal *Praxis* (See [32]). Notably, these translations were interspersed with original Slovenian experimental literature, which was characterized by a pronounced ludistic subversion and social criticism. The juxtaposition of these texts on the newspaper pages fostered a dynamic interplay and exchange of ideas among their respective audiences. This interaction was further fostered by the presence of hybrids combining theoretical and literary elements. In the context of combined modernism under Yugoslav socialism, these hybrids served as a wellspring for another peripheral innovation that gained global traction: the Ljubljana Lacanian School.

The subversive spirit of ludism manifested itself in the early theoretical works of Slavoj Žižek (b. 1949). In the neo-avant-garde collection *Katalog*, edited by OHO in 1968, the author published "The Spy Who Loved Me," a work in which he playfully combines English quotations from James Bond novels with the theory of revolutionary writing. The text is peppered with references to prominent French theorists such as Derrida, Sollers and Althusser, interwoven with complex Heideggerian elements. In this work, Žižek introduces the concept of the signifier, drawing on the concept of writing of the revolutionary Parisian group Tel Quel.[33]

> Today, in the midst of a revolutionary breakthrough, the need for a theoretical reckoning with the neo-capitalist consumer society is obvious [...] Dialectical materialism or materialist dialectics, the "theory of theoretical practice" (Althusser), is the only theory that offers a real basis for the revolution of the proletariat. It can DIS-CLOSE the closure of world history. The disclosure of world history is a revolution of WRITING.[33]

Žižek and other theorists of the Ljubljana Circle adopted the conceptual tools of Louis Althusser and other French structuralists but combined the metropolitan "form" with a peripheral "perspective" in an unprecedented way.[10] Their specific standpoint was informed by their Marxist interpretation of Heidegger and was responsive to local intellectual discourses, avant-garde movements, and the national literary tradition. Furthermore, their theoretical framework aspired to a social critique of socialist self-management, highlighting its perceived inconsistencies, such as bureaucratism, technocratism, and consumerism. However, it also sought the complete realization of the socialist project in the name of the working class. The theoretical group, which came from a peripheral city, made a revolutionary leap forward and eclipsed its counterparts in the metropolises with a unique combination within modern theory.[34] As a result, it became a pioneering theoretical reference throughout the world in the decades that followed.

To summarise, the OHO group, Šalamun's ludism, and the Lacanian school of Ljubljana are examples of Georgi Gachev's concept of "accelerated development."[35] Gachev deliberately avoided allusions to Trotsky's uneven and combined development, but his perspective on the literary process in peripheral, pre-industrial regions was strikingly analogous. He saw the development of these literatures as irregular, eclectic paths that bypassed conventional literary chronology and allowed for rapid progression through the major literary periods and trends within a span of years or decades. Gachev's examination of accelerated development in nineteenth-century Bulgaria is noteworthy, but it is equally important to recognize his broader perspective on the subject. In addition to understanding it as a unique phenomenon in Bulgarian literature, Gachev also saw it as the epitome of contemporaneity, as a necessity for underdeveloped countries on the road to socialism, and as the telos of historical progress. Despite the pervasive influence of official Marxism, Eurochronology, and the Russian–Soviet colonial perspective on Bulgaria in Gachev's theory,[36] he rightly asserts that accelerated development influenced the literary world system during a specific period. However, the impetus for this acceleration was not the pursuit of socialism per se, but rather the decolonial condition. Indeed, the developmental breakthrough of Slovenian combined modernism is largely attributable to Yugoslav participation in the socialist path of decolonization.

The idea that the revolution of poetic language contributes to the revolution of society as a whole through a free play of signification inspired the metropolitan neo-avant-gardes of the long '68. As a periphery between the communist East and the capitalist West, Slovenia caught up with the Parisian metropolis and gave new impetus to modernism. Moreover, the OHO group and the Lacanian school of Ljubljana

were on their way to becoming world-famous precisely because they underwent an uneven and combined development – thanks to their unique intersection of metropolitan concepts with a marginal perspective, context and resources.

Luddism and Ludism Compared

The question arises as to whether Slovenian ludism is a unique modernist movement in its own right. During a Google search for a literary movement of the same name, I came across the term "Luddism" (with a double d). As is well documented, this term refers to the grassroots actions of English textile workers who, under the leadership of the mythical "General Ned Ludd," destroyed newly introduced textile machinery in retaliation for their decline in occupational status and living standards during the rise of industrial capitalism between 1811 and 1817. It's worth noting that this period coincides with the height of British Romanticism. I was disappointed not to find a literary movement comparable to that described by Kermauner, but I was also amused by this extraordinary achievement of Slovenian literature. Nevertheless, I wondered whether it is possible to go beyond this purely grammatological parallel between the Slovenian term "ludizem" and its English equivalent, which refers to completely different historical events. Is it possible to claim that a comparison between incomparables can have epistemic value, at least as a theoretical metaphor?

