

Kosovel and Kramberger: Between the Avant-Garde and Contemporary Slovenian Political Poetry

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This essay looks at the political truth of the poetry of two Slovenian poets, Srečko Kosovel and Taja Kramberger. It proceeds from the concepts of the politics of literature and literary tendencies elaborated by Jacques Rancière, Walter Benjamin, and in part Srečko Kosovel himself, signifying the difference between “literature as political propaganda” and “literature that acts politically by being literature.” Kosovel wrote in both ways, but in order to understand the political truth of his poetry his avant-garde “konsense” are more important. The structural model he worked out in them is also applied to the most recent poetry by Taja Kramberger, demonstrating its aesthetic and structural political appropriateness.

Key words: literature and politics / Slovene poetry / Kosovel, Srečko / Kramberger, Taja / literary avant-garde / political poetry / social engagement

BEFORE CAPITULATIONS¹

From the wounded mountains of the Balkans,
golden dollars roll
into all the slain Macedonian
rebels.

(Kosovel, *From the Inheritance*)

The state of things demands that I speak about political poetry. Does such a thing exist in Slovenian poetry? It does. Here it is first of all necessary to highlight a certain divide separating various political streams within Slovenian poetry. When I talk about Slovenian political poetry, I do not have in mind the traditionally understood explicitly political poets such as Mile Klopčič, Tone Seliškar, Miran Jarc, Matej Bor, Karel Destovnik Kajuh, Lojze Krakar, and others; that is to say, poets that were politically engaged or composed poetry with political content. I show what I mean when I speak of political poetry by analyzing poems by two poets: Srečko Kosovel

and Taja Kramberger. The former's literary position stems from the beginning of the twentieth century, and the latter's from the present day.

I

I am simplifying things when I refer to political dimensions in the poetry of Srečko Kosovel and Taja Kramberger, and so I would like to point out only two levels of the political matters at work in a poem. The first level concerns the content of the poem, its idea or its "tendency," as it was termed by Walter Benjamin. The second concerns its literary structure, its aesthetic scope, which emerges as though stepping out from the traditional regime of poetic speech against the backdrop of the traditional poetic gesture, and as the shaping of a new structure of poetic² dialogue that allows previously muted voices and destinies to enter the processes of reading and writing in a political reeducation of the very means of creating poetry (or, as Rilke says in the poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo," when "you must change your life"³). This is no longer representative; it no longer asserts reality outside the text, but is a *transformed* way of writing poetry. Performativity withdraws from a traditional form of creating poetry and a conventional aesthetics into some kind of new, poetically and politically radical manner that does away with convention, favors only the singularity of speech, and structurally implements new relations of symbolic and social power that present the first-person subject and the subject's material experience. In his essay "Perspectives on Modern Art," Kosovel said:

More than at any other time, modern art wishes to cast off tradition and, more than at any other point, modern art is rebelling against art that is acknowledged and safe in the keeping and refuge of ideal enthusiasts. Modern art, which creates mostly from itself, wishes to defend itself from monotone poeticism, from refinement founded on formal sterility; modern art does not want well-trained, weakened actors, but strong, elementary people. *That is why it is modern art.* (Kosovel, *Zbrano* III/2, 811)

At first glance, it may seem out of place to speak about the political poetry of a poet that once clearly noted in one of his poems, "Letter to Ciril Debevec of 9 July 1925": "nothing yet has given me reason to enthruse myself about Slovenian modernity in any field (you can take also *the political, which does not concern us* [emphasis mine]). (Kosovel, *Izbrana* 210). However, this statement must be approached carefully. Anyone that knows of Kosovel's industrious enthusiasm within the context of the Ivan Cankar club knows that he was an exceptionally socially engaged intellectual and artist, as also evidenced by the last lecture he held on 23 February

126 in Zagorje, entitled “Art and the Proletarian.” Thus, the statement above must be thoroughly reconsidered in light of his clear and declared political engagement. Most probably, in this statement he had in mind a particular, narrow understanding of what is political, which he held to be insufficient because later in Zagorje he said that the only artist that counts is one “that has joined the movement that also fights for the complete liberty of man, for the full rights of man, and fights in the class struggle for a classless society ...”⁴ Clearly, Slovenian politics, which Kosovel dismissed in his previous statement, did not satisfy these demands. This is precisely why there was no sense in seriously engaging with it. Comparing the dates between the two statements, only half a year passed between them. From several other articles from this period, it is also known that Kosovel was most definitely politically involved, and so this does not point to a turnabout in his views and in his work, but to two different conceptions of the political. Precisely through reflecting on the difference between the two conceptions of the political, one may perhaps attain a clear insight into the authentic aesthetic core of political poetry, which “creates mostly from itself.” It seems that it is through reflection on the very oppositional nature of political matters in poetry that one can come to an understanding of what political poetry is as a self-possessed aesthetic structure. Thus, the key to understanding how Slovenian poetry is political poetry cannot be seen in a programmed or representative sense, but in a “poetic” sense. Only against the backdrop of these realizations is it possible to say something about the forgetting or suppression of the “agonistic” contradiction of poetry as its foundational politics.

I must first clarify certain terms that I will use to analyze the situation I have outlined. In the theoretical section of my contribution to the foundationally contradictory nature of poetry and its political determination, I draw from two writers, Walter Benjamin and Jacques Rancière. Here is how Rancière thinks about the politics of literature:

The politics of literature is not the politics of its writers. It does not deal with their personal commitment to the social and political issues and struggles of their times. Nor does it deal with the modes of representation of political events or the social structure and the social struggles in their books. The syntagma “politics of literature” means that literature “does” politics as literature—that there is a specific link between politics as a definite way of doing and literature as a definite practice of writing. (Rancière, “The Politics” 10)

This paragraph can also be used to level a certain criticism against the last phase of Kosovel’s poetic endeavor, marked by the “Red Atom” cycle. Both this poetry, which is firmly steeped in sociopolitical activism, and the lecture in Zagorje signify a certain slip in what I term political

poetry, a slip backwards into a representative⁵ literature that devotes its attention to ideology external to literature, and thus concerns an external interest, which means forgetting political poetry that “creates mostly from itself.” Poetry no longer functions politically, but ideologically; it becomes a political pamphlet, in which its singular core, its inherent effect of poetic language, is drowned out, while its ontological function, which took apart the representative regime imposed by external reality, loses the power of its rotation and its function from the inside outwards. This can clearly be observed in the first of Kosovel’s three poems from the “Red Atom” cycle, which were written around 1925:

Through the grayness of arduous conditions,
look, do not miss the bright way,
in melancholy, in suffocating darkness,
rise like fire over obstacles!

The burning flame will cut through darkness,
like a flag it will wave,
man will raise his face from the floor,
into the future he will step with a rebellious step.

Our exertions in sacrifice and labor
will stir the dead body,
and what lay broken in the ashes

will gurgle like a fall of water into the sky.
Look, friends: from our strength
a new, future life is born.

(Kosovel, *Zbrano I*, 170)

There is no doubt that this poem reads as a programmatic text, as an “agit-prop” call to action. Although it has an undeniable poetic effect, this is relegated to the secondary level, and it is impossible to conceal the poem’s revolutionary messianism that signifies the working of politics from the outside. This is despite the fact that it carries in the very manner of this political engagement the seed of future suppression, which in an aesthetic sense means the suppression of the political truth of the poem and a certain means of the working of the linguistic organism, as a text that fulfils a political function. Translating this form of speech into the sphere of social relations, a declared revolution carried out in this manner will then lead to new injustices and repressions because the “new man” will not exercise his own truth, but will only be a representative of some externally issued commandment. Understood in this way, revolutionary poetry can thus only mean an erroneous politics because its manner of

function already means a negation of its programmatic principle and in and of itself props up the system that it purportedly opposes. Politics as a certain way of acting, and literature as a certain way of writing, are thus structurally symmetrical. It is impossible to act politically in a just manner through literature whose structure retains a traditional form of writing; that is, the very political regime against which Kosovel declared himself.

