

# Miško Šuvaković

3 x Triglav: Controversies and Problems regarding *Mount Triglav*



OHO

Miljenko Matanović, David Nez, Drago Dellabernardina

*Mount Triglav*

Kongresni trg, Ljubljana, 30. 12. 1968

Courtesy: Moderna galerija, Ljubljana

Since 1968, a certain provocative controversy has been at work in contemporary Slovene arts. This experimental, retro, avant-garde, “artivistic”, and artistic-political controversy seemingly refers to the famed happening of the group OHO’s *Mount Triglav*<sup>1</sup>, which originally took place on 30 December 1968 in Kongresni trg, and was later resurrected and reimagined, first by the group Irwin in 2004 as *Like to Like/ Mount Triglav*<sup>2</sup> and last year it was performed atop

<sup>1</sup>Milenko Matanović, David Nez, Drago Dellabernardina

<sup>2</sup>Andrej Savski, Borut Vogeltnik, Roman Uranjek

Mount Triglav by the artists Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša as *Mount Triglav on Mount*

*Triglav*. In the mode of an experimental artistic situation the three performances only seemingly make metaphor of the geographic, national and state symbol of Slovenia that is Mount Triglav. All of the works are the most radical executions of the *political sliding sign*, that is, the individual explanations of symptoms of Slovene identity and, more importantly, the historical construction and realization of political identities.

#### PRELIMINARY PROBLEM 1: TRAGEDY AND THE GROTESQUE

Marx’s well-known – and, without a doubt, cynical – *dictum* (which we’ve heard countless times) asserts that history occurs twice, first as a tragedy, second as a farce, however this misses or conceals a certain important point: the fact that “repetition of history” is never simply “repetition”, but is, rather, always an authentic event with new consequences. The repetitions are carried out under different material conditions and in different circumstances. The carrying out of the *same* or at least *similar* event in different measures and circumstances, produces different results. This is necessary to consider when we observe, or rather, refer to and discuss the three ‘Triglav’s’ in Slovene arts – the *Mount Triglav* of 1968, 2004, and 2007, respectively.

#### PRELIMINARY PROBLEM 2: ORGANISM, INDIVIDUAL, SUBJECT

An organism is a functional and articulated relation of different organs. An individuum is an organism with an identifying “social number” (personal ID number, tax number, social insurance number, voter registration number, resident registration number). A subject is the manifoldness of textual, audiovisual, and/or behavioural manifestations which represent, show and describe a certain individuum and organism in culture and society.

#### OHO GROUP: MOUNT TRIGLAV

The OHO group worked in Kranj and Ljubljana between 1965 and 1971 in the fields of Reism, Process Art, and Conceptual Art, and was the first “radical – urban

– ideological” artistic appearance in Slovene modern arts. Its function wasn’t only an experiment in the “autonomous field” of arts, but also the provocative gesture of neo-avant-garde artists in the spirit of the 1968 protests that had stirred up the arrangement of arts, culture, and society.

From its inception, the OHO product, that is the *article* and then the *happening*, was to carry out the concept of event as visual metaphor which the OHO members demonstrated in projects such as *Mount Triglav*. The purpose of the “visual metaphor” is primarily to problematize the referential relationship between visual appearances and the material or fictional world within them. The visual metaphor is a visual phenomenon which is erected in place of some other visual statement or discursive structure. OHO’s concept of the object (article) or event (happening) was founded on the relation of object/happening and word. The work *Mount Triglav*, which was carried out as a happening, demonstrates the function of visual metaphor: three authors draped by a cloth from which their long-haired hippie heads looked out at three different heights. The title of the work (displayed in front of them) hinted at Mount Triglav, that is, on the scheme: *tri* (three) + *glave* (heads) = *tri glave* (three heads). It established the following relational references: the position of the artists’ bodies and cloth’s iconographical hinting at a mountain, that is, what was visualized was an iconographic-oriented metaphor of a mountain. The artistic work, which models a mountain, showed the relationship between *mountain as material and name* as label; three real human hippie heads were similar to the three peaks of the mountain. The referential relationship between the title of the work, *Mount Triglav*, and the artistic work is repeatedly mimetic.