Similar to British Luddism, which sought to challenge the world-system by destroying local industrial machinery, the Slovenian Ludism movement sought to destabilize the local ideological state apparatuses, particularly the canon of national literature and the national language. As I have demonstrated above, Šalamun's provocative poetry collection *Poker* inaugurated a disruptive interplay between literary tradition and modern socialist society in the spirit of carnivalisation. In his 1968 prose work "Jonas," Šalamun presents a veritable "mosaic of quotations" that embodies the concurrent theory of Julia Kristeva and the concept of playful textual practice, as espoused by Roland Barthes and Philipp Sollers. [37] Unlike traditional narrative heroes, the figure of Jonas is only a name, a floating signifier that moves fluidly between individuals, between fiction and reality. By combining a variety of linguistic registers such as Slovenian, English, and Serbo-Croatian, and by appropriating readymades from various literary genres, Šalamun playfully shakes up literary conventions. His satire of socialist rituals and his blending of the vocabulary of the communist regime with echoes of Catholic traditionalism also amount to a political critique:

On April 14, 1969 at 2:30 p.m., we will gather in Revolution Square. The working class should dress warmly. If anyone asks where Jonas is, the working class should say there. At 14:35 the working class should sit down. He should put his best Sunday suit over his eye. [...] So on April 14, 1969, at 2:41 p.m., 30,000 working-class items are combed by his neighbours. (51)

Šalamun's literary play becomes strikingly political when the narrator gives provocative instructions for student demonstrations:

1. Workers and students must be equipped with simple means of defence, such as a helmet, a scarf, ski or motorcycle goggles.
2. It is not allowed to tolerate secret agents during the gathering or march, even if they are among the spectators of the march. If the police suddenly attack, either on horseback, on foot or with vehicles, the following is required [...] (49)

Here, the irony of an autonomous, absolutely free subject–signifier that characterises ludism introduces a scenario for radical political protest that suggests a militant stance of a decentred revolutionary crowd reminiscent of a number of historical precursors, including the Luddites.

Luddites and Romantics

In his seminal work *The Making of the English Working Class*, Marxist historian E.P. Thompson challenges the simplistic and biased portrayals of the Luddites perpetuated by both the bourgeoisie and Marxists. Textile workers, armed with sledgehammers, with veiled faces and under the cover of darkness, invaded the factories where they worked to dismantle the machines that had made their profession and labour obsolete. But these workers were not just a mindless mob, indiscriminately attacking the first targets they saw in a blind rage. Admittedly, the Luddites were not fighting capitalist exploitation through intellectual insight into the forces undermining traditional relations of production, as Marxist critics often claim. However, Thompson emphasises that the Luddite movement was much more complex than previously assumed. In practice, it represented the emergence of a proletarian class consciousness as its actions approached the threshold of revolution.[38]

According to Thompson, whose account has been further elaborated by Peter Linebaugh and Steven E. Jones,[39][40] among others, the clandestine regional groups of Luddites were well organised and at times exhibited a military-like structure and discipline. Moreover, they were not uninformed and uneducated. They published manifestos, wrote petitions and threatening letters to factory owners and politicians, and

even created their own subculture within the working class. This included group-building rituals, references to the mythical leader General Ludd and ballads about their experiences, demands, beliefs and actions. Jones describes how they fashioned their own legend based on the popular image of the rebellious bandit Robin Hood; their texts and folklore featured carnivalesque traits, such as mock rituals, parodic ceremonies, cross-dressing and satirical flytings, with Ludd as the king of fools.[40]

Although their aspirations were partly conservative, aimed at restoring the paternalistic British protection of guilds, crafts or trade unions before the industrial boom, many of them were influenced by Thomas Paine's radicalism and "the revolutionary traditions of Ireland, France and the 1790s".[39] In essence, their destruction of textile machinery was a blow to the technology that facilitated capitalist exploitation and the degradation of labour. Moreover, the British Luddites were not an isolated phenomenon. They were part of an international proletarian revolt against monopoly capitalism, colonialism and slavery, the conditions of which were exacerbated by machinery.[39]

