

Art of Olive Green

Towards Art, an Ethics & a Laugh

Archives

All posts for the month September, 2012

An Incidental Trajectory Through Art and War

Posted by *getraer* on *September 11, 2012*

Posted in: Culture crit, Engaged art, Some thoughts have a certain sound. Tagged: Autopsia, Brooklyn, Dalí, Goya, Guernica, music, revolution, Sarajevo, war. Leave a comment



(<https://artofolivegreen.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/sniperheadsarajevo2.jpg>)

The “apocalypse section” is the first thing one sees if looking straight into Brooklyn’s Freebird Books and Goods. What started with their whimsical gimmick was but a foretaste of what I would discover in a book from an adjacent section: *The Design of Dissent*.

War and revolution are most provocative when considered through art. Hollywood hero-porn and dry historical treatises both lack the verve, perspectival complexity and continued relevance that comes from a great painting or sculpture. (Think of the most obvious 20th

century example, Guernica, and a copy's veiling (http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_gist/2003/02/hidden_treasures.html) during Gen. Colin Powell's UN Security Council address on the debated Iraq War.) An artwork can lead you to consider a conflict that you'd never have paused at: the Napoleonic Wars felt remote and irrelevant until I learned of Goya's Disasters of War prints, one of which is engraved with "I Saw This."

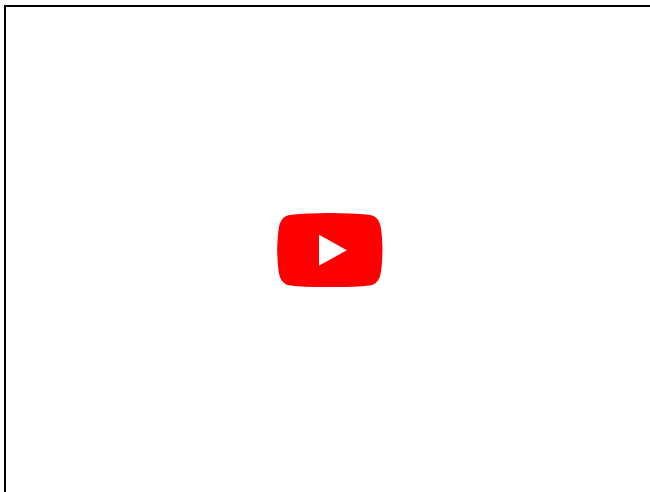
Similarly, I never gave much thought to the Yugoslav Wars, but when I bought *Design* I found they had striking posters. What had merely been televised backlighting for my early adulthood was momentarily thrown into sharp focus by excerpts in *Design* from another book: *Sarajevo Survival Guide*.

...**SARAJEVO MAKES MAD MAX 5 POSSIBLE! SARAJEVO CAN TEACH YOU HOW TO SURVIVE THE POST CATAclySM!**... blares the *Guide's* front cover as would a town crier hiding under a car in a cratered square. The contents were written in Sarajevo between 1992 and 1993, and veer between advice to help you enjoy your trip ("Prices are war-like. The average menu is 50 DM per person...Service is decent. At night, the hotel resembles Casablanca") and a blackly humorous, ironic accounting of life under siege ("Sarajevo is a city of slender people. Its citizens could be authors of the most up-dated diets...The only thing you need is to have your city under the siege – there lies the secret of a great shape"). Plenty of photographs preserve the ambiance: here a teenage girl scowling over her shoulder which supports several empty plastic water drums, there a mannequin's head perforated by a sniper on a deserted street.

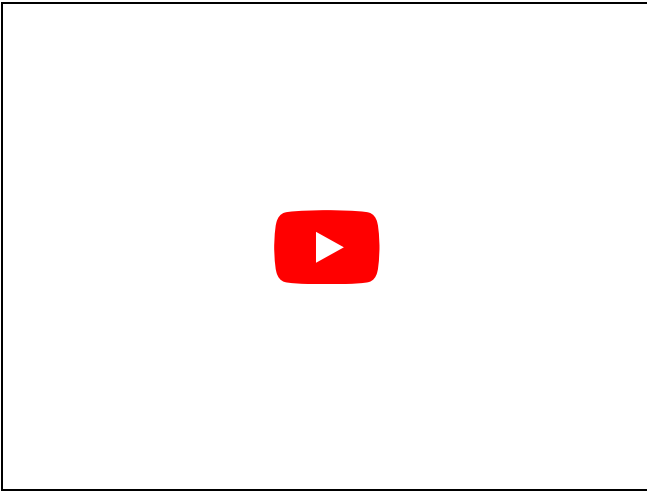
All this dovetailed with my ongoing research into early industrial music. In my continual efforts to find industrial free from gothic dullness and without a preponderance of right-wing allusions, I found Autopsia, a staple of Yugoslavia's 80s scene. Prior to the Yugoslav Wars, Autopsia (whose one constant seems to be Radovan Milinković) produced its finest work. It was when the wars broke out that Autopsia decamped to Prague—itself an interesting choice, given the Eastern Bloc's chain re-ruktion.

Autopsia is often described as "martial industrial," an ad hoc microgenre so small that it wouldn't even warrant a plastic separator card in record stores, if those still existed. It's also infested with every type of unsavory authoritarian from sneaky right-wing entryists (aiming to win the trust of people/organizations only to infiltrate and subvert them) to outright jackbooted fascists. As such, very few of martial industrial's acolytes produce anything of provocative ambiguity comparable to the paintings of Dalí when he was exploring the fascist psyche and its allure. **N.B.:** During his investigation, perhaps because of it, Dalí succumbed to Falangism's wiles himself. That will be a blog for another day.

Autopsia's catalog largely predates the MI category, as does the more well-known Laibach and the *Neue Slowenische Kunst* ("New Slovenian Art") collective of which Laibach was a part. I doubt there's any reactionary message to the timestretched and looped vocal in "Signs of Bodies": It's from "Fortune plango vulnera", the second movement of *Carmina Burana*, Carl Orff's wildly popular cantata. In any case this entire album is chilling given the outbreak of hostilities throughout the former Yugoslavia a year after its release and two years after its recording—at Serbia's Radio Novi Sad. Autopsia's two most orchestral and martial albums (*Death is the Mother of Beauty* and *Palladium*) were recorded there.



The uncanny transformation that happens throughout "Signs of Machines" similarly suggests the emergence of militarism from civil society as though it were always latent therein:



The whole experience, from *Freebird* to *Autopsia*, left me in my rhetorical wheelings again: What is art's role, if any, in forecasting, directing or influencing revolution? How should one represent incipient catastrophe actuated by politics? Is an artist derelict to ignore the transformation until it happens or flee it when it sweeps over? Must one be a Lorca?