There came a time when the poet himself saw his most elementary human rights come under threat, and that was when the poet awoke and found that even his word is curtailed when he wishes to speak according to his own conviction, loyal only to the relentless realization that an artist *must* speak the truth, and not lies. (Kosovel, "Umetnost" 24)

This is precisely the core of the failure of the communist revolution, which propagated a new social order but never replaced the system of social injustice and hierarchy with a fairer, non-corrupt system. At its base, it retained an unjust "class division," which it carried out in its own way. Communism and capitalism cannot be equated according to content, but they share unequal social organization and corruption, which each structures differently—and violently. What does this mean for the politics of poetry and the truth about the politics of poetry, which the poet is not only bound not to lie about, but is also bound not to reproduce? Or, in other words: when can one speak about the politics of poetry as that doing of poetry that corresponds to its truth and coincides with fair political activity?

Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing, and ways of speaking. The politics of literature thus means that literature as literature is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing, and saying that frames a polemic common world. (Rancière, "The Politics" 10)

In the historical means of the visible within literature, there exists a special connection between a system of meanings, a system of words, and a system of the visibility of things. This system requires a particular system of the effectiveness of words, which eliminates the other system. Rancière discovered that:

The contrasting of "literature" as such, literature as the modern regime of the art of writing, to the old world of representation and "belles-lettres" is not the op-

position between two states of the language. Nor is it an opposition between the servitude of *mimesis* and the autonomy of self-referential writing. It is the opposition of two ways of linking meaning and action, of framing the relation between the sayable and the visible, of enabling words with the power of framing a common world. It is an opposition between two ways of doing things with words. (Rancière, "The Politics" 13)

Historically, this literary split between two regimes of doing things with words came about at the beginning of the nineteenth century (with Balzac, Flaubert, and Mallarmé). The new indifference to the hierarchies of the old regime was egalitarian in spirit and replaced the representative power of artistic creation through words, tied to the power of social hierarchy, which was based on the ability to address certain segments of the public with certain speech gestures. However, this meant not only that the meaning of one particular will was no longer tied to another, but that it emerged as the connection between signs and other signs. Moreover, because the written word no longer addressed a precisely determined person or public, it turned into mute speech, as was first described by the Italian philosopher Gian Batista Vico. This speech addressed itself to the general person, any person, without knowing to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. When meaning transformed into a "mute" relationship of signs to other signs, then human activity could also no longer be recognized as a successful or unsuccessful pursuit of goals by individuals and their wills. This led to a very interesting connection between literature, science, and politics. Literature was transformed into a kind of metapolitics that plucked historical events and persons out of their everyday, grounded reality, and showed them in their proper light as a phantasmagorical interweaving of poetic signs that are also historical symptoms.

For their nature as poetic signs is the same as their nature as historical results and political symptoms. This "politics" of literature emerges as the dismissal of the politics of orators and militants, who conceive of politics as a struggle of wills and interests. We are moving toward a first answer to our question regarding the politics of literature "as literature." . . . Literature as such displays a two-fold politics, a two-fold manner of reconfiguring sensitive data. On the one hand, it displays the power of literariness, the power of the "mute" letter that upsets not only the hierarchies of the representational system but also any principle of adequation between a way of being and a way of speaking. . . . On the other hand, it sets in motion another politics of the mute letter: the side-politics or metapolitics that substitutes the deciphering of the mute meaning written on the body of things for the democratic chattering of the letter. (Rancière, "The Politics" 20)

However, Rancière also finds that in the practice of doing politics with words through the means of literature as a democratic chattering of the

letter, it is impossible to exclude elements of the representative regime. This is why literature is always an antagonistic contradiction, built into the very core of literariness as an aggregate that drives the autotelic self-referentiality of the speech system, which symptomatically speaks the entirety of the world. It is an opposition between two ways of doing things with words. Revolutionary struggle thus unfolds as an aesthetic function of poetic language, as a permanent establishment and circulation of signs in a game of sign systems, from which the unseen, the unheard, the suppressed, must be seized; that is, the voices that are pushed out from hierarchized systems of repression in the very act of creative writing or reading as a performance.⁶ Positive political poetry (because it is all political, even conservative and fascist representative poetry), which initiates a democratic principle of being heard, cancels out the vertical hierarchization of meanings and representations and introduces a simultaneous multitude of signs from everyday life, which it turns into signs of history even as signs of history are turned into poetic elements. However, this does not unfold as a construction of a particular state or system forever and always, but as a permanent political act that is newly re-founded and successfully executed with every speech gesture or written word, and which connects action and meaning. The life of such poetry signifies the life of the antagonistic contradiction that unfolds in the very poetic core.

As indicated by his lecture in Zagorje in February 1926, Kosovel, influenced by his friends and a strong inner sense of justice on the one hand, and a creative need for true poetry that would strike at the core of an authentic aesthetic and ethical speech function on the other, explored various possibilities of poetically doing things with words and frequently strayed into the field of “the poetics of workers or social struggle” (as it was termed by Anton Ocvirk). However, it is my opinion that he did not at that point break the wall separating internal poetry constructed “from itself” from dominant classical patterns of hierarchized representational poetry; rather, he succeeded in doing that in the phase referred to as his “avant-garde constructivism.” Not only did his constructivist poetry take part in the aesthetic and revolutionary ferment that seized Europe following the turn of the century, and gained in momentum during and after the First World War (and doubtlessly represented a broad social front and a professed social and political rebellion against “the old art” and “the old world,” which is why numerous artists directly involved themselves in political movements of their times), but he also created his own poetic system and his own radical political poetry. His “kons” are an exceptional example of political poetry “created mostly from itself.” Several examples are examined below.

HEY, HEY

Hey hey, it's raining over the grey houses of Ljubljana
wrapping them in a grey curtain against the sun.
In Trieste they are burning our *Edinost*.
Christ has come into the League of Nations.
No, not that good, beautiful Christ, glowing with the glory of love.
A pseudo Christ is in Geneva.
What, is it raining in Geneva too?
Christ has come among the brown insurgents
and is standing there on the grey street
chasing away the scribes and pharisees.
He is shooting and killing,
shooting and killing.
O you nation of sheep, you white nation,
now do you understand what you are?