This mimetic quality has – in itself – realistic socio-political consequences, but also shows that there are “ideal” and “universally-established” symbols of work and the socialist Slovene nation can also be established as an object of intervention of young “rebels without a cause”.

IRWIN GROUP (NSK): *LIKE TO LIKE/MOUNT TRIGLAV*

The Irwin group was formed under the framework of the *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK) movement in the early 1980s. The early Irwinist mannerist and eclectic paintings illuminated the iconography of the national-socialistic arts, socialist-realism, and avant-garde (above all Kazimir Malevich). They established a supervisory painting gesture in the traumatic fissure between the large totalitarian projects of the twentieth century and the crisis of modernism in the 1970s and 1980s. These paradoxical connections are weak points, symptoms of a political demonstration of reality – the ideological as phantasm.

The works of the Irwin group are signs with which the group destroys the symbolic power of the totalitarian discourse, the projection of reality. With regard to real and self-management socialism their activity still appears as an excess/symptom – graphic (painting) and declarative (manifesto) speech which provoke the existing system of political and artistic values, at which the trauma is pulled into a game as “non-interpretive” or “hyper-interpretive”. “Retro-garde” action is not avant-garde action because it uses the *dead languages* of arts and the *dead languages* of culture and politics (languages of avant-garde arts and the totalitarian system). Within them are references to the archive of the historically deleted,



Irwin

*Like to Like / Mount Triglav*, 2004

Colour photo, 168 x 199,5 x 7 cm

Remake on the basis of a photograph. The

action of the group OHO *Mount Triglav*.

Photo: Tomaž Gregorič

Production: Cornerhouse

Courtesy: Gregor Podnar Gallery

exploited traces, artistic, ethical and political excesses, traumas, symbols, expressions and performances; thus making their work “anti-utopian”.

The series of works of *Like to Like: Irwin – OHO* (2004) was made in opposition to the status of retro-avant-garde artists. From the post-modern repudiation of avant-garde/neo-avant-garde Irwin group directed itself towards the establishment of its own modern or avant-garde traditions in the framework of its national culture. Suprematism, Nazi

kunst, and socialist realism were dead signs of politics and arts for the production of Irwin group. In contrast, the turn toward making images of OHO’s “anti-painterly” and the process proto-conceptual events was an entirely different act – the act of appropriation which adopted some key artistic acts from the end of modernism, was executed in the traditional visual media and implemented as a culturally-rooted fetish, an ‘object’ of fascination. Triglav is an object of fascination and, thus, a fetish.

On the other side, the visual performative (2004) recycling or rather, photographic happening *Mount Triglav* wasn't only an act of self-historicization by the Irwin group. It also meant the grotesque provoking of one of the fundamental political suppositions of identifying politics in transitional, nationally homogeneous countries which were founded upon the disintegration of the second Yugoslavia; and it signified the demands for national reconciliation of all that is Slovene – our – art and culture.

JANEZ JANŠA, JANEZ JANŠA, AND JANEZ  
JANŠA: *MOUNT TRIGLAV ON MOUNT  
TRIGLAV*

Janez Janša (formerly known as Davide Grassi) was born in Italy in 1970. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Milan in 1994. Since 1995, he has been living in Ljubljana. His work is dedicated to the investigation of new media social contradictions and dilemmas. Janez Janša (formerly known as Emil Hrvatin) was born in Rijeka, Croatia in 1964. He graduated from the University of Ljubljana's Faculty for Social Sciences and studied theatre directing in Ljubljana and the theory of theatre in Antwerp. His work is dedicated to the exploration of the role of conceptual strategies and tactics between theatre and society. Finally, Janez Janša (formerly known as Žiga Kariž) was born in Ljubljana in 1973. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana. His work is dedicated to the investigation of new media and the roles of media productions of individual, cultural, artistic, and social identity in the contemporary world.