William Blake and the Romantics Percy B. Shelley and George G. Byron shared the Luddists' concerns about industrial capitalism, whose machinery they invoked in rather demonic terms. Shelley's mystical poem *Queen Mab*, which became a kind of "Bible of the working class," broadened the view of the local British movement "to the revolutionary macrocosm" and "helped make it possible to see machine-breaking as a means of defending the commons".[39] In addition to Linebaugh's analysis, Jones provides a comprehensive account of the way in which the British Romantics not only expressed their sympathies for the Luddites in poetry, but also began to 'romanticise' them. In his parliamentary speech, Byron expressed his support for them and wrote poems satirising their opponents or portraying the Luddites as noble Romantic anti-heroes. Conversely, Jones notices that Byron sought to "appropriate the power of the Luddites in his own career, to borrow their energy, as it were, in order to make his own mark." These local outlaws and secret saboteurs "clearly fed Byron's literary imagination and Romantic self-fashioning". [40] Jones concludes that "Byron's rhetorical ludding reveals how the Romantic poets ... sought to bring something of the energy and symbolic action of groups like the Luddites into their poetry".[40]

Ludism and the Machines of Ideology

Finally, the question arises as to what is Luddite in ludism and what was ludic in Luddism. The second part of the question has already been answered. According to Jones, Luddite texts and folklore, with their mock rituals, cross-dressing, satire and parody, exhibited characteristics of carnivalisation and turned the hierarchy of power on its head.[40] Popular uprisings were often imbued with playful elements, in

contrast to the seriousness of revolutionary movements led by revolutionary parties such as the Bolsheviks. This was the case with the student world revolution of the long 1968s, as evidenced by the reactionary forces that saw the protest and avant-garde literature of the time as chaos or circus (de Gaulle in France or conservative writers in Slovenia). The students of the twentieth century shared their decentralised, grassroots, anarchic and self-organised mode of class struggle with their Luddite predecessors from the nineteenth century.

The Slovenian modernists, whose works the critic Kermauner summarised under the label *ludizem*, were for the most part members of the student movement or at least sympathised with it. The politics of the movement itself had a ludic dimension, which was eagerly taken up in the literature of ludism. By decentring literary language, parodying the national literary canon, playing with stylistic and genre conventions, destroying moral and religious taboos and neo-avant-garde experimentation in search of a semiotics beyond the literary, Slovenian ludistic writers engaged in the destruction of a different kind of machinery to that of British Luddites. Instead of sledgehammers and clandestine paramilitary organisations, they used other weapons and strategies to combat the machinery of ideology, or what Louis Althusser famously called "ideological state apparatuses." Although Althusser regarded his "theory" as analytical and scientific in the true Marxist and structuralist sense – as opposed to what he saw as ideology in competing philosophies or theories – he could not avoid using theoretical metaphor, in this case the metaphor of the machine: "The state is explicitly conceived as an apparatus of repression. The state is a 'machine' of repression."[11]

It may be that Althusser meant the words "machine" and "apparatus" literally. As early as the eighteenth century, the materialist and physician Julien Offray de La Mettrie analysed the human body and mind as a biological machine,[41] while Althusser's contemporaries Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari extended the materialist understanding of humans-machines to the unconscious and desire [42](See also: [43]). In the long years of 1968, therefore, it was not only the state with its dominant ideology, power and repression that was characterised as a machine. The metaphor of modern technology also found its way into psychoanalysis to explain the structure of the subject. Just as the Luddites destroyed textile machines in an effort to regain control over their labour, the Slovenian ludists undermined the ideological state apparatuses in order to regain control over the self, whose unconscious was interpellated by ideology.

The British Luddites smashed the technology that enabled capitalism to increase the profits of the owners of the means of production. The Slovenian ludists, in turn, used textual play as a weapon to fight against the technology that enabled the state to subjugate the individual to its control – the ideological

state apparatuses, including the education system (with the university at the forefront), official Marxist ideology, residual cultural nationalism and Catholicism, and prevailing moral conventions. While the Luddites devoted their skills to *textile* production, the ludists were skilled at writing *texts*. Eventually, the Slovenian ludists allied themselves with the activists of the worldwide student revolution to revitalise their modernism, just as British Romantics such as Byron and Shelley had done in relation to Luddism.

Statements and Declarations

Footnotes

[1] While Kermauner exhibits a certain degree of ambivalence towards ludism, he nonetheless sympathizes with, understands, and promotes it. However, his humanist stance as a critical intellectual of an existentialist orientation remains evident.

[2] Šalamun, *Poker*, 1st ed.[44] – See the English translation: Šalamun, *Poker*, transl. Beckman.[45]

[3] Šalamun, *Poker*, 2nd ed.[46]

[4] Ibid., 21.

[5] On Slovenian "dark modernism" in painting see Brejc, Tomaž Brejc[47]. *Temni modernizem: Slike, teorije, interpretacije*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba; in poetry: Juvan [48]

[6] Published in the newspaper *Delo* (8 Nov 1968).

[7] Quoted from Davidson [49]

[8] On the period of accelerated development of modern Slovenian literature between 1948 and 1975 see [50]

[9] Ibid., 200.

[10] In contrast to [13].

[11] Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays, 137.

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