(Kosovel, *Golden* 92)

One of the things I have already mentioned is the connection between politics and aesthetic exploration. It seems that the era during which Kosovel created his gems was swept by a global spirit because one concurrently finds similar reflections across the world; for example, in America. "If a new literature were to be born, it would have to be the product of a true proletarian culture, one that would be as fertile in literary potential as had been bourgeois culture. Proletarian literature, in other words, must become truly avant-garde" (cf. William Philips, in Gilbert 112). It appears that Kosovel overtook himself, and did what he later predicted in his programmatic lecture in Zagorje. He already wrote about this in a letter to Avgust Černigoj on 7 February 1924: "art lies within how to create work *in some new way*. Of course, this requires that you attain elements of expressions and then in this way build a house."⁷ By stepping out of a poetics of impressions and expressionist tendencies during his experimental phase, which resulted from his meeting with avant-garde ideas, he aesthetically crossed the line from the old regime of writing into an entirely new mode; he managed not only to very clearly imbue poetry with explicitly affirmed political content, but also constructed this content so that what emerged was a forceful rebellious position and a headstrong, independent will, which surpasses merely individual expression and establishes itself as an entirely new world paradigm—and along with it a new social structure, which in any case was always an important element of avant-garde movements. Or, to reverse the argument I have just presented: by becoming avant-garde, Kosovel's poetry truly became the voice of those that until then had had no voice, the letter of the mute, of those that were not addressed by traditional poetry—of those that rose up against an unjust world social order

in his poetry *avant la lettre*. No traditional verse would have been capable of delivering such a clear judgment of the situation as the statement about (pseudo) Christ in the League of Nations, (indirectly) shooting and killing and burning *Edinost* in Trieste. Here is a fierce turnabout because Christ is negated as a theological character and shown wholly as a political figure. There can be no doubt that Kosovel was thinking less of original Christianity and the evangelists than he was of Church rulers and all those others that for long centuries had propelled and exported violence in the name of Christian ideology. His Christ, the one cast off by the Nicean sect, is standing there on the gray street among the brown insurgents chasing away the scribes and Pharisees—those that serve the League of Nations; this is where the pseudo Christ is that kills and shoots.

This “prophetic” recognition was sadly wholly realized after Kosovel’s death during the time of fascist persecution of priests in the Littoral, who were forbidden to offer mass in Slovenian, and who were persecuted and imprisoned with the blessing of the Vatican. Meanwhile, Ljubljana wrapped itself (and still does) in a grey curtain against the sun, so that it did not have to see—and it slept.

LJUBLJANA IS SLEEPING

In the red chaos
 the new humanity is coming! Ljubljana is sleeping.
 Europe is dying in a red light.
 All telephones have been cut.
 O, but there’s the cordless one!
 A blind horse.
 [Your eyes are like those
 in Italian paintings.]
 White towers are rising from brown walls.
 A deluge.
 Europe is stepping into a tomb.
 We are coming with the hurricane.
 With poisonous gases.
 [Your lips are like strawberries.]
 Ljubljana is sleeping.
 The tram conductor is sleeping.
 In the Europa Café they are reading
 the *Slovenian Nation*.
 A rattle of billiard balls.

(Kosovel, *Golden* 101)

However, the fact that Ljubljana is shutting its eyes and sleeping will not, according to Kosovel, protect it from the revolutionary chaos that has

overtaken Europe. A new human is emerging, but Ljubljana does not see this; it continues to live its small, provincial life, communication with the world has been interrupted, but in vain—the red chaos is spreading wirelessly. Europe is stepping into a tomb, but the false national leaders cannot see this; in the café they continue to read the *Slovenian Nation* and listen to the rattling of the billiard balls. Before one is two worlds, closely intertwined, where one penetrates into the other in a three-dimensional poetic composition that skillfully assembles striking, irreconcilable oppositions and denotes voices that were excluded and forbidden (or intolerable) until then. There is also no doubt that there are two types of politics intertwined within the poem: declarations of direct political ferment in Europe, where it is utterly clear what standpoint the poet is speaking from, and signs of a poetic structure that successfully establishes the revolutionary spirit with a new aesthetic and a new way of creating poetry, positively crackling with its sweeping aside of the old by which it had itself been marked, and which simultaneously represents an unmediated grappling with Slovenian society of the time. The sentences are fragmented, condensed into practically only a single word; they look like bricks stacked into an angular three-dimensional assemblage, a type of machine that projects at the reader these forceful cries and calls to action, these impulses/symptoms of a bared political truth, from unexpected positions and directions. Under the influence of constructivism and other (Russian) avant-garde movements, Kosovel clearly cast aside his previously representative poetics and shaped a new, politically clearly formulated construction of poetic creation. This is also attested by the fact that, in following this direction, he soon came to invent a manner of shaping poems in which he realized his three-dimensionality in graphic, visual form. In the poem “Kaleidoscope” (cf. Vrečko), he writes: “letters grow into space, / voices are like buildings.” His collages and montages, which bear a resemblance to, for instance, cubist paintings (which are just as much a product of grappling with the problem of time-space), or the paintings of Piet Mondrian,⁸ in particular his final two neo-plastic paintings, finally also came into being in the recording and building of poetry, which he understood as an architectural project. It is no coincidence that his engagement is somehow successfully realized at two levels, in a parallel manner: both at the level of content, when he directly and radically attacked the ruling institutions (or “policy,” as Rancière would put it) and passed the worst possible judgment on the rulers (“the political crooks are free”), and at the level of the sign, where he typographically radicalized his poetic construction and graphically reshaped it into a three-dimensional machine, which literally jolts the reader aesthetically, politically, and physically. The building of the poem becomes

a courthouse, “alongside the aesthetic value, art also gains in ethical value or, in other words, its value is aesthetic because it is ethical” or, I could say, “political.”

COPS

Cops are people of the lowest quality.
 Servant at their owners' commands.
 I am a stranger to the green field.
 Shrewd as a snake, humble as a dove.
 To live. All who are persecuted want to live.

To live with dignity.

The sun hangs in the tower

THE GREEN PARLIAMENT

OF FROGS

I live in a country
 of European wildcats.
 Symmetry is beautiful.
The political crooks are free!

(Kosovel, *Golden* 96)

Kosovel's radical talent and independent will were unstoppable. His critical political engagement and viewpoint did not stop merely at unmasking the world; the poetic constructs he built led him to turn them around: what had been on the inside saw the light of day, the one that had once spoken in verses faced his reflection in the mirror of self-reflection about his poetic action in an entirely specific environment, which was most certainly not free—on the contrary. As is seen in the next poem I quote, Kosovel experienced the environment in Ljubljana at the time, and probably further afield, as definitely inhibitory. What is inspiration, after all? “Nothing but a creative force (equal to the power of investing images, signs, etc, in “reality”), which at a certain point breaks free and is halted by some obstacle” (Vattimo 11). It is precisely this obstacle that is the generator of a new “body,” when it is forced out by the creative force as it expresses itself. Inspiration is thus a dialectical field that defines the poetic moment, and vice versa. What did you do, human? Why did you steer the golden boat of the new man into the marsh? However, because this is a poetic construct that signifies a dialogue with a reader—that is, a different gaze than the original condition of the sign—the poem shows itself as an apparatus of mirrored reflections in which the tension of political engagement condenses at both levels I have described, while it constructs a three- or even four-dimensional image in which time plays the role of participant in a process that does not end with the conclusion of a poem, but also incorporates its reading itself. Who is the one asking questions now?

The question is reflected between two mirrors; it seems that the reflection that appears in the mirror before the writer only truly sparkles in the gaze of the reader, who instantly sees himself in the wondering, questioning gaze of the writer. Thus they pass among each other a critical, analytical view, which penetrates ever deeper into the heart and keeps opening, until all that remains is the bare fact, the turned-around letter, the bare sign, a spherical field of reflected seeing, where the reflected question evolved into a silence of the bare non-answer, which undeniably stabs at one's eyes. So the invisible shows itself in all its visibility, the mute, unspoken word stands out in its clear spokenness, without ever having to be said. Does this not mean a confrontation in the field of pure political matters, politics as such? Why did you steer the golden boat into the marsh? What has happened to this infamous new human, who was finally meant to live fully in this valley of Šentflorijan? What does the white grave of Ivan Cankar mean? The bare act of being in a fierce convulsion, which places one on the other side of words. The "mute," turned-around letter, which simultaneously speaks and sucks inside itself the speech that should be spoken?