Davide Grassi, Emil Hrvatin and Žiga Kariž all legally took the first name and last name of the current Prime Minister

of the Republic of Slovenia, Janez Janša. However, the artists are not members of any artistic group or movement; rather they are individual authorial figures who work in the interdisciplinary scene of Slovene contemporary arts.

In addition to the change of names and surnames the three artists made the ritual act of an individual and collective – subjective and national – initiation, and presented the work *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2007. They carried out the initiation on Mount Triglav, and the realization of the 'living Triglav' itself was shown with clear references to the works of OHO and Irwin (NSK). The occasion of the "mountain" event was also connected to the eightieth anniversary of the death of Jakob Aljaž, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the magazine *Nova revija*, the sixteenth anniversary of the founding of the independent Republic of Slovenia ... Emil Hrvatin, Žiga Kariž and Davide Grassi joined the political party (Slovenian Democratic Party – SDS) of the Prime Minister Janez Janša, and Davide Grassi, that is, Janez Janša, married under his new name.

The "work" that they realized, in short, is a reconstruction (re-enactment, recycling) of the works of OHO and Irwin. At work is the repetition of the artistic events from times of the neo-avant-garde and the retro-avant-garde. This repetition actually becomes a grotesque of Slovenian contemporary politics, but – and this "but" is essential! – OHO's event expressed a proclivity towards ludist grotesqueness – hippies in the place where we would expect a strong and righteous Slovene Worker/Farmer in the middle of the three-headed Mount Triglav. Irwin's "cool" recycling flirted with post-modern cynical grotesqueness: retro-avant-gardists in the place of avant-gardists;



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša  
*Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav,*  
Mount Triglav, 2007  
Action  
Photo: Gaja Repe  
Courtesy: Aksioma

consumer signs in the place of vital gestures; dandies in the place of hippies. In contrast Kariž, Grassi and Hrvatin's performance, that is, Janša, Janša, and Janša's transparent positioning of the grotesque had within itself something tragic. The tragedy is that the 'artistic work', has as its constitutional elements, totally fixed and materially-concrete social, political, and personal-subjective consequences for the life of an artist. Artists in contemporary times – such as Janša, Janša, and Janša – are no longer

ludist actors (OHO) or professional creators of high art (Irwin), but rather *subjects* in a performative life praxis, which operates in the framework of transitional country/state bio-powers and their instrumental apparatuses. These types of artists carry out their "individual selves" in the bio-political mechanism, where the "machinery" has the effects of designing or rather achieving the forms of its own everyday/quotidian and occasional life. We are dealing with *artivism*, which functions as art not from the basic

arts, but from material moves or fluxes in bio-political society and society's authority of bio-powers. OHO and Irwin worked, or rather, *intervened with* the live performing in the framework of artistic autonomies, in the cultural and social space of socialistic and, later, transitional Slovenia. However Kariž, Grassi, and Hrvatin offered, in opposition, the "live construction" of *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* as a sign of the pre-design of their individual identities, not as Kariž, Grassi, and Hrvatin, but rather as Janša, Janša, and Janša, and for all the concrete social consequences of changing identities. And this is the point: the confrontation with the tragic in the work of the biopower, in the midst of repeating 'history', which, although calling tragically, resembles the grotesque. When someone today kisses the face, forehead or lips of Emil, Davide or Žiga, one will not touch those of Emil, Davide or Žiga, but, rather, of Janez Janša...but which Janez Janša? Who is Janez Janša? Who is the Janez Janša of *here and now*? There's no certain answer. Bio-politics are certainly at work; technology designing life.

First published as "3x Triglav: kontroverznosti in problemi okrog Triglava", in *Triglav*, exhibition publication, Mala galerija - Moderna galerija, 15<sup>th</sup> October – 15<sup>th</sup> November 2007, Aksioma, Ljubljana 2007

Translated by Jana Renée Wilcoxon