The Spherical Mirror

Is it the mirror's fault
you've got a hooked nose?
Glory be to Heine!
To recognize yourself
look into the spherical mirror.
Nationalism is a lie.
Chestnuts rustle beside the water,
autumn has come to the secondhand dealers.
Their shops are full of antiques.
Cin, cin.
Give up on yourself.
A red chrysanthemum.
An autumn tomb . . .
a white tomb.
Ivan Cankar.

THE GOLDEN BOAT

WHY DID YOU LET

INTO THE MARSHES?

(Kosovel *Golden*, 83)

On the basis of the ideas expressed above, it can be assumed that in the case of Kosovel's poetry:

Literature had become a powerful machine of self-interpretation and self-poeticization of life, converting any scrap of everyday life into a sign of history and any sign of history into a poetical element. This politics of literature enhanced the dream of a new body that would give voice to this reappropriation of the power of common poetry and historicity written on any door panel or any silly refrain. However, this power of the mute letter could not result in "bringing back" this living body. The "living body" voicing the collective hymn had to remain the utopia of writing . . . Benjamin would try to rewrite the poem, to have the Messiah emerge from the kingdom of the Death of outmoded commodities. But the poem of the future experienced the same contradiction as the novel of bourgeois life, and the hymn of the people experienced the same contradiction as the work of pure literature. The life of literature is the life of this contradiction. (Rancière, "The Politics" 23)

This politically marks agonistic literature.

II

Il s'agit de gagner les intellectuels à la classe ouvrière, en leur faisant prendre conscience de l'identité de leurs démarches spirituelles et leurs conditions de producteur.¹⁰

Before I turn to the political poetry of Taja Kramberger, I first examine the problem of political poetry that I have been discussing in light of the thought of Walter Benjamin. Even though political philosophy is woven through much of Benjamin's work, it will suffice if I refer to his lecture "The Author as Producer," which he held on 27 April 1934 at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, less than ten years after Kosovel's address in Zagorje. Despite the fact that Jacques Rancière rejected the utopian (messianic) axis of Benjamin's Marxist-centered reflections, there are fewer differences between them than one might conclude on the basis of their points of origin. Rancière understands democracy as a given fact; that is, the starting position, "real power that is not an illusion," the point already achieved, one in which "those who should not speak, speak," the point from which thought on politics develops. On this point, Benjamin is an heir of Marxism, seeing "democracy" as a goal of revolutionary action. Here the two authors may, at first glance, diverge in their points of departure. On the subject of communism, Rancière does not share in Marxist optimism, and even articulates a fundamental doubt: "I take a different

view of this. If this program [communism] exists and if it is a good program, I am afraid that capitalists will buy it and implement it in their way” (Rancière, “Od aktualnosti” 100). But this difference in their approach to the question of political poetry does not influence the structural parity of their conclusions, which they reach independently and following their own paths.

Benjamin’s reflections are built on Marx’s demand for an ideologically clearly proliferated class struggle, a demand to which any engaged social and political action must be subjugated. This also holds for literary creation. Yet even Marx and Engels do not, in connection with literature, speak only of the “true idea” of a literary work, but also of a Shakespearean liveliness with which it must be transmitted; that is, a certain aesthetic quality that is a precondition for literariness and for quality literature. Benjamin states clearly that “an advanced type of writer[’s] . . . decision is determined on the basis of the class struggle when he places himself on the side of the proletariat [and] directs his energies toward what is useful for the proletariat in the class struggle. We say that he espouses a *tendency*” (Benjamin, “Pisac” 96). Yet he cautions that, while it is necessary on the one hand to demand the right tendency from a poet, one must also, on the other hand, insist on the quality of his work. This sort of formula can be satisfying only when one perceives the true meaning of the connection between tendency and quality.

I want to show you that the political tendency of a work can only be politically correct if it is also literarily correct. That means that the correct political tendency *includes* a literary tendency. For, just to clarify things right away, this literary tendency, which is implicitly or explicitly contained in every *correct* political tendency—that and nothing else constitutes the quality of a work. (Benjamin, “Pisac” 96)

What does a tendency actually mean, particularly a political tendency in a literary work? Does it concern the assertion of a particular idea, standpoint, point of view, or program, which the writer believes to suit a just world and which he creates through his writing? If that were the case, one would be dealing with representative art, which imitates the external literary world and places literature into the function of expressing and re-enforcing signposts external to the literary world. In such a case one would thus be dealing with what only appears to be art, which Rancière also politically problematizes as literature, which does not present itself as a performative sign in a field of signs—that is to say, with literature that “keeps quiet” about its foundational fact and narrows the social space of voices while it silences, with its manner of speech, the very voices that cannot make themselves heard in this speech. Benjamin also rejects this

sort of literature. However, it is true that every *correct* political tendency, as he says, comes to the fore where there is also a literary tendency because only the latter assures the literary quality of the work. “However revolutionary this political tendency may appear, it actually functions in a counterrevolutionary manner as long as the writer experiences his solidarity with the proletariat ideologically and not as a producer” (Benjamin, “Pisac” 101). A political tendency is *correct* when the writer not only recognizes himself as the mediator of certain ideas, or their sympathizer, but when as a producer he no longer “transmit[s] the apparatus of production without simultaneously changing it to the maximum extent possible in the direction of socialism” (Benjamin, “Pisac” 104). There is no doubt that Benjamin equates political *correctness* with this socialist sense; that is, with a particular political order that enables the proletariat to assert its equality. In this register, Benjamin’s socialism approaches Rancière’s democracy.¹¹ I do not intend at this time to enter into a debate on the issue. I will have to do so at another occasion. For the moment, let it suffice to point to that understanding of politically sound literature that no longer reproduces ideas, models, or convictions that are wholly external to literature or any concrete literary work, but that transforms the very process of creation—that is, the regime of speech as well as itself as an apparatus of production—and enables the emergence of previously silenced voices and realistic social relations, in whose web the voices take part even as they are excluded from representative modes of literary matrices. “Changing it [the apparatus] would have meant breaking down one of the barriers, overcoming one of the contradictions that fetters the production of intellectuals” (Benjamin, “Pisac” 106). The emergence of suppressed speech, or modes of speech of good literature (i.e., literature that has freed itself from a representative role and established itself as the performance of a sign as a special ontological state, touching on both the poetic function of language as well as the problematic of existence within the field of social relations itself), places literature in the sphere of social change as a machine that affirms the existence of “mute” signs and silenced, repressed social groups. Here one is not merely dealing with “affirmation,” but even with bringing into existence certain signs and social groups, or the generation of existence itself. There is no space here to develop a suitable philosophical view that would explicate the ontological function of literary language, even though this greatly concerns political philosophy as the performativity of the bare sign, living energy, and an ethical standpoint in the sense of Rancière’s understanding of democracy as a state in which one begins rather than the goal one would like to reach. In this circle I would also like to include revolutionary pathos in its original, Ancient Greek meaning

(πάθος ‘suffering or experience’). Mastery of literary language, transformation of its mode, allows the assertion of a tendency (which signifies the political core of literary creation) that shows itself in the quality of a literary work created according to means outside established conventions:

Here too technical progress is the basis of political progress for the author as producer. In other words: the only way to make this production politically useful is to master the competencies in the process of intellectual production, which, according to the bourgeois notion, constitutes their hierarchy; and, more exactly, the barriers that were erected to separate the skills of both productive forces must be simultaneously broken down. When he experiences his solidarity with the proletariat, the author as producer also directly experiences a solidarity with certain other producers in whom he was not much interested earlier. (Benjamin, “Pisac” 106)

Solidarity with suppressed social classes, segments, castes, or communities discovered by the writer, intellectual, or poet is thus not external but internal because he was brought to it by means of his own creative technique, production itself, speech as a marking machine—in as far as he writes “from itself” (from literature) instead of merely reproducing and representing views, ideas, and programs external to poetry. In this, socialism, or rather the democratic character of political poetry, is its political core, its existential energy. This is the poetry that portrays situations of exit from the field of conventional competencies of speech and social orders, which suppress or silence (or even persecute) certain social communities or classes. Political poetry of this sort does this within itself by changing its means, the means by which poets use speech in the field of conventional processes.

The best political tendency is false when it does not indicate the attitude with which one should approach it because the writer can only indicate this attitude when he makes something: namely, something written. The tendency is a necessary but never sufficient condition for the organizational function of a work. The tendency also demands an exemplary, indicative performance from the writer. Today, more than ever before, this should be demanded. *An author that teaches a writer nothing teaches nobody anything.* The determinant factor is the exemplary character of a production that enables it, first, to lead other producers to this production and, second, to present them with an improved apparatus for their use—and this apparatus is better to the degree that it leads consumers to production; in short, that it is capable of making coworkers out of readers or spectators. (Benjamin, “Pisac” 109)

At this point, Benjamin turned to Brecht’s epic theatre, which achieved its political effect by presenting situations. “It attains that condition, as we shall soon see, by [Brecht] allowing the action to be broken up” (Benjamin, “Pisac” 110). He achieves this through songs. Allowing the

action to be broken up enables him to show events, people, or occurrences, or to use speech that would otherwise be excluded from or not allowed access to the conventional arc. “I am speaking of the process of montage: the element that is superimposed breaks into the situation on which it is imposed. . . . epic theatre does not reproduce situations; rather, it reveals them. The discovery of situations is accomplished by means of the interruption of the action” (Benjamin, “Pisac” 110). The same goes for systems of conventional competencies or for established means of speech. Political poetry is the poetry that, by interrupting the established course of action or established means of poetic speech, reveals situations of reality. It does not reproduce them, but reveals them. It thus montages both speech and “sensible” (to use Rancière’s term) reality. Kosovel’s constructivist poems are sequences of such sudden interruptions, montaged situations, linguistic montages that have a clear political core. This political core reveals situations that were once invisible and silenced, which troubled conventional poetry as foreign bodies interrupting the stream of traditional poetic speech. This is also attested by the fact that Ocvirk only published them forty years after they were written. However, despite their late publication, they instantly had a pivotal effect that is still reverberating today. The “kons” are not merely an event, but a lasting situation of interrupting traditional poetry that calls poets to writing from within poetry, to its politics as the heart of poetry. Slovenian poets are challenged to respond. This challenge is still ongoing, just as contemporary and just as pivotal as during the time of its hushed creation. This challenge calls poets to respond with means of speech that reveal the subjugated politics of poetry, its function of the ontological state as realized democracy. Of course, in hindsight, poetry is also political when it did not and does not do this. Poetry that covers up suppresses these situations. It is conventional poetry. However, here I am not speaking of political poetry that is yet meant to appear, but the poetry with which one begins. The poetry that tears itself from the grip of conventional poetry wages a form of poetic battle with this poetry, a form of political struggle, as the poet becomes aware that he is no longer creating poetry in the conventional sense, but placing himself in opposition, taking his own path, and creating his own verse. The poet deconstructs traditional poetry, takes it apart, and newly creates it as completely different. It would be wrong to assume that poetry of the new kind happens by itself as an organic phenomenon, as a mystical event that has an independent origin somewhere outside of poetry. Poetry of the new type is the result of a dialogic process between the old and new poetic regimes; it is antagonistic. It is as much at the level of social order as in the structure of poetic verse. The challenge of which I spoke

in relation to Kosovel is precisely this duality of the verse, which rejects traditional poetic regimes and simultaneously erects new ones in a double antagonistic game of tradition and creativity. Such is also the poetry of Taja Kramberger.

III

Criticism, the movement of life in art.

Srečko Kosovel

It is time to turn attention to contemporary political poetry. In doing so, one must not lose sight of what was said above. Poetry is not only autonomous art, but also the presentation of social conditions; it is a *dispositif* of time in which it functions in the manner of doing things with words as particular production. Here it is necessary to point to the dual meaning of autonomy, which on the one hand highlights the hard-won creative freedom of poetic activity, and on the other hand calls it into question when one thinks about its social and political isolation. In the post-Marxist world, it is of course questionable whether one can narrow the field down to a collectivistic optic of class struggle in light of some future revolution whose goals are never quite entirely clear. However, even a discussion of partial injustices that does not rest on thorough reflection about the foundations of global inequality as a reality of global corporate capitalism, and does not reach into the very structure of discursive processes in the field of a certain *dispositif* so as to change it at its base, is not enough. Thus every discursive practice that does not question the invisible or mute discourses, which is conditioned by their absence, automatically collapses at the very point where it was supposed to puncture the point of its limitations and establish itself as autonomous practice: either as a situation of freedom or as a technique (means and ability) for including mute, silenced speech. One must distinguish this from autonomy, which often means no more than alienation; that is, marginalization, silencing, exclusion, excommunication, and isolation from social life. It is necessary to rebel against such poetic autonomy; it must be pulled back into social action; poetry must be what it is: political. At the same time, it must not lose itself in the field of agitation or academism, limited to artistic circles, to the sphere of representative processes that functionalize it to the level of a media campaign and social privileges. Poetry is the political deconstruction of its own field, it is a re-structuralizing of the *dispositif* of both the symbolic and the material world, which pulls along the effect of invisible destructive-constructive mechanisms of itself and already established

democracy (or perhaps justice). The questions that arise and the answers that offer themselves are no longer a matter of global images, but of small steps that democratize poetic speech in its forcefulness, or *eros*, at the level of its ethical and ontological function, which is creative, performative, and in the beginning even generating.

What interests me is the way in which, by drawing lines, arranging words, or distributing surfaces, one also designs divisions of communal space. It is the way in which, by assembling words or forms, people define not merely various forms of art, but certain configurations of what can be seen and what can be thought, certain forms of inhabiting the material world. These configurations, which are at once symbolic and material, cross the boundaries between arts, genres, and epochs. They cut across the categories of an autonomous history of technique, art, or politics. (Ranci re, "Surface" 91)

It may now be time to consider the possible tie between the political poetry of Sre ko Kosovel and Taja Kramberger. One certainly cannot seek any connection between either content or form. Kosovel was active in the time following the First World War, when the illegitimate Italian political seizure of the Littoral raised urgent questions about ethnicity, existence, and the fascist persecution of the Littoral segment of the Slovenian nation on the one hand, while the communist unrest following the October Revolution raised questions of social justice on the other. However, Kosovel did not fall prey to either the nationalist or communist campaign, but remained faithful to the political truth of poetry itself, which creates "from itself." He developed the idea of a new human under the influence of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore; a new human that is in fact a poetic human, a human that is only fully revealed in his avant-garde poetry. It is not unusual that the avant-garde and communism did not get along. The Hungarian Marxist philosopher Georg Luk acs had already branded the avant-garde as bourgeois decadence and, as is known, communism replaced avant-garde artists in the Soviet Union with social realists shortly after the October Revolution. It is not difficult to show that in an artistic sense social realism is a conservative fiction that does not carry out a revolutionary transformation in literature and poetry, but retains the temporal and structurally already superseded representative function of a regime's propaganda machine. Kosovel, who was led by poetic practice, as an exceptionally educated and cultivated European in dialogue with Avgust  ernigoj and Rabindranath Tagore, surpassed both at the level of form and of content (he actually surpassed this dichotomy), the narrowness of the political declarations, and the influences of the time. Within poetry he shaped processes that enabled him to step out of a tradi-

tional representative regime and to fashion emblematic poetic speech with a (dual) engaged political stance and great artistic quality, which cannot be separated from one another because they equally belong to poetics. It is precisely at this point that I see the key for reading the poetry of Taja Kramberger. There is no coincidence with Kosovel's work at the level of content, but they are structurally identical, revealing Taja's poetic structure to be a realized regime of the new means of speech, its living openness, and a distinctive sign of excellent political poetry. I thus show how Kramberger's poetic machine functions, and it is precisely in the structural identicalness of both opuses, Kosovel's and Kramberger's, that I see a blueprint on which to position a broader question about the political quality of Slovenian poetry as a "mute" word, which demands its not autonomous, but authentic, politically engaged voice. The battle for poetry is thus fought in poetry itself. Political poetry is antagonistic; it means a battle between the representation of ideas and the linguistic singularity of existential openness, which transparently moulds signs in a clearly located social arrangement. The pen is a weapon. Taja Kramberger is aware of this. In this sense, she possesses tendencies according to Benjamin. That is the only means of initiating the highest registers of the poetic machine in the core of society. Quality means the inevitability of political unmasking, which does not retreat into representation but presents situations of suppression and of uncovering simultaneously. It is not possible to run from this speech, to hide from it, to blacken it with lying commentary, because it evades interpretation during the breath of that step in which the "muteness" of the voiced word moves into the reader and prevents the attempt to drown out that which is obvious. Obviously, it concerns the reader's social and political everyday. Poetry is the voicing of mute speech, which, overlooked, rustles in the registers of everyday speaking as discourses of excluded speech and marks these situations within speech.

The unspeakable exists and it exposes itself anew with every poem; the poem's task is to maintain it in its entirety. The powerlessness of speech can only be shown, but not faked. We are all equally subject to the unspeakable. There is no position from which information of collective worth could not emerge. It is impossible that decisions reached in the process of writing would not be left to total confrontation. (Detela 6)

Thus wrote Jure Detela in his little-known but pivotal essay on the cultural feudalism of the Slovenian literary scene, which is nothing but a form of suppression, and thus a certain dominant social relation that must be opposed both within and without poetry. In this sense things have not changed since Kosovel's (or Detela's) time. So it is justified to claim that

one moves within the same literary horizon of injustice and concealment, which places the practical response to the question of literary quality at this very point. The quality of poetic output is always political. To speak the unspeakable demands a poetic machine that is capable of this; it demands a technique, a strategy, to maintain this in its entirety. The virtuoso lightness of creating poetry proves itself at this point.

IV

Culture at work or at play, on the other hand, is not a problem of knowledge, but regulator of relations. My question, therefore: In what interest, to regulate what sort of relationships ... "Culture" is also a regulator of how one knows: Foucault's famous capacity-to-know doublet pouvoir/savoir as the ability to know is "culture" at ground level. (Spivak 329)

I now examine several of Taja Kramberger's poems to determine whether it is possible to analyze them according to the structure of the poetic machine sketched out above. The poems are taken from her latest collection, *Opus quinque dierum* (Kramberger). The title indicates that the poems were written in practically a single stream over the course of five days, but there is no doubt that they came about as a result of a thorough study and understanding of the Dreyfus affair, one of the core themes of this collection, as well as several other events and persons that appear in her poetry. The following poems are taken from the "Séverine" cycle.

V

La Fronde:

the first journal that is
wholly the work of women.
Margueritte Durand and Séverine.
No hunching, no hesitation,
the determined steps of women in
a land of unrest are like
a social metronome.

Overcoming obstacles
for some people means a lightening;
not for hordes and not for sects.
Stepping out from statistical tables
returns dignity to some people;
not to the herd and not to the masses.

It is because of the people that I lower myself into the mine.

It is because of the poor that I join strikes.

It is because of the sugar crumblers that I change clothes into a worker.

(Kramberger 63)

In her previous collection *Vsakdanji pogovori* (“Everyday Conversations”), Taja Kramberger already announced, or even realized, the demand for relocating poetic speech from the sphere of metaphorical symbolism and charmed narrativity into the directness of everyday life. Completely ordinary, everyday things: a mailbox, a notary’s office, a particular square, a certain street, have become forms of a fierce poetic confrontation in sharpened speech, which confidently issues a challenge through a skilful game along registers of verses and uncovers poetic speech as a sign of habitus of openness and uncompromising democracy. Her verses are written like slaps that the contemporary poet metes out to the tradition of poetic vacillation of the central (or mainstream) Slovenian literary scene. However, they are more than just an expression of mockery and rebellion toward tradition; they are also clearly established signs of poetic power, which marked the hitherto still invisible horizon of poetry and changed the relations that are not only relations of symbolic values in a poem, but also newly established relations of the material world, which determine not only different types of art, but particular configurations of what can be seen and thought, certain means of being in the material world. Harking back to the phrase “cultural feudalism,” applied to the Slovenian literary scene by Jure Detela, this means that she changed the feudal relations on the Slovenian literary scene. In fact, it means a deconstruction of cultural feudalism, which is indirectly also indicated by the expression *La Fronde*, the title of the newspaper mentioned in the fifth poem of the *Séverina* cycle. This obviously means more than just a sling, the weapon David used to defeat Goliath, but is also a reference to the French insurrection of the seventeenth century, when old freedoms were first demanded, and then, in the second front, Paris for the first time collectively rebelled against the king, heralding the Paris Commune. It certainly marked a need for holistic social reform and the end of feudal order. This represents a rebellion and a change of a particular situation, which in the case of Taja Kramberger acts to completely and openly change existing ruling hierarchies not only in Slovenian poetry, but also in the hierarchy of the social scene, affirming what Rancière calls “democraticness” as the creative inheritance of Europe in general. Here, however, I am not merely dealing with a political performance, but with the determined appearance of a woman in politics that changes politics as a whole, changes “the means of doing things with words” and signifies a strong expression of the hitherto “mute,” poorly

asserted voice. Here I am speaking not only of her own voice, but of a universally suppressed voice, which belongs to the world and superseded her person, the voice of the repressed world, which has, by speaking, de-structured ruling hierarchies and transmitted the focus of action into new speech. Moreover, Kramberger's poetry not only means a new "division" of voices in poetry or a new speech, but a new division in the material world, which displays and engages an invisible reality that up until now was incapacitated by obstacles. What were these obstacles? Established, accepted means of doing things with words, which excluded other means. Yet these means are not merely the techniques of writing, but pull along some more fateful consequences with them: "the world of symbolic forms—philosophy, art, the entirety of culture—retains its autonomy in relation to technically rationality insofar as there exists a space in which the subject, whose world was out at his disposal by technique, dis-places himself, mis-places himself, deconstructs himself as a subjugated subject, as the embodiment of what stands behind the structures of domination" (Vattimo 26). Beneath the statistical tables live real people, who work in mines and go on strike, people whose relations are governed by solidarity. However, solidarity only from the outside, as Benjamin has already warned, is fruitless insofar as the writer does not solidarize himself as a producer; that is, as someone that first deconstructs himself (as a subjugated subject, and as the means by which he does this) through his work and thus accepts the social relations and structures of domination (the division of the sensible, material world). In the given circumstances, this unfolds as a struggle.

VI

The struggle for the rights of living beings,
human, woman, animal,
unfolds on a jetty that the sea,
foaming in the storm, tries to swallow.

Pacifism, suffragettes, *L'Humanité*,
the years of Dreyfusian meetings in *Les trois marches*,
three steps of social legitimacy.

Coco bleu—parrot
and three small dogs—Rip, Tiote, Mégôt:
a community of *subjects* of furred being,
and a donkey—Cadichon, also
an equal member of the household,
who along the Montmartre boulevard
willingly pulls a picnic basket.
A procession of non-depilated memory
of an era, overgrown with sharp grass.

*I want no more than that they should persuade me.
If they command me, I defy them.*

(Kramberger 64)

To “solidarize” means to become involved, to engage in battle. But what is it—along new social relations—that comes gushing forth with the new means of division of the sensible through words? For a moment, turn to Nietzsche, who “understood art as precisely that ‘place’ in the history of Western culture where a sort of Dionysian remnant managed to survive, a form of free spirit, in short, that which will in later years come to be known as the will to power” (Vattimo 10).¹² One should not understand this will to power as merely a desire or an excuse, but as possession, the realization of a “strong will”; that is, will that has already attained this power and is that power. This will is not exclusionary, it is not isolated, it is prepared to act and inhabit social life, but social life that is not imposed or unjustly hierarchical. In such an environment it rebels, acts against injustice, places itself in opposition; it attacks “in the great style of which it is capable. What is common to this style, with great passion, is that it scorns the need for ingratiation (the need to be liked); that it forgets about accumulation for its own sake; that it wants to . . . rule over chaos; force its chaos to gain shape: logical, simple, unambiguous, to be mathematics, law—this is where this great ambition hides” (Vattimo 10). Such a politically clear, new way of doing things with words unfolds at the intersection of social and individual life as a dual political assault in the web of the subject and of society.

VII

Rebellion is a majestic spreading of the mind:
words unfold and
breathe in the air like parachutes.
During the fall it is necessary to
notice them, to attach to them and
travel part of the way with them.

The only possibility
that human life is not only
the blind headlong crash of hope,
hastened by freefall.
Rebellion is the military mobilization¹³ of emancipation, which
unfolds synchronically in
all areas of life.

(Kramberger 65)

The poem clearly states that every will to power as a historical Dionysian remnant of freedom comes to be realized as a political rebellion against established hierarchies of domination. This means rebellion against par-

ticular means of writing, their de-structuring, or even more thoroughly as the de-structuring of the very subject of writing as the subjugated subject. In this sense, language is the center of creation. Not only does the shaping of chaos take place within language as it does things with words (chaos that comes into being following the deconstruction of established hierarchies) but, even more, what occurs here is a new subject, a new means of doing things with words, a new ordering of the world and the existence of the world itself. It is not an empty hope, an illusion, but emancipation, which happens as a mobilization, as placing oneself into the point of emancipation and affirming it throughout all areas of life. The mobilization of emancipation takes place as poetry that is already realized, which is not utopian and does not declare (even though it does not hide) its politics because it deals with power relations, with hierarchies of domination as symbolic as they are material. However, the human that responds, shows himself, and exposes himself, in the mobilization of emancipation, triggers the return volley:

VII

The sick diatribes of fascism
 bounce off Séverine like
a league of threatened interests,
fears, privileges.
grudges, prejudices,
routines and misunderstanding
... which have collectively taken up
 wild Medea's cry:

"Only us,
and it is enough!"

In the first days of July 1927, when
 my mother first
 takes in the world,
 Severina supports
 Sacco and Vanzetti's struggle.

Before death she demands
 to be buried on a Saturday, so that
 workers would be able to attend her funeral.
 With a swallow at her grave she leaves
 the world in the year that *Modra ptica*
 flies into the sky in Ljubljana.

(Kramberger 66)

Modra ptica (Blue Bird) is the name of a magazine and publisher that was active in Ljubljana from 1929 to 1941. It was a literary magazine of

European quality, the constant target of the Ljubljana elite. It also represented an indubitable literary achievement, a voice that burst through and reevaluated the provincial standards of society. There can be no doubt that *Modra ptica* can be understood as a Dionysian achievement, some form of the freedom of spirit of the West, which was instantly exposed to polemics and shaming from the conservative and hostile middle ground of the time. A purely literary magazine triggered a political response and bursts of diatribes¹⁴ because the material published in it established new standards of poetic creativity and thus new relations between creators and their fellow passengers on the cultural scene; in this way it not only publicly questioned the fascist tendencies within society, but also dismantled them and offered an alternative at a European level.

“Séverine” is a sign that marks out the open space or habitus of political poetry in social and poetic space. In both cases, Taja Kramberger’s poetry steps out of the frames of the Slovenian scene and explicitly and fully addresses the world because it primarily points to the universal meaning of the breakthrough of political truth of poetry as a great power that comes with and is generated by the discovery of the regime of new speech. This power is as poetic as it is social, as symbolic as it is material, and as artistic as it is political. Her poetry not only shows that the truth of poetry is political, but also that society’s political truth is poetic. My selection of poems from the collection *Opus quinque dierum* is modest. I have left out the central corpus of the book, which, as I have already mentioned, is dedicated to the Dreyfus affair and to anti-Semitism. However, I believe that an analysis of this set of poems would also lead to similar realizations about the political structure of Taja Kramberger’s poetry as a dynamo, which permanently deconstructs and reveals the political core of the (Slovenian) poetic machine, while determinately confronting and pulling the (Slovenian) reader into a social whirlpool—a whirlpool whose political horizon is attempting to conceal itself by established forms of writing and reading through the use of cynical and aestheticized play-acting. It is clear from Nazism onwards (and this holds particularly for all “totalitarian regimes”) that violent politics reaches for aesthetic means of representation. One could even say that, no matter where it appears, aestheticism is a sign of a totalitarian regime. Because of the “invisible” broader social and political meanings and effects, the poetic machine signifies the taking apart of the aesthetic shell and the realization of a hidden political truth, the creative core, which deconstructs the totalitarian regime and unjust, criminal hierarchies, as well as structures of social organization and the material world, through a process of poetics. In this lies the terrible power of language, its poetic function: to take apart the shells of systems, to be

the center of creation and to generate being, or existence. Political truth is the reality of this permanent center. Placing oneself in the field of poetic centrality means deconstructing oneself as a subjugated political subject and establishing a new, confident regime of doing things with words. Not once and for all, but always once again. This points to the hidden political core of Slovenian poetry—to its foundational disjunction, as Taja Kramberger defines it in the last poem in her book.

DISJUNCTION

Being
 a poetess
 or
 a poet
 is observing
 how
 knowing,
 which has
 spatially
 expanded,
 sabotages
 the flat
 knowledge
 which
 conceived it.

A settling of accounts
 with sources
 without
 end.

(Kramberger 123)

Translated by Špela Drnovšek Zorko

NOTES

¹ Unless stated otherwise, all Kosovel translations are by Š. D. Z.

² I am intentionally using the adjective *poetic* to distinguish between poetics and poetry. The first signifies the philosophically complex concept of the phenomenological structure of creativity, and the second bears a more descriptive, taxonomic meaning, whose character is more superficial.

³ My attention was drawn to this poem by Darja Pavlič.

⁴ From “Umetnost in proletarec” (Kosovel, *Zbrano* III/1, 24).

⁵ “**representative**, fitted to represent, portray or typify; acting as a substitute for another or others, performing a function for another, representing a citizenry or constitu-

ency, typical of a kind, class, or group, being invested with his or their authority, etc.” (*New Webster’s Dictionary*). I am not using this word in the meaning of realistic artistic imitation of outside objects or the world (in the meaning of Greek *mimesis* or Latin *imitatio*).

⁶ On the performative function of language in the way it is understood above, see Osojnik.

⁷ From “Pismo Avgustu Černigoju” (Kosovel, *Izbrana* 152).

⁸ This is confirmed by at least two verses from “Kaleidoscope”: “Constructivity notices/cosmos in the object.” Piet Mondrian tried to use his “etchings” to graphically determine the universal structure of the cosmos (the structural basis of the seen) or “harmonious reality.” One could perhaps also interpret the next verse from “Kaleidoscope”: politics = knowledge about the intellect. In connection with Mondrian’s persistence in configuring the rational structure of the rational world, “it is necessary to emphasize the central idea of the rational harmony of being, which directly passes from art to society, which is why alongside the aesthetic value, art also gains in ethical value, or in other words, its value is aesthetic because it is ethical.” It might also be useful to emphasize the importance of the magazine *De Stijl*, published by Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg, the fathers of conceptions of art’s functionality (“the house is a machine for living”; Bauhaus was later born from this, along with all its consequences). Does this not bear a resemblance to Kosovel’s verse quoted above: “letters grow into space, / voices are like buildings”? Is it possible that Kosovel was familiar with the work of both Dutchmen, who began publishing their magazine in 1917? On the subject of Mondrian’s painting, see “Delo” (Busignani 9–26).

⁹ See note 8. Kosovel thinks in a similar way, and in 1925 he wrote: “Art is no longer, as some cathedral aesthetes imagine, only an aesthetic problem, but a problem that is aesthetic, ethical, social, religious, revolutionary, in other words, a problem of life.” See “Sodobno evropsko življenje in umetnost” (Kosovel, *Zbrano* III/1, 650).

¹⁰ “It concerns winning intellectuals to the cause of the working class in such a way that they will become conscious of the identification of their affective [spiritual] work and their position as producers.” Cf. Ramon Fernandez (Benjamin, “Pisac” 95).

¹¹ Although there are certain similarities between these two ideas of political action and the status of legitimacy of excluded communities. Rancière expands and pluralizes this multitude of community: “It is from demos that those that have no business speaking, speak, and those that have no business taking part, take part. These subjects give themselves collective names (the people, citizens, the proletariat, German Jews, and so on) and impose a reconfiguration of the sensible by making visible what was not visible, beginning with themselves as subjects capable of speaking about common ground” (Guénoun and Kavanagh 19; Rancière, “Subjekt” 175–80).

¹² Here it should be mentioned that I do not understand this “Dionysian remnant” in the light of its ritual function as a work of art, which Benjamin describes in his essay by claiming that “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art” (Benjamin, “Umetničko” 119), but precisely in the spirit of his realization that the work of art, “instead of being based on ritual, begins to be based on another practice—politics” (Benjamin, “Umetničko” 124). I understand “the Dionysian” in its original sense as an intrusion into or as a destruction of the established social, living order, as its radical transformation or even difference, which not only reveals the politically suppressed realities of everyday life, but also *de facto* carries out this change (politically unaware) because is attested most radically by the fateful structure of Greek tragedy.

¹³ “Mobilization” is an imperfect translation; the term refers to the act of moving troops into enemy territory for warfare, and could also be understood as a stage in the very act of military assault.

¹⁴ A diatribe is a polemic, shaming composition and, more broadly, everything that is listed in the first verse of the poem quoted above.

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Kosovel in Kramberger: med avantgardo in sodobno slovensko politično poezijo

Keywords: literatura in politika / slovenska poezija / Kosovel, Srečko / Kramberger, Taja / literarna avantgarda / politično pesništvo / družbeni angažma

V prispevku poskušam opozoriti na poseben položaj in pomen politične resnice (slovenske) poezije. Osredotočim se na poezijo dveh pesnikov, Srečka Kosovela in Taje Kramberger, nastale približno v razponu sto let, v kateri ta najbolj pride do izraza. V prvem delu prispevka pojem političnega najprej teoretično opredelim. Pri tem se naslonim na pojmovanje političnega v literaturi oziroma politike literature v delu Jacquesa Rancièra, ki ga razume kot »literaturo, ki 'dela' politiko kot literaturo«, kar pomeni, da »obstaja posebna zveza med politiko kot določenim načinom delovanja in literaturo kot določenim načinom pisanja«. Ugotavljam, da obstajata dve vrsti poezije, taka, ki dela politiko kot literaturo, in taka, ki literaturo uporablja za propagando neliterarnih političnih programov. Z razumevanjem politike literature kot literature, ki ustvarja po večini sama iz sebe, se strinja tudi Kosovel. Misel je jasno poudaril v svojih spisih in predavanjih o poeziji, uspešno pa jo je tudi uresničil v sami poeziji, še posebej v *konsih*. Razvoj estetskega ustvarjanja politike literature v Kosovelovi poeziji na kratko prikažem z analizo štirih njegovih *konsov*: Ej, hej, Žandarji, Ljubljana spi in Sferično zrcalo. Toda pri Kosovelu se pravzaprav pojavljata oba načina pisanja. Da jasno poudarim razliko med politično resnico njegove poezije kot poezije in poezije v funkciji politične propagande, analiziram prvo pesem iz cikla Rdeči atom, tipičen primer ideološke ali »delavske ali socialno borbene poetike«, kot jo označi Anton Ocvirk, ki ne doseže pesniške moči, estetske prodornosti in politične resnice njegovih avantgardnih *konsov*. V drugem delu prispevka pojem političnega v literaturi obdelam na ozadju razmišljanj o pravi tendenci (in pravi solidarnosti) v dobri literaturi Walterja Benjamina, ki kot Rancière, čeprav iz drugačnega zornega kota, pride do podobnega zaključka o estetski nujnosti literature, da je »tendencia nekega dela politično dobra samo, če je tudi v literarnem smislu dobra.« Literatura torej nima več vloge reprezentiranja določenih omejenih družbenih interesov in političnih programov, ampak deluje kot estetski stroj, ki spreminja režim pisanja in omogoči prezentacijo v starih režimih pisanja »nemih« glasov. Oba misleca prepoznata zgodovinsko naravo in znotrajliterarno nujnost tega procesa v povezavi z družbenim učinkom in recepcijo literature. Na podlagi teoretskih in analitičnih dognanj o strukturi pesniškega stroja in politične resnice poezije iz prvih dveh delov

se v tretjem delu razprave posvetim analizi in interpretaciji pesmi Taje Kramberger iz njene zadnje pesniške zbirke *Opus quinque dierum*. Pokaže se, da gre tudi v njenem primeru za v prvih dveh delih dognano strukturo politične resnice poezije. Končni zaključek, ki ga nakazuje moj prispevek, je, da je v slovenski pesniški produkciji od Kosovela do Taje Kramberger na delu stroj, ki bodisi potlači ali pa razkrije politično resnico poezije kot literature.

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